



Bible Training Center

The Gospel

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Introduction

The gospel is a marvelous topic to study, but it is impossible to adequately cover in one class or one book. The gospel message is throughout all of Scripture and is an essential ingredient in all doctrines. We will be studying the gospel for all of our lives, and will continue studying it in heaven.

The theme of redemption is one that the angels desire to look into; it will be the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Is it not worthy of careful thought and study now? {CE 57.2}

This book is the result of several years of teaching and study. It is an attempt to address the often repeated questions I have received while teaching and giving Bible studies throughout southern Chad, Africa. Some of the chapters are more thoroughly developed than others. Even though this book is not as polished as I would like, I have made the decision to print a first edition so that what is already organized can begin to be used by other people. In the future I hope to publish a more refined second edition.

As we study through this book, we will look at the definition and origin of sin. Then we will look at God's solution for sin and His plan to eliminate it. Towards the end, we will discuss how the gospel affects our lives in a practical way.

My hope is that the gospel message will become much more personally meaningful to you. We will address questions such as:

- Why does God allow sin and suffering to exist?
- What is God's plan to eliminate sin in my life?
- What is God's plan to eliminate sin in the world?
- Why did Jesus choose to die?
- How do I believe in Jesus and be saved?

- If I am saved by grace but judged by what I do, am I also saved by what I do or don't do?
- Do I need to confess my sins to my pastor before the church?
- How can I successfully fight temptations?
- How can I stop sinning when it seems that I am powerless to stop?
- How can I erase my desire to sin?

As we explore these questions and many others, we will find that the Bible is full of answers for us. For some questions, the answers may not become totally clear. I hope that you will continue asking the Holy Spirit to guide and teach you and that you will use this book only as a step to launch further into deeper study and thought on these topics.

May God bless you as you read and study His Word!

Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless. The student of Scripture looks, as it were, into a fountain that deepens and broadens as he gazes into its depths. Not in this life shall we comprehend the mystery of God's love in giving His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The work of our Redeemer on this earth is and ever will be a subject that will put to the stretch our highest imagination. Man may tax every mental power in the endeavor to fathom this mystery, but his mind will become faint and weary. The most diligent searcher will see before him a boundless, shoreless sea. {COL 128.4}

The truth as it is in Jesus can be experienced, but never explained. Its height and breadth and depth pass our knowledge. We may task our imagination to the utmost, and then we shall see only dimly the outlines of a love that is unexplainable, that is as high as heaven, but that stooped to the earth to stamp the image of God on all mankind. {COL 129.1}

Yet it is possible for us to see all that we can bear of the divine compassion. This is unfolded to the humble, contrite soul. We shall understand God's compassion just in proportion as we appreciate His sacrifice for us. As we search the word of God in humility of heart, the grand theme of redemption will open to our research. It will increase in brightness as we behold it, and as we aspire to grasp it, its height and depth will ever increase. {COL 129.2}

God Loves You

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Psalms 33:8-9 Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

Psalms 139:14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.

Psalms 8:3-4 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?

Matthew 6:25-34 Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow,

for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Psalms 91:2,4 I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.

Jeremiah 17:7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the Lord."

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

John 1:10-11 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Romans 3:23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them: "As I live," says the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Romans 5:18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

Romans 6:23 the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:8 God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Micah 7:18-19 Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.

1 Peter 2:25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Luke 15:6-7 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!" I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

Zephaniah 3:17 The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.

John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for

you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

1 Corinthians 2:9 As it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jeremiah 31:3 The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you."

Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

John 4:13-14 Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Revelation 22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Revelation 22:3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.

Revelation 21:4-5 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

Revelation 22:7, 12, 20 Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. ... And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. He

who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Mark 13:35-37 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!

Matthew 24:46 Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

The Sin Problem

Perfection Spoiled

Perfect Lucifer

God is the loving King of the universe. As King, He has established a well-organized government and operates his kingdom on the principles of this government. As part of this organizational structure, God created and established a leader angel named Lucifer.

Ezekiel 28:14 You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you.

God created him perfectly and wonderfully.

Ezekiel 28:12-13 You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created.

Q: Was this angel evil or good? **The Bible says** this angel was good. He was beautiful and wise and perfect. He was also a musician. Being perfect means there was nothing wrong with him. He was perfectly good.

Q: What was the source of his beauty and perfection? **The Bible says** God is the One Who established him.

Q: Where did this beautiful angel live? **The Bible says** he was in Eden, God's garden.

God also created other angels in addition to this leader angel.

Psalms 148:2,5 Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! ... Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created.

Psalms 103:20-21 Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.

Q: What are some characteristics of these angels? **The Bible says** they are very strong. They obey God's word. They do God's pleasure.

Perfect Lucifer Sins

But God's lead angel became a rebel leader and challenged God's government in an effort to establish his own government. Trouble broke the perfect environment of perfect peace and happiness in heaven. Lucifer the leader angel began thinking about how good he was and how perfect he had been created. He began thinking prideful thoughts.

Ezekiel 28:15 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

Isaiah 14:13 You have said in your heart: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High."

Q: Where was iniquity found? **The Bible says** it was found in Lucifer, in his heart.

Q: Who tempted Lucifer to sin? Until this point, heaven was only a place of sinless perfection. There was no devil to tempt anybody. Lucifer's sin did not originate in another tempter but **the Bible says** it clearly originated in him, in his heart. It was self that tempted Lucifer to sin, his own self.

He was a highly honored angel, yet he wanted more than what God had given him. He was not happy with who he was and what he had. He coveted God's position. Lucifer's attitude spread to other angels and before long, he had convinced one third of the angels to rebel against God. They decided to try to conquer God and replace Him with Lucifer.

Revelation 12:7-9 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Q: Where did this war take place? **The Bible says** in heaven.

Q: Who won the war? **The Bible says** Michael and his angels.

Q: Who lost the war? **The Bible says** Satan and his angels lost and were cast out of heaven.

Q: Where was Satan cast? **The Bible says** he was cast to the earth.

Q: Who was cast out with him? **The Bible says** his angels were cast out with him.

Revelation 12:4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

Q: How many angels did Satan deceive? **The Bible says** that one third of the angels were swept out of heaven to the earth. (The stars is a symbol for angels. See Revelation 1:20)

Q: What is Satan doing now and where? **The Bible says** he deceives the whole world.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

We might wonder why Lucifer was cast out of heaven. Ezekiel helps us understand the answer to this question.

Ezekiel 28:15-17 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you.

Q: Why was Lucifer cast out of heaven? **The Bible says** Lucifer sinned.

Q: Where did the sin of Lucifer originate? **The Bible says** sin was found in him and that he was filled with violence within.

Q: Specifically, what was Lucifer's sin for which he was cast out of heaven? **The Bible says** he became filled with violence by the abundance of his trading. Also, his heart was lifted up; he became proud. He also corrupted his wisdom.

Trading or trafficking here seems to imply something illegal, or bad. Satan was in a high level of God's government, but introduced selfish thoughts and ideas. In God's good government, there is no selfishness. Yet Satan's judgment and wisdom was spoiled by selfishness and he began making decisions—not for the good of others, but for the good of himself. This selfish idea has spread all over Earth and has corrupted churches and governments nearly everywhere.ⁱ (See separate tract on Corruption.)

This story of Satan sinning in a perfect environment brings up an interesting question. We know the Bible says that sin came from Lucifer's heart. But how did sin find its way into Lucifer's heart?

The Bible does not reveal to us the answer to this question. It is a mystery to us how sin can originate in a perfect, sinless environment. There is no good reason for sin. There is no good excuse for sin. There is no good explanation for sin.

Some people attempt to charge God with originating sin. They say that God created Satan, knowing that he would later sin. Therefore, they say that God is responsible for the sin and suffering in this world. But remember that God created Lucifer, not Satan. Lucifer was created perfect but changed to become Satan later by his own choices. We will address this question more later (see "Sovereignty"). But for now, allow me to share a simple illustration.

Let's say that I own a vehicle. You wish to learn how to drive, so I teach you the traffic laws and how to safely operate the vehicle. I teach you very well, and the day that you take your driving test, you do everything perfectly. You understand the rules and you know very well how to control the vehicle. I give you a driving permit and give you the freedom to drive wherever you want.

One day some months later, you get overconfident. You have been following all the rules and have been driving safely and happily for a long time now. You feel good about yourself and begin to feel more relaxed. Suddenly you crash in an accident.

Whose fault is it? Is it your fault or my fault? I am the one who trained you and gave you the permit. It is my vehicle. But in court, who will be declared guilty? You, the driver, are guilty. You neglected a traffic rule or were not careful and crashed the vehicle.

Likewise, God gives each person the freedom to choose his loyalty. We are not our own; God owns us. Yet, He gives us the freedom to make choices in life. When we make evil choices, the responsibility for that choice rests on us and on Satan the originator of evil, but not on God.

(Later on, we will see how Jesus invites us to place the responsibility of our sins back on Him, our Sin-Bearer. He voluntarily invites us to give Him the responsibility of something He is not responsible for.)

Scripture is also clear that God does not tempt anybody to sin.

James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Q: How are we tempted? **The Bible says** that we are tempted by our own desires.

Lucifer was created a perfect, sinless being. God made him beautiful and wise. He was tempted and led astray by his own desires. For God to create him, tempt him, and then cast him out of heaven for sinning would be for God to work against himself. It would be like God laying a foundation, building a building, and then removing the foundation.

Even though God's love for Lucifer was great, God had to cast him out because He could not allow sin and sinners remain in heaven. To

leave sin in the holy environment of heaven would be like to place one piece of rotten fruit among a pile of good fruit. A rotten tomato in a bowl of good tomatoes spoils the good tomatoes.

Ever since then, Satan has been working against God, His law, His truth. He still misrepresents God's character and leads people to believe that God is not fair and that His government is faulty. Christians today still accept these arguments of Satan.ⁱⁱ

Lucifer sinned, but he sinned by his own choice. It is Lucifer who spoiled God's perfect creation, not God spoiling His own creation.

Perfect Creation

During His creation, God created everything good. After creating something, God would say, "It is good" (Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25). There were no problems. Everything was perfect. In fact, at the end of the sixth day after God had created Adam and Eve, God saw that everything He had made was indeed "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

God made man a little lower than the angels, but gave him responsibility over the other things that God had created.

Psalm 8:5-6 For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.

God knew that Adam and Eve would be happiest if they lived and worked in nature, so God planted a garden for them to enjoy.

Genesis 2:8-9 The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Q: Who planted the garden? **The Bible says** that God planted the garden.

Q: Did God plant any bad trees in His garden? **The Bible says** the trees that God planted were pleasant to the sight and good for food. They were pleasant and good. God did not plant any evil trees with poisonous fruit.

God's perfect government is based on His perfect law. As subjects under His government, Adam and Eve were given instructions to follow for their happiness. God loved Adam and Eve dearly, and wanted them to obey His law out of a response of love to Him. God warned them specifically of one forbidden tree and the penalty of death for eating the fruit of that tree.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

God knew that Adam and Eve's happiness would depend on their strict obedience to His law, so he clearly stated their privileges and limitations on eating fruit in the garden.

Perfect Creation Sins

One day Eve wandered near the forbidden tree. In the garden there were many other trees that were pleasant and good. Eve had no good reason to approach the forbidden tree. She was not suffering from hunger or lacking shade from the sun. Neither she nor Adam had any good excuse for ignoring God's word.

But there she was, by the forbidden tree, and Satan talked to her. He questioned God's word. Did God really mean exactly as He said?

Genesis 3:4-5 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Q: What did God say was the penalty for sinning by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree? **The Bible says** sure death would be the result.

Q: What did Satan say about the penalty for sin? **The Bible says** he contradicted God and promised eternal life in place of death.

Q: Besides eternal life, what two things did Satan promise? **The Bible says** that Satan promised that 1) their eyes would be opened and that 2) they would be like God.

Then Satan suggested that God was trying to hide something good from them and that if they would just disobey Him, that they would become “like God, knowing good and evil.” The way Satan talked suggested that the knowledge of evil was good. He suggested that they would become much wiser than before, if only they would disobey God.

Satan still does this today. He will take something forbidden and present it as something good and beneficial. He presents curses as blessings, and blessings as curses. He presents the wisdom of this world as possessing value above the wisdom of God.

Genesis 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Q: Was the fruit of this tree poisonous? No, **the Bible says** Eve saw that the tree was good for food.

Q: Was the tree a bad tree? No, **the Bible says** it was pleasant to the eyes.

Genesis 3:7, 22-23 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. ... Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. ...”

Q: Were their eyes opened? **The Bible says** their eyes were opened, but to see their nakedness.

Q: Did they become like God? **The Bible says** they became like God in that they came to understand good and evil.

Our good God had created Adam and Eve to be perfect. God did not want their eyes to be opened to see their nakedness. He designed them to be covered in perfection and sinlessness and for them to have no knowledge of nakedness. Their blindness to nakedness was a

blessing to them; but sadly, they chose a curse rather than to keep the blessing.

Our good God also did not want them to understand or know evil. He did not want them to be like God in this way. He gave them everything they needed for their happiness. Their ignorance of evil was a blessing to them, but they rejected God’s blessing and chose a curse for themselves.

Genesis 3:22-23 “And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.

Q: Could Adam remain in the garden after he and Eve lost perfection and became sinners? No, **the Bible says** God sent him out of the garden.

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

Q: Why did Adam and Eve have to leave Eden? **The Bible says** that sin separated them from God. Also, **the Bible says** that God did not want them to eat from the tree of life and as a result live forever in sin.

God did not want this separation, but it was a necessary result of the rules of His government. Sin is horrible because it is like a cancer: it spreads quickly and separates us from God, Who is the source of happiness and life. It was merciful of God to block access to the tree of life so that there would eventually be an end to sin.

Satan wanted to be like God; he wanted to be happier and wiser. But he was cast out of heaven and separated from God. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God; they wanted to be happier and to know good and evil. But they were cast out of Eden and separated from God.

As we think about the problem of sin, it does not take long for us to ask ourselves how perfect beings could become sinners. Why would anybody want to introduce imperfection into a perfect

environment? While there is no good explanation or excuse for sin, we can identify some of the issues.

The Search for the Root of the Problem

When God created Lucifer, He made him full of wisdom. Yet, discontent with God's perfect gift, he wanted more than what God had given him. **The Bible says** he corrupted his wisdom. That which God had given him was good, but he corrupted it.

And Lucifer led others to do the same. Adam and Eve wanted to become like God, the same desire Lucifer had. Eve perceived that eating the forbidden fruit would make her wise. Today, God has given us wisdom, but often we are not content with that and search for more.

Reflect on these questions: How can we avoid repeating the same mistake of corrupting our wisdom? How can we choose to be truly wise?

We need to recognize that **the Bible says** there are two kinds of wisdom. Earthly wisdom is self-seeking. Heavenly wisdom is willing to yield and is others-focused.

James 3:13-17 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Q: What is earthly wisdom based on? **The Bible says** it is based on envy and self-seeking.

Q: What do envy and self-seeking lead to? **The Bible says** it leads to confusion and every evil thing.

Q: What is heavenly wisdom? **The Bible says** it is pure and a whole list of good things, including willing to yield.

Now we can understand a little more how Lucifer corrupted his wisdom and became filled with violence within. Originally, he was pure, peaceable, and gentle. He gradually became unwilling to yield to others and wanted others to yield to him. And the root of this was envy and self-seeking. Lucifer envied God's position and wished that he, himself, was in God's position. Lucifer's self-seeking, not God, is what led to such confusion and every evil thing. Self-seeking is the root of confusion and evil in our day, too.

Jeremiah 4:22 For My people are foolish, they have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

Many of us are quick to blame God or Satan for all the trouble in this world. We wonder why God could allow such an evil thing to happen. But we forget that, whether we like it or not, we have all been like Lucifer at times. We get envious and are naturally self-seeking. If we think that God should have eliminated Lucifer, than we should also think that God should eliminate each one of us at one time or another.

The Search for the Solution

Some say the solution to sin should have been to eliminate Lucifer at the first sign of sin. But had God eliminated Lucifer, God would not have eliminated sin. For Lucifer had already planted seeds of doubt in many hearts. Lucifer had now raised a question that deserved a solid, once-and-for-all answer. Lucifer's logic and ideas sounded genuine to some of the angels and they wondered if Lucifer's wisdom was really better. They wondered if they could themselves become wiser than the wisdom God had given if only they would follow Lucifer.

Indeed, we often convince ourselves, as did Lucifer, that envy and self-seeking are actually good qualities. Instead of 100% faith in God's word, we question what He says. We search to find what He has not given. We think we are gaining wisdom, when really, we are only becoming wise to do evil.

The Bible offers advice on this topic. Let's read some of it now.

Job 28:28 And to man He said, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

Psalms 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

Q: Where does true wisdom originate? **The Bible says** the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Q: Where does good understanding originate? **The Bible says** good understanding originates in obedience.

Adam and Eve thought they would become wise and acquire great understanding through disobedience. But they became deceived.

1 Corinthians 3:18-19 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness."

Q: What is the warning? **The Bible says** to be careful about being deceived. Apparently it is easy to be deceived with earthly wisdom and we are warned not to be deceived.

Q: What is the counsel given to those who are wise with earthly wisdom? **The Bible says** to become a fool in earthly wisdom so that we can become wise with God's wisdom.

Do we sometimes think we are being wise when really we are being foolish with God? Do we sometimes seek our own way, convincing ourselves that it is really better than God's way? Do we sometimes ignore God's word and do our own thing, being wise to do evil?

Jesus commented to a group of Jews,

John 8:43-45 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a

lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.

Q: Why did the Jews not understand Jesus' words? **The Bible says** that they were not able to listen to His word. They listened to the devil and wanted to do his will.

Encouraged by Lucifer, Adam and Eve cultivated their own desire for earthly wisdom. They had heard the word of God, the Father of love, but had chosen to listen to the word of Satan, the father of lies. And as we are all descendants from Adam, we have all inherited this tendency. We are all naturally self-seeking. And this is why the earth is full of confusion and every evil thing.

Thankfully, we are not hopelessly stuck being wise to do evil, but we need help. Naturally self-seeking, we cannot change ourselves, even if we try really hard. Jesus knows how to provide that help.

Romans 5:12,18-19 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

We are all sinners, and so we are all subject to death. This is a fundamental fact known even to Lucifer and Adam. But Jesus came to give us another choice. Through His power, we can actually be made righteous! It is not something we can buy, but it is a free gift. And it is available to anybody who will accept it.

Satan promises eternal life through trust in his own word. But Satan is the father of lies. His followers receive eternal death. But because of what Jesus has done for us, our lives may be changed and we may receive eternal life!

Satan promises wisdom through trust in his own word. But Satan is the father of lies. His followers receive earthly wisdom and become

wise to do evil. But because of what Jesus has done for us, our wisdom may be changed and we may receive heavenly wisdom.

Satan promises that men can become like God through trust in his (Satan's) own word. But Satan is the father of lies. His followers become like God only in the sense that they know more about evil. But because of what Jesus has done for us, our characters may be actually changed to become more like God's character.

And what did Jesus do for us? Now that is a question too big to answer fully. But in summary, He demonstrated His love to us and showed us how to live a life without envy and without self-seeking. He showed us how to have access to power that miraculously changes evil to good. He ensured that we could really have eternal life by destroying the power of eternal death. But all this came at a terrific price: His own death on the cross.

Why did Jesus die? Why couldn't he just wipe out the sin problem without dying? To understand this question, we need to understand what sin is.

What is Sin? (first attempt)

The Bible gives us a simple definition for sin. We will look at that definition soon. Most of us know that sin is not a good thing. Look at this verse, for example.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Q: What is the wages, or the result of sin? **The Bible says** the wages of sin is death.

Apparently, sin requires wages. We may ask why there are wages of sin. Why is there need of wages or payment for sin, and why is that payment death? And why is death a problem? Everybody who lives eventually dies. We see death all around us. Whether I sin a lot or I sin a little, I still eventually die.

To understand sin then, we need to understand why there is a need for wages, and why those wages are death. Why is sin so expensive? Before attempting an answer, let's turn to the simple Bible definition of sin. What is sin?

1 John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

1 John 5:17 All unrighteousness is sin.

Q: What is sin? **The Bible says** that sin is lawlessness. Sin is defined as transgression of the law.

OK, so sin is the transgression of the law. What is wrong with that? What is bad about breaking the law?

To really understand sin and what sin is, we need to understand law. We also need to understand why there is wages or a penalty for breaking the law. We need to understand why the penalty of breaking the law is death.

So soon after we asked our simple question “What is sin?”, it looks like we are already blocked with many unanswered questions. We can’t really understand sin until we understand some other things. So let’s take the next step deeper and find out what the law is. When we have investigated law and wages and death a little bit more, we will return to our question “What is sin?”.

What is the Moral Law?

When you think of law, what do you think of? Perhaps you think of a list of rules and limitations imposed by a government. You might think some of these thoughts: “If I break the law and steal something in the market, I might get in trouble.” “I shouldn’t operate my motorcycle unless I have the papers required by law. I need to be sneaky and avoid the control.” “I can’t make bricks unless I pay the tax required by the government.” Our thoughts toward law are often negative, and even fearful, perhaps because of the punishment for breaking the law.

But pause for a moment and consider life without law. Imagine that the government of your country decided that observing the laws is not obligatory and that because the laws are too restrictive, nobody has to keep them anymore. The citizens are declared free from the restrictions of the law. With no law there are no rules and no punishments and everybody does as he pleases. With no law, there is no standard with which to determine if something is good or bad. Anarchy results—a state of lawlessness and disorder that happens when a government fails. Read in the books of history, and you will find examples of anarchy.

Indeed, government cannot exist without law. The same principle applies to God’s government. God loves order. His government is well organized and founded on His Law. His Law is His rule of government, and it is by His law that we know what sin is, and whether our character is like His character.

The Bible definition for law is not quite as simple as the definition for sin, but Scripture talks a lot about law. There is not time or space to study law in-depth here, but we will attempt to cover the basics sufficiently to help us with our understanding of sin and the gospel. Let’s get started, praying that God will show us wonderful things from His law.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.

Definition of Moral Law

One simple definition for moral law is “the measure or standard that shows how well we know God and love Him.” Think about this definition as you read the following passages.

1 John 2:3-4 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Q: How do we know if we know God? **The Bible says** we can know that we know God if we keep His commandments.

1 John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Luke 10:25-28 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” So he answered and said, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’ ” And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”

Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Romans 13:10 Love is the fulfillment of the law.

James 2:8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well.

Clearly, there is a connection between love and law. As we study to learn the definition for law, we cannot ignore this factor of love. Law is the standard by which we measure our love for God. We will soon

see that moral law is a moral mirror in which we see ourselves as sinners and are oriented toward Jesus Who alone can save us from perishing from our sins.

1 John 4:8 God is love.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Remember our simple definition for moral law? God's law is "a measure or standard that shows how well we know God and love Him." That is perhaps not a complete definition, but it helps us on our way to understand what God's law is. God is love, and His law expresses His love and His character in a practical way that we can understand. And it is on this law that God has founded His government. And it is by this law or standard that we are judged. We can say that God's government is built on love. We can also say that we are judged by love.

As we continue studying, we will understand this idea more. But in summary, the law shows us that we are sinners by contrasting our character with God's character. Through the law, we are oriented to Jesus and His love for us as the only Solution to our sin problem. When we see that love toward us, our response is love to Him, to repent, and to ask for forgiveness. And when we love Him, we also desire to obey Him and keep His law.

Purpose of Moral Law

The Law is Our Sin Detector

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Q: What is the purpose of the law? **The Bible says** the law helps us know what sin is. We compare our actions with the law, and if they do not match up, we know our actions are sin.

Romans 7:7-8 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would

not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

Q: In Romans 7, which law is referenced as an example of knowing sin through the law? **The Bible uses** the Ten Commandment law, or God’s Law to illustrate how we know sin through the Law. Paul uses the tenth commandment as an example that clarifies which law he is talking about.

Q: Where is the problem of sin, in the law or in us? **The Bible says** that the law is not sin. In other words, sin is not in the law, but in us.

Psalm 19:11 Moreover by them [God’s law] is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

Q: What is the purpose of the law as explained in Psalm 19? **The Bible says** that God’s law warns us.

Below are a few other texts that show the law as the sin detector.

Romans 5:13 For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

James 2:9 If you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

1 John 3:4 Sin is the transgression of the law. (KJV)

Obedience to the Law is an Indicator of Our Love for God

1 John 2:3-4 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

Q: Which comes first, knowing God or keeping His commandments? **The Bible says** that our keeping of the commandments shows that we know God. We keep God’s commandments because we know Him. Knowing Him comes first; obeying Him is the result of knowing Him.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Q: Which should come first, love for God or keeping His commandments? **The Bible says** that our keeping of the commandments shows that we love God. We keep God's commandments because we love Him.

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Q: What should be our motivation for loving God? **The Bible says** that we love Him because He first loved us. Our love to Him is a response of His love.

1. God first loves us.
2. We love Him.
3. We keep His commandments.

Out of our love for God, and as a response of His love to us, we obey Him and His commandments!

How is the law an indicator of our love for God? If we love God, it will be natural for us to love His law. Love of God's law results from love of God. As we have seen already, God is love, and love is the fulfillment of the law.

1 John 2:3-6 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

The Law Brings Us to Jesus

Galatians 3:24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Q: What is the purpose of the law? **The Bible says** the purpose of the law is to bring us to Christ.

Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Q: Who is the end of or the purpose intended by the law? **The Bible says** that Christ is the end of, or the purpose intended by, the law.

At first, we may be confused to read that Jesus is the end of the law. Did this law really end with Jesus on the cross as some people claim? We must let Scripture help us here. Take a look at what Jesus Himself said about this law:

Matthew 5:17-18 *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*

Romans 13:10 Love is the fulfillment of the law.

Isaiah 42:21 *The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable.*

Q: What did Jesus not come to do? **The Bible says** Jesus did not come to destroy the law or the prophets.

Q: What did Jesus come to do? **The Bible says** Jesus came to fulfill the law.

Q: How did Jesus fulfill the law? **The Bible says** that love is the fulfillment of the law. God is love. Jesus demonstrated God's love to us by living according to God's law of love.

Q: How did Isaiah describe what Jesus would do? **The Bible says** He would exalt the law and make it honorable.

Q: How do we know that the law can still bring us to Jesus today? **The Bible says** that the law has not changed as long as heaven and earth have not passed away.

Apparently the word "end" in Romans 10:4 cannot mean "termination," for Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus did not come to destroy (or terminate or end) the law. On the contrary, Jesus came to fulfill or magnify, not to do away with. Clearly, heaven and

earth have not passed away, so the Law still exists. It has not ended, but points ever more clearly to Jesus.

Supplementary Study on “The End of the Law”

Another example or two will serve to remove any doubt that remains about the Law ending with Jesus. Let’s see how the Bible uses the word “end” in other places similarly.

James 5:11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. (KJV)

Here, “the end of the Lord” does not mean that the Lord came to His end, or was abolished or died. The word “end” here means the “purpose” or “goal” of the Lord was that we recognize the Lord’s character.

1 Peter 1:9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

Does our faith end when we receive salvation? Again, the word “end” is not defined here as “termination.” We cannot say that the termination of our faith is salvation. But we can say that the goal or purpose of our faith is the salvation of our souls.

1 Timothy 1:5 Now the purpose [end (KJV)] of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,

How the Law Brings Us to Jesus

The law cannot get rid of the sin problem in your life. It cannot cleanse your heart. Only Jesus can do that. The Law points us to Jesus. How does that work?

James 1:23-25 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Q: What object lesson is used in this text to help us understand how the law works? **The Bible says** the law is like a mirror. It shows a

person how to continue being a faithful doer instead of a forgetful hearer.

How does a mirror work? If we understand how a mirror works, we can understand better how God's law works. When you look into a mirror, you see light that is reflected off of the mirror. The mirror doesn't shine on its own. It must have a light source in order to be effective. In summary, a mirror works by reflecting light that shines on it.

A mirror shows me what I look like. Without a mirror or similar device, I cannot see my own face. But by using a mirror to reflect a good light source onto my face, I can see where my hair is well arranged and where it is messy. But still, the mirror doesn't fix my messy hair. The mirror is useful to show me my need by reflecting light on it, but is not the solution to my need. The mirror cannot wash my hair for me, nor can it comb my hair.

Similarly, for me to really understand what my character is like, for me to really understand my heart condition, I need something to show me where it is well arranged and where it is messy. When I begin to compare my character to God's Law, I begin to see a big difference between the two because it is God's character that is being reflected onto me through His law. But the Law cannot fix my sins. It only points me to Jesus Who can fix my sin problem.

Origin of Moral Law

Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying: [The Ten Commandments]

Q: Who is the origin of the moral law? **The Bible says** that God spoke the law. It is the direct word of God.

Exodus 31:18 And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Q: Who actually wrote the moral law? **The Bible says** that God wrote the law with His own finger.

Earliest Evidence of Moral Law

The moral law was written on stone with the finger of God during the time of Moses. Many people claim that when God spoke the law from Mount Sinai, it was the first time the Israelites had heard of the law. Did God give them a new law, or did He organize and summarize a law that already existed for a long time? What does the Bible teach?

Let's look backwards in our Bibles and try to see if we can find any clues that help us know if the Law existed before Sinai.

Clue 1. Our first clue is contained right in the heart of the law, the ten commandments. Look at how the fourth commandment starts:

Exodus 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Q: What word in this verse gives us a clue that the law, at least this part of it, was not new when God wrote it on stone? **The Bible says**, "Remember." When we remember something, we think back on what has already happened or what already exists.

Genesis 2:2-3 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Q: How does this verse in Genesis show that God's law existed before it was written on Mount Sinai? The Israelites were to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy because **the Bible says** God blessed the Sabbath and made it holy when He created the earth hundreds of years before. The Sabbath did not originate on Mount Sinai.

Clue 2. We find another clue just a few chapters back, in Exodus 16. The Israelites were hungry, and God rained down food from heaven for them. But He instructed them to gather twice as much food on Friday, the sixth day, because there was to be rest on the seventh day.

Exodus 16:4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.”

Exodus 16:26-28 Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none. Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the Lord said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?”

Q: Did this story take place before or after the Ten Commandments were given as found in Exodus 20? **The Bible says** this happened before. Exodus 16 comes before Exodus 20.

The Israelites were to observe the Sabbath in this story which took place before the Ten Commandments were given on Mount Sinai.

Clue 3. Joseph knew about God’s law.

Genesis 39:7-9 And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.” But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “...How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

Q: What did Joseph call adultery? **The Bible says** that Joseph recognized adultery as sin against God and great wickedness.

It was contrary to God’s law to covet Potiphar’s wife, and it was contrary to God’s law to commit adultery. Remember that the Bible definition for sin is transgression of God’s law. Had there been no law, there would have been no sin. We can know that Joseph knew about God’s law because he knew what sin was.

Clue 4. Adam sinned.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned

Q: How did sin enter the world? **The Bible says** that sin entered through one man, who is Adam.

Adam sinned and was cast out of the garden of Eden. He transgressed God's law. Had there been no law, there would have been no reason for God to put Adam out of the garden.

Clue 5. Lucifer sinned.

Ezekiel 28:15-16 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you. ... And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God.

Q: Where did sin originate? **The Bible says** that iniquity was found in Lucifer. This is the first mention of sin in Bible history. Sin originated in Lucifer, a perfect being in a perfect environment.

We have already learned that there can be no sin without law. Therefore, we can conclude that the law existed even in the perfect Garden of Eden, before there was sin because without law, sin could not have existed! In a few more pages, we will see that the law has actually existed as long as God has existed.

Location of Moral Law

Where does God's law originate? To deeply understand the answer to this question, it is helpful to study the tabernacle sanctuary that the Israelites constructed in the wilderness. We will not attempt this study deeply here, as that is the topic for another study. But we will show a few key texts that help us know where God's law originates.

Here are the words of God to Moses.

Exodus 25:8-9 And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.

Q: How were the Israelites to make the tabernacle? **The Bible says** they were to make it from the pattern that God gave to Moses.

So Moses was to have the tabernacle made according to a pattern. This passage doesn't explain where the pattern came from, except that God showed Moses this pattern. And God showed Moses the right place to store the Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy 10:5 Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, just as the Lord commanded me.

Q: Where did Moses place the tablets of stone with God's law? **The Bible says** he placed them in the ark.

Q: Who told Moses to put the tablets of stone in the ark? **The Bible says** that the Lord commanded him.

If we were to study the sanctuary, we would find that the ark was the most holy and most sacred of all pieces of furniture in the tabernacle. This was where God lived. It was here that God's Law, the Ten Commandments, the Testimony, was stored. The ark containing God's Law was central to all operations of the sanctuary. As the temple was constructed, everything else was built up around it (see Exodus 40). That was where God's presence was, on the mercy seat over the Law.

Exodus 25:21-22 You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.

Exodus 26:33-34 And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy. You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy.

Q: From where did God speak to the Israelites? **The Bible says** God spoke to them from above the mercy seat.

Q: Where was the mercy seat? **The Bible says** the mercy seat was on top of the ark, between the two cherubim or angels.

Q: Where was God's Law? **The Bible says** it was kept in the ark under the mercy seat.

Q: Where was the ark placed? **The Bible says** the ark was placed in the Most Holy place.

So we see that God's law was kept in the most holy piece of furniture in the Most Holy place in the earthly sanctuary, just underneath the mercy seat where God was. Since the tabernacle was built from a pattern, we would expect to see a similar idea in the original from which the pattern was made. Hebrews discusses where this pattern for the Israelite tabernacle came from.

Hebrews 8:5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

Q: What was the tabernacle a copy or shadow of? **The Bible says** the tabernacle was a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.

Since the earthly sanctuary was a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary, we expect that if there was an ark in the earthly sanctuary, there would be an ark in the heavenly sanctuary.

Hebrews 8:1-2 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

Hebrews 9:11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

Hebrews 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

These verses talk about Jesus, our High Priest. He is in heaven, at the right hand of the throne of God which is in the sanctuary. The throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary corresponds with the ark in the earthly sanctuary. Where Jesus our High Priest is working, He is together with God's Law.

Revelation 11:19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple.

Q: When the temple of God was opened, what was the piece of furniture that John saw? **The Bible says** that John saw the ark of His covenant.

John caught a glimpse of the ark in the temple in heaven. From his description and from other verses we have already read, we can put together some ideas about the heavenly sanctuary. In case we do not know exactly what is meant by “ark of His covenant,” let us look at the following verse.

Exodus 34:28 So he [Moses] was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy 4:13 So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

Q: What is another name for the covenant? **The Bible says** the covenant on the tablets of stone is the Ten Commandments.

In the earthly sanctuary the ark of the covenant was where God’s presence was. This represents God’s throne in the heavenly sanctuary. In the earthly sanctuary, there were angels on either side of the mercy seat. In heaven, living angels surround God’s throne. In the earthly sanctuary, a copy of God’s Law (the covenant, the Ten Commandments) was written by God on stone and was stored in the ark under the mercy seat where God was. So in the heavenly sanctuary, the original copy of God’s law (the covenant, the Ten Commandments) is under His throne, or is the foundation of His throne and government.

Now we conclude that God’s Law did not originate on Mount Sinai when God wrote the Law in stone and gave it to Moses. God was only writing a copy for the Israelites to keep. The great original is kept in heaven, in the ark that is in God’s temple there.

Characteristics of Moral Law

Perhaps we have not satisfactorily addressed the question, “How does the Law bring us to Jesus?” In this section, we will more fully

understand how the Law reveals God's character, thus showing a great contrast with our character and our need of Him.

God's Law Shows Us His Character

The more we study the law of God, the more we understand about His character. It may be difficult at first to understand the connection between God's law and His character. The following verses will help us understand how this happens.

Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying: [The Ten Commandments]

Q: According to Luke 6, where do words come from? **The Bible says** that words come from the heart.

Q: According to Exodus 20, who spoke the Ten Commandments? **The Bible says** that God spoke the Ten Commandments.

He spoke them with His mouth. Putting Luke 6:45 together with Exodus 20:1, we can say that God spoke the Ten Commandments from the abundance of His heart.

Exodus 33:18-19; 34:6-7 And he [Moses] said, "Please, show me Your glory." Then He [God] said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. ..." And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Q: According to Exodus 33, what is God's heart(or character) like? **The Bible says** that God revealed some of His glory to Moses explaining what God is like, or His character. God is full of goodness and mercy, He is forgiving, He is just, etc.

God's character is good. Out of the abundance of His goodness, God spoke the words of the Law. It should be no surprise, then, that the Law reflects the character of God.

Take some time to reflect on the following pairs of verses. Compare the verses on the left with the verses on the left and see if you discover any similarities between God and His Law. Ask your self, "Do I see God's character in His Law?"

God	God's Law
<p><i>Psalm 93:2 Your throne is established from of old; You are from <u>everlasting</u>.</i></p> <p><i>Psalm 119:142 Your righteousness is an <u>everlasting</u> righteousness.</i></p> <p><i>Isaiah 9:6 And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, <u>Everlasting</u> Father, Prince of Peace.</i></p>	<p><i>Psalm 119:144 The righteousness of Your testimonies is <u>everlasting</u>; Give me understanding, and I shall live.</i></p>
<p><i>Psalm 45:6 Your throne, O God, is <u>forever</u> and ever.</i></p> <p><i>1 Timothy 1:17 Now to the <u>King eternal, immortal, invisible</u>, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.</i></p>	<p><i>Psalm 119:152 Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them <u>forever</u>.</i></p> <p><i>Psalm 119:89 <u>Forever</u>, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.</i></p> <p><i>Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands <u>forever</u>.</i></p>

<p>Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I <u>desire</u> besides You.</p> <p>Job 22:25 Yes, the Almighty will be your <u>gold</u> and your precious silver;</p>	<p>Psalm 19:9-10 The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. <u>More to be desired are they than gold</u>, yea, than much fine gold;</p>
<p>Ephesians 2:14 For He Himself is our <u>peace</u>, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,</p>	<p>Psalm 119:165 <u>Great peace</u> have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.</p>
<p>Deuteronomy 32:3-4 For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is <u>perfect</u>.</p> <p>Psalm 18:30 As for God, His way is <u>perfect</u>; The word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.</p> <p>Matthew 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is <u>perfect</u>.</p>	<p>Psalm 19:7 The law of the Lord is <u>perfect</u>, converting the soul;</p> <p>James 1:25 But he who looks into the <u>perfect</u> law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.</p>
<p>John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the <u>truth</u>, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”</p> <p>John 16:13 However, when He, the Spirit of <u>truth</u>, has come, He will guide you into all truth;</p>	<p>Psalm 119:142 Your law is <u>truth</u>.</p> <p>Psalm 119:160 The entirety of Your word is <u>truth</u>,</p> <p>John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is <u>truth</u>.</p>

<p>Revelation 22:1 And he showed me a <u>pure</u> river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.</p>	<p>Psalm 119:140 Your word is very <u>pure</u>; therefore Your servant loves it.</p> <p>Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is <u>pure</u>; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.</p>
<p>Psalm 119:137 <u>Righteous</u> are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments.</p>	<p>Psalm 119:172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are <u>righteousness</u>.</p> <p>Psalm 119:138 Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are <u>righteous</u> and very faithful.</p>
<p>Isaiah 9:6 And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, <u>Mighty</u> God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.</p> <p>Psalm 62:11 God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: that <u>power</u> belongs to God.</p>	<p>Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and <u>powerful</u>.</p>
<p>Isaiah 9:6 And His name will be called <u>Wonderful</u>, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.</p>	<p>Psalm 119:129 Your testimonies are <u>wonderful</u>; therefore my soul keeps them.</p>
<p>Psalm 42:2 My soul thirsts for God, for the <u>living</u> God. When shall I come and appear before God?</p> <p>Jeremiah 10:10 But the Lord is the true God; He is the <u>living</u> God and the everlasting King.</p>	<p>Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is <u>living</u> and powerful.</p> <p>Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of <u>life</u>.</p>

<p>Psalm 22:3 But You are <u>holy</u>, enthroned in the praises of Israel.</p>	<p>Romans 7:12 Therefore the law is <u>holy</u>, and the commandment <u>holy</u> and just and good.</p>
<p>Isaiah 45:21 And there is no other God besides Me, a <u>just</u> God and a Savior.</p> <p>Deuteronomy 32:4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are <u>justice</u>, a God of truth and <u>without injustice</u>; righteous and upright is He.</p>	<p>Romans 7:12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and <u>just</u> and good.</p>
<p>Matthew 19:17 So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is <u>good</u> but One, that is, God.”</p>	<p>Romans 7:12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and <u>good</u>.</p>
<p>John 1:9 That was the true <u>Light</u> which gives light to every man coming into the world.</p> <p>John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the <u>light</u> of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the <u>light</u> of life.”</p>	<p>Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a <u>light</u>; reproofs of instruction are the way of life,</p> <p>Psalm 119:105 Your word is a <u>lamp</u> to my feet and a <u>light</u> to my path.</p>
<p>Malachi 3:6 For I am the Lord, I <u>do not change</u>.</p> <p>Psalm 102:27 But You are <u>the same</u>, and Your years will have no end.</p>	<p>Deuteronomy 4:13 He wrote [the Ten Commandments] on two tablets of <u>stone</u>.</p> <p>Matthew 5:18 Till heaven and earth pass away, <u>one jot or one tittle will by no means pass</u> from the law till all is fulfilled.</p>

After studying this chart, the correlation between God and His law should be obvious. As God is, so is His law. God's law shows us His character. Let's select a couple of these points to examine more closely.

God is Holy, His Law is Holy

When Moses returned from Mount Sinai when God gave him the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments, his face was glowing so brightly that the people could not look on his face directly.

Exodus 34:29-30,33 Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. ...and they were afraid to come near him. ... And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.

Q: Why was Moses' face shining so brilliantly? **The Bible says** his face shone after speaking with God and receiving the Ten Commandments.

Moses could not look at Jesus directly, so he was hidden in the crack of a rock; the glory would have been too much for Moses to bear. When Jesus gave him the Law, however, Moses could look at those. They, like God, were holy. But without Jesus and His righteousness, they would not have been so glorious. As Moses looked at those pieces of stone with the Law written on them, he saw the righteousness of Jesus in His Law and Moses' face shone with God's glory.ⁱⁱⁱ

God is Unchangable, His Law is Unchangable

God is forever, eternal, unchanging. So is His Law. The Bible gives us a lot of evidence that God's Law is unchangeable and unalterable. We have seen that God wrote the Ten Commandments with His own finger. Not only are they written with the finger of God, they were written in stone. The law written on paper could be easily burned or destroyed or erased. But the law written on stone signified its permanence and unchangeability.

Matthew 5:17-18 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Psalms 119:152 Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever.

Psalms 111:7-8 The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.

Results of Moral Law

The law is an expression of God's idea. When we receive it in Christ, it becomes our idea. It lifts us above the power of natural desires and tendencies, above temptations that lead to sin. "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165)—cause them to stumble. {1SM 235.3}

It is by studying and obeying God's law that our characters may become changed to match God's character. We must be careful to remember that it is not the law that changes us. It is God Who changes us through the law. How does this happen? As we study the Law and become more familiar with it, we begin to understand how big of a contrast there is between the pure Law and our sinful lives. Once we see this standard of God's character, our need of a Savior will be unmistakable and we will turn to Jesus for power to abandon sin in our lives.

As you take a few moments and reflect on the following verses, ask yourself how the Law is life-changing to you. Consider the following results of reading and loving God's Law.

Psalms 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.

If we would just ask God to open our eyes, we would see wonderful things from His law. If you see the law as a burden, ask God to open your eyes to the wonderful law of God.

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

Proverbs 4:2 For I give you good doctrine: do not forsake my law.

Consider the following texts, also.

Psalms 119:98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me.

God makes us wiser through His law.

Psalms 119:99,104 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. ... Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

Through the law we acquire more understanding and a hatred for sin.

Psalms 119:165 Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.

Through the law we find great peace and stability.

Psalms 119:172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.

Through the law our conversations are transformed to speak of spiritual things.

Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Through the law we learn to treat others like Jesus would have us to treat them.

Revelation 22:14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.

Those who are obedient to the law are blessed .

Let's go back to the chart comparing God's character with His law. This time we will add a third column showing that these

characteristics of God's character and His law are actually God's ideal for us.

Characteristic of God and His Law	God's Ideal for Us
everlasting	<p>John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have <u>everlasting</u> life.</p> <p>1 Corinthians 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on <u>immortality</u>.</p>
eternal, forever	<p>Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is <u>eternal</u> life in Christ Jesus our Lord.</p> <p>Genesis 3:22-23 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live <u>forever</u>"—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.</p> <p>John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live <u>forever</u>.</p>
gold	<p>1 Peter 1:7 ...that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than <u>gold</u> that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as <u>gold</u>.</p>
peace	<p>Psalm 119:165 <u>Great peace</u> have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.</p>

<p><i>perfect</i></p>	<p><i>Matthew 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is <u>perfect</u>.</i></p>
<p><i>truth</i></p>	<p><i>Psalm 51:6 Behold, You desire <u>truth</u> in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.</i></p> <p><i>Psalm 25:10 All the paths of the Lord are mercy and <u>truth</u> unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.</i></p> <p><i>Psalm 15:1-2 Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the <u>truth</u> in his heart.</i></p>
<p><i>pure</i></p>	<p><i>Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a <u>pure</u> heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.</i></p> <p><i>Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the <u>pure</u> in heart, for they shall see God.</i></p>
<p><i>righteous</i></p>	<p><i>Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of <u>righteousness</u>, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.</i></p> <p><i>Psalm 112:1-4 Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments. ... And his <u>righteousness</u> endures forever. ... He is gracious, and full of compassion, and <u>righteous</u>.</i></p>

<p><i>mighty, power</i></p>	<p><i>Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be <u>strong</u> in the Lord and in the <u>power</u> of His <u>might</u>.</i></p> <p><i>2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but <u>mighty</u> through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.</i></p>
<p><i>living</i></p>	<p><i>Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a <u>living</u> sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.</i></p> <p><i>John 4:10, 14 Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you <u>living</u> water. ... Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”</i></p>
<p><i>holy</i></p>	<p><i>1 Peter 1:15-16 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye <u>holy</u> in all manner of conversation; because it is written, be ye <u>holy</u>; for I am holy.</i></p>

<p><i>just</i></p>	<p><i>Ezekiel 18:9 “If he has walked in My statutes and kept My judgments faithfully—he is <u>just</u>; he shall surely live!” says the Lord God.</i></p> <p><i>Habakkuk 2:4 Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the <u>just</u> shall live by his faith.</i></p> <p><i>Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do <u>justly</u>, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?</i></p> <p><i>Proverbs 4:18 But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.</i></p>
<p><i>good</i></p>	<p><i>Psalms 37:23 The steps of a <u>good</u> man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way.</i></p> <p><i>Proverbs 12:2 A <u>good</u> man obtains favor from the Lord, but a man of wicked intentions He will condemn.</i></p>
<p><i>light</i></p>	<p><i>Matthew 5:14 You are the <u>light</u> of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.</i></p>

Remember how the Law is like a mirror that points us to Jesus? Perhaps now we can begin to see how that process takes place. We become like what we study and think about. By studying the Law we discover the character of God. By studying God’s character, we become changed into the same image. While our characters are definitely not like God’s character yet, His character is our objective and God’s ideal for us and we can ever be growing more and more like Jesus.

James 1:25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We are changed and blessed not because the Law had any power to change us, but because Jesus and His righteousness changed us. The moral Law is powerless to change us, but in it we find the all-powerful Savior Who does change us and separate us from sin.

How Two Sinners View the Law

As we have clearly seen, God's law is good and just and holy. It is eternal, unchangeable, immutable. Yet different people still see it different ways. Take a look at how two sinners (one repentant and one unrepentant) see God's law, and ask yourself which viewpoint more closely reflects your thoughts about God's law.

Unrepentant Sinner	Repentant Sinner
views the law as a list of “don’t do this” and “I can’t do that”	views the law as merciful
is sorrowful in disobedience (Matthew 19:16-22)	is happy in obedience (Proverbs 29:18) finds great peace and happiness (Psalm 119:165)
wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)	gift of God is eternal life (Romans 6:23)
the law testifies against him (Nehemiah 9:34)	Jesus testifies for us as our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)
rejects the law, the only rule which can define sin	accepts the law as defining sin and showing his need of a Savior
focuses on the law	focuses on Jesus
believes he is saved by keeping the law (self-righteous)	believes he is saved by Christ and His righteousness
tries in his own strength to keep the law, but fails (Matthew 23:23-25)	relies on Jesus’ power to keep the law, and succeeds (Galatians 2:19-21; Philippians 4:13)
hates the law	loves the law (Psalm 119:127)
wishes to make the law void (Psalm 119:126)	establishes the law (Romans 3:31)

follows tradition and man's word and worships God in vain (Mark 7:6-13; Matthew 15:1-6)	worships God for magnifying His word (Psalm 138:2)
those who forsake the law will be consumed (Isaiah 1:28)	Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction. (Psalm 119:92)

Summary

To summarize the question “What is the Moral Law?” ponder these statements.

- If we do not appreciate God's law, we cannot truly appreciate His character, for His character is revealed in His law.
- If we do not love the law of God, and if it is not our delight, than we do not love the message of the gospel because it is the law that points us to Jesus.
- If we wish to do away with the law, we wish to do away with our measuring standard of our love for God.
- If we do not wish to acknowledge the validity of God's law, we no longer have a definition for sin and do not know what to confess or repent of.

The law is a crucial part of the gospel. The law and the gospel cannot be separated or understood without the other; they are interdependent on each other. Because of the law, we become convicted of sin and feel our need of Jesus and His atonement. The law not only shows us our need, but points us to Jesus. It brings us the good news that although we are sinners, we can through faith find forgiveness, cleansing, and the power to live a good life through Jesus. Through the law we come to Jesus and through Jesus we keep the law.

There are, in the various denominations, men eminent for their piety, by whom this fact is acknowledged and deplored. Prof. Edward Park, in setting forth the current religious perils, ably says: "One source of danger is the neglect of the pulpit to enforce the divine law. In former days the pulpit was an echo of the voice of conscience. ... Our most illustrious preachers gave a wonderful majesty to their discourses by following the example of the Master, and giving prominence to the law, its precepts, and its threatenings. They repeated the two great maxims, that the law is a transcript of the divine perfections, and that a man who does not love the law does not love the gospel; for the law, as well as the gospel, is a mirror reflecting the true character of God. This peril leads to another, that of underrating the evil of sin, the extent of it, the demerit of it. In proportion to the rightfulness of the commandment is the wrongfulness of disobeying it." {GC88 465.2}

In the truths of His word, God has given to men a revelation of Himself; and to all who accept them they are a shield against the deceptions of Satan. It is a neglect of these truths that has opened the door to the evils which are now becoming so widespread in the religious world. The nature and the importance of the law of God have been, to a great extent, lost sight of. A wrong conception of the character, the perpetuity, and the obligation of the divine law has led to errors in relation to conversion and sanctification, and has resulted in lowering the standard of piety in the church. Here is to be found the secret of the lack of the Spirit and power of God in the revivals of our time. {NL 10.3}

Wages and Death

Wages?

Scripture talks about the wages of sin. It sounds serious.

Ezekiel 18:4 The soul who sins shall die.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.

Why? Why are there wages for sin? Before Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, God gave them a warning about the wages of sin. His instructions were simple and straightforward.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Q: What did God say they could do? **The Bible says** that they could eat of any tree they wanted, except one.

Q: What did God say they could not do? **The Bible says** that they could not eat of the one tree.

Q: What was the consequence for disobedience? **The Bible says** death.

God basically said, "Obey My law. In obedience, you will find life. In disobedience, you will find death." But why? Is God just picky or proud so that He kills off everybody who doesn't obey Him? No, certainly not.

The fact is that His law requires complete and perfect obedience. It also requires death for the transgressor, or the one who does not completely and perfectly obey His law. How do we know this? Let's dig a little deeper into the story of Adam.

Sacrificial System

Adam and Eve knew about God's law. It existed before any sin, and they understood it, to some extent. They knew God and His

character, though not fully. They were perfectly happy when their lives were in harmony with God's character. They were happy in obedience.

They also learned about sin, for they did not guard and protect their character to remain like God's character. Instead, they distrusted God, ignored His warning, and disobeyed His law. They personally felt and saw some of the affects of sin immediately after sinning.

But what about the penalty for disobedience? Did it really exist? Why didn't Adam and Eve experience the full wages of sin immediately? If the law really demands perfect obedience, and if it really demands the death of those who break the law, why didn't Adam and Eve pay the wages of sin by dying as soon as they had eaten the forbidden fruit?

Adam and Eve didn't die immediately because a Substitute—Jesus—offered to pay the wages instead of requiring that Adam and Eve pay the wages. Payment for sin, an atonement, was necessary to pay for breaking the law, but Adam and Eve were not forced to atone for their own sin. Actually, they couldn't and still live. They were incapable. So God intervened and offered the only solution by allowing Jesus to lay down His life in place of ours to pay for sin.

But nothing changed about the law or God's Word. It was holy, and just, and good then, and even to this day it still is holy, and just, and good. It always will be. It still demands atonement whenever it is transgressed. It still demands that wages are paid for sin. To teach Adam and Eve that God's law was still valid, that it demanded wages, but that Jesus was willing to pay the wages for them, God instructed Adam and Eve in the sacrificial system.

When Adam sinned, he became guilty of breaking the law of God. He became condemned to die, and nothing he could do could save himself. Then God must have explained, "Adam, your sin requires atonement. Somebody has to pay the penalty of death for breaking the law. My law requires justice. But I have a solution for you. You do not have to die forever. You can still live eternally. I will send

my son Jesus to die so that you do not have to pay for your sin. To help you remember my promise and to encourage you to believe that what I promised is true, I want you to kill a lamb every time you sin. This lamb represents Jesus, my son. This lamb will have to die because you sinned. In a similar way, Jesus is choosing to die because of your sin.”

Sacrificing the lamb was not the real thing. It was not the lamb that paid the wages of sin. The death of a lamb could not pay for the real sin of breaking the real law. But it pointed to Jesus who was the real Solution. Jesus’ solution did not take away the broken law, nor did it take away the penalty for breaking the law. Jesus’ solution, as demonstrated by the sacrifice of the lamb for sin, was to sacrifice Himself for sin. He was to die and pay the penalty that we cannot pay.^{iv}

How Wages are Calculated

We can think of wages as a penalty or payment. But what is this payment or penalty for? What is being paid for? Sin. It is the wages of sin that we are talking about. What is sin? Sin is the transgression of the law of God. What is the law? It is a representation of God’s character and the standard by which we determine if our characters are like God’s.

Something as sacred and holy as God’s character is indeed something to respect and value. God’s law is on the same level as His character. When God’s law is broken, it is a direct attack on God’s character. Now that is serious!

In other words, when our characters are not like God, we deserve to die. God requires perfect obedience to His law. But since all humans have not perfectly obeyed God’s law, it demands that all humans die. God’s law reflects His character, but we but imperfectly reflect His character. We all have fallen short.

Romans 3:23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The wages of sin are calculated according to the sin that the person commits. Study the following verses.

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Job 34:10-11 Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding; Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to commit iniquity. For He repays man according to his work, and makes man to find a reward according to his way.

Revelation 22:12 And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

Q: How are wages given or determined? **The Bible says** that the wages are given according to our works—the things we have done.

Q: Who gives the wages? **The Bible says** that the wages are given by God.

The wages required by the law is death because any other solution would perpetuate sin. If man continued living, sin would be preserved in sinful man. When man sinned, he forfeited his right to eternal life. Now that sin had been introduced, if there was no other solution, God would be forever separated from His people, because sin cannot exist in the presence of God. Although God wants to be with His people forever, His character is incompatible with sin and will not allow sin to exist forever.

Wages vs. Gift

Thankfully, we do not have to think about the wages of sin all the time. The verse has two parts, and the second part is definitely good news for us.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Q: What word contrasts with wages? Gift.

This verse contrasts wages and gift. In order to understand wages, it is important to understand the contrast portrayed in this verse.

Wages are given according to what is deserved. Gifts are given according to love.

Wages is something earned by doing or not doing something and is given as payment or compensation. For example, a man who works in the field has the right to receive wages or payment for what he has done.

A gift, in contrast, is something that is given voluntarily, not as a payment or compensation. For example, a man may buy a gift for his wife. He does this not because she earned it but because he loves her.

Both wages and gifts involve giving something. The difference between the two is that wages are earned and the gift is not earned. Death is earned and deserved. Eternal life is given, but not earned or deserved.

Jesus took our sin and died to pay the wages of that sin so that we can live. Now he offers us a free gift of eternal life, if we will but accept it! Yet somehow, people fail to understand the importance of this gift. They try to be good on their own and earn their way to heaven. But in so doing, they turn their backs on God and forget Him Who offered to bear their penalty.

Ezekiel 23:35 “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, Therefore you shall bear the penalty of your lewdness and your harlotry.’”

Hebrews 9:28 Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Q: In Ezekiel, who bears the penalty of sin and why? **The Bible says** the sinner bears the penalty of sin because the sinner forgot God and cast Him behind his back.

Q: In Hebrews, Who bears the penalty of sin and why? **The Bible says** that Christ bears the sins of many for salvation.

If we receive the wages of sin, whose choice is it? Jesus has already died to take our sins and the penalty of sin away. We would certainly be fools to choose to try to be good on our own and to reject Jesus' offer of eternal life.

Think about the following verses. You may find it interesting to do your own Bible search, or to look at the context of these verses in your own Bible.

Proverbs 26:10 The great God who formed everything gives the fool his hire and the transgressor his wages.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Philippians 2:13 It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Isaiah 3:10-11 Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

Romans 2:5-9 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil.

2 Chronicles 25:4 A person shall die for his own sin.

Let's look at a few conclusions:

- If we suffer the wages of sin, it is because we earned it by our own evil works.
- If we receive eternal life, it is because we were saved from the wages of sin by grace and given the gift of eternal life by God.
- If our works are good, it is because it is God Who works in us, not because of anything good in us.

Which Death?

Death is a part of everyday life. The sound of wailing and funeral drums is a common occurrence. Perhaps especially tragic are the deaths of innocent young people. Death is certainly an awful thing.

But for some people, perhaps death is desirable. In a life full of hardship and suffering, death seems to be a sweet release from the troubles of this world.

Sometimes, death is even something that people enjoy. For some, hunting and killing animals with friends out in the bush is thrilling. When somebody finally finds and kills an animal, there is great rejoicing and the hunter is often praised as brave, courageous, and highly skilled.

Then, we read in the Bible that the wages of sin is death. Perhaps this verse does not affect us the way it should since we are surrounded with death. We are familiar with death. Is it really that bad to receive the wages of sin? Let's look a little more into this death and how bad it really is.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Q: What is the wages of sin? **The Bible says** the wages of sin is death.

Q: What is contrasted with death in this verse? **The Bible says:** eternal life. Life and death are opposites.

Q: In addition to contrasting death and eternal life, what two other things are contrasted in this verse? **The Bible says:** Wages and gift.

Sin and God. Wages are earned, a gift is not. Sin and God are opposites and cannot exist together.

Let's organize this idea into a chart, noticing that there are three pairs of opposites.

WAGES	of	SIN	is	DEATH
GIFT	of	GOD	is	ETERNAL LIFE

Now we have a question, because there is more than one type of death mentioned in the Bible. The Bible talks about a first death and a second death. Let's explore the difference between the two types of death and try to determine which death is given as the wages of sin.

First Death

Genesis 3:19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.

These verses talk of the death that every human dies, whether they are righteous or evil.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Even the righteous and faithful people described in Hebrews chapter 11 died, but they had hope of a resurrection. They were pilgrims here for a time, with their goal set on moving to heaven someday. They did not receive the promise in this life, but were assured of receiving those promises in the next life. But what about the other death and who dies this death?

Second Death

Revelation 21:7-8 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable,

murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Revelation 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

1 Corinthians 15:26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

Q: What is the second death? **The Bible says** that the second death is the lake of fire.

Q: Who or what are destroyed in the second death? **The Bible says** that sinners and Death and Hades are destroyed in the second death.

Q: What is the last enemy destroyed? **The Bible says** death is the last enemy destroyed.

If death is destroyed, it cannot continue existing. Something that is destroyed ceases to exist. Think for a moment what it would be like to experience a place without death!

Revelation 21:4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Now we return to our question: which death is the wages of sin? Is it the first death or the second death? The first death is a death all people die, whether they are righteous or wicked. The second death is for sinners and death itself and is the death that one dies and does not resurrect from; it is eternal death. The alternative is eternal life. Therefore, the death talked about as the wages of sin in Romans 6:23 is talking about the second death, or eternal death, the death that all unrepentant sinners die in the end.

Psalms 145:20 The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.

Q: Who are preserved? **The Bible says** that those who love the Lord are preserved.

Q: Who are destroyed? **The Bible says** that the wicked are destroyed.

The wicked are destroyed. They do not continue to exist.

Q: What is the word contrasting with “preserve”? Destroy, or not preserved.

Q: What is the word contrasting with “love”? Wicked, or those who do not love God.

Q: How complete is this work? **The Bible says** God preserves all those who love Him and destroys all the wicked.

All those who love God (the righteous), are preserved. All those who do not love God (the wicked), are destroyed.

Psalm 37:37-38 Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off.

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power.

Why Eternal Death?

Perhaps the issue of wages and death is already clear in your minds. But let's linger just a little longer and try to dig a little deeper before we move along. Why is eternal death the salary of sin? Why couldn't God just punish the sinner with another punishment less severe? Why couldn't God just bleach all sinners of their sins and then allow them into heaven?

Sin Separates Us from the Lifegiver

Life requires certain basic elements. Without any one of these elements, life cannot continue.

For example, a person cannot live in a place without air. In some places where water is very far below the surface of the ground, men will try to dig a well to find water but have to stop because there is not enough air to breath deep in the well. A person without air runs out of breath, suffocates and dies.

A person cannot live in a place without food. To have health and energy, one must eat good food regularly. A person without food will eventually starve and die.

A person cannot live in a place without water. The human body is composed over 70% of water. Water is necessary for body functions. A person without water will dehydrate and die.

A person cannot live in a place without light. Light is required to support photosynthesis, the energy-making process of plants. Without plants for both humans and animals to eat, people would have nothing to eat and would soon die. Light is a fundamentally important component to life and health. A person cannot live without light.

We are dependent on God for all of these things: for breath, for food, for water, and for light. God is the Source for all of these things. Take a look at the following verses.

Genesis 2:7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Job 33:4 The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

John 6:33 For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.

John 4:14 Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.

Revelation 22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

What does this all mean? It means that Jesus is necessary for life. The Bible compares God or Jesus to these necessary elements to illustrate that Jesus is as necessary for our eternal life just as these physical things are necessary for our life. Jesus is the Source of breath. He is the Source of food. He is the Source of water. He is the Source of light. Without Him, we cannot live!

Now, these things are not obligatory. We can choose not to breathe and put a plastic bag over our heads. But we would consider a person who does that to be stupid. Why choose death by suffocation when there is fresh air to breath? We can choose not to eat, even though food is available to eat. But we would consider a person who chooses this to be stupid, too. Why would someone choose to die of starvation when his granary is full of grain? We can choose to stop drinking water. But we would consider a person who chooses this to be stupid. Why would someone die for lack of water when his well is overflowing with water? And, we could choose to live in the darkness. We could build a large building with no windows and a tightly sealed door. We could try to live and raise our crops and animals in complete darkness. But we would consider this choice stupid. Why would someone choose to live in the darkness when there is abundant sunlight for anybody who wants it?

1 John 5:11-12 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Psalms 36:9 For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.

Hopefully it is now clear that God is the Source of life. This is an important point when trying to understand the question of why death is the necessary penalty for sin. Now, let us look at another verse.

Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

It is that simple! Eternal death is the necessary and natural result of separation from God, much like a phone “dies” when it is separated from its battery. The wages of sin is death because the sinner chooses to become separated from the Giver of life. God does not desire to punish the sinner and give him what he deserves, but death comes because the sinner chooses to separate himself from God the Source of life.

Thankfully, God's love for us is unchangeable. He wants us to choose eternal life.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Death is the Only Way to Eradicate Sin

Before a surgery in the hospital, the instruments are heated so hot that any microbe living on them dies. The instruments are thus sterilized before being brought into the sterile environment of the operating room. Nothing that brings infection is allowed into the operating room.

Read the following verse about heaven and notice the similarities.

Revelation 21:27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

God will not allow sin to enter heaven again.

Nahum 1:9-10 What do you conspire against the Lord? He will make an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second time. For while tangled like thorns, and while drunken like drunkards, they shall be devoured like stubble fully dried.

Sin will not continue to exist forever. Once eradicated, it will not return. The only way to fully eradicate it is to burn it up, to purify the earth of sin.

Malachi 4:1 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the Lord of hosts, “that will leave them neither root nor branch.”

The process of maintaining a bush airstrip has taught me a few important spiritual lessons. If a tree starts growing where it does not belong, I must cut it down. The problem is that cutting the tree only patches the problem. After only a few months, more branches spring up from the roots and start to become trees. We can cut the tops off the trees and bushes every year, but the pesky plants keep growing back. The only way we have found to get rid of them is to dig up their roots and lay them in the sun to dry. That is what God will do with all sin. He will dig it up by its roots and lay it out to dry and burn it, never more to sprout again.

Lucifer, now Satan, sees that God is just and that His way is best. But he insists on maintaining his rebellion and will continue to do so until he dies. God cannot force him to be loyal. Nor can he force anybody else to be loyal. But once those in rebellion against God make their final decision and there is no hope of them becoming loyal to God, God will end all sin and all rebellion once and for all. Once God has cleansed the earth by fire and no trace of sin remains, sin will cease to exist. And there will be no other source of infection from which sin can start up again. That is why the wages of sin is eternal death.

What is Sin? (second attempt)

Let's try to summarize what we have learned about sin up to this point.

- Sin is the transgression of God's law.
- God's law:
 - is the measure or standard that shows how well we know God and love Him.
 - defines sin.
 - is the foundation of God's government.
 - is God's character in written form.
- God's character is summarized in one word: love.

If we follow this simple outline through logically from beginning to end, perhaps we can better understand what sin is and how significant it is. Sin is the breaking of the law which is the representation of God's character which is love. God is love. Sin is not just about breaking a rule and then saying "sorry" afterward. Sin is something deep. It is something serious. It is something truly deadly. It is anti-God. It is an act of terrorism against God and His love.

Sin is the transgression of the Law.

When we say that sin is breaking or disobeying God's law, we are also saying that sin is the transgression of God's character, for the law is a written example of God's character. Sin is the rejection of God's character and the promotion of our own character and Satan's character.

Sin is a rejection of God's love

Although sinning is natural for us humans, God loved us so much that He sent His only Son Jesus to die for us so that we do not have to

follow our natural inclinations to sin. Because of God's love we no longer have to receive the wages of sin but can have eternal life! By sinning, we reject God's love. By sinning, we say "No" to Jesus' sacrifice for us.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Sin is a rejection of God's government.

God has designed His government with limitations that are designed to promote the perfect happiness of His subjects. Within these limitations is peace and happiness. But by sinning, we reject God's plan of government and embark on a plan of wretchedness and eternal ruin.

Lucifer was against God's government. He said,

Isaiah 14:13 "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God."

However, if we accept God's system of government here on earth, we will be a part of God's government in heaven.

Psalms 132:12 If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore.

2 Timothy 2:12 If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

Sin is a rejection of our family membership.

We are not only subjects of a King, but we are members of the royal family. When we sin, we choose not to receive God as our father and thus reject our right to be children of God.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

Sin is separation from the Lifegiver.

Sin separates us from God. The automatic result of separation from the Source of life is death. By choosing to sin, we are choosing death. But by believing in Jesus, we can abandon eternal death for eternal life!

1 John 5:11-12 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Sin is a distrust of God's Word.

Scripture is full of wonderful promises to help us in time of need. When we sin, we show our unbelief in God's Word. We show that we do not believe that Jesus, the Word, is powerful enough to help us in our temptations. We show that we think Satan is more powerful than God. But we can trust God's Word, and have complete confidence in what God says.

1 John 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Sin is choosing momentary pleasure in place of eternal pleasure.

When we choose to sin, we show that we have not reflected well on our actions. When we sin, we often sin because we want to sin. Perhaps we feel more happy or more satisfied when we commit that sin. But pleasure from sin is always short-lived. There is no sinful pleasure that is eternal. We have before us the offer of eternal sinless pleasure in God's presence. But we cannot experience eternal pleasure if we are only searching for temporary pleasure of sin here on earth.

Sin is choosing our wisdom over God's wisdom.

To think that we are more wise than God is actually quite foolish. It is God that made us and gave us any wisdom that we have. But by sinning, we reject God's wisdom and declare that our wisdom is better. To think that we are more wise than God is a deception of the Devil since the very beginning of the human race. It would be wise for us to recognize that it is our ways that are not right and that it is God's ways that are good.

Ezekiel 18:25 Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is not fair." Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?

Summary

We say that we are Christians and obey God. We say that we love God. We say that we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. We say that we are sons and daughters of God and call God our Father. We say that we have eternal life. We say that we believe God's Word. We say that we want to go to heaven and experience joy and pleasure in God's presence evermore. We say that we want wisdom and guidance from God.

But what is our personal experience? What do our actions show? Are we really honest about what we say or are there contradictions hidden away somewhere deep down in our hearts? For example, we say that we believe God's Word, but then we worry about life or become discouraged. If we truly believe God's Word, we will not worry and we will not become discouraged!

If we are truly honest, perhaps many of us will have to admit that there are contradictions about what we claim and about what we actually are. As Christians, we want to be good. Our intention is to be good. But intentions are not enough. Now, we must ask God for His miracle to change our hearts so that we may actually grow in our Christian walk and become more like Jesus.

Sin is actually an absolutely horrible and terrible thing. Though I still fall sometimes, I wish nothing to do with sin. I want Jesus to help me recognize what sin really is so that I will detest it and want to eliminate it from my life. I want Jesus to take away my ugly and filthy sin and to cleanse me from all iniquity. I don't want to merely DESIRE to be like Jesus—I want to BE like Jesus.

The good news is that Jesus knows how to help us be like Him. He knows how to help us recognize the awfulness of sin. In fact, He came to Earth for just that.

Luke 19:10 The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

John 1:19 Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

In the coming chapters, we will study the atonement and how Jesus takes away our sin and how we can abandon sin in our lives.

All Have Sinned

When we understand the awfulness of sin, we will not want anything to do with it. Obviously, we do not really understand the awfulness of sin, because we keep returning to sin and repeating it! In fact, the Bible tells us that all of us have sinned and that we are all in need of help.

In a previous chapter, we discussed how we would think somebody is stupid if they chose to thirst to death while living next to a well overflowing with fresh water. We saw how Jesus is the living water and how He offers it to us abundantly. But we still act like we are stupid sometimes. Apparently we are all foolish and stupid, because we have all chosen to sin.

Jeremiah 4:22 For My people are foolish, they have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

Romans 3:10-11 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God."

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Realizing that all have sinned can be very discouraging. We have all made foolish decisions. We have all sinned. We have all, every one, chosen our own way. That means we have all transgressed God's law, rejected His love, rejected His government, rejected our right to be members of the royal family. We have all been separated from the Lifegiver and we have all mistrusted God's word.

Choosing sin is just plain stupid. But do we really understand how stupid it is? Do we understand how expensive sin is, and how if we cling to it, we will be destroyed with it? Away with choosing sin, and away with it now!

Praise God that we are not left with this discouraging message alone. Eternal life is very expensive, but God has already provided it and it is free to us! Who in his right mind would choose to pay for sin by dying eternally when Jesus has already paid the penalty and has offered eternal life as a free and abundant gift?

What shall we do then? Shall we sit here and be sad about how terrible sin is and how unfortunate it is that we are all sinners? I surely hope not. In this book our study is the Gospel, the good news. The good news is not that we are all sinners. The good news is that Jesus has provided a solution for sinners to get rid of their sin. If you are feeling guilty about how sinful your life has been, be of good courage! Look to Jesus Who is the Solution for the sin problem. The message of the Gospel is truly good news. As the following chapters unfold, you will be encouraged with the simplicity of God's plan of salvation. For now, pause for a moment and simply choose life. You will find practical insights into how to deal with the sin problem in your life.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days.

Common Questions about Sin

In this section, we will attempt to address a few common questions about sin

Little Sin, Big Sin

We like to categorize sins into “big sins” and “little sins.” Sometimes we may think that this is a “little” sin, so it doesn’t really matter if I make it right. We think, “Everybody else is doing it and it looks like they are OK, so I just won’t bother to confess.” On the other hand, some people have the idea that some sins are too “big” for God to forgive, and they lose hope in God’s promises of forgiveness and cleansing. Let’s look at a few Bible stories that illustrate how God views sin.

Achan’s “Little” Sin (Joshua 7)

Achan coveted the clothing and money he saw. To him, coveting seemed to be just a “little” sin; but God viewed it otherwise. As a result of his sin thirty-six men from among the Israelites were killed when Israel attacked Ai. A “little” coveting led to Achan and his family being stoned and then burned and then buried in a pile of rocks.

Perhaps Achan had reasoned that stealing a garment and a little money wouldn’t hurt anybody. In fact, nobody else knew about it. It seemed like such a harmless thing to do. It seemed like a waste to leave those things in the destroyed city. But God had already made His command clear. If he had simply believed God’s word, he would have lived. But his actions showed that he trusted in himself more than in God. Death was the result.

Ananias and Sapphira’s “Little” Sin (Acts 5)

Ananias and Sapphira brought a partial offering to God after they had promised to bring a complete offering. They thought it was a “little” thing, but God showed that His opinion was otherwise. A

“little” lie resulted in the immediate death of both Ananias and Sapphira.

They probably reasoned that the sum of money they were giving was already very large, and that nobody would really notice or care that the actual offering was reduced. Maybe they reasoned that they should save a little money in an emergency fund. But they had already promised the whole sum to God. They failed to trust that God would honor their sacrifice and provide for their needs. They tried to provide for themselves, but ended up losing everything including their lives. They should have remained faithful to God and trusted Him to provide for their needs.

Lucifer’s “Little” Sin (Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-19)

Lucifer was next to God in heaven, but he allowed a “little” sin of pride to develop in his heart. Lucifer reasoned that God was not fair. Although he was highly honored and was perfect, he searched for an even higher place. He was not content with what God had given him or where God had placed him. He did not believe that God knew what was best. He should have trusted God’s word and been content with his position.

Pride was a hidden sin, known at first only to him and God. But with time, pride developed into other more obvious sins. Pride, a “little” hidden sin, led to Lucifer’s downfall and expulsion from heaven. It also led to a world full of sin and suffering, and will lead to the complete destruction of sin and sinners in the end.

David’s “Big” Sin (2 Samuel 11)

David committed three sins. One seemed “little” (coveting Uriah’s wife), while the other two seemed “big” (committing adultery and killing Uriah). But later David confessed his sin and genuinely repented for what he had done (see Psalm 51) and God forgave him. God called David “a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22).

Moses’ “Big” Sin (Exodus 2:11-12)

Moses committed a “big” sin. He murdered an Egyptian. Yet Moses confessed his sin and repented, and God forgave him. Moses developed into a great leader for God, a mighty prophet who knew

God face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10). Eventually Moses was taken to heaven.

Degrees of Sin?

In God's way of thinking, there are no small sins. Sin is defined as the transgression of the law; whether it is a "little" sin or a "big" sin, the definition remains unchanged.

But not all guilt is measured equally. God measures guilt differently depending on the case.^v For some sins, the punishment was less severe. For example, the punishment for stealing one sheep was to replace it with four sheep (Exodus 22:1). The punishment was more severe for other sins. For example, the punishment for committing adultery was death (Leviticus 20:10).

Scripture talks about sins that were "very grave" (Genesis 18:20), "a great sin" (Exodus 32:30), "the sin... was very great" (1 Samuel 2:17).

Human government measures guilt differently, too. For example, if a man murders somebody, the law of the government declares that he must be put in prison and pay a large fine. We say he is very guilty, and so measure this as a "big" sin. If a man steals a piece of gum at the market, he may be scolded or slapped on the hand. We say he is guilty, but not as guilty as the man who murdered somebody. Then there are sins that appear to be nothing serious and are not typically punished. If I am proud or selfish, nobody but me may know. And if somebody else did know, I certainly would not be put in prison or fined. We measure pride as a "little" sin, if we even measure it as a sin at all.

So there are different levels of guilt, as demonstrated by different levels of punishment. The problem is that we often measure the sin by its punishment. Because we are not immediately punished for pride or selfishness, so we do not see these as serious sins. But God still sees sin as sin. All sin is offensive to God. What we measure as a "little" sin, or a sin not very dangerous, God still measures as serious and dangerous.

In the following verse, John does not differentiate between “big” sins and “little” sins. Sin—that is, all sin—is lawlessness.

1 John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

James reinforces this idea that sin is sin and doesn't mention degrees of sin. Breaking any one part of the law makes one guilty as if he had broken all the law.

James 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

Paul in Romans tells us that the wages of sin is death. It doesn't just say that the wages of the biggest sins is death. All sinners are in need of a Savior. All sin needs to be confessed and repented of; otherwise, the result is death.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

While this may sound harsh to us, we do not have to fear or worry. God is completely just. He is not willing that anybody perish. He wants everyone to have eternal life. He understands the heart of each person and judges them based on what they know or could have known. Look at what Jesus said here:

John 15:22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

Is there a sin too big for God to forgive?

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 Timothy 1:15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Romans 6:10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

Acts 10:43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.

Psalms 130:7 For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

I hope that the message in Scripture of God's all-saving power is clear to you. Jesus wants to cleanse us from all sin, not just most of it. Jesus came to save sinners and with Him is abundant redemption. He is able to save to the uttermost, even the "worst" sinner.

Unpardonable Sin

Many people worry about the unpardonable sin. "Have I committed the unpardonable sin?" "Am I beyond hope?" After studying through this section, you will be able to clearly identify the unpardonable sin.

2 Chronicles 36:14-16 Moreover all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord which He had consecrated in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

Q: What was the tendency of the leaders and the people? **The Bible says** they transgressed more and more.

Q: What was God's response, and why did God respond the way He did? **The Bible says** God sent messengers with warnings because He had compassion on them.

Q: How did the people respond to God's compassion? **The Bible says** they mocked and despised and scoffed the Word of God and His messengers.

Q: How long did the people mock and despise and scoff? **The Bible says** they continued until God's wrath was aroused and there was no remedy.

God did everything He could. He blessed His people immensely, but they sinned more and more. He sent them messengers with warnings because of His great compassion for them, but they rejected those warnings. God could do nothing more for them. There was no additional remedy to cure their sin habit other than what had already been provided. They insisted on following their ways over God's ways and eventually found themselves in a hopeless situation.

In Genesis we find another group of people who heard the truth clearly preached to them, but they rejected it. Noah preached for one hundred and twenty years. Although the message was clear, the people chose to follow their own ways and to reject God's warning of love and eventually died a hopeless death. Rejecting the Holy Spirit one time too many resulted in a hopeless end for them.

Genesis 6:3 And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever."

Another example of this concept is found in the book of Numbers.

Numbers 15:31-32, 36 Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him. Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

Q: Why would a person be completely cut off or separated from the Israelites? **The Bible says** whoever despised the word of the Lord and broke His commandment was to be completely cut off. Then, the Bible gives an example of a man who despised the word of the Lord and broke His commandment. That man was stoned to death.

The following proverb also speaks of this concept, and the danger of rejecting what we know to be right.

Proverbs 29:1 He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Once somebody knows the truth, he is responsible for his knowledge of truth. But once truth is rejected, there is nothing more true than truth to convince that person what is true. He is left without a remedy and will die in his sins. Hebrews further clarifies this concept.

Hebrews 6:4-6 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

Hebrews 10:26-29 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Once a person sins knowingly, he is openly rejecting Jesus and His sacrifice. He is saying, "I don't care that you died in my place, Jesus. I reject your offer of mercy. I am going to try my own way." The problem is that once a sinner cuts himself off from God, there is no other solution for the problem of sin. Jesus already paid the ultimate sacrifice, and there is no other Savior, no other person Who can save us from sin. All that can be done has already been done. And when we reject that work, and insult the Holy Spirit by ignoring His warnings, there is nothing more God can do for us. We are left without remedy.

Matthew 12:31 Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.

Mark 3:28-30 “Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation”—because they said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

1 John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

How Should We Respond?

What should be our response? When we recognize that the ultimate fate of all those who reject light and the Holy Spirit is a hopeless eternal death, we will desire to walk in the light and follow it. We will desire to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and obey Him the first time He speaks to us. We do not know His limit. When He speaks, listen! Do not despise God’s goodness and longsuffering toward you.

We should also not be living in fear that we have committed the unpardonable sin and that God can no longer forgive us. Do not be afraid. God’s goodness leads you to repentance. When God calls, do not harden your heart. Respond to the Holy Spirit when He convicts you of sin. Read the following verses of encouragement.

Romans 2:4-6 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who “will render to each one according to his deeds.”

John 12:35 Then Jesus said to them, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.”

Hebrews 3:15 Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Covered Sin

There are multiple ways to cover sin. Some ways appear to be effective at first, but end up being ineffective. There is only one successful way to cover sin: when Jesus covers it for us. Nevertheless, we often try to cover our own sin by making excuses why we sinned or why we couldn't avoid sinning. Look how the first people who sinned tried to cover their sins and what they learned in the process.

Genesis 3:7,21 *Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. ... Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.*

Adam and Eve realized that they had sinned. Before they sinned, they were well covered. Now they were naked and uncovered. Realizing that they needed help, they tried to cover themselves.

Q: What did Adam and Eve use for their covering? **The Bible says** they used leaves to cover themselves.

Q: Who sewed the leaves together? **The Bible says** that Adam and Eve themselves sewed the leaves together.

Q: Was this acceptable to God? No. **The Bible says** that God made clothes from the skin of an animal and clothed them. Their coverings were not sufficient; they needed clothes.

Leaves shrivel in the sun and crumble when they dry up. Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves, but their method of covering was certainly not effective or enduring. The leaves would soon wither and blow away.

This example represents all of our own attempts to cover sin. It represents all of our own attempts to be good on our own without Jesus. Our efforts are certainly not effective or enduring. Perhaps, like Adam and Eve, we see that we need to cover our sins. We do not want to appear before God naked with our sins exposed to Him. So we try to cover ourselves. We try to excuse our sin. We try to make sin appear less sinful. We try to make ourselves look better, not realizing that our efforts are worthless and that God sees everything and all our filthiness.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Q: What is all our righteousness like? **The Bible says** it is like filthy rags.

Q: What two additional object lessons are used in this verse? Leaf and wind.

A rag is not a complete piece of clothing. It is a scrap, often torn and full of holes. Leaves wither and blow away. Imagine the picture with me! Our righteousness is like rags and we fade as a leaf. Leaves and rags do not cover us well when the wind blows.

If this is our only message, what a hopeless message! We are overcome by sin and have become filthy with no way of our own to clean ourselves up. Only Jesus can effectively cover sin. He offers to take away our sin, but amazingly, we sometimes reject his offer to cover us!

Matthew 22:11-13 But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The king provided a garment, a covering, to each person invited to the feast. But this man refused to wear it. He was confident in his own covering. But his own covering was not acceptable to the king who commanded that he be thrown away from the feast.

Sometimes we are just as stubborn. We say, “No, God, my righteousness is just fine. I don’t need your righteousness.” But this story of the wedding feast clearly illustrates how pitiful our arguments and excuses are. In the end, if our sins are not covered by Jesus, if we reject Jesus’ free offer of salvation from sin, we will be thrown out to suffer eternal death.

Proverbs 28:13 He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Do you want mercy? If you want mercy, you had better not try to cover your own sins. If you do, you will not prosper. Through God’s power you can confess and, yes, forsake your sins and have mercy! Those who try to cover their own sins will eventually see how futile their own coverings are. They will see the need for a covering other than their own, but it will then be too late.

Hosea 10:8 Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars; they shall say to the mountains, “Cover us!” and to the hills, “Fall on us!”

Revelation 6:15-16 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!”

Why, oh why would anybody want to wait until it is too late to search for a covering for his sins? If your sins are not covered by Jesus when He comes, you will desperately search for an adequate covering, but it will not be found. As you stand before God after trying to be good on your own strength, it is like you are standing in your skimpy coverings of leaves. You will experience terror and remorse as you realize just how stupid of an idea it was for you to

rely on your own methods for covering sin in your life. God can so easily see past the leaves.

How terrible it will be for those with unconfessed and uncovered sins to stand in the sight of Jesus, their sins exposed in all their clarity to Jesus Who desperately wanted to cover them. But they had refused His covering!

Jesus has already provided a perfect covering for us. He has lived a perfect life as an Example to show us how we can live. And He is willing to wash us clean from our unrighteousness and sin and give us His righteousness and sinlessness as if it was us who were actually righteous! Why wait wait any longer to ask Jesus to cover your sins and to give you a righteous life? Why will you prefer to wait and pray that the mountains will cover you in death when you can pray right now that Jesus covers your sins and that you can find eternal life and peace?

Jeremiah 3:25-4:2 We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God. "If you will return, O Israel," says the Lord, "Return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, then you shall not be moved. And you shall swear, 'The Lord lives,' in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory."

Our reproach covers us. We have not obeyed God and we have sinned against Him. We are shameful. But there is still hope! We must return to the Lord and put away our sin and He will preserve us and cover us with His righteousness.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Q: Who gives us garments of salvation? Who covers us with the robe of righteousness? **The Bible says** that God does.

Micah 7:18-19 Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Psalms 85:2 You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin.

Q: Who forgives iniquity and covers sin? **The Bible says** that God forgives and covers sin.

Q: How much sin does God cover? **The Bible says** that God covers all of our sin.

Q: How is sin covered? **The Bible says** in the same verse that God forgives and covers. Those words are similar. When God covers sin we can also say that He forgives sin.

Romans 4:7-8 Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.

Psalms 32:1-2 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Here we see that God's covering is not just a surface thing. Notice how God forgives transgression, covers sin, and does not impute or charge us with iniquity. There is no deceit in this man's spirit. He is changed on a deep level.

How does this work? Our ineffective method is like hiding sin under a cover. But God's method of covering sin is different. He forgives us and gives us a clean heart. Then He covers us with His robe of righteousness. Let's think about that robe and what it means for a little bit.

My friend had a difficult time telling two twin brothers apart. Their faces were similar, their voices were similar, their heights were similar, and if the two were not together, it was hard to differentiate one from the other. Only when my friend learned to match their

names with their shoes, could she then tell them apart. But, on one confusing day, she matched the name to the shoes but got his name wrong again! How could that be? The twin had played a trick on her and had worn the shoes of his brother.

This little silly story can help us understand a little bit about the robe of righteousness. Naturally, we are sinners and inclined to do evil. When God forgives us of our sin, He not only pardons us, but cleanses us from all unrighteousness. We become clean. Our desires are changed. Before we were changed, our heart was against God; now, our heart is united with God's. Before we were changed, our thoughts were against God; now, our thoughts are brought into captivity to His thoughts. Our desires are changed.

When Jesus covers us with His robe of righteousness and we are like Him, it changes God's perspective on us. Now, when He sees us, He doesn't see our sinful filthy rags but the clean, pure robe of Jesus. Like my friend identified the twins by their shoes, God identifies us by our robe, or our character. He sees Jesus' robe, which represents Jesus' perfect life of perfect obedience to God's law. Jesus is perfectly righteous, without sin. By putting His robe of righteousness on us, He is saying, "My son, my daughter, your righteousness is like filthy rags. It is not sufficient. But you have confessed your sins and repented, and I have pardoned and cleansed you. Now you will be like Me. I will help you to obey. I will put My character in you so that when My Father sees you, He will see My robe on you and will identify My life with yours!"

What an amazing gift!

The Sin Solution

Look to Jesus

As we have studied the definition of sin and the wages of sin, perhaps we have had a tendency to become discouraged. Naturally, we are all sinners. Naturally, we all deserve to die eternal death. This is where Satan wants our thoughts to rest. He wants us to become weary of trying to get rid of sin and just give up. This is not good news.

If we are to find a solution for sin in our lives, we cannot focus on the sin in our lives. That is a source of much discouragement. Instead, we must look to Jesus. He is the One Who died so that we may be cleansed from sin and so that we may have eternal life. Jesus is the solution to our sin problem. That is good news!

So what shall we do? If we want to really learn to detest and abhor sin, we must look to Jesus. If we want to be clean and pure, we must look to Jesus. How can we practically look to Jesus?

- Focus your thoughts on Jesus and what He has done for you. Think about Him.
- Pray to Him. Ask Him for help, and He will surely help you.
- Sing to Him.
- Study and appreciate nature.

In the following chapters, we will study the Gospel, the good news. Jesus is the Gospel. Jesus is good news. We will look to Jesus and live. This will not be only the theory, but we will focus largely on how to practically look to Jesus. We do not need to continue in life always trying, but always failing to abandon sin. By looking to Jesus, we may find power to truly abandon sin in our lives. In Jesus, we find encouragement, hope, and confidence. We will study the concepts of repentance, confession, and forgiveness. We will study how Jesus can change even our thoughts and desires. We will study how to successfully resist temptation.

Before we continue, spend some time to reflect on these verses that talk about looking to Jesus.

Psalm 40:12,16 For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me. Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, "The Lord be magnified!"

Psalm 5:3 My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up.

Psalm 16:11 Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!

Psalm 121:1-2 I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

Isaiah 45:22 Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

Micah 7:7 Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

As we continue studying some practical aspects of salvation, always remember that we must continually look to Jesus. It's not about the exact formula for how to repent or confess your sins. Formulas are important, but meaningless without Jesus. Salvation is in Jesus, not in our formulas.

As we look to Jesus, may we be transformed to be more like Him!

Salvation

The words “salvation” and “redemption” are words that many Christians use frequently. But like many other big words, church people sometimes use these words without understanding their full meaning or significance. In reality, nobody fully understands the topic of salvation. It is too big, too wonderful, too amazing to fully grasp.

The theme of redemption is one that the angels desire to look into; it will be the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Is it not worthy of careful thought and study now? The infinite love and mercy of Jesus, the sacrifice made in our behalf, calls for the most serious and solemn reflection. We should dwell upon the character of our dear Redeemer and Intercessor. We should meditate upon the mission of him who came to save his people from their sins. As we thus contemplate heavenly themes, our faith and love will grow stronger, and our prayers will be more and more acceptable to God, because they will be more and more mixed with faith and love. They will be intelligent and fervent. There will be more constant confidence in Jesus, and a daily, living experience in his power to save to the utmost all that come unto God by him. {CE 57.2}

Saved from What?

This word comes from the verb “to save” and indicates being saved or rescued from some dangerous situation or death. In the context of the gospel, it means to save from sin or the power of sin which leads to eternal death and to give eternal life.

If you do not understand why a person would need to be saved from sin, go back to the previous section and read about what sin is. Sin is definitely something we need to be saved from. Without salvation, all of us are trapped in a hopeless situation because the power of sin is much stronger than we are. All of us are contaminated and infected with sin and have no power to decontaminate or disinfect ourselves. We are all condemned to die.

Sin is like a cancer. Once it gets started—and it surely has started in every one of us—it continues to grow and fester, spreading throughout the entire body. The result is a lot of suffering and sure death. Sometimes a surgeon will cut into the body of a cancer patient and remove the infected body part. This is a good illustration of how we need to be saved from sin. It is sin that has infected us, and we cannot get rid of it except for the miracle of salvation that God offers to us. God is willing to do surgery to remove our infected heart and replace it with a good heart.

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Our situation can also be compared to a person who has fallen into a slimy pit. The edges of the hole are steep and slippery and the bottom is covered in thick, sticky mud. Each time we lift one foot to try to step out, the other foot sinks deeper into the mud. When we try to climb out of the edges, we slip back down. We are hopelessly stuck in a horrible pit. The only way we will ever escape is if somebody comes along from above us and pulls us out of the pit. We need salvation to save us from sin!

Psalm 40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps.

Saved by Who?

Salvation is something that God does for us, not something that we do for ourselves. Sometimes we forget that we cannot save ourselves and try and try to be good enough to be saved. But we cannot do surgery on ourselves to remove our cancer. We cannot replace our stony heart with a soft heart. We cannot dig ourselves out of the horrible pit of miry clay. Only God can do this for us!

- I cannot save myself by being good.
 - *Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?*

- *Luke 18:19 So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.”*
- I cannot save myself by obedience. I can only obey through Jesus’ power.
 - *Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*
 - *Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*
- I cannot repent on my own; repentance is a gift from God.
 - *Acts 5:31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*
- We are saved by grace through faith, but even our faith comes from God!
 - *Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*
 - *Romans 12:3 God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

No matter how hard we try, there is no possibility of us ever saving ourselves from sin. We are incapable of that. Only Jesus can save us from sin in our lives.

Psalm 37:39 But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble.

John 10:1,9 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. ... I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

1 John 2:1-2 *My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*

Mark 10:25-27 *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”*

Micah 7:9 *I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness.*

God’s Love for Sinners

John 3:16-17 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*

Psalms 103:11-12 *For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

Matthew 18:14 *Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.*

Romans 5:6-11 *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having*

been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

1 Peter 2:24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

1 Peter 1:18-19 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Please take the time to read again the chapter entitled “God Loves You” near the beginning of this book. Take time to reflect on how God loves each one of us and wants to save us from eternal death.

Salvation Simply

I have sinned and deserve eternal death, but God has offered me salvation and eternal life. I am free to choose or reject this offer. Choosing to accept this offer is choosing eternal life. Choosing to reject this offer is choosing eternal death.

I am saved from sin by grace, through faith. God saves me, but I need to exercise the faith He gives me. Without faith, I cannot please God. Faith involves not only believing Jesus, but trusting Him. I must trust that Jesus is Who He says He is and that He does what He says He does. When I trust Him, I will obey Him.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Acts 16:31 Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.

Mark 16:16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

John 8:23-24 And He said to them, “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

Passages for Further Contemplation

Almost Christians, yet not fully Christians, they seem near the kingdom of heaven, but they cannot enter there. Almost but not wholly saved, means to be not almost but wholly lost. {COL 118.1}

The gospel of Christ is a blessing that all may possess. The poorest are as well able as the richest to purchase salvation; for no amount of worldly wealth can secure it. It is obtained by willing obedience, by giving ourselves to Christ as His own purchased possession. Education, even of the highest class, cannot of itself bring a man nearer to God. The Pharisees were favored with every temporal and every spiritual advantage, and they said with boastful pride, We are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”; yet they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Revelation 3:17. Christ offered them the pearl of great price; but they disdained to accept it, and He said to them, “The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.” Matthew 21:31. {COL 117.1}

We cannot earn salvation, but we are to seek for it with as much interest and perseverance as though we would abandon everything in the world for it. {COL 117.2}

Our salvation depends upon our knowledge of God’s will as it is contained in His word. Never cease asking and searching for Truth. You need to know your duty. You need to know what you must do to be saved. And it is God’s will that you shall know what He has said to you. But you must exercise faith. As you search the Scriptures, you must believe that God is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. {MYP 260.3}

O search the Bible with a heart hungry for spiritual food! Dig into the word as a miner digs into the earth to find the veins of gold. Do not give up your search till you have learned your relation to God and His will concerning you. {YI, July 24, 1902 par. 10}

All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it. Yet as we study the Bible and meditate upon the life of Christ and the plan of redemption, these great themes will open to our understanding more and more. {FLB 43.4}

In genuine, saving faith, there is trust in God, through the belief in the great atoning sacrifice made by the Son of God on Calvary. In Christ, the justified believer beholds his only hope and deliverer. Belief may exist without trust, but confidence born of trust cannot exist without faith. Every sinner brought to a knowledge of the saving power of Christ, will make manifest this trust in greater degree as he advances in experience. {3SM 192.1}

Atonement

God could have permanently destroyed sinners in their sins. God could have given sinners the wages that they deserve: eternal death. He hates the separation from Him and disunity that sin brings. But God loves each sinner infinitely. He loves you, He loves me, no matter how terrible of a sinner we are. So God, in His wisdom, chose an infinitely costly plan to provide the infinitely valuable gift of salvation to each person who would accept it.

The plan of salvation is a wonderful plan because God provides us with salvation freely, even though we do not deserve to be saved. And God does not save us in our sins. He provides a way that we may be saved from our sins. We may be cleansed and washed from the contamination of sin. Perhaps the most wonderful part of this plan is that sin will eventually be completely eliminated, not only in our lives but in the entire universe!

Overview

To better understand the plan of salvation, we need to understand the concept of atonement as illustrated in the Israelite sanctuary. As we study the sanctuary, we will understand God's plan to save us from sin in a more profound way because the Jesus represented in the sanctuary is the same Jesus that died for our sins and is the same Jesus that lives for us today in the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest! While we do not have the space to study the sanctuary deeply in this book, let's briefly study the concept of atonement.

After sinning, the sinner was required to bring a live, perfect animal to the courtyard of the sanctuary. There, he would lay his hands on the animal's head and confess his sins. The sinner then would kill the animal with his own hands. Some blood from the animal was taken into the Holy Place and sprinkled there. The rest was poured out by the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard.

By placing his hands on the head of the innocent animal, the sinner symbolically transferred his sins to the animal. Then, the life of the animal was taken in place of the life of the sinner. The sinner deserved to be punished with death for breaking the law, but the animal symbolically took his place and died instead of him.

Leviticus 1:4 Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.

Leviticus 4:35 So the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him.

Notice that the life of the animal was accepted in place of the life of the sinner. Once the sinner confessed his sin onto the head of the animal, the responsibility of sin symbolically shifted from the sinner to the innocent animal. Then atonement was made and the sinner was forgiven. See also Leviticus 5:17-18.

We can summarize this process in three steps:

- The sinner becomes guilty by transgression of the Law.
- Sin is transferred from sinner to animal.
- The sinner is forgiven and cleansed from sin.

The Day of Atonement

Even though the sinner was forgiven, the blood that was sprinkled in the Holy Place remained as a record of sin there. To solve this problem, an annual ceremony called the Day of Atonement was performed. This was a day of cleansing from sin, where the sanctuary was cleaned and sin was symbolically removed from the Israelite camp. Of two goats chosen, one was sacrificed to the Lord, and on the other was symbolically placed all the sins that had accumulated over the past year. This goat was released into a distant wilderness to die. This, among the other ceremonies, was the Day of Atonement. Let's try to understand the meaning of this day.

Leviticus 16:30 For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.

Q: Why did the priest make atonement? **The Bible says** atonement was made to cleanse, to be clean from all sins before the Lord.

Q: Atonement cleansed the person from how many of their sins? **The Bible says** all sins.

Atonement was a thorough and complete solution. It was not just a patch or a help for getting mostly clean. It was a solution to cleanse the people from every one of their sins. The fact that there was a need for cleansing shows that there was dirt; something clean does not need to be cleaned.

Have you ever tried to wash yourself when you are dirty? You usually need soap and water and sometimes a cloth to scrub with. Now look at this verse:

Isaiah 64:6 All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.

Q: What are our righteousnesses like? **The Bible says** they are like filthy rags.

Q: Are some of our righteousnesses good? **The Bible says** that they are all like filthy rags.

Have you ever tried to clean yourself or something with a filthy rag? A filthy rag cannot clean something; it only spreads the filth around and transfers it to whatever it rubs against. The best righteousness we can try to do is like a filthy rag—it cannot cleanse us. We can try all we want, but with a filthy rag for our righteousness, we just get more filthy.

This is one area where many people become discouraged. They want to be good. They try to be good. But they end up sinning anyway. As we continue to learn about the message of atonement, we will be encouraged! Let's read further.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Sometimes we only remember the first part of this verse. We sin, then ask Jesus to forgive us. Then we find ourselves doing that same

sin again! Remember to read to the end of this verse. Jesus not only forgives our sins, but He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The atonement is important because that is what brings cleansing from sin. This is not just forgiveness or pardon from sin, but actual cleansing from sin. That means there is a core change in the life, and a stopping rather than a continuation of sin. Let's continue digging just a little deeper to see how this cleansing works.

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.

Q: According to this verse, what makes atonement? **The Bible says** it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.

Q: Why is it the blood that makes atonement? **The Bible says** the life is in the blood.

Of course, all this is symbolic. An animal or even the blood of an animal cannot save a persons from their sins. We do not find forgiveness through animals.

Hebrews 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

Why did so many generations of people from the time of Adam to the time of Jesus offer sacrifices for sin if it was not possible that the blood of these animals could take away sins? The ceremonies of atonement were symbols that represented the real Solution to sin.

Psalm 65:3 Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them.

Q: Who provides atonement for sins? **The Bible says** that God provides atonement for them.

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Even though it was impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins, Jesus, the Lamb of God came to take away the sin of the world.

Hebrews 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

1 Peter 1:18-19 ...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Q: With what did Jesus redeem us? **The Bible says** He redeemed us with His blood.

Q: How permanent or sure is this redemption? **The Bible says** Jesus obtained eternal redemption. That means a redemption that lasts eternally, or forever.

Q: What is the value of Jesus' blood? **The Bible says** it is precious, not like gold and silver which are corruptible.

What we value as precious, such as gold and silver, are only corruptible things. They come and go and do not have true value. But the blood of Jesus is truly precious.

Why is it so precious?

- It represents a life without sin.
- It saves us from the hopeless situation of sin that we all find ourselves in. It provides us with our only hope of eternal life, where otherwise we would only face eternal death.
- *Hebrews 9:22 Without shedding of blood there is no remission.*

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Q: Is there a sin that the blood of Jesus cannot cleanse us from? **The Bible says** that the Blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

The message of the atonement is a wonderful message because it teaches us that Jesus wants to forgive us and cleanse us from sin. We

have no excuse to continue sinning. Because of Jesus living and dying for us and living again, we have the possibility of being cleansed and free from sin!

After Adam and Eve sinned, they were instructed how to offer a sacrifice for sin. They came from a perfect garden where there was no death. But now, because of their own sin, they had to be reminded continually that the wages of sin is death. Each time they sinned, they were reminded of how terrible sin is. Even though it was horrible for them to see the lamb suffering and dying, they understood that the lamb represented Jesus, Who would suffer and die in their place. Because of their sin, they deserved to die eternally. There was no way that they could ever provide a solution for their sin problem on their own. But Jesus promised to take that penalty on Himself and assure them of eternal life.

Jesus in My Place

When I break God's law, I owe something that is impossible for me to pay back. I am totally incapable of paying this debt. Only Jesus can pay the debt for sin. Jesus died in my place so that I would not have to suffer the eternal penalty of sin. What an amazing thought! With His own blood, He provided atonement for our sins. Take a few moments and meditate on the following passages of Scripture.

1 Corinthians 15:3 Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Isaiah 53:4-6,12 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ... He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many.

1 Peter 2:24 ...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. “With His stripes we are healed.” {DA 25.2}

Selflessly, Jesus took on Himself the death penalty resulting from my sin. As that is the only option for payment, that is my only hope for eternal life. If I selfishly choose to enjoy temporary pleasures of sin in exchange for accepting Jesus gift, I must pay the death penalty that has already been paid for. How foolish!

Jesus’ Work Now

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Hebrews 8:1-2 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Jesus is now in the heavenly sanctuary working for us. Soon, His work will be done and He will come as King of the universe to gather

all the people who accepted His cleansing from sin and who were loyal to Him.

Passages for Further Contemplation

Malachi 3:16-17 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him."

Isaiah 43:1 But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine."

Why did Christ die? Because it was the only means for man to be saved. ... He took upon Himself our sins that He might impute His righteousness to all who believe in Him. {OHC 141.3}

In order to more fully realize the value of redemption, it is necessary to understand what it cost. In consequence of limited views of the sufferings of the divine Son of God, many place a low estimate upon the great work of the atonement. {ST, August 7, 1879 par. 2}

There are souls to be saved. It was at a tremendous sacrifice that the Father gave His only begotten Son to die a shameful death. Jesus' experience on earth was necessary, in order that no one might truthfully say that Christ could not enter into sympathy with him in his temptations. {2SAT 299.5}

Christ died because there was no other hope for the transgressor. {FW 30.1}

In order for man to be saved, and for the honor of the law to be maintained, it was necessary for the Son of God to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. {AG 80.3}

Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. {PP 63}

It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God, and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. {RC 50.4}

While the Saviour's death brought to an end the law of types and shadows, it did not in the least detract from the obligation of the moral law. On the contrary, the very fact that it was necessary for Christ to die in order to atone for the transgression of that law, proves it to be immutable. {PP 365.3}

When Adam and Eve realized how exalted and sacred was the law of God, the transgression of which made so costly a sacrifice necessary to save them and their posterity from utter ruin, they plead to die themselves, or to let them and their posterity endure the penalty of their transgression, rather than that the beloved Son of God should make this great sacrifice. The anguish of Adam was increased. He saw that his sins were of so great magnitude as to involve fearful consequences. And must it be that Heaven's honored Commander, who had walked with him, and talked with him, while in his holy innocence, whom angels honored and worshiped, must be brought down from his exalted position to die because of his transgression. Adam was informed that an angel's life could not pay the debt. The law of Jehovah, the foundation of his government in Heaven and upon earth, was as sacred as God himself; and for this reason the life of an angel could not be accepted of God as a sacrifice for its transgression. His law was of more importance in his sight than the holy angels around his throne. The Father could not abolish nor change one precept of his law to meet man in his fallen condition. But the Son of God, who had in unison with the Father created man, could make an atonement for man acceptable to God, by giving his life a sacrifice, and bearing the wrath of his Father. Angels informed Adam that, as his transgression had brought death and wretchedness, life and immortality would be brought to light through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. {1SP 50.2}

A system was then established requiring the sacrificing of beasts to keep before fallen man that which the serpent made Eve disbelieve, that the penalty of disobedience is death. The transgression of God's law made it necessary for Christ to die a sacrifice, and thus make a way possible for man to escape the penalty, and yet the honor of God's law be preserved. The system of sacrifices was to teach man humility, in view of his fallen condition, and lead him to repentance, and to trust in God alone, through the promised Redeemer, for pardon for past transgression of his law. If the

law of God had not been transgressed there never would have been death, and there would have been no need of additional precepts to suit man's fallen condition. {3SG 295.3}

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” The blessing comes because of pardon; pardon comes through faith that the sin, confessed and repented of, is borne by the great Sin-bearer. Thus from Christ cometh all our blessings. His death is an atoning sacrifice for our sins. He is the great Medium through whom we receive the mercy and favor of God. He, then, is indeed the Originator, the Author, as well as the Finisher, of our faith. {3BC 1146.3}

Of Christ's life and death and intercession, which prophets had foretold, the apostles were to go forth as witnesses. Christ in His humiliation, in His purity and holiness, in His matchless love, was to be their theme. And in order to preach the gospel in its fullness, they must present the Saviour not only as revealed in His life and teachings, but as foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament and as symbolized by the sacrificial service. {COL 127.1}

Why Did Jesus Choose to Die?

This is a question that is hard for many to understand. Jesus' death does not seem right. How could a perfect God be killed for another person's sin? That does not seem like justice. Why couldn't Jesus just forgive sin without having to die? Why can't each person pay for his own sin?

Although we have already touched on some of these points, we will cover them again from this angle of responding to the question, "Why did Jesus choose to die?"

...to provide salvation to man.

Sin is an awful thing. We do not understand how awful it really is. It is something we need to be saved from, and there was no other solution but the death of Jesus to save us. Let's look a little more into this idea.

Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Sin is so big, so awful, that Jesus is the only One Who can save us from it.

Romans 8:7 The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Q: What is our natural attitude toward God? **The Bible says** the carnal mind is enmity against God. That means we naturally hate God. If Jesus had not died for us, we would be enemies of God and would have no way of being at peace with Him.

Colossians 1:19-22 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

Q: How did Jesus make peace? **The Bible says** through the blood of His cross. In other words, Jesus died to make peace.

Q: How were we alienated from God? **The Bible says** by our wicked works, or by our sins.

Q: How did Jesus reconcile us who were once alienated and enemies? **The Bible says** Jesus settled this problem in His own body through death. In other words, Jesus died to settle the differences between God and us, His enemies. He took our wicked works that were alienating us and making us enemies, and paid the death penalty for them.

Q: According to this verse, why did Jesus die? **The Bible says** Jesus died so that He could present us before God as holy, blameless, and above reproach!

Naturally, we are not and cannot be at peace with God. But because of Jesus' death, it is possible for us to find peace. Jesus' death saved us from our hopeless natural condition of being enemies of God. We do not have to stay in this condition because Jesus has made a way out. But we still cannot be saved through our own strength. He gives us this invitation:

Isaiah 27:5 Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.

Q: Whose strength are we to take hold of? **The Bible says** that we are to take hold of God's strength.

But there is more! How is it possible for us to be at peace when we were enemies? Jesus presents us as holy, blameless, and above reproach. Of course we are naturally unholy, full of blame, and full of reproach, doomed to die eternally. But Jesus lived His life holy, blameless, and above reproach, then died as a perfect Sacrifice to make atonement for our unholiness, blame, and reproach. When Jesus presents our case to God, He actually presents His own character in place of ours. What an amazing offer of salvation!

Romans 5:8-10 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Although the law of God requires eternal death for the transgressor. Jesus saves us from this wrath of the law. Even while we were still enemies, Jesus died this death penalty for us so that we can be reconciled to God. Jesus' death settles the differences between Him and us and declares us friends and family.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

...to destroy the power of death.

Death was not God's original plan. God intended for man to live forever. That is why He gave Adam and Eve access to the Tree of Life and the Water of Life. But man chose to sin and sin separated him from the Source of life, and man became doomed to die.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Jesus came to rescue us from this penalty of sin so that we could have life.

John 10:10-11 I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

And not only did Jesus come to give us life, He came to destroy death and even the possibility of death!

1 John 3:8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Q: Why did Jesus come? **The Bible says** He came to destroy the works of the devil.

Hebrews 2:14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

Q: What is one of the works of the devil that will be destroyed? **The Bible says** the devil had the power of death.

Q: Why did Jesus become a human like us and then die? **The Bible says** Jesus died to destroy the devil.

The devil and the power of death were destroyed by the death of Jesus Who has the power of life.

John 10:17 Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

Because of Jesus dying the death penalty for us and destroying the power of the devil, He has the right to cause death to die. And in the end, death itself will die the second death, the forever death.

Revelation 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Revelation 21:4 There shall be no more death.

...to make a complete and permanent end of sin.

Jesus came to make an end of sin and to bring everlasting righteousness. Look at part of the message of hope that Gabriel brought to Daniel:

Daniel 9:24 Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.

That is truly good news! Gabriel said that Jesus would make an end of sins and bring in everlasting righteousness. Obviously sin is not everlasting; sin ends. It is righteousness that is everlasting, and Jesus came to ensure that sin would be ended and that righteousness would continue forever.

Sin is a temporary thing. It does not endure forever. While it seems attractive, it really is terrible. Moses understood this concept,

Hebrews 11:25 ...choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.

Sin gives a certain pleasure, but it is only temporary, unfulfilling pleasure and ultimately results in death. Jesus does not want us to be interested or attracted to the passing pleasures of sin. He presents to us the amazing character of God as the most truly attractive thing. He has provided a way that we can have everlasting joy and pleasure. Because of what Jesus has done, we may live together with Him eternally!

Psalms 16:11 You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Jesus came to assure us that sin will be dealt with and we do not have to fear that it will come back again.

Nahum 1:9 What do you conspire against the Lord? He will make an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second time.

Psalms 9:5-6 You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever and ever. O enemy, destructions are finished forever! And you have destroyed cities; even their memory has perished.

...to declare God's law permanent.

Perhaps the strongest argument in Scripture that God's moral law is unchangeable is that Jesus died for our sins, our transgression of the law. Jesus' death was not just a nice gesture, or the result of a quick, thoughtless decision—it was well thought out, well planned. Jesus died to pay the penalty that the law required. He was an infinite Sacrifice beyond measure. If there was any way to change the law, God would have changed it or abolished it and not allowed His beloved Son to experience such horrible suffering and death. If there was any way to cancel the death penalty of the law, God would have done so.

But God's character is eternally holy and pure and just and good. God's law is eternally holy and pure and just and good. There is no changing of God's character or of His law that reflects His character. Likewise, the penalty of breaking God's law cannot be changed. The penalty must be paid. Why? Because God in His great love and mercy cannot tolerate the horrible pain of sin in the universe forever.

To preserve sin would be to make the law invalid. To say "sin is OK" would be to say that the law is unnecessary. When Adam sinned, God had two choices: to enforce His law and get rid of sin or to change it and preserve sin. Which did God do? Look at this example:

Genesis 3:22-24 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Q: Why did God send Adam and Eve out of the garden? **The Bible says** God sent them out of the garden so that he would not eat of the tree of life and live forever. God was not willing to change His law and allow sin to exist forever.

Even now, some people will still have the question, "Why did God allow His Son Jesus to be killed? Wouldn't it have been more merciful to change the law and let Jesus live?"

We must not think for a moment that God the Father was cruel and unjust in killing His Son. Far from it! God so loved the world that He gave His only Son Jesus, but Jesus voluntarily gave His life.

John 10:11,15,17-18 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ... As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

Clearly, Jesus' death was not a case of His Father killing Him. It was a joint decision made among the Trinity and a decision they all accepted because there was no other solution. God could not change the perfect principles upon which His government was founded. There was no problem with God or His law. To do away with the law would be to do away with the fundamental principles of peace and happiness. No, the problem was not with the law; the problem was with the intruder, sin.

We fail to understand the horribleness of sin. Sometimes we may think, "How cruel! The wages of sin is death." We think that the punishment for sin should not be so severe. But we should think about how cruel sin is. Sin causes death. And it is sin that caused the death of Jesus, our Creator. And then to think that we are all sinners, and that there is a death penalty to pay for each of us, leaves us all in a state of hopelessness.

But we do have hope! We do have a way of escape! The way of escape is not a change in God's character, for that does not change. The way of escape is not a change in God's law, for that does not change. If these changes were possible, they would have instantly happened and Jesus would not have chosen to lay down His life.

The way of escape is in God's infinite love for us. Jesus, the Lifegiver, took our penalty of death and gave up His life because there was no way to change the law or its penalty. Our sin caused His death, but He laid down His life voluntarily, of His own will, because He knew that was the only way to offer us hope. There was no other way that we could have the eternal life that He intended for each one of us.

Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

Q: What did Jesus not come to do, and what did He come to do? **The Bible says** He did not come to destroy but He came to fulfill the law.

Isaiah 42:21 The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable.

Q: What two things did Isaiah say Jesus would do to the law? **The Bible says** that He will exalt the law and make it honorable.

Jesus' death showed clearly that God's law is permanent. He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, to exalt it, and make it honorable. Jesus' life and death showed in a powerful way that there really is no defect in the character of God or His law.

...to reveal the nature and results of sin.

Not only did Jesus' death show that God's law is permanent, it also clearly shows the results of choosing to break God's law.

Think back to the perfect environment of heaven, where Lucifer was full of wisdom and was a leader among the angels. Everything God created was perfect, and every being was perfectly happy. Then sin intruded and spoiled the peace, and there was war in heaven. There were many questions about God' character. Was He really selfish as Lucifer said?

Then Adam and Eve were created perfectly in the perfect environment of heaven. God gave them everything they needed for their happiness. But again sin intruded and spoiled the peace. Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden of Eden and were not allowed to come back in. Was God fair?

And so the questions continued. Lucifer, now Satan, raised questions about God's character. He suggested that God's character was defective, that God was selfish and unreasonable. He also tried to convince everybody he could that God's law was too strict, unreasonable, and impossible to obey. It was as if Satan was slinging mud at God. Were his accusations true? Many wondered.

God decided that He would show once and for all that Satan's accusations were false and that God's character was good and pure and selfless. Merely talking was not enough. A demonstration of God's love would be the most compelling, the most gripping evidence.

Romans 5:7-8 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Thus, by His death, Jesus demonstrated God's love in a way that could not be more clear or complete. It was shown by demonstration, but it was also shown by contrast. In contrast to God's infinite love, the real nature of sin and the results of sin are now uncovered, clearly revealed. Sin was clearly shown to not be the key to happiness and freedom. Rebellion against God and His law eventually led to the murder of God the Son, the lawmaker Himself! There is no higher crime, no worse thing anybody could do! Yet sin so affected humans that they put to death Jesus, their Creator, and the Creator of the universe!

Sin is horrible. It is like a cancer. It seems like it often starts small, but it always and surely results in death. Jesus died to demonstrate the terrible nature and results of sin, and to point us in wonderful contrast to His love for us.

...to demonstrate God's love.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Romans 5:8 God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

John 17:4,6 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ... I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.

...to be Immanuel.

God created man in His own image. He wanted to be able to be good friends with the people He had created, to talk with them, to walk with them. But sin separated Adam and Eve from Him, and they had to leave the place where God was. Sure, they could still talk with God

in prayer, but the relationship was now different. It was strained. It was more distant.

Since the time of the Garden of Eden, God has been looking forward to the time when He can invite His people back into the garden so that He can talk and walk with them as He did with Adam.

Jesus' death enabled this to happen. Without a solution to the problem of sin, humans would be eternally separated from God. But with Jesus' death for us, there is a way to end this separation. Whoever accepts what Jesus has done for us may live eternally with Him!

John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Repentance

As we will later see in the examples of Judas and Achan, simply confessing a sin does not make us innocent. They acknowledged that they had sinned. They were sorry for the suffering their sin caused. They wished they had not sinned. But they did not repent.

We humans are this way. We are often sorry for what we have done and the suffering it causes us. Sometimes we even try to make it appear that we have changed our ways. But our natures are not changeable by us. We can fake a change for a time, but our hearts are not really changed.

True repentance is not just being sorry for the results of sin, but being sorry for the sin itself. Confession that God accepts will be accompanied by repentance. But on his own, a sinner cannot repent. Where does repentance come from?

A Gift

Acts 5:31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Q: Where does repentance come from? **The Bible says** that our Savior, Jesus, gives repentance. It does not say that He sells repentance; it says that He gives repentance. It is a gift from Him.

Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Q: Do we have to repent before coming to Jesus? **The Bible says** that we can simply come to Jesus. Jesus says, “Come to Me.”

The Bible does not tell us that we need to repent before we come to Jesus. We can come to Him with our sins, with our problems, with our heavy burdens, and He will give us rest. He will give us the gift of repentance. In fact, in order to have this gift of repentance, we must receive it from Jesus. We can't repent on our own!

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Q: What does Jesus do as the Lamb of God? **The Bible says** He takes away the sin of the world.

John 12:32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.

Q: What is the result of Jesus being lifted up on the cross? **The Bible says** that He draws all peoples to Himself.

As we come to Jesus asking Him for help and as we ask Him for help, He will surely help us! He wants to take away our sin; that is what He came for. He wants us to repent. He wants people to come to Him.

Matthew 9:13 For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

Q: What did Jesus come to do? **The Bible says** that Jesus came to call sinners to repentance.

Luke 13:3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

Q: How important is repentance? **The Bible says** that unless you repent, you will all perish. Repentance is important for eternal life. Without repentance, we die. Thankfully, God gives us what we need so we do not need to die.

A Change of Our Ways

The Bible often associates repentance with the idea of a change in the life.

Ezekiel 18:30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin."

Acts 3:19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Q: What actions are together with repentance in the previous two verses? **The Bible says** turning from transgressions and being converted.

Let's say that I am walking toward a deep well. I can confess or acknowledge that there is a well in front of me. I now have two choices: I can keep walking in the same direction or I can change the direction I am going. If I continue in the same direction after confessing that the well is in front of me, I still fall into the well. Repentance is like turning away from the well and actually changing my path.

When we repent, we choose not to continue in the same path to repeat the same sins over and over again. We must actually turn from our sin and be changed or converted for our confession to be acceptable.

Proverbs 28:13 He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Q: What are the two things a person needs to have mercy? **The Bible says** whoever confesses and forsakes his sins will have mercy. Here again we see that we must not only confess our sins, but we must forsake them. We must leave them behind. We must turn from them. We must be converted.

The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 illustrates the idea of true repentance. Zacchaeus was a dishonest tax collector who set unfair prices and stole much money from people. When he met Jesus he not only confessed his sins, but he changed his ways. He did not continue to set unfair prices and to steal money. He did not continue in his sins. By looking to Jesus, His life was changed. Through his changed life he showed that his repentance was genuine.

Ezekiel 18:31-32 "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!"

Power to Change

How do we turn from our ways so that we can live? How do we become converted and not continue to repeat sin? How does God give us the gift of genuine repentance? If you are like me, you have often seen a need to abandon sin in your life and you have tried many times, but have also failed many times. We know what is right, but just cannot seem to always do what is right. When we realize that we are really powerless to abandon sin in our lives, we may easily become discouraged and give up hope. This is the intent of the devil. He wants us to continue a life of sin and to give up hope that we can truly repent.

Thankfully, God has already offered us a solution. Though we cannot change ourselves, God can change us and He desires to do this for us!

Ezekiel 36:25-27 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Q: What does water represent in this passage? **The Bible says** that water cleanses. Water represents cleansing.

Q: When God sprinkles clean water on us, how much are we cleansed? **The Bible says** that God cleanses us from all of our filthiness. This is complete cleansing.

Q: How is this cleansing accomplished? **The Bible says** that God takes away our hard heart and replaces it with a soft heart. He will put His Spirit in us and cause us to be obedient to Him.

We need cleansing from our filthiness. However, when we try to cleanse ourselves with our righteousness which is like filthy rags, we only get ourselves more filthy. As you study Scripture, you will not find a single reference to anybody successfully changing his own heart. God is the only One Who can change a heart. God can cleanse us and cause us to turn from our wicked ways and to walk in His

ways. He can give us a new heart and new desires. We can be cleansed from all filthiness!

God doesn't just fix a little thing here and repair a little thing there. God's method is drastic: He changes us at our roots, at the base level, at the heart level. He washes us with water. To modify a hard heart is like trying to reshape a brick after it is fired. God chooses to remove the hard heart completely and replace it with a soft heart, one that can be molded and shaped to do His will. Jesus also gives us His Spirit. That means that we are not only capable of doing good, but our desire is to do good. When His Spirit is in us, He causes us to be obedient.

Ephesians 5:26 ...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.

Through God's power and through His word, we can be changed, cleansed, sanctified. Through God's power we can abandon sin and experience and practice true repentance in our lives. God is eager to do this for us, but will not force us to change. Repentance is a gift to be accepted or rejected. By choosing to allow God to give us a new heart and a new Spirit, we accept the gift of repentance and are changed on a deep level. And now it is God who works successfully through us, and not us trying to work unsuccessfully through our own strength.

Titus 3:4-7 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Isaiah 27:5 Or let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.

Restitution

The concept of restitution is built into the idea of genuine repentance. A person who is not willing to restore what he has destroyed or lost is showing that his repentance is not genuine.

Leviticus 6:4 (French 5:23) Then it shall be, because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found.

Restitution involves more than just paying back money or objects that you stole. Its meaning is deeper and fuller and covers not only physical objects, but words and thoughts. Consider these examples of restitution that follows genuine repentance:

- If you have stolen money from your brother, return it to him. If you have already spent it, replace it.
- If you have stolen a hoe, return it to the owner. If somebody else stole the stolen hoe from you, buy a replacement hoe of equal or better quality.
- If you borrow your neighbor's cart and you run over a thorn bush and a tire deflates, confess to him what happened. Then, either fix the tire yourself or pay for somebody else to fix it.
- If you misjudge or misinterpret somebody, go back to those you talked with and take back the statements you said.
- If you injured the influence of your pastor in any way, go back to the people with whom you had the conversation and tell them that what you said was not right.

Joy in Heaven

Would you like to make Jesus happy? Would you like to make the angels of heaven happy? You can! Repentance brings great joy to heaven.

Luke 15:6-9 *And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!” I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!”*

When a sinner repents of his sins and chooses the gift of eternal life, there is great joy in heaven and God sings!

Zephaniah 3:17 *The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*

For us, the message of repentance is truly good news. And it is good news for God, too.

Passages for Further Contemplation

The very first step to Christ is taken through the drawing of the Spirit of God; as man responds to this drawing, he advances toward Christ in order that he may repent. {FLB 110.2}

Confession

Many people are confused when they think about the topic of confession. Some people believe that they must confess their sins to Jesus only. Others believe that they must confess their sins to a priest. Still others believe that they must confess their sins to the pastor or elder in front of the church members. There are many different ideas about confession. Our goal today is to find out what the Bible says about confession. What is confession? When is confession necessary? To whom is confession made?

What is Confession?

To confess something is to acknowledge something, to say it is true. A person can confess something bad or something good. Look at the following examples in Scripture.

John the Baptist was preaching by the river and people were convicted of the truth. They confessed their sins.

Matthew 3:6 [They] were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Q: In these two verses, what is being confessed? **The Bible says** the people confessed their sins.

Q: When we confess our sins, who forgives us? **The Bible says** it is Jesus who is faithful and forgives and cleanses us.

When you have sinned, look to Jesus for help because He is the source of forgiveness and cleansing!

Jeremiah 3:13 Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God.

To confess our sins means to acknowledge that we have sinned and broken God's holy law. The Bible also talks about another way to confess.

Matthew 10:32-33 Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Romans 10:9 If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Q: What is being confessed in these verses? **The Bible says** that we can confess Jesus with our mouth. **The Bible also says** that Jesus will confess us before God.

When we confess Jesus, we acknowledge both by what we say and by what we believe that Jesus is true and that we accept His death and resurrection for our salvation. When Jesus confesses us to the Father, He acknowledges that we are truly living for Him, that we are His and not Satan's. He is our representative.

Confession is not a complicated idea. To confess something is simply to acknowledge it. Obviously, when we speak of the idea of confession, we normally speak of confession of sins. When we confess our sins, we simply acknowledge that we have sinned.

To whom should I confess?

Do we confess our sins to God only? to a priest? or the pastor? or the elder of the church? or to each other? Let's explore what the Bible teaches on this topic.

Psalms 51:4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.

Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Q: When David sinned, who did he sin against and to whom did he confess his sin? **The Bible says** he sinned against God. He acknowledged (confessed) his sins to God.

Q: Who forgave David of his sin? **The Bible says** that God forgave him.

David confessed his sin to God because he had sinned against God and because God is the Source of forgiveness.

When Simon the magician approached Peter and offered to pay for the power of God with money, Peter clearly told him that he had sinned. Some people believe that Peter was given power to forgive sins. Were people supposed to confess their sins to Peter? Let's let Peter answer this question. He said,

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

Q: Peter told Simon the magician to pray to who? **The Bible says** Peter told Simon to pray to God.

It is God's law that we break when we sin, and so any time that we break God's law, we are sinning against God and must also confess our sin to God.

Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Mark 2:7 Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?

1 John 2:1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The above verses show again and again that salvation is found through Jesus. We go to Him to confess our sins. He is our Advocate, not any other person on earth. Now that is good news!

When John saw Jesus, he recognized that Jesus was the One who takes away the sin of the world.

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Q: Who takes away the sin of the world? **The Bible says** the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. Who is the Lamb of God? **The Bible says** Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Matthew 11:28 Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Clearly, God is the only source of forgiveness, and so we must confess our sins to Him if we desire salvation from those sins. Jesus is the One Who takes away sin. No other person, no pastor, no priest on earth can take away sin. Only Jesus can cleanse us from unrighteousness. Jesus gives us His invitation to come to Him for rest. If we will just accept that invitation, He will give us that rest.

When should I confess my sin in public?

We acknowledge our sins to God because He is the only source of cleansing and forgiveness. Yet the question remains, do we confess to God in public or in private? The Bible again helps us with this question. Look at the following story.

1 Samuel 8:4-5 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

Samuel responded with God's warning that by requesting a king, they were rejecting God and would suffer greatly under the rule of a human king.

1 Samuel 8:19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us."

Some time later the people regretted their request.

1 Samuel 12:19 And all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves.”

Q: What did the people acknowledge (confess)? **The Bible says** they confessed that they sinned by asked for a king.

Q: Was their request for a king something done in private or something widely known publicly? **The Bible says** “all the elders of Israel” came. These were the representatives of the people. This was clearly a public request from the people of Israel.

Q: How was the confession of the public sin made? **The Bible says** “all the people” came to Samuel. The Israelites sinned publicly and made this confession publicly.

Now let’s look briefly at another example, the example of Paul.

Acts 26:10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

Paul persecuted Jesus’ followers publicly, so he made this confession publicly. Look at the next example.

Judges 10:10-16 And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, “We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!” ... So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord.

Israel publicly forsook God and served other gods, so they made their confession publicly. Their actions of putting away their foreign gods showed that their confession was sincere.

The Bible teaches that there are times to make a public confession of sin. In the examples we just read, we see that public sins are publicly confessed. However, it is not always wise to acknowledge sins in public. We need to use wisdom from God to know when and how to make public confession. The following example teaches us one more important principle about public confession.

Nehemiah 9:2 2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

Q: What did the Israelites do before confessing their sins? **The Bible says** that they separated themselves from all foreigners.

Apparently, foreigners lived among the Israelites. Why did the Israelites separate themselves from all foreigners before confessing their sins? The foreigners were people who did not believe in God would not understand the situation and would use the Israelites confession of sin as an excuse not to follow God. Had the confession been made in public, the foreigners might have thought, “Look, those are the people of God. See how God’s people are no different than us?” Thus, their conception of God’s character would be soiled.

The Israelites, the people of God, were careful to confess their sin among themselves. Those whom the sin did not involve were not involved in the confession. Those who were foreigners did not know God and would not understand the confession. They would see it only as interesting gossip to spread around.

We need to be very careful when we make public confessions. If the sin is indeed a public sin that needs public confession, confess the sin in a manner that will bring glory to God, and only to those you have sinned against. Confessing sins publicly that should not be confessed publicly puts shame on God’s name and on His church.

Sometimes somebody who used to be a hypocrite in the church will be converted and desire to confess his sins. He must carefully consider the nature of his sin and if it requires a public confession. He should ask himself, “What will be the affect of my confession on God’s name and work?” To publicize sins weakens the influence of the church by weakening the influence of those who are trying to be Christlike in character.^{vi}

When should I confess in private to others?

Sometimes public confession is necessary. But Scripture also shows us examples of when sins should be confessed privately and not made known to everybody.

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Q: If you remember a problem between you and your brother, who should you tell about it? **The Bible says** that even if you come with an offering to God, return first to your brother and be reconciled.

Notice that it does not say, “If you remember that your brother has something against you, acknowledge it to the church.” Instead, Scripture’s clear counsel is to go to your brother directly and be reconciled. If this is not clear enough, look at the following example where Scripture gives us a protocol for dealing with sins.

Matthew 18:15-17 Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Like concentric circles increasing in diameter, Scripture gives the protocol.

Q: What is the first action if your brother sins against you? **The Bible says** to go him and tell him his fault.

Q: Who else should be there for this conversation? **The Bible says** this should be between you and him alone.

Q: If the first step does not work, what is the second step? **The Bible says** to involve two or three witnesses.

Q: If the second step doesn’t work, then what? **The Bible says** to bring it before the church.

Even this step does not necessarily mean to confess the sin before all the church members during the church service. It may be appropriate to talk to the pastor or the elders who represent the church.

Q: What is the last, and most severe option? **The Bible says** they become like a heathen. Their names are removed from church records.

The Biblical principle here is clear: keep knowledge of the sin as limited as possible. Involve only the people that the sin involves. Only when necessary, call other godly people for counsel. Making sins public by bringing them before the church is a last option.

Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

If we have offended somebody or wronged them, we should go to them and confess our sin to them. Instead of telling others about our sins or their sins, we should tell only those who we wronged or offended. Telling others other than those involved becomes gossip.

When should I confess in private only to God?

Sometimes public confession is necessary. Other times, it is necessary to confess sins in private with the one you offended. But what about sins that only you know about and that affect only you?

David prayed this prayer to God:

Psalms 19:12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.

He was asking God to cleanse him from secret problems in his life. He didn't ask anybody else to cleanse him from his secret faults because God is the only One Who fully understands each person's heart.

It is difficult to find examples in the Bible of private sins being confessed because by definition, if they were committed in private, they were confessed in private, and were not known publicly or written about.

Private sins should be confessed in private and should never be spoken about publicly. Take for an example a church elder who sins privately and then confesses his sin before the church. Before his confession, the members did not know about his sin. It was between him and God. Now, the whole church knows about it. Their minds dwell on the fact that this good, Christian elder sinned. They are tempted to think, “If the elder did that sin, it must not be so bad.” Often, this leads others to repeat the same sins confessed. Open confession of secret sins is like planting bad seeds and will eventually result in multiplying the sin.^{vii}

Specific or General?

Scripture teaches us to be specific when we confess a sin.

Leviticus 5:5 And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing;

Numbers 5:5-7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the Lord, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed.’”

Q: According to these verses, is confession general or specific? **The Bible says** confession should be specific. In other words, confession isn’t to say “I sinned” but to acknowledge the specific sin that we sinned.

Connected with Repentance

Judges 10:15-16 And the children of Israel said to the Lord, “We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray.” So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.”

Q: What did the Israelites say to the Lord? **The Bible says** they confessed that they had sinned.

Q: After confessing that they had sinned, what did the people do? **The Bible says** they put away their foreign gods and served the Lord.

They not only confessed their sin, but they changed their actions. They didn't just say "We have sinned" and keep sinning the same sin. They said "We have sinned" and then put away their foreign gods and served the Lord.

Q: What was the Lord's response? **The Bible says** He could no longer endure their misery. He decided to help them.

Sincere confession is not enough by itself; it must be accompanied by repentance. The following passage helps us understand this idea.

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

True confession is connected with a change in the life. When we confess, we will also repent. When we are truly sorry for the sin we have done, we will change our ways and not continue in sin.

For further study, study the previous chapter titled "Repentance."

Confession without Repentance

God does not accept confession that is forced or that is made without repentance. Confession should come from your heart and is your choice, not a choice forced on you by somebody else.

Judas

Matthew 27:3-5 Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.

Q: Was Judas sorry that he had sinned? Yes, **the Bible says** he was remorseful.

Q: Did Judas confess his sin? Yes, **the Bible says** he confessed his sin by saying "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

Q: According to the passage in 2 Corinthians 7 on the previous page, what kind of sorrow did Judas have? **The Bible says** that godly sorrow produces repentance and that worldly sorrow produces death. Judas was sorry, but he died. His sorrow was not godly sorrow, for there was no repentance. There was no change of heart.

Achan

Joshua 7:19-21,25 Now Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.”... And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day.” So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

Achan first sinned by coveting the things that God had prohibited. It was a hidden sin, and he did not think it was very serious. But the sin of coveting grew and grew until it became the sin of theft. Achan took what was not his, and what God had specifically told the people not to take.

If Achan had confessed his sin earlier, he would have been able to find forgiveness. Even as the lots were being cast and his tribe and then his family was chosen, he remained silent. Only when the confession was forced did he confess his sin. Achan was not truly sorry for his sin, and he was stoned.

God is faithful to forgive sins when we confess them, but only when we confess them sincerely.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Psalms 34:18 The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Saul

The story of Saul gives us another example of a confession of sin that was not sincere. You can read the story in 1 Samuel 15.

Saul was instructed by the prophet Samuel to eliminate Amelek and totally destroy everything. Saul attacked Amelek, but in defiance of God's command, he did not kill the king of Amelek and he kept the best animals alive and took some of the nicest things without destroying them. Saul's excuse was that he preserved the animals to offer as a sacrifice to God.

Such a sacrifice would be offensive to God! God had given a very clear command to completely destroy everything and everybody, and Saul had failed to obey that command. Samuel confronted Saul, telling Saul that he had sinned.

1 Samuel 15:24-25 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord."

Notice that Saul confessed his sin. But his confession was not motivated from being truly sorrowful for his sin. He was not sorry that he had offended God by boldly disobeying Him. Saul was simply scared about the results of his sin, and his confession was empty and worthless.

1 Samuel 15:26 But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel."

When I sin, who do I sin against?

It is important to understand who you sinned against before you decide who to confess your sins to.

Sin against myself

Numbers 16:38 The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the Lord, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel.

1 Corinthians 6:18 *Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*

Sin against Man

Matthew 18:21 *Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”*

Matthew 6:12 *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

Genesis 42:22 *And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”*

Sin against Man is Sin against God

Exodus 10:16 *Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you.”*

Luke 15:18 *I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.”*

1 Corinthians 8:12 *But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.*

Sin against God

Psalms 51:1,4 *A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.*

(For the rest of the story about David and Bathsheba, read 2 Samuel 12-13.)

Acts 5:1-4 *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”*

Genesis 39:7-9 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "...How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Psalms 119:11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!

Every time we sin, we break God's law. Every sin is an offense to God and should be confessed to Him. Yet our sin often affects or injures other people. Because those people are God's property who He has created and redeemed, we must ask God for forgiveness. It is only God Who can cleanse us from sin. But we must also ask forgiveness from those whom we have wronged.

Sin against Holy Spirit

Matthew 12:31-32 Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

"Whatever the sin, if the soul repents and believes, the guilt is washed away in the blood of Christ; but he who rejects the work of the Holy Spirit is placing himself where repentance and faith cannot come to him. It is by the Spirit that God works upon the heart; when men willfully reject the Spirit, and declare it to be from Satan, they cut off the channel by which God can communicate with them. When the Spirit is finally rejected, there is no more that God can do for the soul. ... The most common manifestation of the sin against the Holy Spirit is in persistently slighting Heaven's invitation to repent. Every step in the rejection of Christ is a step toward the rejection of salvation, and toward the sin against the Holy Spirit." {AG 215}

For further study, see the tract on the Holy Spirit.

Questions and Answers

Why not confess sin to a priest or pastor?

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

God is the One to do the searching and knowing the secret or hidden sins in my life. God and God only needs to know about those.

Jeremiah 17:5,7 Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. ... Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord."

To confess our sins to a priest or pastor requires trust in that person—trust that they will forgive our sins and change our hearts. We are cursed when we put our confidence in human beings because they cannot do what only God can do: clean the heart of sin. Our confidence and trust should be put in God.

When we confess our sins to God, we come to Him in humility, acknowledging that He has died for our sins and is the only one Who can cleanse us from our sins. He is the only One Who is perfect and can give us a correct Example. When we humble ourselves, he lifts us up and restores us and makes us more noble and more like God.

The problem with confessing sins to a human is that we are actually degraded and lowered by the experience and become less like God. By confessing our sins to a man, we admit that he is higher than us and has the capability to forgive our sins. We view this man like God. But God is not like sinful man. All men have sinned. God has not sinned. Confessing our sins to a man confuses us about how holy God is and leads us to view God on a level with man. When we misunderstand God's holiness, we are encouraged to sin further and our characters become less like God's, not more.^{viii}

Why do my friends respect me less after public confession?

When we sin, we are breaking God's law. Therefore it is to Him that we must confess. For us to share our own private sins or to hear

others' private sins separates us from God and from each other. Look at these verses:

Proverbs 16:28 A whisperer separates the best of friends.

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.

Proverbs 25:8-10 Do not go hastily to court; for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor has put you to shame? Debate your case with your neighbor, and do not disclose the secret to another; lest he who hears it expose your shame, and your reputation be ruined.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.

For further study, see the tract on gossip.

Did people confess their sins to John the Baptist?

Matthew 3:6 [People] were baptized by [John] in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

Mark 1:5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

Some people claim that people were confessing their sins to John the Baptist. But the Bible does not teach this. There is no evidence in Scripture that John even heard one confession. Scripture does teach that John believed that it was God Who takes away sins.

John 1:29 Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Forgiveness

The sinner confesses his sin, he repents, but in so doing he is looking for forgiveness, and the power to leave his sins and have a changed life. Where does forgiveness come from? How are sins forgiven?

God Forgives Sins

1 John 2:1 And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Acts 5:31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.

Isaiah 44:22 I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Psalms 32:1-5 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ... I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Micah 7:18-19 Who is a God like You, pardonning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion

on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Asking for forgiveness of sins from anyone but God is like asking for money from a counterfeit bank. You might convince yourself that you are rich when you hold stacks of beautiful money in your hand. But counterfeit money is a deception. While it looks good, it has no value. The real bank rejects counterfeit money.

Man Forgives Sins

John 20:22-23 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Colossians 3:13 ...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Luke 6:37 Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Matthew 6:15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 9:6-8 “But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

Luke 17:3-4 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, “I repent,” you shall forgive him.

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said

to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

Matthew 18:32-35 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all the debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

How should our forgiveness and God’s forgiveness be similar?

We are to forgive each other when we sin against each other just as Jesus forgives us when we sin. Our attitude of forgiveness toward others when they sin toward us should be the same as Jesus’ attitude of forgiveness toward us when we sin against Him.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Clearly, Jesus is our Example. If we want to know how to forgive others, we should study examples of God’s forgiveness throughout Scripture. For now, let’s look at just one verse. What was Jesus’ attitude here?

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

Jesus’ attitude was not an attitude of frustration or one of revenge. He even said that they do not know what they are doing. While

recognizing the sin of those who were taunting and torturing Him, Jesus treated them lovingly.

Throughout Scripture, we find many stories illustrating God's forgiveness. In the Gospels we find stories of Jesus' forgiveness. These are to serve as our examples for how to forgive others. Study these stories! As you reflect on the following characteristics of God's forgiveness, ask yourself how your forgiveness compares with God's forgiveness. In reality, when others sin against you, are you willing to forgive them as God forgives?

- God abundantly pardons.
- God does not count forgiven sin against us.
- God does not retain His anger forever.
- God does not hold grudges. He forgets sin.
- God forgives from His heart; His forgiveness is genuine.
- God is merciful.
- God loves the sinner and is not willing that any perish.

These are all characteristics worthy of imitation. Through God's help, we may forgive others as He has forgiven us.

How is God's forgiveness different from our forgiveness?

God's forgiveness is large, and deep, and full. We can only start to understand it, for it is profound. While there are some aspects of God's forgiveness that we may imitate, there are other aspects that belong only to God.

Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Cleansing

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

1 John 1:7 *The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

None of us can cleanse ourselves or anybody else from sins. But when God forgives us, He gives us a clean heart, or clean desires.

Sin Removal

John 1:29 *Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

Psalms 103:12 *As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

Micah 7:19 *He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.*

Zechariah 3:1-4 *Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."*

We cannot remove sins. But when God forgives us of our sins, He takes them away and separates us from them.

Replace Sin with Righteousness

Psalms 51:10-12 *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*

Ezekiel 11:19 *Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh.*

Once sin is removed, we cannot fill the space with something good. But when God forgives us, He gives us a new heart, new joy, a new spirit and causes us to be obedient and not sin. He replaces the old and bad with the new and good.

Saves from Sin

Matthew 1:21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

1 Timothy 1:15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Isaiah 43:1 Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine.

We cannot save anybody from their sins. But when God forgives, He saves sinners from their sins and reclaims them from sin.

Delivers from Power of Sin

Matthew 6:12-13 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

2 Corinthians 1:9-10 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,

We are not strong enough to deliver ourselves or anybody from the power of sin. But when God forgives us, He delivers us from the power of sin.

Practical Godliness

We may study the gospel all day long until we know many details about the gospel. We may be amazed at the provisions God has made for dealing with the sin problem. We may believe in Jesus. But if the gospel does not change our lives in a personal and practical way, it is worth nothing to us. That is why in this section we will be discussing practical godliness.

James 2:19-20 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

To have practical godliness means to live like Jesus in our everyday lives. Practical godliness is more than being nice at church. It is more than doing nice things for our neighbors. It is about being like Jesus in everything we think and say and do. When we know Jesus as our Friend, the things we do will be evidence of what we really believe in our hearts.

Let's investigate how we can have practical godliness in the following chapters. We will start in a general way by looking at what righteousness is and how we get it. Then we will look more specifically at how the gospel changes us in our everyday lives.

These messages [Ephesians 4, 5], written with a power not of man but of God, contain lessons which should be studied by all and which may with profit be often repeated. In them practical godliness is outlined, principles are laid down that should be followed in every church, and the way that leads to life eternal is made plain. {AA 470.2}

Righteousness

What is righteousness?

Before we dig in a little deeper, we need to understand a little bit about what righteousness is. A look at a few Scripture verses will help us with this.

1 Corinthians 15:34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin.

1 John 5:17 All unrighteousness is sin.

Since unrighteousness is sin, then we can also say that righteousness is the opposite of sin. When we love the one, we hate the other.

Hebrews 1:9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

The next verse clarifies this idea a little further.

Romans 6:18,20 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Here we see two opposites, freedom and slavery. We are always free to something and a slave to something. When we are free from sin, we are slaves to righteousness. This language of freedom and slavery should encourage us. Usually, we think of the power of sin and become discouraged that we are slaves of sin. But we forget about the power of righteousness. We can become slaves of righteousness, too! And we will find out soon that the Power behind righteousness is greater than the power of sin!

Ephesians 4:22-24 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

So, what is righteousness? In summary, righteous is the opposite of sin. Righteousness is freedom from sin. A righteous person is no longer a slave of “the old man” of sin.

Do I need righteousness?

Romans 3:10 There is none righteous, no, not one.

Romans 3:23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To say there are none righteous is the same as saying that all have sinned. The wages of sin, or the result of not being righteous, is death! I definitely need righteousness if I want eternal life.

Can I get righteousness by keeping the law?

Many of us have tried to become righteous by trying really hard not to sin. We feel that if we can do the right things or do enough good things, that we can somehow achieve righteousness. We may be tempted to think, “I am a very kind person; I helped my family or my neighbors in time of need.” Or, “I go to church every Sabbath, and I pray every day.” But even our best efforts at obeying the law or trying not to sin are insufficient for us to find righteousness.

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Romans 8:7 The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.

Galatians 2:16, 21 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by

the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Deuteronomy 9:6 Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.

Where can I get righteousness?

Psalm 11:7 For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright.

Daniel 9:7 O Lord, righteousness belongs to You.

Q: To whom does righteousness belong? **The Bible says** it belongs to the Lord.

Psalm 36:6 Your righteousness is like the great mountains.

Jeremiah 23:6 Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Q: What is one of the names for the Lord? **The Bible says** His name is the Lord our Righteousness.

Q: Who is our righteousness? **The Bible says** that the Lord is our righteousness.

Isaiah 54:17 “This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me,” says the Lord.

Psalm 24:5 He shall receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Isaiah 45:24 Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength.

Q: If I have any righteousness at all, where does it come from? **The Bible says** righteousness is from God. It is in the Lord that I may have righteousness.

How can I be (and stay) righteous?

Daniel 4:27 Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.

Daniel's advice to the king was for him to break off his sins and be righteous. But how can we do this? How can we break off our sins and be righteous?

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Q: How can we become righteous? **The Bible says** that Jesus became sin for us! Because of what Jesus has done for us, we have the possibility of becoming righteous. This is nothing that we can do on our own. Becoming righteous is only possible through what Jesus has done for us.

Jesus is not a sinner. He has never sinned. Yet, the Bible says that He became sin for us. Like the innocent lamb became a sacrifice for sin, so Jesus became our Substitute so that we can become righteous.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Q: Who clothes us with garments of salvation? **The Bible says** it is the Lord Who gives us salvation. He covers us with the robe of righteousness. To be and stay righteous, we need to recognize that it is God who gives us righteousness.

Psalms 71:16 I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.

I will make mention of the Lord's righteousness only because my own righteousness is not worth mentioning! I go in God's strength because my strength is insufficient.

Isaiah 42:6 I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles.

We do not have to stay righteous on our own! In fact, we can't! That is why the Lord not only calls us to righteousness, but He holds our hand and keeps us as long as we are willing to hold His hand by allowing Him to work in us.

One day, if we are faithful to Jesus, He will give us the crown of righteousness.

2 Timothy 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

In the following chapters, let's look at how the gospel helps us prepare for this crown of righteousness. We will study how we can become righteous in practical areas of life such as our desires, our thoughts, and our conversation.

Desires

Much suffering and sin in this world could be avoided if only we understood the importance of controlling our desires. Most people identify sin as a bad action, something we physically do or don't do to break God's law. For example, if I ask a thief why he is in prison, he will likely say, "I am in prison because I stole something." If I ask a murderer why he is in prison, he will likely say something like, "I am in prison because I killed somebody." I might ask further, "Why did you kill somebody?" and he might respond, "Because I became drunk with alcohol."

Have you struggled with desires for sin? Perhaps you want to be good, and you do not want to sin, but you do not understand why you keep sinning! It seems that no matter how hard you try to stop repeating whatever sin is plaguing you, you are powerless to break the cycle of sin in your life.

Maybe the problem is that you are trying to tackle the problem at the wrong place. Instead of digging up the thorn bush by the roots you are trying to chop off the leaves one by one. The stubborn bush keeps sprouting new leaves and branches and you never seem to get it under complete control.

The Bible gives us plenty of counsel on the danger of our natural desires and how to replace those evil desires with good desires. Let's first look at some warnings that help us see the danger and the real character of our desires. Then we will look at how to replace those bad desires with good desires.

Bad Desires, our Natural State

In Numbers 11, we find an interesting story. God had been providing the Israelites in the desert with delicious manna that could be prepared in a variety of ways. But they got tired of the manna and asked for meat. They knew better. Even though God worked a daily miracle to provide them with nutritious food that they needed, they

desired more than what God knew was best. Their desire for meat grew until they craved it and cried for it. Finally, God gave them what they desired, but they soon discovered that following their desires got them into trouble quickly. David recounts a summary of this story this way:

Psalms 78:27-31 He also rained meat on them like the dust, feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; and He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, the wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel.

The Israelites quickly learned that what they naturally desired was not a benefit to them. They thought they were hungry for meat, when God had already provided them with plenty of the best food to satisfy their hunger. They thought they valued meat, but soon discovered it was not worth much to them.

Proverbs 10:2-3 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death. The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but He casts away the desire of the wicked.

Psalms 112:10 The desire of the wicked shall perish.

God wanted to teach the people that their natural desires came and went without really satisfying them. In fact, their natural desires ultimately led to death. God wanted them to understand that He knew how to satisfy their needs and how to deliver them from death. They did not need to be hungry for meat.

Consider how many times we desire something that we think might be good, only to find that it does not truly satisfy our desire! As in the example of the Israelites craving meat, sometimes we might desire certain unhealthful foods that taste good in the mouth but cause disease. We have many other sinful desires that we talk about and work toward, but if and when we finally fulfill those desires, we find that they do not satisfy us and usually result in disappointment or even death.

Q: In the verse above, what profits nothing? **The Bible says** the treasures of wickedness, or the things the wicked treasure or value.

Q: What delivers from death? **The Bible says** righteousness delivers from death.

Pause for a few moments and contemplate what you really desire in your life. Do you desire things that profit nothing and are cast away or do you desire righteousness that delivers you from death? The things we naturally desire are like treasures to us; they seem very desirable and valuable. But we fail to see their end.

James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

A horse-drawn cart is a cart that is drawn or pulled by the horse. Which is in front and which follows? The horse is in front; the cart follows. The Bible says that we are tempted when we are drawn away by our own desires. I envision a horse named "desire" drawing or pulling a cart named "temptation." Perhaps we can envision ourselves on the cart of temptation, being pulled away by our desires. A temptation isn't a temptation to us if we don't desire it. For example, if I think chocolate is disgusting, I'm not tempted to eat it. If I eat it, I recognize that I ate it because I was tempted. But more fundamentally, I ate it because I desired chocolate, not merely because I was tempted. I am not tempted to eat dirt, because my desire is not for dirt. I am not tempted to do something I don't desire.

Q: What gives birth to sin? **The Bible says** that desire gives birth to sin.

Q: What is the ultimate result of desire (our natural desire)? **The Bible says** that desire results in sin which results in death.

Now, you might ask the question, “Why do we naturally have desires that profit nothing and lead to death? Did God originally intend for us to have evil desires?” Let’s look at the origin of evil desire.

Romans 7:8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

Q: What produces evil desire? **The Bible says** that sin produced all manner of evil desire.

Sin is transgression of the law of God and was not God’s plan. And each of us have inherited both good and evil tendencies from our ancestors all the way back to Adam. Each of us has transgressed the law of God. God’s plan for us is neither sin nor evil desires.

[illustration]

Notice the discouraging downward cycle we piece together when we read James 1:15 with Romans 7:8. Desire gives birth to sin, and sin produces evil desire. Desire feeds sin, and sin feeds desire. When we disobey God, there is produced in us evil desires. Thus, sin encourages more sin and makes it easier to sin more. Even when we know that our desires are naturally evil, we still do not have a way within ourselves to control these desires. They are just there. And they are there because sin is there. And we can’t get rid of sin on our own either. This could lead us very quickly to feelings of discouragement.

Romans 7:18-19 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we feel this way sometimes, too. Is there anybody who has not struggled with the problem of sin in their lives? We know enough to realize that we want to do good, but our natural desires are built-in so that we often do the opposite of what we know is right. Then we become discouraged because we know what is right and we know that we

should have done that, but we actually did what was wrong. This is not a new problem. This is a problem common among humans, and as we saw in the verse above, even Paul the great preacher in Bible times struggled with this problem.

Thankfully, Scriptures present us with a solution for how we can deal with our naturally evil desires and have good desires. Before looking at the solution, let's look at a few more verses that will help us understand the deadly danger of our natural desires and the need for eradicating them. It is these desires that form thoughts that cause us to forget about God. Read this verse:

Psalm 10:3-4 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; he blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord. The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.

Job 21:14-16 Yet they say to God, "Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him?" Indeed their prosperity is not in their hand; the counsel of the wicked is far from me.

Q: What does the wicked person boast about? He boasts of his heart's desire, his natural desires. He likes them and talks about them. He is proud, thinking of himself. He does not seek God, and God is in none of his thoughts.

That is the problem with our heart's natural desire. Our natural desire replaces desire for God so that we do not desire God. We do not cultivate our thoughts to think about God.

Q: Why do the wicked want God to depart from them? **The Bible says** they do not desire a knowledge of God's ways.

Q: What else do they question? They question why they should serve God. They question what profit they will have from praying to God.

When we cultivate our natural desires, we treasure and value things that are not truly valuable and we chase away or do not look for that which is truly valuable. We may think, "What profit will I get if I pray to God and serve Him?" In so doing we are self-focused, and being

self-focused will lead us to ruin just as Lucifer was led to ruin by being self-focused.

Q: How much do you think about God during each day? What does this tell you about your desires?

Mark 4:19 The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Q: What is the result of cultivating worldly desires in our hearts? **The Bible says** these desires for other things choke the Word and it becomes unfruitful.

The last thing that we want is for the Word to be choked and become unfruitful in our lives! We need the transforming power of the Word of God to work change in our lives. We must not let our desires choke the Word!

James 4:1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

Certainly, we must find a solution to our desires. They lead to sin and certain death. They bring wars and fights. They bring destruction and perdition. They choke the Word. Thankfully, God has provided a solution and knows how to free us from our natural desires and replace them with good desires.

How do I replace bad desires with good desires?

Trying to stop sinning by trying to stop doing bad things is much like trying to cure a malaria fever with a fever reducer. The malaria, which is caused by parasites in the blood, causes a high fever. The fever is a symptom of the malaria. You can certainly treat the fever, and you can bring the fever down for a time, but it rises again once the affects of the fever reducer wear off. Why does it rise again? Because the malaria is still present. To treat malaria effectively you need to eliminate the malaria parasites in the blood. When you treat the root cause, the disease goes away. Even the fever disappears, without your taking a fever reducer!

Similarly, to be effective in treating the sin problem in our lives, we need to identify the root issue and attack the problem at the root. Treating symptoms may seem to help at times, but it will not be a satisfying solution. We must understand that the real problem of sin is not just the actions that we do. Truly, sinful actions are terrible and cause much suffering and pain in this world. But if we just try to address our actions, we will not get very far in finding a real solution. We may say a thief is in prison for the act of stealing something. Theft is sin, but the fact that he stole something is not the complete problem. Theft is the result of a deeper problem. We may say a murderer is in prison because he killed somebody. Locking him up in prison is good, because we do not want a murderer free in society where he may kill others. Murder is sin, but the fact that he killed somebody is not the complete problem. The real problem is a much deeper issue.

God wants us to learn how to control our actions and He wants us to be people who do good things and avoid doing bad things. But the key to learning to do good actions does not lie in trying really hard to be good. We try and try our hardest to be good and end up thoroughly discouraged because we fail to understand the importance of controlling our desires and knowing how to control them.

Controlling our actions without controlling our desires is like trying to control a gas fire without shutting off the gas line. We can spray extinguisher on the fire all day long, but as long as there is pressure in the pipe, the gas still continues to come and the least spark starts up the raging fire again.

When we recognize that our natural desires give birth to sin, we will recognize that in order to eliminate sin in our lives, we need to first eliminate our desire for sin. Naturally, our desires lead us to sin which leads to death. If we wish to avoid the wages of sin which is death, we must put our bad desires to death. Ultimately, something or somebody certainly has to die—either our desires or us. Either we must overcome our desires or they will overcome us.

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Our natural desires are either put to death or they bring death.

Recognizing the problem is crucial to fixing the problem. In this case, recognizing the problem of desires is something that many people miss. They try to fix the result rather than the source of the problem. But once they understand the problem of natural desires and the need to eliminate them, the solution is actually quite simple. It involves a heart transplant. Of course, if we try to do a heart transplant on ourselves, we will absolutely fail. But in the Bible we find the offer of a Specialist in heart transplants.

Ezekiel 11:19-21 “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord God.

Q: Who is the heart surgeon in this passage? The Lord God is speaking here and it is He who does the operation on the heart.

We are incapable of performing heart surgery on ourselves!

Q: What is the problem? **The Bible says** we have a stony heart.

Q: What is the solution? **The Bible says** we need a fleshy (soft) heart.

The language here refers to a total heart transplant, not just a reparation of one portion. God takes out our stony heart and gives us a soft heart as a replacement.

Q: Why does God give us a soft heart? **The Bible says** so that we can walk in His statutes and keep His judgments and do them. Walk, keep, do.

Q: What does that imply about a stony heart? That implies that a person with a stony heart cannot walk in His statutes or keep His judgments or do them. Can't walk, can't keep, can't do.

Romans 8:7 The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Now we can understand the importance of a heart transplant! Without it, we cannot be obedient! Without it, we cannot live! But no matter how hard we try, we cannot perform a heart transplant ourselves. We must have the master Surgeon do it for us.

Galatians 5:24-25 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:3-5 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

Ephesians 8:1,6,13 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ... For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ... For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

But you might ask, "Is it not a risk to have a total heart transplant? What if I cannot do the things that I used to desire? What if I have to stop doing some things that I enjoy? Where will I find joy in life?" Such foolish thoughts! Do you really think that your way is more fun and that God's way is "no fun"? What risk is it to have assurance that the desires of your new heart will be fulfilled? What risk is it to be free from the sentence of eternal death and receive the promise of eternal life? What risk is it to abandon the hopeless self-centered struggle against evil desires when we have God's promise to give us

His strength and to transform our desires? In my analysis, this is not a risk at all.

When you have an evil desire, don't try to get rid of it yourself. Stop right there and ask God to remove that desire and to replace it with a good desire. Ask God to make your former desires dead and to give you living, fulfilling righteous desires. Let's look at some good desires.

Good Desires, our Goal

If we focus on our evil desires, they will only get worse. Satan wants us to focus on our problems and be discouraged. Instead of listening to Satan, we must focus on Jesus and the way He has enabled us to have and maintain good desires.

As you ask God to remove your stony heart and to remove your old desires, ask Him to give you the good desires that we will see in the following verses.

Desire that which is good

Proverbs 11:23 The desire of the righteous is only good, but the expectation of the wicked is wrath.

Desire God

Psalm 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Isaiah 26:8-9 Yes, in the way of Your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for You; the desire of our soul is for Your name and for the remembrance of You. With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early; for when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

Desire the fear and judgments of the Lord

Psalm 19:9-10 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Desire the pure milk of the Word

1 Peter 2:1-3 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Desire water of life

Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Desire life

Psalms 34:12-14 Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Desire to live with God

Psalms 27:4 One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.

Desire wisdom

Proverbs 3:13-15 Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.

Proverbs 8:11 For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.

Desire salvation of souls

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

Desire spiritual gifts

1 Corinthians 12:31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

1 Corinthians 14:39 *Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.*

God Satisfies Righteous Desires

When God removes your natural evil desires, He replaces them with good desires. Now, when you desire something, it is a righteous desire and God promises to satisfy you.

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 145:19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.

Psalm 10:17 Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear.

Proverbs 10:24 The fear of the wicked will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

God's desires

Truth

Psalm 51:6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

Broken and contrite heart

Psalm 51:16-17 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.

Mercy

Psalm 40:6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.

Hosea 6:6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Matthew 9:13 But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

Matthew 12:7 But if you had known what this means, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice,” you would not have condemned the guiltless.

To be with His people

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

Salvation for all

1 Timothy 2:3-4 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Thoughts

Like our desires, our thoughts are hidden. No other person but you knows your thoughts. Of course, people can make educated guesses about what you are thinking, but it is really only you and God who know exactly what you are thinking.

Though unseen, thoughts are very important. What we think affects what we do. If I think well toward somebody, I will likely do well toward him as well. If I keep thinking about some food I like, I may start salivating and decide to eat that food for my next meal. Thoughts also affect our health.

At the beginning of the chapter on desires, we used two examples to illustrate the importance of controlling desires. Those two examples also serve well to illustrate the importance of controlling our thoughts. The murderer will not murder somebody without thinking first. A murderer will have thoughts of anger or resentment before killing somebody. No murders are motivated from thoughts of love. And the thief will not steal without thinking first. Perhaps he sees something he wants and covets it. The hidden, sinful thoughts of covetousness grow into more open, sinful actions of stealing.

Do the Ten Commandments address our thoughts? Of course, they all do, but the tenth commandment addresses our thoughts and desires directly and specifically.

Exodus 20:17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.

Bad Thoughts, our Natural State

Matt 15:19; (Mark 7:21) For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

Q: Where do evil thoughts come from? **The Bible says** that they come from out of the heart. That's another way of saying that evil

thoughts (and the other sins listed) are natural for us without God in our lives.

The problem of bad thoughts is not a new problem. Humans have struggled with their thoughts since Adam and Eve. God wants His people to have good thoughts, because He knows the result of bad thoughts. It is very important to God that we think good thoughts, and He wants us to view this as a life and death matter. But so often we do not control our thoughts and they naturally wander to evil until evil thoughts become our habit. To help us understand the importance of good thoughts, take a look at the story of Noah.

Genesis 6:5-7 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

Q: Why did God send the flood to destroy man? **The Bible says** that the heart of God was grieved because the wickedness of man was great and the heart of man was continually full of evil thoughts.

The story of Noah is a clear warning for us. Naturally, our thoughts are evil. But we cannot sit idly and say, “Oh well, that’s just they way my personality is.” The heart of God is grieved when we have evil thoughts because He knows that evil thoughts result in destruction. Many thousands of people died in the flood because they did not manage their thoughts.

Luke 17:26 And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man.

To us, thoughts seem so harmless. Perhaps we say to ourselves, “If I just think something, it can’t hurt anybody. My thoughts are secret.” But thoughts are the origin of actions, and sinful thoughts lead to sinful actions. And sinful actions lead to death. Perhaps sometimes we are a little bit like the people in the time of Noah. We do not understand the importance of good thoughts. In the days before

Jesus comes, the majority of people will be like the majority of people in Noah's day: their thoughts will be only evil continually.

Here are a few more verses that talk about judgment for thoughts.

Jeremiah 6:19 Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people—the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it.

Micah 4:12 But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord, nor do they understand His counsel; for He will gather them like sheaves to the threshing floor.

Psalms 64:6-7 They devise iniquities: "We have perfected a shrewd scheme." Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep. But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they shall be wounded.

Romans 1:20-21 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Humans have no good excuse for thinking evil thoughts. God has clearly revealed Himself and His power to cleanse us and has showed us how we can be freed from evil, whether it is actions or thoughts. But we humans foolishly reject Him and choose our own way. It is like we show God our phone with a dead battery and He points us to the outlet and the charger, but we refuse to plug in the phone. He has showed us His power, but we do not glorify Him as God and are not thankful. This leads to us becoming futile in our thoughts and our hearts are darkened. Away from God's power, we are weak and incapable of changing our thoughts.

Psalms 10:4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.

Q: How much do the wicked think about God? **The Bible says** that God is in none of his thoughts.

Q: How much do you think about God? How much is God in your thoughts throughout each day? Are your thoughts more like the thoughts of the wicked or more like the thoughts of the righteous?

Proverbs 15:26 The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but the words of the pure are pleasant.

God hates evil thoughts. In fact, Proverbs says that they are an abomination to Him. The word “abomination” is a strong word. And yet, God does not hate the evil thinker! In fact, He loves the evil thinker. Even though the evil thinker is without excuse, God still loves him and wishes him to abandon his wicked thoughts and return to him. Take a moment and try to comprehend the feelings in God’s heart as you read the following verse:

Isaiah 65:2 I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts.

In this verse God is stretching out His hands all day long, not to the righteous but to a rebellious people! How often when we deal with rebellious people we just want them to go away or to disappear. We certainly do not want to reach our hands out to them. But God is not like that. He reaches His hands out all day long, pleading with us to abandon our sinful thoughts.

Q: How are the people rebellious? **The Bible says** they walk in a way according to their own thoughts.

Q: How good is this way? **The Bible says** that the way is not good.

Isaiah 1:2-3 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider.”

Again, try to understand the feelings in God’s heart in this passage. It is a marvel to the universe how dense and unthankful God’s people can be sometimes! The animals know who their masters are and where to find food and water at their masters’ house. But God’s children have rebelled against Him. Even though He fed them and

raised them, they do not even know their Father. Worse yet, they do not even think about Him or consider Him!

How God's heart must ache when we go throughout our day, busy with our work and responsibilities, and forget to consider Him Who made us and has showered us continually with abundant blessings! Even the animals that go out to the field to graze each day think to return to their masters house each evening. But we sometimes forget about God altogether.

Even those dedicated to full-time ministry can be guilty of forgetting God. We so easily and quickly forget about Him, even when we are busy with "His work." Sure, we spend time with Him and think about Him each morning. But when the day gets busy and the stress rises and we have more on our list than we can accomplish, where are our thoughts? When our personal plans are disrupted due to a bursting pipe or a mechanical problem or the death of a neighbor, where are our thoughts? When our burdens become heavy and we feel burnt-out, where are our thoughts?

Is it possible that we are choosing a way according to our own thoughts? If we do, it is not a good way, and God is stretching out His hands toward us, pleading with us to return our thoughts to Him.

How Do I replace bad thoughts with good thoughts?

In many places throughout Scripture, we are told to cleanse ourselves from the sin of evil thoughts and to replace those with righteous thoughts. We may wonder, "How is that possible? I have tried for so long to change my thoughts but they always return."

Do not be discouraged. If you have recognized that your thoughts are negative or not Christlike, you have already made the first important step to changing them. Perhaps your thought habits are very deep and you have found it very difficult to abandon your habitual thoughts. But remember, God will never instruct us to do something impossible. When He tells us to do something, His command is also a promise to supply the ability to accomplish that command.

Ask God for help

We must ask God to change our thoughts.

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

Q: What are the two action verbs given in this verse? **The Bible says repent and pray God.**

There is one way to replace our bad thoughts with good thoughts. We must repent. That means that we recognize our bad thoughts as sin and leave them behind. We must also pray to God because when we ask God for help with our thoughts, He is eager and willing to help us.

Isaiah 55:6-7 Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

The key to replacing our bad thoughts with good thoughts is simple. We must ask God to help us. We must ask Him for the gift of repentance—the gift to hate sin and turn away from it. When we desire to abandon our evil thoughts, God will have mercy on us and abundantly pardon!

The solution to evil thoughts that come from an evil heart is to get rid of the old heart and to get a new heart. As we saw in the section on desires, it is God Who does that for us.

Like David, we can pray that God will fix or establish our thoughts and hearts on Him.

1 Chronicles 29:18 O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward You.

Spend time in Scripture

Jeremiah 4:14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?

Q: What action verb is given in this verse? **The Bible says** wash your heart from wickedness.

How are we to wash?

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

Q: How are we to be washed? **The Bible says** that because of God's mercy, He washes us and renews us with the Holy Spirit. We cannot wash ourselves.

Ephesians 5:26 That He might sanctify and cleanse her [the church] with the washing of water by the word.

Q: How else are we cleansed? **The Bible says** that we are cleansed by the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Nothing is hidden from God. Even our thoughts are visible to Him. God has given us His Word as a means of cutting deep and exposing even our most hidden and deep thoughts. If you want to change your thoughts, spend time reading your Bible. As you study the Bible, ask God for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding. Ask God to show you clearly the thoughts you need to abandon and to give you the power to abandon those thoughts.

The more of a habit you have each day spending time in Scripture, the more you will find your thoughts turning to spiritual things throughout the day.

Sing

Singing is another practical way to turn our thoughts away from evil and toward the good. Throughout the day when you catch yourself thinking discouraging thoughts, distract yourself by

singing a song about God's power and redemption! The song will cheer you up and help you turn your thoughts toward spiritual things. Rather than becoming discouraged because our thoughts are evil so much of the time, focus on positive thinking, thanking God in advance for the victory over evil thoughts and for saving you from them.

Psalm 98:1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.

Isaiah 44:23 Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel.

Exodus 15:1-2 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the Lord, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him."

Recognize that victory is possible

Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.

Notice the condition and the surety of the promise. If we commit our works to the Lord, our thoughts will be established. There is no question of doubt about it. It does not say that our thoughts *might* be established. They *will* be established as we commit our works to the Lord.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Would you like God to direct you? Trust in Him. Do not rely on your own thoughts or your own wisdom. God promises to direct our paths (that includes our thoughts) as we make Him first in our lives.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Q: Although we walk in the flesh, what weapons must we use to combat bad thoughts? **The Bible says** we must use weapons that are mighty in God.

None of our own weapons are mighty enough to pull down the strongholds of evil thought habits. If your is experience is like mine, you have tried on your own unsuccessfully to conquer evil thoughts. But we cannot win the battle on our own. We must have God's mighty help.

Q: What percentage of our thoughts may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ? **The Bible says** that every thought can be brought into captivity.

The Bible promises us complete victory. We must not be satisfied with ridding ourselves of most of our bad thoughts. We must not be happy with the idea that now we think mostly good thoughts. No, we must continue the battle using God's mighty power until we have all of our thoughts under control.

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Q: How does a child think? **The Bible says** the child thinks like a child.

Q: What does a man do with his childish thoughts when he is grown? **The Bible says** he puts childish things away.

As we grow spiritually, God will help us to leave behind our childish way of thinking and to bring every thought into captivity to obey Him.

Philippians 4:19 *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

Good Thoughts, our Goal

Philippians 2:5 *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*

2 Corinthians 3:5 *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.*

Proverbs 12:5 *The thoughts of the righteous are right, but the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.*

Romans 12:3 *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 Love *suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil.*

God Knows our Thoughts

Psalms 94:11 *The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile.*

Daniel 2:29-30 *As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart.*

Amos 4:13 *For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, Who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, Who treads the high places of the earth—the Lord God of hosts is His name.*

Psalms 139:1-4 *O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.*

1 Chronicles 28:9 As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.

Part of Jesus' mission while He was here was to help people understand their thoughts and to realize a need for change. Look at the following verses that talk of Jesus' knowledge of thoughts.

Luke 2:34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Matthew 9:4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

(See also the following similar texts: Matthew 12:25; Luke 5:22; Luke 6:8; Luke 9:47; Luke 11:17)

God's Thoughts

Psalm 92:5 O Lord, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep.

Isaiah 55:8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Psalm 40:5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you," says the Lord, "thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Psalm 139:17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!

Meditation

Meditate—Why?

Psalm 1:2-3 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Psalm 119:11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

Psalm 119:99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.

Deuteronomy 8:3 Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

Q: Why should we meditate on God's Word?

- **The Bible says** we will prosper. For the righteous person, meditating on God's Word is a delight. If we meditate on God's Word continually, we will prosper and have good success.
- **The Bible says** we will obey. When we meditate on God's Word, we are not forgetful of His Word and will be obedient. His Word is fresh in our minds, and we can use God's Word to combat temptation. Meditation helps us to not sin. As we think about Jesus, and how weak we are, we find strength in Him Who gave us an example of how to deal with temptation (by using Scripture).

- **The Bible says** we will have superior understanding. When we meditate on Scriptures, we gain an understanding that is unequalled by those who do not meditate on Scriptures. By meditating on Scriptures, we open our minds to the teaching of the Holy Spirit and He can make us wise.
- **The Bible says** we will find life. Jesus is the Bread of Life. As we cannot live physically without food, so we cannot live spiritually without spiritual food. God's Word is living; it gives life.

Malachi 3:16 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name.

God knows our characters and the condition of our hearts. He knows which people genuinely love Him and think about Him and which people think about other things. God keeps a book of remembrance especially for those who remember Him.

Is your name in that book?

Meditate When?

Psalm 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 63:6 When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.

Psalm 119:97 Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Q: When should we meditate? **The Bible says** we can meditate continually, day and night. While this is probably not your habit, you can begin to develop this habit. Ask God to help you return your thoughts to Him throughout the day.

Meditate Where?

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Genesis 24:63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming.

Psalms 4:4 Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.

Q: Where should we meditate? **The Bible gives** us a few examples of where to meditate: in your house, on your bed, at your door and gate, on the road, in the field, etc.

It logically follows that if we are to meditate continually, that means we are to meditate everywhere. Obviously, there must be different levels of meditation. We may meditate more deeply on God's Word in the quietness and privacy of our room. Or we may meditate on God's Word as we travel along the road or as we are in the busy, noisy market. There is no place where we cannot turn our thoughts toward Jesus.

Meditate on What?

Psalms 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

God's Goodness and Justice

Romans 11:22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

God's Works

1 Samuel 12:24 *Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.*

Psalms 64:9 *All men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider His doing.*

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 *Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.*

Psalms 77:12 *I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds.*

God's Knowledge

Hosea 7:2 *They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness; now their own deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face.*

God's Word (testimonies)

Psalms 119:95 *The wicked wait for me to destroy me, but I will consider Your testimonies.*

Psalms 119:97 *Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.*

Jesus

Hebrews 3:1 *Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus.*

Hebrews 12:3 *For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*

2 Peter 3:15 *Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you.*

Our Own Ways

Haggai 1:5-6 *Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves,*

but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.”

Matthew 7:3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

Proverbs 4:26-27 Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.

Galatians 6:3-4 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

Each Other

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.

Nature

Psalms 8:3-4 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?

Proverbs 6:6-8 Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.

Matthew 6:28-29 So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Luke 12:24 Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?

Conversation

Let's think for a moment about the origin of speech.

Luke 6:45 Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Q: Where does speaking originate? **The Bible says** the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. The heart is the origin of speech.

The words that come out of our mouths are often painfully accurate at identifying our heart condition. For example, if I speak in anger to somebody, I have anger in my heart. Without the anger in my heart, I would not have spoken in anger.

Here is another question to ponder. What do you talk about on an average day? I know somebody who very often talks about cars. He loves to talk about cars. It seems that every time I talk with him, he is talking about cars. His conversation reveals something about his heart: he loves cars.

Think about what you talk about. What is your conversation from day to day? What does your conversation reveal about your heart?

The gospel is a life-changing power. When we understand and accept the gospel, it changes us. Jesus gives us new desires and new thoughts. He gives us new hearts! If our hearts are truly changed by the power of the gospel, we will have a new conversation! The things we enjoy talking about will change. We will speak out of the abundance of our new heart, a heart that loves God.

The Bible speaks about our speech many times. In the following few pages, we will take a look at some of what the Bible has to say.

Bad Conversation, our Natural State

James 3:4-5 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

The Bible compares the tongue to the rudder of a ship. The tongue, although small compared to the rest of the body, is a very powerful thing.

James 3:7-10 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Q: Who can tame the tongue? **The Bible says** that no man can tame the tongue.

Q: What is the tongue full of? **The Bible says** that it is full of deadly poison.

Let's put these passages from James together. The tongue is a powerful thing. The tongue is full of poison. No man can tame the tongue. This uncontrollable, deadly, poisonous tongue sounds like a dangerous situation! Without Jesus and the power of the gospel, it surely is a terrible, helpless situation.

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

Q: How useful is religion to a person who does not control his tongue? **The Bible says** that person's religion is useless!

Some people turn to God, but fail to understand how completely they can be changed. They think they are religious, but have not allowed God to change their hearts completely. Thus, their speech continues to spoil their experience.

Psalms 55:21 The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.

Some people try to conceal their heart condition from others by trying to say the right things. But even these words are destructive.

How do I replace bad conversation with good conversation?

While we have just read some sobering things about our speech, we do not need to become discouraged.

Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

As we have already noted, if my heart has evil treasure, my speech will be evil. But if my heart has good treasure, my speech will be good. I cannot change my heart from evil to good. But God can. He can replace my stony heart with a soft heart. And He can give me good speech.

Isaiah 59:20 “As for Me,” says the Lord, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the Lord, “from this time and forevermore.”

Psalm 119:162 I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure.

In order to have good speech, we need to first recognize that we cannot change our own speech. We need God to rid us of evil treasure in our hearts and replace it with good treasure. We need God to put His words in our mouths. When we give God permission to do this, speaking good treasure will become natural for us.

A bowl of rotten sauce gives off a fowl odor, but a bowl of fresh sauce gives off a wonderful odor. So it is with our speech. A rotten heart gives bad speech, but a clean heart gives good speech.

Psalm 77:12 I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds.

When God’s word is in our hearts and we treasure it, we will begin to talk about it! If I really like something, I will talk about it. If I find a really nice telephone, I will want to share with you what I found. If a new baby is born in our family, I will want to tell others about it.

Similarly, when I find the treasure of God's Word in my heart, I will want to tell others.

Do you want to change your speech? Ask God to change your heart and to give you good speech. Meditate on God's Word and on His creation. Then you will find yourself talking about true treasure rather than evil treasure.

Bible Story Examples

The Bible gives us some examples of God giving good speech to people.

Exodus 4:10-11 Then Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."

Isaiah 6:6-7 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."

Jeremiah 6:6-7 Then said I: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth." But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak."

Good Conversation, our Goal

Here are a few verses to encourage you as you learn new habits of speaking good treasure.

Psalms 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

1 Peter 1:15 As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Psalms 89:1 I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 96:2-4 Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.

Ecclesiastes 10:12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up.

Titus 2:6-8 Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

2 Peter 3:11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Few Words

Ecclesiastes 5:2 Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few.

Proverbs 10:19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

James 1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

Gossip

Exodus 20:16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

James 4:11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

Proverbs 26:20-22 Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.

Titus 2:1-3 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.

Proverbs 26:17 He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears.

Proverbs 11:13 A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.

Proverbs 20:19 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.

Life and Death

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Matthew 12:36-37 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Psalms 34:12-13 Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.

Psalms 59:12-13 For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be taken in their pride, and for the cursing and lying which they speak. Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be; and let them know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth.

Proverbs 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

Temptation

Where does temptation come from?

Satan

We all probably agree that temptation comes from Satan.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (serpent = Satan. See Revelation 12:9)

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Zechariah 3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him.

Satan has been tempting people from the very beginning. He has tempted every single human being who ever lived. He even powerfully tempted Jesus in an effort to make Him fall.

Q: What was Satan like when he tempted Eve? **The Bible says** that the serpent was more cunning than any other beast of the field.

The devil still uses his cunning, deceitful techniques to encourage people to oppose God. For him, it doesn't matter if he can tempt someone to sin in their secret thoughts or in an open matter. But he does it in a way that seems attractive at the time.

If Satan came to Eve in the form of some terrifying creature, Eve probably would not have been caught off-guard. But Satan chose to work through a serpent, a beautiful and wonderful animal in Eden before it was cursed. Satan's voice was pleasant and his arguments seemed reasonable at the time and Eve was attracted to sin. Today, Satan still presents his temptations in an attractive manner in hope that we will be caught off-guard.

Ourselves

While temptation can come from Satan, it can also come from our own desires.

James 1:13-16 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

It is hard to kill a tree by cutting off some of its branches. The tree just sprouts new branches where the old ones were cut off. To kill a tree, one must cut it down at the level of the roots. We must address the sin problem at the level of desire, because that is where temptation originates.

If this is hard to understand, try to answer this question: Who originally tempted Lucifer to sin? There was no devil, no tempter, no serpent to tempt Lucifer. He was tempted by his own desires.

Now that Satan has introduced sin into the universe, and now that he tempted Adam to sin, and because we are descendants of Adam, our natural human desires are sinful. Our own desires are infected with sin, so we must learn to recognize these desires and ask Jesus to disinfect us of them when they arise.

God?

There are some who promote the idea that it is really God Who tempts us. One verse is clear enough to answer this question without doubt.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Which temptations are too big to overcome?

Many people believe that some temptations are just too big to overcome. They reason that God knows our weaknesses and will understand if we fall under temptation sometimes.

For example, one may reason like this: “I am a pretty good person. I help a lot of people, I don’t drink or smoke, I witness to my friends, I read the Bible, and I go to church every Sabbath. Yes, sometimes I release a burst of angry words at people, but that is just the way I am. That is how I am built. God understands.”

There is some truth to that. Perhaps that really is just the way he is. Perhaps he truly does react with anger in a way that he is powerless to control. And God does understand his situation and his tendencies to evil. But none of these are suitable excuses for being overcome by temptation.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Q: Does God understand what it is like to be tempted? **The Bible says** that Jesus (our High Priest) sympathizes with our weaknesses. That means He knows what it is like to be tempted.

Q: How thoroughly was Jesus tempted? **The Bible says** that Jesus was tempted in all points as we are.

Q: Which temptations were too big for Jesus to overcome? **The Bible says**, none. He was tempted in every way like us, but was without sin. That means He did not even fall under temptation one time!

Thankfully, we do not need to be overcome by any temptation; when we are tempted we can have help to overcome the temptation. Jesus, Who was severely tempted and was not overcome, is willing and even eager to share His technique of success with us and to help us be victorious under all temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Q: Is there any temptation that is too big to overcome? **The Bible says**, no. God is faithful to not allow any temptation bigger than we can deal with.

That is good news, because God has arranged everything so that we can overcome all temptations that come our way! God wants us to have victory over all sin, not just most sin. Any sin is enough to separate us from God.

Who can help us with temptation?

Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 2:18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Proverbs 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

Matthew 6:13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

These verses clearly tell us that Jesus is qualified and willing to help us. He knows temptation personally, and He knows how to be victorious. When we feel powerless when confronted with temptation, we can run to the Lord and be safe because He is a strong tower.

Luke 22:31-32 And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”

Q: When Simon Peter was being tempted by Satan, who was praying for him? **The Bible says** that Jesus was praying for him.

Resisting Temptation

So far we have learned that we are tempted both by the devil and by our own desires. But there is no temptation so strong that we

cannot, through God's help, resist it and become overcomers. God will not allow that.

This is interesting information, but practically speaking, how can we resist temptation when it comes? Temptations often seem irresistible. That is why we often fall. How can we learn to be strong and withstand temptations?

Study Jesus' Example

First of all, we know from Hebrews 2:18 that Jesus is able to help us when we are tempted. Next time you are tempted, immediately ask Jesus for help, and He will help you! We can have His help, and we also have His example to encourage us.

1 Peter 2:21-22 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth."

Q: What did Jesus leave for us? **The Bible says** He left us an example.

Q: Why did Jesus leave an example for us? **The Bible says** so that we should follow in His steps.

Q: How many times did Jesus fall into sin? **The Bible says** that Jesus committed no sin.

While this verse is in the context of enduring suffering, two things jump out at me as we think about how to deal with temptations: 1) Jesus is our Example and 2) He did not sin. It seems like a good idea to study His example and discover His secret of resisting temptation.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Q: Is it a sin to be tempted? **The Bible says**, no. Jesus was tempted, but He did not sin.

What was His secret to not sinning? And how was He strong to resist every single temptation that ever came His way? We will

identify two main points that will also help us in combating temptation. Jesus recognized His need of supernatural help and He recognized the power of Scripture.

Resist Temptation with Supernatural Help

One major key for Jesus' success in combating temptation is that He realized that He could do nothing by Himself. Alone, He was powerless. He relied on His Father for power and for wisdom.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

John 5:30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

John 5:19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."

I cannot combat temptation by myself. I can of myself do nothing. I am powerless to resist even the smallest temptation. But if I believe that Jesus can help me, He will!

Mark 9:23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

We can resist temptation with confidence by faith, because we know that God will answer our prayer for help.

Ephesians 6:16 ...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Q: How many of the devil's darts does the shield of faith quench?

The Bible says the shield of faith quenches all the fiery darts of Satan. That means there are no darts that the shield of faith cannot quench!

Why can we believe God when He says that He can help us with temptation? Why can we have faith that He will help us?

2 Peter 2:9 The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.

Q: Who knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations? **The Bible says** the Lord knows.

Notice the word “deliver.” It is not a part-way word. Imagine that I fall into the river and a hippopotamus grabs me and nearly swallows me in its huge mouth. After a while some people come throwing sticks and bricks and the hippopotamus mostly lets go of me except for my foot. My foot is still in the jaws of the hippo, but the rest of me is freed. Am I delivered from the hippopotamus? No, certainly not. But if the animal releases me completely and I am pulled to the safety of land, then I am delivered.

When you are tempted, you don’t have to fall half-way and just sin a little bit. You can be delivered! You can be rescued and saved from the temptation. When it seems like temptation has surrounded you and taken you captive, the Lord knows how to deliver you and set you free!

Since the Lord knows how to deliver you from a temptation, wouldn’t it be a good idea to ask Him for help next time you are tempted? As Jesus gave us an example prayer, He taught us to ask for deliverance from temptation.

Matthew 6:13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Psalm 50:15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

Q: When we are in the trouble of temptation and call on the Lord for help, what are two promises in this verse? **The Bible says** that God will deliver us. Not only that, we will glorify God through the situation.

We look at trouble and dread it. But God says, “No, when you are in trouble, when you are tempted, call on Me. I will deliver you and through that experience you will bring glory to My name.”

Psalm 91:15 He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.

Q: When we call on God when we are in trouble, where is He? **The Bible says** that God is with us when we are in trouble. And again we see the promise of deliverance and honor.

No matter how strong the temptation may seem to you, remember that it is not too strong for you to bear. He is not far from you—He is with you! God will absolutely not allow a temptation that is too strong for you. When tempted, remember these promises:

Habakkuk 3:19 The Lord God is my strength.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

No matter how strong we think we are, we cannot combat temptations on our own power. We are weak and helpless. Jesus recognized this when He said,

John 5:30 I can of Myself do nothing.

Even though we are weak and helpless when temptations come, God’s grace is sufficient for any temptation. His strength is made very clear because for us to resist temptation is a miracle of God’s strength working in us.

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

God is always there as a refuge for us. He is our strength. Our strength is insufficient to combat temptation. But when we let God help us, He is our refuge and strength and help in trouble.

One major key for our success in combating temptation is to realize that we can do nothing by ourselves. Alone, we are powerless. We must rely on our Father for power and for wisdom. Recognizing this is perhaps the first step in combating temptation.

Resist Temptation with Scripture

Another key to successfully combating temptation is to recognize the power of Scripture.

When Jesus lived on Earth, He was severely tempted. Let's look at His story as recorded by Matthew and see how He resisted temptation.

Matthew 1:1-11 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' " Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Q: What did Jesus give Satan when Satan gave Jesus a temptation? **The Bible says** that Jesus gave Satan a Bible verse. He said "It is written..." meaning, it is written in the Scriptures.

How did Jesus know what was written in the Scriptures? How did He know which verse to quote to Satan? Obviously, Jesus was familiar with the Scriptures. He studied them, read them, and spent much time with them. He quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, Psalm 91:11-12, Deuteronomy 6:13, and 1 Samuel 7:3.

Notice how Satan also quoted Scripture. Satan used Scripture to make the temptation seem Scriptural. If Jesus had not been a Bible

student, He may have been overcome by temptations that appeared to have Scriptural support. But Jesus knew that Satan had misapplied these Scriptures and had taken them out of context.

We also need to spend time studying God's Word. When we are tempted, it will give us power to combat temptations and be successful. When you read or listen to God's Word, try not to just read and forget about what you read. Try to store what you read in your memory, because it will help you when temptations arrive.

Psalms 119:11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Q: Why should we hide God's Word in our hearts? **The Bible says** that God's Word in our hearts helps us to not sin.

God's Word is like a barrier to sin. If we encounter a temptation and have God's Word ringing in our ears "Don't do it. Stay faithful to Jesus.", we will find strength to resist that temptation.

If we are to be victorious over sin, we must not become discouraged by looking at our difficult circumstances. If we are to be victorious over sin, we cannot fall back helpless in the weakness of self. If we are to be victorious over sin we cannot look at the power of temptation. Is not the power of God and His Word much greater than that of temptation?

Q: The Word of God is living and powerful. What does it discern? **The Bible says** the Word of God discerns even our thoughts and intents.

God's Word identifies areas of sin even in the secret levels of thoughts and intents! It is like a sharp knife in the hand of a surgeon, slicing and cutting away the areas of cancer. God's word is powerful. When God's Word is hidden in our hearts, it

automatically reveals sin in our lives and helps us to recognize temptations before they become sins!

We are instructed to put on the whole armor of God so that we can withstand the attacks and temptations of the devil.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

To know what this means practically, we would need to study the armor of God more closely. But for now, we will note that this armor includes a sword.

Ephesians 6:17 And take the... sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Q: What does the sword represent? **The Bible says** the sword is the Word of God.

The Word of God is our defense for temptation just as Jesus used the Word of God for His defense against His temptations.

Practically, how can we remember Scripture to help us with temptations?

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

Q: What does the Holy Spirit do for us? **The Bible says** that He teaches us and brings things to our memory.

Do not be afraid that perhaps you will not be able to remember just the right verse when you are tempted. If you have studied the Word of God before, the Holy Spirit reminds you of the right verse at the right time.

Let's summarize some key points on resisting temptation:

- We are powerless to resist temptation on our own.
- Jesus knows temptation and knows how to help us. We should ask Him for help.

- God gives us the shield of faith to combat Satan’s temptations.
- Jesus gave His example of how to overcome temptation: quote Scripture.
- God gives us the sword of the Spirit, and sends His Spirit to bring to remembrance the Scripture that we need.

The Blessing of Enduring Temptation

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Q: What is the result of enduring temptation? **The Bible says** the man who endures temptation is blessed and will receive a crown of life.

Falling into temptation is not a blessing. We definitely should not seek temptation in order to find a blessing. That is not what the text says! While temptation in itself is not a blessing, the results of temptation successfully resisted and overcome can be a blessing.

- Every temptation resisted makes us stronger to resist the next temptation.
- Our characters are strengthened by successfully resisting temptation.
- Those who resist temptation successfully are promised a crown of life.

Don’t go around looking for temptation. Enough temptations come our way without having to search for them. But when temptation does come—and it is sure to come—resist it through God’s strength and you will come out blessed and victorious!

Passages for Further Contemplation

“Yielding to temptation begins in permitting the mind to waver, to be inconstant in your trust in God. If we do not choose to give ourselves fully to God then we are in darkness. When we make any reserve we are leaving

open a door through which Satan can enter to lead us astray by his temptations. He knows that if he can obscure our vision, so that the eye of faith cannot see God, there will be no barrier against sin.” {MB 92.1}

He “walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.” 1 John 2:11. Through persistently cherishing evil, willfully disregarding the pleadings of divine love, the sinner loses the love for good, the desire for God, the very capacity to receive the light of heaven. The invitation of mercy is still full of love, the light is shining as brightly as when it first dawned upon his soul; but the voice falls on deaf ears, the light on blinded eyes. {MB 92.3}

Victory and Surrender

In a typical war, two or more groups fight against each other to see who is strongest. In the end, the strongest group gets to rule over the weaker one. Unless totally defeated, it is the weaker group that surrenders. In this context, surrender is humiliating because it means admitting that the group was weak or not smart enough to remain in control. In this chapter, we want to take a look at victory and surrender from a little different perspective.

We are in a war, the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Although this idea might seem like some distant conflict somewhere near the edge of the universe, it affects each one of us in a very real and personal way. For thousands of years, Satan, the father of lies, has been trying to convince people that the real path to happiness and joy lies in the cultivation of self. Satan wants your heart. In response, Jesus, the Source of truth, demonstrated in His own life that the real path to happiness and joy lies in selflessness—or surrendering self to God. Jesus also wants your heart.

Here lies the conflict. Both sides desire our hearts. To whom will we be loyal? To whom will we give our hearts? Who will we allow to control us? Satan comes with his many temptations to make sin appear as appealing, attractive, desirable, and harmless as possible. He tries to convince us that doing this sin once more will not really be a problem, and that we can always change our ways after that. He does not want us to remember that the wages of sin is death.

But then, as we read God's Word, we see our terrible sin in contrast to God's character and we determine that we will not repeat that sin again. And perhaps we are successful for a time. We think that we have gained the victory. But just when we are feeling good about gaining the victory, Satan lays another surprise attack and we are overcome by sin again.

What went wrong? We sincerely wanted to be good. We sincerely wanted to lay sin aside and obey God. But we fell to temptation once again.

The problem is, we have not gained the victory because we have not surrendered.

At first glance, surrender does not seem like a good thing to us. Surrender is humiliating. It is embarrassing. It is admitting that we were not strong enough to win. We do not want to surrender. We want to do what we want to do and not let anybody interfere with that.

But in this battle, surrender is absolutely necessary if we want to be on the side of victory. Take a moment to think about that thought and be sure you understand it, for it is not the normal way that we think about war and victory. Why must I surrender in order to be victorious?

You see, self—my natural tendencies inherited from my family, tastes, desires, thoughts, feelings, habits—is opposite to God’s character. Self is corrupt. It is contrary to God, Who is pure. And no matter how hard we try to change our selves, we cannot. Self is an unconquerable enemy, if we rely on our own strength to conquer self. Self is powerful and strong. Each time we yield to self, Satan gets us in his hold more securely and we have no possibility in ourselves to get out of his hold.

Satan wants us to focus on self and to not surrender self to Jesus. He wants us to focus on self because it is impossible for us to overcome self and gain the victory over sin without Jesus. Satan points to certain sins that we have hidden or covered up and tries to discourage us. He says, “See, you can’t give that sin up. You keep doing it. You are powerless to overcome.”

And so, many people today are discouraged. Perhaps you would like to be victorious over sin, but feel as though it is impossible. Maybe you always seem to get angry when stressed. Or maybe you keep eating or drinking food food or drink that you know is not best for

you. Perhaps you keep thinking thoughts that you know are not good, but you think them anyway.

The Gospel is good news because in the Gospel, we find a solution to this problem!

Equipped for Victory

God has provided a way to be victorious in this battle. He has given us armor so that we may be successful.

Ephesians 6:10-13 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Q: Who are we to be strong in? **The Bible says** we are to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

We certainly are not strong enough ourselves to resist evil. And we certainly do not have enough might or power to be victorious over sin. That is why we must rely on Jesus and His strength and power.

Q: Whose armor are we to put on? **The Bible says** we are to take the armor of God.

Q: How much of the armor are we to use? **The Bible says** we are to put on the whole armor—all of it!

Q: Why should we use this armor? **The Bible says** that we need it to stay standing (not fall in sin) when Satan attacks.

Q: What are we wrestling against? **The Bible says** we are not wrestling against human powers, but against supernatural powers.

It is foolish to think that we can overcome sin in our lives just by trying a little harder, or just by trying one more time. If we think we can tackle the problem ourselves, we are setting ourselves up for discouragement, for we are sure to fall again.

As we look at the pieces of armor below, notice how each piece is found in Jesus.

Ephesians 6:14-18 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Belt of Truth

Ephesians 4:21 The truth is in Jesus.

Exodus 34:6 God is abundant in truth.

Isaiah 65:16 God is the God of truth.

Psalm 25:5 Lead me in Your truth.

Breastplate of Righteousness

Isaiah 61:10-11 Jesus is the Source of righteousness.

Romans 3:25 Jesus was sent to reveal God's righteousness.

Romans 5:17 Righteousness is a gift from God.

1 Corinthians 1:30 We find righteousness "in Christ."

Philippians 3:9 Not my own righteousness, but righteousness of God.

Boots of Peace

Isaiah 9:6 Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

Romans 1:7 Peace is from God.

Romans 15:13 God can fill us with peace.

1 Corinthians 14:33 God is the author of peace.

Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.

Shield of Faith

Galatians 2:16 I am justified by the faith of Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:15 We find faith in Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8 Faith is a gift from God.

Helmet of Salvation

Acts 4:12 We find salvation only in Jesus.

Habakkuk 3:18 We will rejoice in God's salvation.

Psalms 62:7 God is the God of my salvation.

Sword of God's Word

John 1:1, 14 The Word was with God, the Word was God.

Psalms 56:10 In the Lord, I will praise His word.

Psalms 18:30 God's Word is certain.

John 8:31 If you continue in My word, you are my disciples.

Praying Always

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray continually

Mark 1:35; John 17; Jesus' prayer life

Hebrews 7:25 Jesus intercedes for us

Q: What is the source of each armor? **The Bible says** that Jesus is the Source. Jesus is truth. Jesus is Righteousness. Jesus is Peace. He is the Source of Faith. He is Salvation. He is the Word.

God has given us the tools to be victorious over sin. We have no excuse. He has given us armor so that we may stand against the attacks of the devil and be successful.

Victory is Essential

Not only is victory over sin and self possible through Jesus' power, it is essential! We must be victorious if we desire to live with Jesus eternally. This battle against self is a serious battle. A failure to come out victorious in this battle is certain death. Note these verses and think about the questions.

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

What happens if I overcome sin in my life? I will be clothed in white garments and will find eternal life. But what if I do not overcome sin in my life? The implication here is that I will not be clothed in white garments and that my name will be blotted from the Book of Life.

1 Corinthians 15:50 Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

Revelation 21:27 But there shall by no means enter [the New Jerusalem] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Can I enter heaven if I retain only one small sin in my life? What is my future if I do not gain victory over sin? Nothing that defiles enters the gates of the heavenly city. That means not even a little bit of defilement or sin will be there. Everybody who is not within those walls at the time of the last judgment will be consumed with fire.

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

What is the heart condition of those people who will see God? Can I see God without a pure heart?

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Sometimes we fail to understand the importance of growing in our relationship with Jesus and gaining the victory over sin. We sometimes think that we will be fine, and that this certain sin is just the way that I am. We want things our way, not realizing that our way is the way of death. Victory over sin is essential to those who desire eternal life.

Victory is Possible

If those who have not gained the victory over sin do not enter heaven, it follows then that those who do enter heaven have gained the victory over sin. Victory over sin must be possible if there will be people in heaven!

The topic of victory and surrender is a very important one when as we study the Gospel. The good news, the Gospel message, is about Jesus' solution to the sin problem. If we really believe that Jesus is Victor over sin and has provided a solution for it, then we can believe that we may have the victory over sin! Remember, Jesus didn't die for Himself—He died for you and for me! Jesus' death without the promise of personal victory over sin would be an empty message.

The Gospel is good news because it is powerful to change us. It is not just a nice message to please us and help us to feel better. We can say that we believe in Jesus and what He has done for us, but unless our lives are changed by Him, our belief in Him is meaningless. If we are not victorious over sin, sin will be victorious over us.

1 Peter 1:15 As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Matthew 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Jude 24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

On our own, we are incapable of being victorious over the power of Satan. If we try to fight the battles of temptation alone, we are assured of failure and defeat. Ironically, our only assurance of victory is found in surrender.

Joseph was victorious over sin.

Jesus was victorious over sin.

Promises of Victory

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Exodus 14:14 The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.

Isaiah 40:28-29 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.

Deuteronomy 20:4 The Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

Philippians 2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Proverbs 21:31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:4-5 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 8:35,37 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Romans 6:11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A dead person doesn't move toward temptation. A dead person ignores temptation.

Romans 13:13-14 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Deuteronomy 4:9 You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Proverbs 16:6 By the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Practical Keys to Victory

Based on the various passages from Scripture that we have seen, we can identify a few key points on how to have victory.

- When I am tempted, I must use Word of God as my sword for combat as Jesus did when He was tempted. Scripture is my authoritative code of conduct.
- I must recognize that my strength is insufficient for victory. I am fighting against supernatural powers far stronger than me.
- I must recognize that victory comes only through Jesus and His power. I will ask Him to give me the victory.
- Submit to God.
- Resist the devil.
- Do not “feed” sinful practices.
- “Feed” godly practices.

Overcoming by degrees is a deception of the devil.

Some say, when an effort is made to enlighten them on these things, “I will leave off by degrees.” Satan laughs at all such decisions. He says, “They are secure in my power; I have no fear of them on that ground.” But he knows he has no power over the man who, when sinners entice him, has the moral courage to say No, squarely and positively. Such a one has dismissed the companionship of the devil, and accepted that of Jesus Christ; and as long as he holds to Jesus, he is safe. He stands where heavenly angels can connect with him, giving him moral power to overcome. He can truly advocate temperance; for he will not urge a liquor drinker to abstain from alcohol with a tobacco pipe in his own mouth. {GosHealth, March 1, 1898 par. 6}

Reward for Victory

Those who overcome are blessed beyond measure. Take a look at what is given to the one who overcomes:

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Revelation 2:7 To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life.

Revelation 2:11 He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

Revelation 2:17 To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.

Revelation 2:26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

Revelation 3:21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Revelation 21:7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

Misc

Ultimately, we have a choice of being in one of two groups. One group is guaranteed victory, and the other group is guaranteed defeat. The good news is that we have a choice in which side we will join. We can choose victory and everlasting life, or we can choose defeat and everlasting death. This concept is illustrated throughout the entire Bible. Let's look at a few examples.

- The Great Controversy has two groups with two leaders: God and Satan. Since before the creation of the world, Jesus has already defeated Satan.
- In Noah's time, those who chose to enter the ark lived, while those who chose to stay out of the ark died.
- In Lot's time, those who chose to leave Sodom and Gomorrah lived, while those who chose to remain in the city died.
- In Moses' time, the spies believed God's Word and desired to enter the Promised Land while those who ignored God's promises wandered in the desert for forty years and eventually died without entering the Promised Land.
- Daniel's three friends remained faithful to God, while the masses of people worshiped the image.
- In Revelation, we find two groups. Those who are loyal to the Lamb and worship Him find eternal life, while those who worship the beast and his image are destroyed with the beast in the lake of fire.

How do we choose whether we are in the victorious group or the defeated group?

Confidence

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

1 John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

2 Timothy 1:8-9 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

Review and Herald July 31, 1888 Cast Not Away Your Confidence

End-Time Message

This section is not yet fully developed and will be completed later.

The gospel message is throughout all Scripture. If we want to understand the gospel message better, we will study topics such as:

- Sanctuary
- Jesus' birth, life and death on Earth
- Sabbath
- Health
- Three Angels' Messages
- End-time Events
- Jesus' Second Coming
- and many other topics

There is no way we can adequately explore the topic of the gospel in a single book. The study of the gospel is a process that will keep you busy for the rest of your life!

All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it. Yet as we study the Bible and meditate upon the life of Christ and the plan of redemption, these great themes will open to our understanding more and more. {FLB 43.4}

Certainly, we cannot finish our study of the gospel with this book. However, before closing this book, I would like to briefly cover the gospel and its relationship to the end of time. Revelation 14 contains

a special part of the gospel message, and we will briefly touch this topic here. For deeper study, please see our other studies on The Three Angels' Messages and End-time Events.

Three Angels' Messages

The gospel message, or the good news about salvation, has been preached and taught throughout history since Jesus first instructed Adam and Eve about the plan of salvation. However, there is a part of the gospel message that can only be preached at the end of time after the judgment has already begun and just before Jesus returns.^{ix} In Revelation 14, we find three angels with three special messages. To help you better understand these messages, we have prepared a separate study titled, “The Three Angels’ Messages.” But for now, take a few minutes to understand some of the important points of these messages.

Here is the first angel’s message:

Revelation 14:6-7 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea, and springs of water.”

Judgment, Second Coming

In the prophecy this warning of the judgment, with its connected messages, is followed by the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven. The proclamation of the judgment is an announcement of Christ’s second coming as at hand. And this proclamation is called the everlasting gospel. Thus the preaching of Christ’s second coming, the announcement of its nearness, is shown to be an essential part of the gospel message. {COL 227.2}

The message of the judgment is an especially important topic in our study of the gospel, because it is Jesus’ work in the judgment that completes the work of saving people from sin.^x The judgment is part of the good news, and so is the second coming of Jesus.

Acts 17:31 He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness.

These truths, as presented in Revelation 14 in connection with “the everlasting gospel,” will distinguish the church of Christ at the time of His appearing. For as the result of the threefold message it is announced: “Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” And this message is the last to be given before the coming of the Lord. Immediately following its proclamation the Son of man is seen by the prophet, coming in glory to reap the harvest of the earth. {GC 453.3}

Sabbath, God’s Law

[The angel of Revelation 14] presents a message that is to be proclaimed to the world just before Christ comes in the clouds of heaven. ... Just prior to this time, then, the attention of the people is to be called to the down-trodden law of God, which is contained in the ark of the testament. {Mar 170.4}

They see that instead of observing the seventh day, the day that God sanctified, and commanded to be observed as the Sabbath, they are keeping the first day of the week. But they honestly desire to do God’s will, and they begin to search the Scriptures to find the reason for the change. Failing to find any scriptural authority for the custom, the question arises, Shall we accept a truth that has become unpopular, and obey the commandments of God, or shall we continue with the world, and obey the commandments of men? With open Bibles they weep, and pray, and compare scripture with scripture, until, convinced of the truth, they conscientiously take their stand as keepers of the commandments of God. {Mar 170.5}

This message, if heeded, will call the attention of every nation and kindred and tongue and people to a close examination of the Word, and to the true light in regard to the power that has changed the seventh-day Sabbath to a spurious sabbath. {2SM 105.3}

Our Duty to Proclaim

This message is declared to be a part of “the everlasting gospel.” The work of preaching the gospel has not been committed to angels, but has been entrusted to men. Holy angels have been employed in directing this work, they have in charge the great movements for the salvation of men; but the

actual proclamation of the gospel is performed by the servants of Christ upon the earth. {GC 312.1}

Mark 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

All power is promised those who go forth in faith to proclaim the everlasting gospel. {Pr 93.3}

The gospel invitation is to be given to all the world—"to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." Revelation 14:6. The last message of warning and mercy is to lighten the whole earth with its glory. It is to reach all classes of men, rich and poor, high and low. "Go out into the highways and hedges," Christ says, "and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled." {COL 228.3}

The world is perishing for want of the gospel. There is a famine for the word of God. There are few who preach the word unmixed with human tradition. Though men have the Bible in their hands, they do not receive the blessing that God has placed in it for them. The Lord calls upon His servants to carry His message to the people. The word of everlasting life must be given to those who are perishing in their sins. {COL 228.4}

In the command to go into the highways and hedges, Christ sets forth the work of all whom He calls to minister in His name. The whole world is the field for Christ's ministers. The whole human family is comprised in their congregation. The Lord desires that His word of grace shall be brought home to every soul. {COL 229.1}

To a great degree this must be accomplished by personal labor. This was Christ's method. His work was largely made up of personal interviews. He had a faithful regard for the one-soul audience. Through that one soul the message was often extended to thousands. {COL 229.2}

Hasten Jesus' Coming

2 Peter 3:12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him. When there came upon Israel the calamities that were the sure result of separation from God—subjugation by their enemies, cruelty, and death—it is said that "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." "In all their affliction He was afflicted ... and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Judges 10:16; Isaiah 63:9. {Ed 263.1}

- i {4BC 1163.8}
- ii {1SM 222.4}
- iii {10MR 329.1}
- iv {1873 JNA, HSF 63.1}
- v {2MCP 452.4} {CCh 259.5}
- vi {5T 645.4} {5T 645.3}
- vii {5T 645.2}
- viii {5T 638.1}
- ix {GC 355.3}
- x {FLB 283.7}