

Clothed With Christ

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Dedicated to my precious wife Tara, who has been with me through good times and bad and always been faithful to us, as well as to the Lord. Her passionate love for God is a daily witness to those around her! I am grateful for her help with the development and editing of this book.

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Introduction

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:27)

The most central and beautiful truth of Christianity is that Jesus Christ has *already* fulfilled the Law, made the ultimate sacrifice and satisfied the wrath of God. In the words of Jesus Himself, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). As believers, we daily are to walk in the blessed knowledge of His incredible accomplishment. How astounding it is to realize that God Himself came down from His glorious dwelling place, became a man, suffered all types of temptations, trials and persecutions, bore all of the sins of humankind on Himself and was raised up from the dead as the eternal conquering King! This truly is the good news- the

gospel.

Many believers have been taught for years the truths of 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 as a result of works*, so that no one may boast." (emphasis mine). We have been told repeatedly that we are not saved by our own works, but rather by grace, through faith. This precious, wonderful truth has been preached world-wide, bearing much fruit, bringing countless people into the kingdom of God.

Yet, the bride of Christ is currently full of believers who, though having sincerely come to Christ, daily struggle with a cycle of rebellious sin, condemnation and self-efforts at justification. Why is this?

I believe that one of the reasons is that people are encouraged to come to Christ by faith, but are then exhorted to try their best to please God with their lives. In other words, grace is emphasized as greatly needed in the life of a sinner, but once they are saved, they are expected to "measure-up". Many of us have been told that since Christ gave us His all, we need to give Him ours as well. This would be truth *if* it was preached from the perspective of a simple, non-negotiable, glorious fact- that we as believers are called to live with the garment of Christ's righteousness clothing us; we are not to seek to establish our own righteousness through works. God did not save us so that we could become improved people, but rather new creatures in Him.

When the righteousness of Christ is no longer presented as the *only* means of

God's approval, man forgets the impossibility of satisfying the holiness of God through works. He amazingly begins to think that if he imitates Christ enough, that he will please the Father. He attempts to please Him by perfecting his flesh, fervently trying to make Him happy- completely unaware that, because of Christ, God is *already* happy with him. When, in his own estimation (and that of others), his works are good, he takes pride in them and expects God to take notice; when his works fall short, he feels unable to approach God, ashamed at his failure. The deeper problem in all of this is self-righteousness; it is one of the greatest plagues in the body of Christ today. It has dampened the faith of many people and cooled off the fiery zeal of those who once passionately serve God.

I have had the desire to write this book for quite some time, earnestly desiring to pass on the freedom that God has given me. God has brought my wife, Tara, and I through some very difficult times and situations and He has burned these truths into our hearts through them. Walking in the robe of Christ's righteousness is the key to holiness, passion for God and a Spirit-filled life! There is simply *no* other way to live a life full of God. I am trusting the Holy Spirit to write this message through me, and believe that He will speak to you through this book and transform your life.

Chapter One

The Deadly Cycle

I grew up on the mission field in Taiwan as the son of Presbyterian missionaries. My parents taught in a Christian college named "Christ's College" for twelve years, disciplined students, ran outreaches and planted a church in a nearby village. After that time, we all moved down to a tiny village named "Shi-Hu", which was just outside a town named "San-Yi". San-Yi was known as the chief idol-making area of all of Taiwan. We lived in an old farm-house, in which a previous tenant had committed suicide, and struggled to make friends. As the only Americans in our area, we were at first viewed with suspicion by the Chinese and it was a struggle to befriend them. God helped us, however, and

added souls to our church, "San-Yi Gospel Center".

Although some of it was hard on us, I am grateful for my childhood. I had the opportunity to learn Chinese, grow up in a very foreign culture and learn to evangelize. Looking back, I can see that , as is often the case with MKs (missionary kids), there was constant pressure on me to be a good representative of Christ. Whether this pressure was real or just my perception, I do not know. I was continually aware of watching eyes, both those of the Chinese Buddhists and those of fellow Christians. I was highly aware that anything I did would either validate or discredit the truths my parents espoused to those around them.

As a result, my view of God was very different than it is now. Although I intellectually was aware of His love, it seemed very conditional to me. I felt a continual pressure to live up to what I was "supposed" to be. When I did, I felt like He was smiling at me in approval. When I didn't, I would scurry around, trying to escape His notice, for fear that His disapproving eye would see me and I would suffer His wrath. All of my knowledge of Him was intellectually based, which I could only grasp when I felt that I was being good enough. I had virtually no knowledge of His love experientially at all; although I had truly been saved, God seemed distant to me most of the time.

An unbearable cycle of trying to be good, failure, condemnation and shame dominated my life. I felt like all was well as long as I was on the "trying to be good" side of the cycle and I'd be utterly devastated when I was at the other end

of it. In high school, I began to punish myself whenever I sinned. I would punch a wall as hard as I could, the rougher the wall, the better. When I saw my knuckles bleed, I felt better, although only for a little while. I felt as though I had somehow made God happier, that I had satisfied His wrath somewhat. This self-punishment was much like what Martin Luther used to do, except he did it with whips. I never felt better for long, for I would then feel guilty for having ruined my knuckles.

Just like Adam and Eve, every time I failed the Lord, I desperately tried to hide from Him! Like my ancient ancestors, my main concern in life was to try to hide from the watchful eyes of the Lord. I somehow thought that if I could cover my soul with enough goodness, that I would merit His approval. Hopefully He wouldn't notice my spiritual "nakedness" which I was trying to hide. Ironically, when God truly convicted me of sin, I often would try to shift the blame elsewhere. Let's examine their story a little, since it aptly illustrates my folly:

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or

you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 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 loin coverings. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and *the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God* among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

(Genesis 3:1-12; emphasis mine)

Following their sin against their loving Father, Adam and Eve were immediately aware of their nakedness- so much so, that they quickly made coverings out of leaves and tried to hide from Him. Of course, it is supreme foolishness to try to hide from the Almighty God, as the experience of Jonah clearly shows. Adam and Eve learned this, for God quickly found them and then questioned them. Now, why would God, who knows everything, bother to question them? My thought is that He wanted to draw a confession out of them. However, instead of confessing their sin, both Adam and Eve quickly tried to shift the blame. How quickly their spiritual sight was distorted after eating the fruit from the forbidden tree!

After hearing their pitiful excuses, God turned His attention to the slithering, deceitful serpent and pronounced the following,

“The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; *He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.*"

(Genesis 3:14-15, emphasis mine)

When God says something, it is not only as good as done, it *is* done. Even though thousands of years would pass before the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ,

came to destroy the works of the devil, it essentially was done. The apostle Peter wrote that the plan of salvation was in effect long before the world was even created- what an incredible revelation of the mysterious foreknowledge and providence of God (see I Peter 1:20-21). The Word of the Living God is *absolutely* certain and *will* definitely come to pass, no matter what obstacles may seem to be in its way.

It is very significant that God was the one who made the very first blood sacrifice in the Bible. After the fall of man in the Garden, fig leaves were not enough to cover the sin of His beloved children. We are told in the third chapter of Genesis that, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.” (vs. 21). There is an incredible message in this! The fig leaves that Adam and Eve sewed together were not enough to cover their nakedness. God had to shed blood, for the very first time, and provide garments for them (see Hebrews 9:22b). In the same way, our human works are *never* enough to cover the perversities of our fallen hearts- we simply *must* have a garment that God provides through sacrifice.

In His infinite love for humanity, He did not stop there. He did not desire for Adam and Eve to be eternally trapped in their fallen condition. Thus, in verses 22-23, we find, “ Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"- therefore the LORD

God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.” This judgment may have looked harsh from Adam and Eve's perspective, but it actually was a beautiful demonstration of the love of God! Not desiring their eternal damnation, He cast them out of the Garden. Have you ever wondered why He chose this course of action? He could have just started over and created brand new humans, couldn't He? After all, there were only two in the Garden to deal with! Instead, He decided to take a much harder path- one of dealing with fallen flesh, one that ultimately led to the death of His own precious beloved Son.

If we could comprehend even a small taste of this magnificent love of God, then persecution, threats, failures, diseases and even hell itself could never defeat us! Paul wrote these encouraging words:

"But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am *convinced* that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor *any* other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Romans 8:37-39, emphasis mine)

If the devil cannot get us to follow him blatantly through vile sin, then he will do his best to erode our trust in the love and character of God. He will attempt to

convince us that God is a harsh Task Master and to seduce us into trying to earn God's favor by our own devices. No matter what tactic the devil may use, he always has one goal in mind- the robbing of God's glory, which he seeks to accomplish by disrupting our fellowship with God. Of course, we shouldn't be frightened of him, but rather soberly aware of his tactics, so that we can resist them (see Colossians 2 & II Corinthians 2:11).

To the Christian on one side of the cycle (right after he or she has had some sort of spiritual "success"), he may whisper something like, "You sure are godly- certainly a lot more than those around you. God must be pleased with you! Others will really regard you and respect you now." Notice that his main intent here is to reinforce our pride and to build up our flesh. If we choose to pay attention to this seduction, we become confident in our Christian "successes" and may even start believing that God owes us something! After all, did we not do great wonders in His name? Once we have allowed these dangerous, prideful thoughts to dominate our minds, we have set ourselves up for a fall (see Proverbs 16:18-20) because our confidence has ceased to be based upon the finished work of Jesus Christ and is now resting upon our good deeds.

Many Christians ask requests from the Lord and even try to make deals with Him, all the while reminding Him of how much they've done or perhaps what they haven't done. They are mistakenly thinking that, by reminding Him of their own goodness and works, He will respond with wonderful, quick answers to

their prayers. However, God will *never* be pleased by us casting aside the cloak of Christ's righteousness and trying to establish our own. Although He may sometimes answer such prayers because of His incredible patience and mercy towards us, He often lets them go unanswered. Sadly, when they do go unanswered, God gets the blame, which further strengthens the devil's work in their lives. The devil then persuades them to try harder until they are running quickly "for God" like a rat on a wheel- working hard, but going nowhere. Unless these poor souls are delivered from the devil's scheme of performance-Christianity, they eventually lose passion for God, secretly resent Him and become wasted, burnt-out shells sitting in pews, unable to affect others for Christ.

David once wrote,

"Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully."

(Psalms 24:3-4)

Honestly, which one of us in our own strength and righteousness truly has clean hands and a pure heart, a soul not given to falsehood and lips that are truthful? If we think we do, we are deceiving ourselves (see I John 1:6-10)! The Bible makes it *very* clear that nothing good dwells in us- that is, in our flesh (Romans 7:18). When we approach God based upon our own performance, we are walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit. And, since the flesh wars against

the Spirit (see Romans 8:7), we end up disregarding His provision through the blood of Christ and flailing around trying to satisfy Him with our works.

Ultimately, we end up fighting against God Himself.

On the other side of the cycle, the devil may whisper to the disappointed believer something like, "I guess you're just not good enough! Maybe you just haven't done enough." Or perhaps "Why hasn't God answered your prayers? Has He even noticed all of the good things you've done, the people you've won to the Lord, the hours you've prayed and read His Word. See, He really doesn't care. He can't be trusted."

Of course, the Holy Spirit is there all along, bringing conviction! If we are used to relating to God based on our performance (how well we're doing in our walks), we often take that conviction from His Spirit, weep over our condition and then *resolve to try harder*- trying feverishly to get back into God's favor. This really grieves the Holy Spirit and frustrates the grace of God.

We must ask ourselves a simple question- what is the goal of the conviction of the Holy Spirit? Is it for the purpose of getting us to try harder? NO! A thousand times NO! Conviction from the precious Holy Spirit always leads us to the freedom-bringing, chain-breaking realization that Christ has *already* paid it all, that freedom was *already* won for us, that our prayers are answered because of Him and not us! Needless to say, this naturally causes deep love for Him to rise up in our broken hearts and sets us free from the performance-based relationship

we once had with God! The fruits of a holy, intimate relationship with Him begin to grow in our lives, edifying us, as well as others.

If we continue basing our relationship with God on our performance, the destination is very clear. We will become more and more just like the Pharisees- who were people that honored God with their lips, but were far from Him in their hearts (see Mark 7:6). Our hearts will become so calloused towards the Lord that, even if He should show up right in front of us, we would miss Him (see Luke 19:44). We will become cold-hearted, disillusioned skeptics of what He is doing in those around us and may even resort to speaking evil of His deeds.

Turn with me from this path! Allow His love to break the cycle of performance in your life! The first step is recognition of your condition; let the light of His Word shine into the depths of your heart, into every nook and cranny of it. Ask the the Lord to search your heart and His Spirit to show you if you are living a performance-based, rather than grace-based, Christian life. Ask Him to open your heart to His truth and to radically set you free! Then, trust Him to do so- not only is He more than able, but more than willing, too! When He sets us free, we are "free indeed" (John 8:36)!

Chapter Two

Spiritual Drug-Babies

I had just finished preaching a message, one in which I felt the Holy Spirit powerfully speaking through me. After the church service was over, someone came up to me and began telling me about what they had learned from the message. I was dismayed to find out that they had somehow taken only the "letter" of what I had said and completely missed the "spirit" of it. They had freshly determined to try harder in their own efforts, which was the very opposite of what I had been preaching.

Deeply troubled, I spent quite some time that night in prayer about it. The Lord revealed a simple truth to me- the "veil" of religious legalism had blinded

the eyes of that person to the freedom that I had preached. This person, a well-meaning child of God, was filtering everything through that veil, unable to clearly see and understand. Compassion overwhelmed me and I cried out to the Lord for this individual's freedom. I began to understand that, until this "veil" was removed, much of what I spoke would be misunderstood, misappropriated and even sometimes used by the enemy to increase that person's religious bondage.

For many years, I had really only thought of unsaved people as being unable to comprehend the spiritual things of God. However, now I was dealing with a Christian who was, to some degree, blinded by religion and, thus unable to really hear and understand spiritual matters. Although I had once been blinded in the same manner, I wondered, "How could this be?"

During my prayer time, the Holy Spirit reminded me of the following Scripture:

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he *cannot* understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

(I Corinthians 2:14, emphasis mine)

I was also reminded of the Scripture in Hebrews, where the author expressed his frustration, "Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." (Hebrews 5:11)! The Greek word for "dull" here is "νωθροί" (nothroi), which indicates someone who is moving very slowly and sluggishly, barely plodding along! It is *very* difficult to lead someone into the deep truths of Scripture and into passionate love for the Lord if they are sluggish in their acceptance of His truth; their spiritual "senses" dulled by the "drug" of religious legalism!

Those who walk by their fleshly nature are very sluggish and dull-minded concerning the "things" of the Spirit. After all, true Christianity was never intended to be lived out by the will power and strength of carnal men! We did not come to Jesus by the power of our flesh (John 1:12-13) and, likewise, we cannot walk it out according to the will, desires and strength of our old nature! Galatians 3:3 makes this very clear, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" Of course, we can try to walk it out by the power of our flesh- but how incredibly foolish and destructive that would be.

Someone once expressed to me that it seemed like many Christians around them were spiritual "babies"- people who had trouble with even the most basic of Christian doctrines and needed to be continually pampered. The author of the book of Hebrews apparently dealt with people like this, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the

elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food." (Hebrews 5:12-13). As I thought about what was said, a thought came to me- a great deal of believers are not only spiritual "babies", but spiritual "drug-babies". I'd better explain, before I get myself into trouble!

When we were first married, my wife Tara and I were looking into becoming foster parents. While attending a class in order to learn more about the process, I overheard the term "drug-baby" and later asked Tara about it. She explained to me that the term referred to babies whose mothers had been taking drugs during pregnancy. As a result, they are usually born at a low birth weight and suffer with various mental and physical defects. Taking care of them requires a great deal of extra attention and loving care.

We have ministered to many of these poor believers and have often found that they had been fed all sorts of legalistic junk from previous churches. Some of the things they had been told were absolutely outlandish! For instance, one lady was told that if she wore pants to church instead of a dress, she'd go to hell. Another person was told that if they left and attended another church that they were backsliding and in danger of hell. A great deal of emphasis was placed on outward behavior, but very little on the heart. As a result, people would act very godly around church, but reveal their "true colors" elsewhere.

These churches had essentially been mixing portions of the Levitical Law with the teachings of Jesus and were sending out a *very* distorted message- certainly

not the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sadly, the poor believers in their care were continually scared to death- fearful that they'd break some rule and perish. The cycle that I described earlier in Chapter One was very much a part of their lives, greatly hindering them from true intimacy with Christ.

I will not speculate as to why these particular churches were teaching such insane things, but do want to emphasize a simple point: legalistic rules and laws *never, ever* produce inward change. All they does is cause pain and bring destruction by getting peoples' eyes off of Jesus and onto themselves. Legalism also often causes churches to distance themselves from other parts of the body of Christ. Any other church that doesn't have the same standards or rules is regarded as apostate.

Because religion adds to and complicates the gospel message, let's take some time to be reminded of two very basic truths of Christianity. These truths are very important and cannot be passed by, overlooked or ignored if we are to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The first one is that man is inherently sinful, born into sin and utterly unable to fellowship with God. As Paul wrote, "...just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Romans 5:12, emphasis mine). Because of the sin of Adam, sin entered into the world, resulting in death that has spread to *every* man. Mankind without Christ is utterly dead spiritually and completely unable to comprehend the things of God (I Corinthians 2:14). Fellowship with

God for an unbeliever is absolutely impossible. The gulf separating humanity from God is spiritual death, which is the result of sin. We all need Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

The second is that the gospel can only be received by people if the Holy Spirit first opens the "eyes" of their hearts, illuminating them with His glorious light (Ephesians 1:18, Hebrews 6:4 & 10:32). While Paul was testifying to King Agrippa, he recounted the glorious calling the Lord Jesus Christ had given to him on the road to Damascus:

"But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ***to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God***, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me."

(Acts 26:16-18, emphasis mine)

As we see from the above verses, the calling of Paul was for the very distinct purposes of being a witness and opening the eyes of others. The opening of their eyes would allow them to "turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God". Of course, this was only possible for Paul through the power and

agency of the Holy Spirit working through him, as is the case for every believer.

A chief thing that impresses me in the book of Acts is that when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, multitudes were saved, literally turning from darkness to light. One of the most incredible examples of this in Scripture took place in the city of Ephesus. Spiritually blind people that had been very involved in occult practices had their eyes opened by the Gospel. In fact, as an act of repentance, they actually burned their once-valued books on magic (Acts 19).

Apart from the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, humanity is helplessly and hopelessly blind to the things of God. I have heard many testimonies of people who, although they had heard the gospel message many times, suddenly one day understood. They have described it as though a light suddenly was turned on in their understanding, illuminating the truth. Suddenly, they understood what had been right before their eyes the entire time and accepted it. What had looked like utter foolishness to them for so long suddenly made sense.

We find in II Corinthians a wonderful truth- that the veil of spiritual blindness is removed in Christ, "...whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." (II Corinthians 3:16). However, as we minister to people who just continually "don't get it", the following question naturally springs up in our minds, "Why then, if the veil was removed, do some believers still not comprehend simple truth?"

The answer that the Bible gives us is that believers can choose to turn away

from an intimate relationship with God and return to the deadness of religion. This is taught many places in the New Testament. In fact, the entire book of Galatians was written by Paul for the purpose of confronting this deadly sin. We can see his anger, bewilderment and frustration being expressed throughout the book. For instance, take a look at his words recorded in Galatians 5:12, "I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves". Strong words! The entire book is full of his desperate pleadings for the believers in Galatia to disregard this new, different message and return to the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. Certain people that he called Judaizers had been preaching in areas that Paul had previously traveled through, trying to discredit him by preaching messages against his simple, grace-filled, gospel message. Essentially, they were teaching that, although those who believed in Christ were saved by His grace, they now needed to become circumcised and keep the Law. Sadly, many people were being duped by their poisonous words.

Amazed that the believers in Galatia were being deceived so easily, Paul wrote:

"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have

preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"

(Galatians 1:6-9)

Awhile ago, we decided to do a Bible study in our church on Wednesday nights. The Lord had revealed to me several months before it started that we needed to first go through the book of Galatians. Many of the people were coming out of very legalistic backgrounds and were really struggling with the poison they had been fed. As I was studying one night in preparation for it, I was struck at how seriously Paul seemed to view legalism. I began to realize that I really hadn't seen it as all that big of a deal. Perhaps as you've read through Galatians, you have had some of the same thoughts that I had go through my mind, such as, "Why was he so upset? Why would he even go to the extreme of desiring eternal punishment for these Judaizers? Why does he say that they have deserted Christ- isn't that awfully strong language? After all, is it really that big of a deal?"

Paul likens the persuasions from these Judaizers to "leaven" (Galatians 5:9)- which always ends up working itself through the whole "lump of dough". That is, just as leaven always affects the whole lump, legalism always affects those around it! Leaven is usually used in the Bible as a type for sin and hypocrisy (see Leviticus 2:11, Matthew 16:6-11, Mark 8:15 and I Corinthians 5:7-8). As I

studied, God showed me that the previously mentioned questions were an indicator that there was some leaven in my own heart. I had no anger towards the false teachings of legalism, in fact I actually sometimes flirted with and found myself attracted to them.

Americans have a saying, "like a moth to a flame", which means to be attracted to something to the point where all danger is ignored. Deep inside my heart, I was still drawn to religion, much as a moth is to a flame. Do you know why a moth is drawn to a flame, such as that of a candle? Originally, it was thought that it was because it is drawn to light, but actually it is because it gets confused and loses its sense of direction. Normally, a moth is guided navigationally by the light of the moon. But when a bright light is close enough to it, the moth starts looking at it, apparently thinking that it is the moon. The result is that it flies in the opposite direction that it intends to, getting closer and closer to the source of the light and eventually perishes in the flames.

In the same way, whenever we begin revering the traditions and rules of men even remotely as much as we do the Word of God, we essentially are turning our eyes away from our precious Saviour, from His sacrificial work for us and towards the flickering false light of religion! We lose all sense of direction, confusion sets in and we head straight towards that seductive flame of death. Whenever we tolerate the terrible leaven of legalism, we inevitably are affected by it and eventually suffer terrible consequences.

The believers in Galatia were tolerating and receiving an impure "gospel", turning back to what God had brought them out of. By seeking to establish righteousness by doing the works of the Law again, they had severed themselves from Christ and had fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). By doing so, they were denying the very necessity of the death of Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:21).

When people return to the poison of religion, they actually put the veil that Christ removed back on; they choose to go back to blindness. Christians cannot see clearly if they subject themselves again to what God has delivered them out of. As Paul pleaded, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1). We cannot enjoy freedom in Christ, while being in bondage to anything- whether sin or its better looking "sister", religious legalism.

Many of us have tasted the poisonous waters of religion and have been affected. The effects may not even be evident to us in our own lives, for we seldom are able to clearly discern what is in our own hearts (see Jeremiah 17:9-10). Just as the effects of some poisons (such as arsenic) are not noticed immediately, so is the case with the poison of legalism. It eats away at your spirit so slowly that you may not even notice it! This is why we desperately need *continual* fellowship with our heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit; why we need to be *continually* walking in the Spirit. He searches our hearts, brings conviction and fills us with the power for us to repent and truly be transformed by

Him!

In our earnestness to keep the Word of God, grow in Christ and bring glory to Him, many of us have tried very hard to please Him by the power of our flesh. Instead, the Christian life is really supposed to consist of a daily dying to self in order that the life of Jesus Christ may be manifested more fully through us (II Corinthians 4). Of course, this *cannot* be done apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who does this work inside of us. Matthew Henry, a famous commentator wrote the following,

"Nothing is so sure a proof that a sinner has passed into a state of justification, as Christ being formed in him by the renewal of the Holy Spirit; but *this cannot be hoped for, while men depend on the law for acceptance with God.*"¹

How true! If we are counting upon the Law or even supposing in the slightest that our works will bring us acceptance with God then we have disregarded the death of Jesus and fallen from grace. As believers we have completely been set free from the Law through Christ's atoning death. We once were bound to it, but no longer. Paul *clearly* exposed this to us:

"Therefore, my brethren, *you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, **in order that we might bear fruit for God.*** For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions,

which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now *we have been released from the Law*, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter."

(Romans 7:4-6; emphasis mine)

Many people may get nervous at these verses; they may assume that Paul is advocating a lawless type of life. Far from it! We are completely dead to the Law for the purpose of being joined to the Writer of it, "in order that we might bear fruit for God". The Law *was* important but was fulfilled in Christ. I have heard many believers acknowledge that Christ fulfilled it, but somehow still believe that, through their imitation of Him, they are to try to fulfill it as well. Scripture makes it very clear that Jesus Christ once-and-for-all set us completely free from it. Now we bear fruit because we have been joined to Christ, our Vine (see John 15), and glorify God out of hearts that are in love with Him. The divine, "ἀγάπη" (agape) love that is resident in our hearts proves itself in daily life towards God and others. The commandments of God are naturally fulfilled, for the Holy Spirit *always* bears the fruit of Christ's righteousness out on us, the "limbs" of Christ. He does this completely apart from our efforts to do so, but *not apart* from our daily submission to Him.

For several years, the Holy Spirit has performed "surgery" on my spirit. He has revealed many things to me through His Word and these revelations have

slowly and painfully been dismantling the "spiritual man" I had once been trying to build in my heart. I once regarded myself as a very spiritual person, as someone very close to God. My regard of myself should have been a warning to me, for the closer we get to Him, the less we consider ourselves as spiritual! Actually, although I knew all the right words, read the Bible through many times, faithfully attended church and even preached, I was actually far from Him in my heart.

When the Holy Spirit first started convicting me about legalism, I began to clearly see that I had been counting on my own strength to please Him. I began to see that most of what I did was out of a "works" mentality, feverishly trying to do enough for God in order to be noticed by Him and others. Much of what I did came out of a heart yearning for approval- both from God and from man. I was so deeply dissatisfied (sometimes even to the point of despairing of life itself) but hadn't been able to figure out why. But, once the Holy Spirit started convicting me, I understood and it hurt deeply. The problem was that I was not living life as God intended me to, for He intends all of those who believe in Him to live and walk under the mantle of Christ's glorious righteousness and not their own! I was self-reliant, self-confident and independent- exactly the opposite of what He desired me to be.

It is important to realize that the condemnation the devil tries to heap on us is *very* different from the conviction which the precious Holy Spirit brings.

Condemnation gets your eyes on yourself to the point where you cannot see your Messiah; it leads to despair, hopelessness, bitterness and anger. Conviction, although often very painful, guides our eyes to the Author and Finisher of our faith- Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2) and brings us hope, for He is *more* than able to deliver us and set our feet once more upon Him, the "Rock" of our salvation (see Psalm 62, 89:26 & Matthew 7:24-27)!.

Because the hurt was the result of the probing finger of God upon the wounds in my heart, I knew that allowing Him to continue probing was the key to full healing. I simply had to trust Him, even though my flesh "screamed" at me not to. I began to realize that God never brings things up just for the sake of pointing them out, but *always* for the sake of delivering us and making us more like Jesus. Many times in the past, I had backed off from Him when He began touching areas in my heart that hurt, but this time I let Him. As I began to experience His love even in the midst of this ache in my heart, I began to learn afresh that relying on Him is the key to *everything*.

Do you realize that we do not have what it takes to please God in our own flesh, but rather only in Christ who dwells in our hearts? Has God been probing your heart? Has the Holy Spirit been touching areas deep inside of you? Don't be frightened, for He truly is "Jehovah Rapha"- the "God who Heals" and His healing is complete. Are you painfully aware of your deep need for a pure, spotless Messiah and High Priest? Do not resist the beckoning of His Spirit-

return to Him in simple, child-like faith. Cry out to Him to utterly dismantle all in you that was not built by Him and yield to His incredible work in your life!

Praise the Lord that He is willing, big enough and powerful enough to minister to spiritual "drug-babies". No matter what "drug" we have have been fed, God *is* able to purify and deliver us. Cry out to Him with me, asking the Holy Spirit to search your heart and expose any of the leaven of religious legalism. Trust Him- He *will* deliver you! Surrender from a broken heart, He is the great Healer!

Chapter Three

Clearer Vision

How we approach God is very much dependent upon our view of Him and greatly affects how we approach Him. We may suppose that we presently perceive our Lord as He is, but if we could but for one moment *really* see Him face to face, it would shake us to the core. We would agree with Job, who upon seeing Him, cried out in despair, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6). In the light of His holiness, all of our human wisdom and deeds are exposed and pale in comparison- they look like mere filth compared to the glory of our God on His throne. Suddenly, there is One Person that deserves all attention, honor and praise; suddenly, there is only One Person that we long to be

with.

Some people view God as a grumpy old man in the sky, nervously wringing His hands as He looks down on the rampant corruption on the Earth, wondering what He should do next. Others view Him as an angry, vengeful God, who is barely able to restrain Himself from destroying everything in a raging fit; they see Him as a god who uses every opportunity He gets to punish people, one who plays a twisted, morbid game with fragile humanity. Still others view Him as some sort of "heavenly bellhop", the co-pilot of their lives, whose primary purpose for existing is to serve them, make their lives happier and help them fulfill their desires. Even others view God as some impersonal force out there somewhere- an unreachable, unknowable Being who, having wound up the clock of creation, left it running and turned his attention to more important matters elsewhere.

Then there are the redeemed- those people who have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His light (Acts 26:18, I Peter 2:9 & Colossians 1:13). They see Him as the huge, magnificent, holy, personal, loving God, the Redeemer of His people, the Shepherd of His sheep *and* the dreadful Judge of the living and the dead; He is everything to them. Without Him, they could not truly live. Their eyes have been opened, their spirits quickened, the veil removed, their minds washed; they are completely new creatures in Him and are sold-out to following Him no matter what the cost may be. They are unable to

contain themselves; even in the face of persecution, they cry out boldly, "...we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)! They would rather be tortured than deny their precious Christ, they would rather lose everything than Him, they go to their deaths with smiles on their faces, knowing that He will raise them to be with Him forever (John 6:39-40, Hebrews 11, I Peter 4:19 & I Corinthians 15). They are passionate lovers of their Redeemer!

Ignatious, the bishop of the church in Antioch in the early days of Christianity was a radical believer. Around A.D. 107, as he was being taken to Rome for his trial (and ultimately, martyrdom), he dictated the following words to his amanuensis (scribe) for a letter to the church at Ephesus, "Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let breakings, tearings, and separations of bones; let cutting off of members; let bruising to pieces of the whole body; and let the very torment of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ."¹

True believers are only willing to live *and* die for their Savior because they have had an encounter with Him. Rather than having been given a second chance or a fresh start, they have been made into completely new creations, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (II Corinthians 5:17, NKJV). These believers are radical for the Lord- their whole reason for life itself is wrapped up in who He is.

I have mentioned some of the ways in which people view God. We need to ask ourselves, "Which one am I?" and "How do I perceive God?" Perhaps we

started off with the perspective of the redeemed, but have allowed our eyes to be darkened. Having been disappointed by the trials in our lives, have we left the path of life and sought another route to His throne- one which He never intended us to walk on, the path of works? Have we exalted our experiences above the Word of God and begun to secretly doubt His goodness? Have we tolerated the whispers of unbelief that the devil tempts us with?

We must have our eyes opened and, once opened, we must fix them upon the person of Jesus Christ! Some of my favorite verses in the Bible say:

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

(Hebrews 12:1-2; emphasis mine).

The Greek word for "fixing" in these verses is "ἀφοράω" (aphorao), which means "to view with undivided attention by looking away from every other object; to regard fixedly and earnestly"². We can only truly fix our eyes on Jesus if we turn away from looking at everything else around us. We must spend time daily turning our attention away from everything and everyone else and focus solely on Him, for He is the "author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2,

NKJV). As we look at Him, He changes us, "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 from the Lord, the Spirit." (II Corinthians 3:18; emphasis mine).

Imagine for a moment what would happen if the Holy Spirit were to allow us to see our King with perfect eternal vision:

Our eyes would be opened to the One we've been communing with and our very beings would be shaken with the majestic, glorious splendor of the God of all creation. Our words would completely fail us, we would be unable to express what we see for He *far* exceeds our comprehension, way beyond our wildest imaginations! We would be completely overwhelmed at the awesome beauty of His holiness and His unchangeable, flawless nature and our hearts would fail us, for we would instantly know that we are unworthy to be in His presence. We would be terrified to behold the great God, knowing that nothing unholy can survive in the presence of the Holy God. We would follow in the footsteps of our spiritual forefathers, such as Isaiah who saw the Lord on His throne and cried out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5) and the apostle John, who saw his risen Messiah and "fell at His **feet** like a dead man." (Revelation 1:17).

But then, as our hearts beat furiously, we would become infused with the

wonder of another realization- we are still alive! How could this be? Looking down, we would behold the evidence of the incredible grace of God in our lives- the righteousness of Christ clothing us in a blood-washed robe of purity. Our hearts would cry out to Him in unending praise and worship; we would be unable to stop bowing down before Him.

Only those that are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ can survive in the presence of the holy God! He is the "all-consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). His holiness is unable to tolerate darkness at all; therefore all that are allowed to stay in His presence *must* be holy. The very nature of God is such that nothing less will be able to be near Him. In Leviticus 11:44, He says, "I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy." Notice that the text doesn't say, "Be good, for I am good." or "Try hard, for I try hard." or "Do your best, for I've done my best." No! He demands holiness- which is reason for rejoicing.

You see, if God would tolerate sin and call darkness His friend, He would be no God at all. If He isn't fully pure and holy, how could we be sure that His Word is infallible; how could we be sure that He truly is unchanging; how could we ever trust that His sacrifice really was sufficient? You see, when you have an "image" of God as someone who is only *somewhat* holy, you have a wrong image of Him! You have instead a god who is unable to really be trusted, for He is somewhat light and somewhat dark; the epitome of the false Buddhist belief of

"Yin-Yang"⁶.

If our God can't be trusted, then we may as well live however we want. If He isn't really the bedrock that we set our feet upon, then we are doomed, destined for spiritual collapse (see Matthew 7:24-27). Fortunately, He *is* trustworthy, *the* Rock of our salvation (Deuteronomy 32 & Isaiah 26:4). As the apostle John wrote, "...God is Light, and in Him there is **no** darkness at all." (I John 1:5, emphasis mine).

This puts us all in the same "boat"; *none* of us can stand before the holy God without His robe of righteousness! We are unable to establish a covenantal relationship with Him and are completely powerless to have intimate fellowship with Him. What we need is a Messiah- someone pure, holy and spotless, someone whose blood would be enough to satisfy the wrath of the holy God, someone who is unable to be held in the throes of death. Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ is that someone!

When we truly see God as He is and begin to comprehend His nature with our little minds, we instinctively cry out to Him for a Saviour. We become fully aware that we simply *cannot* come close to God without His Son (see 1st John 1:3, 2:22-24). We become eternally grateful that Jesus Christ died in our place, reconciling us to God.

For years, I really didn't understand that God is a holy God and, thus, had very little true fear of Him. One day, while Tara and I were counseling a man who had

been sinning, I reassured him that he didn't need to be afraid of God and that God loved him. After he went home, I was troubled, but didn't really know why. The next morning, I came across the following passage during my devotional time:

"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, **conduct yourselves in fear** during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

(1 Peter 1:14-9; emphasis mine)

"Conduct yourselves in fear! What in the world does that mean?", I thought. I was convicted by the Spirit speaking through this passage that what I had told the man was wrong. Yes, of course God loved him, but God is still God. While I was reflecting on these things, the Holy Spirit reminded me of another verse, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." (Galatians 6:7). My counsel to that man was wrong, for it portrayed a wrong view of the holy God and His view towards sin. In my efforts to make him

feel better, I had compromised the truth. I had portrayed God as loving at the expense of His holiness. Needless to say, this foolish counsel of mine did not lead this poor man to repent; quite the opposite- he continued along as he had before, spiraling down even further.

Partway through John Bunyan's classic book "Pilgrim's Progress", Pilgrim is talking to his companion Hopeful about a legalistic man they encountered in their travels, Ignorance. Pilgrim and Hopeful had previously spent some time confronting him about his legalism and self-righteousness, but it was all to no avail. After he went on his way, they are discussing how the conversation had gone and marveling at how some people seem to be oblivious to conviction. Christian asks Hopeful, "Have they at no time, think you, convictions of sin, and so, consequently, fears that their state is dangerous?" After Hopeful declines to respond (for fear of being wrong) and asks him to answer his own question instead, Christian goes on to say that people like Ignorance:

"...think that those fears are wrought by the devil, (though indeed they are wrought of God,) and thinking so, they resist them, as things that directly tend to their overthrow. 2. They also think that these fears tend to the spoiling of their faith; when, alas for them, poor men that they are, they have none at all; and therefore they harden their hearts against them. 3. They presume they ought not to fear, and therefore, in despite of them, wax presumptuously

confident. 4. They see that those fears tend to take away from them their pitiful old self-holiness, and therefore they resist them with all their might."⁴

People seeking to stand before God and please Him based on their "self-holiness" usually reject the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They pridefully pursue the establishment of their own righteousness and, sadly, when they inevitably fail from time to time, embrace condemnation from the devil. As the Holy Spirit convicts them, fear begins to rise up in their hearts, for all they have been doing to please God is in vain, for it has not been born of faith in the completed work of Christ on the cross. They shun this fear, believing it to be of the devil, when in fact it is the result of true conviction from the Holy Spirit; people *should* be scared if they are trying to please God with their own self-ordained methods, for they are discounting Christ's work and seeking to do their own!

A believer who truly loves the Lord also fears the Lord. Not in a legalistic, "God is out to get me" kind of fear, but rather with a healthy awe of who He is. He is so full of awe at who God is, that he quickly dismisses any longings of his flesh towards sin.

One of the tendencies of fallen human nature is to exalt the false, which is idolatry. Idolatry is always the manifestation of the sin nature in our flesh; it is essentially worship of anything besides the Lord. It can also result from over-emphasizing one attribute of the Lord to the detriment of another, such as seen in

the story above (Pilgrim's Progress). When we view God or portray Him as different than who He really is, we are essentially building a false image of Him in our minds.

Worship in heaven is focused on the Lord Himself (see Revelation 5), therefore no idolatry exists there. In heaven, where the vision of the redeemed and angels is clear, there is no longing for substitutes, no fascination with created things, no frantic searching for meaning, no misconceptions of His nature and no efforts to exalt ourselves. There is simply pure worship.

We can see what God our Father is like by allowing the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Scriptures regarding the life of Jesus Christ to us. He truly is God! The author of Hebrews wrote:

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they."

(Hebrews 1:1-4, emphasis mine)

Jesus perfectly manifested the character, attributes and the person of God Himself. All that God is was perfectly seen in His life. We see in Jesus the holiness *and* gentleness of God, the righteous anger at the false teachers of the day *and* the patience of an expert Shepherd. One of the best things I have ever come across was written by Hannah Whitall Smith, a famous evangelist who lived from 1832 to 1911:

"We may know a good many things about Him, but that is very different from knowing Him Himself, as He really is in nature and character. Other witnesses have told us of His visible acts, but from these we get often very wrong impressions of His true character. No other witness but Christ can tell us of the real secrets of God's bosom, for of none other can it be said, as it is of Him, that "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." **It will make all the difference between comfort and discomfort in Christian lives, whether or not we believe this to be a fact.** If we do believe it to be a fact, then the stern Judge and hard Taskmaster whom we have feared, even while we tried to follow Him, and whose service we have found so irksome and so full of discomfort, will disappear; and His place will be taken by the God of love who is revealed to us in "the face of Jesus Christ," the God who cares for us as He cares for the sparrows, and for the

flowers of the field, and who tells us that He numbers even the hairs of our head. No human being could be afraid of a God like this. If we have been accustomed, therefore, to approach God with any mistrust of the kindness of His feelings toward us; if our religion has been poisoned by fear; if unworthy thoughts of His character and will have filled our hearts with suspicions of His goodness; if we have pictured Him as an unjust deposit of a self-seeking tyrant; if, in short, we have imagined Him in any way other than that which has been revealed to us in "the face of Jesus Christ," we **must** go back in all simplicity of heart to the records of that lovely life, lived in human guise among men, and must bring our conceptions of God into perfect accord with the character and ways of Him who declares that He came to manifest the name of God to men."^s

When the Bible tells us to fear God, it often does so while warning us to not continue in sin (such as in Hebrews 6). It warns us against a cavalier attitude towards sin and urges us to walk in obedience to our Lord. We should not be afraid of God in the sense of fearing His disapproval, for we are confident that Christ's righteousness has fully satisfied His wrath. However, we must live in holy respect of our Lord, not treating all that He is and has done for us lightly. Instead of being spoiled little children who do not appreciate what their parents do, we are to be grateful children- those who *love* their Father in Heaven and

want their lives to be full of His holiness.

Before he was saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, Philip was not able to see Jesus for who He really was. Even after having seen Him perform countless miracles and hearing Him teach with powerful authority, Philip was still longing to see the Father, not knowing that Christ was His perfect express image. He didn't understand that Jesus was God in human flesh; to Philip's carnal mind, Jesus was great, but not quite God. We see this in the following passage:

"Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? **He who has seen Me has seen the Father**; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works."

(John 14:8-10, emphasis mine)

Later on, however, we find Philip passionately preaching Jesus (see Acts 8)! The Holy Spirit had truly opened his eyes and, as a result, his life was revolutionized; he was transformed from a doubter into a preacher. Likewise, once *our* eyes are opened and we clearly perceive our Saviour, our lives are never the same again. Then, as we keep our eyes on Him (see Hebrews 12:1-2), we joyously run the race of faith, gladly forsake sin, cast aside distractions, resist

temptations, endure trials and hardships, and press closer and closer to the Love of our hearts until we one day see Him face to face.

Now, of course we will never be able to "see" our Savior with perfect vision while in this world, for we as long as we are on this earth, "...we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known." (I Corinthians 13:12). None of us are able to fully perceive our Lord in all His splendor, but as we grow in our relationship with Him, we are able to perceive Him more and more. We grow in our longing to see Him face to face; in fact, all of life pales in comparison with such a hope.

The apostle Paul wrote:

"More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, *not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith*, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for

which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 3:8-14; emphasis mine)

If you examine what Paul gave up to follow Jesus (see Philippians 3), you will be dumbfounded. He gave up status, prestige, honor, wealth, family, friends, health and who knows what else. He considered it all as rubbish (literally "dung") in order to be found in Christ as one with His righteousness and not his own. He realized that he had to relinquish all of his human righteousness in order to be found in Christ with His righteousness. It's an either-or choice!

Likewise, we must decide that all we have is *nothing* in comparison with our Lord. We must forget all that is behind us- failures *and* victories, problems *and* successes, inadequacies *and* qualifications. With our eyes open to who God really is, our hearts will beat with loving gratitude! Suddenly, holiness no longer seems beyond our grasp, but is dwelling within us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. We quit trying to make it happen and merely abide in Him, letting Him control and direct all that we say and do. The character of Jesus Christ utterly transforms our own, our persons so merging with Him, that all that can be seen in us is Him.

Chapter Four

Rest in Christ

Have you ever heard the saying, "If it seems too good to be true, it probably is!"? Many people are skeptics regarding anything free- understandably so, for they have been taken advantage of and had their hopes dashed. In the last forty or so years, it has become quite popular to be a skeptic. Cynicism, sarcasm and unbelief have become regarded as prudent. However, these are not regarded by God's Word as such. In fact, they greatly hinder a person's ability to gladly receive the simple, pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. They find it difficult to accept that He truly paid for their sins- it just seems too good to be true, much too easy to be real.

Although it may *seem* too good to be true, the fact is that Jesus Christ really did pay for our sins. He thoroughly satisfied the wrath of God by becoming the

propitiation for our sins (see Romans 3:25, 1st John 2:2 & 4:10). I think that the most exciting words ever recorded in the Bible are those of Jesus, "It is finished!" (Luke 19:30). Not half-way or somewhat finished, but completely finished. The New Covenant had been sealed with His own blood, the work on the cross complete when He gave up His spirit.

Something very significant happened the very moment that Jesus gave up His spirit- the thick veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom (Mark 15:19). A professor named Marvin Baldwin wrote about this veil:

"According to the Rabbis this was a handbreadth in thickness, and woven of seventy-two twisted plaits, each plait consisting of twenty-four threads. It was sixty feet long and thirty wide. Two of them were made every year, and according to the exaggerated language of the time it needed three hundred priests to manipulate it. This veil was the one which covered the entrance to the holy of holies, and not, as has been asserted, the veil which hung before the main entrance to the sanctuary..."¹

The heavy veil which had prevented people from entering into the presence of the Almighty God was torn, leaving the holiest place in the temple open! The author of Hebrews wrote:

"Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence

to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way *which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh*, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

(Hebrews 10:18-22, emphasis mine)

The very fact that it was torn from top to bottom signifies that God was the One who did it; in fact, He is the only One who could have. Certainly such a thick, heavy curtain could not be torn by human strength- let alone from top to bottom. This is very important because it shows us that *God* is the Initiator of our salvation, Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2, KJV). We are merely those who respond to His love. When we are convinced of this, we are filled with gratitude and our love for Him is ignited afresh.

Notice that Christ's flesh is likened to the veil that was torn. Just as it was torn from top to bottom by God, so was Christ's flesh. Christ, on His heavenly assignment, *willingly* went to the cross for us, fully aware that He would suffer incredibly for us; He would fulfill the ancient prophecy by Isaiah, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5, KJV). He went knowing full well that even His own Father would

have to turn His back on Him, unable to behold the sin that His Son bore (Psalm 22:1 & Matthew 27:46). Not only would He be forsaken for awhile, but He also would bear the full wrath of God towards sin in our place.

I have met many people who earnestly believe that their repentance is what has saved them. While hearing them share their testimonies, I have gotten the impression that Jesus was out there somewhere and they somehow stumbled upon Him and decided to join His "team". Much of their emphasis is placed upon what they gave up for Him, rather than on what He did for them. What this produces in their lives is pride,- in their own repentance. They are unwittingly viewing themselves as the source of their deliverance, somehow thinking that they had had enough sense to choose Him.

Jesus addressed this fallacious idea, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." (John 15:16). Now, I don't want to get into a debate about predestination, but the fact remains that God did choose us. I have read many varying opinions about this topic and have come to a very simple conclusion: God did choose us *and* we have free will. Somehow, they are both part of the picture. Although I won't spend a great deal of time on this, I do want to point out that God **is** the Initiator and we are the responders. The more clearly Christ is revealed to us, the more readily and gladly we repent. Salvation is based solely on His grace, which we

simply receive by faith, a gift from God (see Ephesians 2:8-9) which enables us to repent- to turn away from ourselves and to Him.

The timing of Jesus' death was vitally important as well. It took place on about the "ninth hour" (Matthew 27:46), which was the time of the evening sacrifice, just before the Sabbath. How appropriate that as the high priest prepared to offer atonement for the sins of the people, that God tore the veil- as a forcible demonstration that the Old Covenant was done away with and the New Covenant was established, having been sealed by the blood of Jesus. This was an incredible demonstration of the finality of Christ's sacrifice. In one dark, yet glorious, moment, the system of multiple sacrifices was completely done away with; the wrath of God had been appeased.

A Christian is only truly free in Christ to the degree that he believes the incredible revelation that Christ sealed the New Covenant with His blood and that He completely satisfied all that God's holiness demands. Of course, this is not a mere mental acceptance or even moral bending to His rules, but a whole-hearted desperate surrender of all that we are and will be to Him. Surrender based on who He is, what He has done and what He promises to do in us, should we let Him. People who come to Christ must first be fully aware that they are *unable* to satisfy God through their own human efforts (or works) or they will never see their desperate need to have Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

Christ has saved us, is saving us and will save us.² Positionally, we are saved

when we whole-heartedly surrender to Him and are born again. We then experientially learn to follow Him as He *daily* saves us from ourselves (daily leading us away from dependence upon ourselves, the deeds and yearnings of our flesh) unto the abundant life He has called us to live (this is actually referred to as the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, see 1st Peter 1:2). We are then ultimately saved when we go to meet Him, either through death or His glorious return. This is when we shall be utterly transformed and see Him face to face.

This simple realization sets us free from the endless striving to please God and enables us to surrender to the incredible life of Christ that God has placed within us. Now of course, when we walk in continuous surrender to Him, God is pleased, for we are then truly walking by faith (see Hebrews 11:6) and reflecting His glory back to Him! We are convinced that every bit of change in our hearts and lives, every bit of "success" we have in our Christian walks, every "accomplishment", every bit of fruit- *all* of it is to be produced by the Holy Spirit living inside of us. We are to simply cooperate with what He is already doing in us. We are not called to improve ourselves- God never has been and never will be impressed by improved flesh. Instead, the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of us is daily working inside of us and we "are being ***transformed*** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (II Corinthians 3:18; emphasis mine).

What image is this that Paul is referring to? Jesus Christ Himself! We find

this truth mentioned a few verses later in II Corinthians 4:4 which says, "...Christ, who is the image of God." Some people have foolishly taken this passage (as well as others) to mean that Christ is not actually God, but that's not the meaning whatsoever. The word for "image" here is "εἰκών" (eikon), which "...involves the two ideas of representation and manifestation."³ God's grace in Christ will yet accomplish more than what Adam lost...[in] 2 Cor. 4:4, 'the image of God' [is]...essentially and absolutely the *perfect* expression and representation of the Archetype, God the Father "⁴. Christ truly represented the Father perfectly and manifested Him perfectly towards mankind.

How could we ever, in our own human efforts, truly become transformed into the image of Christ, genuinely representing and manifesting Him as He is? We can't- human efforts at goodness *never* draw us closer to God and *never* change our hearts. In fact they do just the opposite. These efforts merely distance ourselves from Him, for they fly in the "face" of the grace of God. Should we succeed somewhat at taming our flesh on our own (which is highly doubtful to me), we would stop depending upon Christ as our Saviour and start relying upon ourselves. How vain to think that we could somehow improve ourselves spiritually through our own efforts! One of the main messages promoted by the world and numerous false religions is that of self-improvement, but the message of Scripture is that of growth by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is very different. The first we could attempt on our own, the second is impossible

without fellowship and submission *daily* to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes us, molding us and making us like our Lord.

One of the main things that the Pharisees did was to try to establish their own righteousness. They loved the benefits of the appearance of holiness- the praises of men, their position in the Temple and the religious "clout" they wielded. Yet, it is evident that they did not truly see or value God Himself, for when Jesus Christ ministered in purity in front of them, they rejected Him. They not only missed the day of the visitation of their Messiah (Luke 19:44), but also truly thought He was being smitten by God on the cross for His own sin. They were so blind that His words of testimony about His true identity (as God) filled them with rage- a rage so blind that it ultimately justified in their minds His death upon a Roman cross.

Isaiah spoke of this, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." (Isaiah 53:4, ESV). Although Christ was bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, He was esteemed as being punished by God for His own sins! Truly the righteousness of the Pharisees was not righteous at all, for it ultimately blinded them to the Messiah Himself.

Although they had a zeal for God, it was not a zeal that was produced by Him, but rather produced out of the selfish ambitions of the heart. Paul speaks of this terrible sin in Romans 10:1-4:

"Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. *For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.* For Christ is the *end of the law* for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Notice that the Pharisees were ignorant about God's righteousness. Instead of subjecting themselves to His righteousness, they sought to establish their own. They had somehow forgotten that even Abraham, one of their favorite ancestors, had been acceptable to God because of his faith (see Romans 4:3-14, 9:29-31). They thought that God was pleased by their "sacrifices", which consisted of many rules, regulations, traditions and abstinences from many things. Jesus addressed this when He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for *I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*" (Matthew 9:12b-13, emphasis mine).

Only the Holy Spirit can transform us "into the same image from glory to glory" (II Corinthians 3:18), but let us not forget that He does *not* do it apart from the New Covenant, for that would not be glorifying Christ at all! Of course, the Spirit would never do that for He always glorifies the Son (see John 16:14). So how can we expect to please God apart from the foundational truth of the sealed

New Covenant? Will God be pleased apart from the work of Christ? If we throw off our robe of Christ's righteousness and seek to please Him by our works, will this please Him? Are we so foolish? Do we expect to somehow become good enough?

When believers rely upon themselves and seek to please God through the Law, they deny the New Covenant and step outside of the grace of God (see Galatians 2:21) for their lives. In fact, they are actually severing themselves from Christ. "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." (Galatians 5:4)! Inevitably, they find themselves failing to truly walk close with their God, which deadens their love and passion for Him. Many people who find themselves in this condition then try to cover it up by becoming very busy "for God", immersing themselves in numerous church activities, while others stop going to church altogether. Although they are intellectually grateful that He once saved them, they fail to see that He wants to continually be in fellowship with them, transforming and molding them into deeper union with Him. Unfortunately, He has become the One who once saved them, but now has little to do with changing their lives. He has become a distant Savior, now only reached when one's good works are sufficient enough to warrant His attention. How sad!

God calls us away from the struggling futility of dead works to a glorious "place" of rest. This rest is spoken of throughout the fourth chapter of the book of

Hebrews and, although we will ultimately experience it in fullness in eternity with God, it can be experienced now to some degree by a simple choice: we can rest in the finished work of Christ or continue to struggle to merit the approval of God! There is no middle ground, no "fence" to sit on in this choice- we daily choose one or the other! Abraham discovered this choice and chose to believe, to walk by faith and, thus, to rest in God. He was confident that God would fulfill His promises to him. He simply believed, as Paul declared:

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, *but not before God*. For what does the Scripture say, 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness...*it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace.*"

(Romans 4:1-5 & 16a; emphasis mine)

Notice that, although Abraham seemed like someone who could be justified by his works (after all, he *had* left everything to follow God), he wasn't before God. When we forget that our works do not justify us in the *slightest*, we have forgotten that our God is completely holy and pure! We have somehow come to

believe that He can tolerate partial righteousness, but He can't. If He was slightly impure, some of our deeds might be able to survive in His presence. However, this is not the case! His holiness, as mentioned previously, cannot tolerate sin. From His viewpoint, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags..." (Isaiah 64:6b, KJV). Any attempt to walk in righteousness apart from His own is an affront to Him. Pursuit of our own righteousness is essentially battling against God.

Also, notice the beautiful truth in verse five, "...the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."! Do you see it? In order for us to truly believe in Jesus, we must cease our work! What work? Certainly not the righteous deeds that flow out of a heart full of God, but rather the vain striving to merit His favor apart from Christ.

The prodigal son, upon returning to his father's house had made up his mind that he would ask his father if he could be his servant, not realizing the depth of his father's love! His father wouldn't hear of it. He wouldn't allow him to be his servant but instead gladly welcomed him back as his son (Luke 15:11-32)! He clothed him with the best robe (which speaks of Christ's righteousness- see Isaiah 61:10), put a ring on his hand (which speaks of the restoration of the covenantal relationship) and sandals on his feet (for only slaves went barefoot²). Likewise, God wants us as His children, not just his servants.

Now, of course, some may think (especially those looking for reasons to get away from serving God) that being at rest in Him means that we are free from

serving Him. Again, how sad! True sons of God *love* to serve their Heavenly Father, not out of a frantic striving to merit His favor, but out of affectionate love for who He is. We are supposed to be His bond-servants experientially, but we cannot be such in purity if we are not first true sons (or daughters) of Him, for apart from our covenantal relationship with Him, we end up serving ourselves alone.

My dad taught my brother and I, from our early years, how to swim, surf, snorkel and scuba dive. Our family spent most of our vacations at the beach and I have very fond memories of them. One afternoon, we saw a big rock out in the ocean that didn't look very far away to us and determined that we would swim out to it the following morning. I donned my snorkel gear, while my dad donned his scuba gear and we began the swim. After about fifteen minutes, we began to realize that the rock was a lot further out than it had appeared. Dad had brought his spear-gun and was planning on diving down to hunt for fish while I rested on the rock. However, when we got to the rock, we were in for a quite a shock- there were literally hundreds of huge crabs crawling all over it! Needless to say, I wasn't about to risk being attacked by them, so I decided not to go up on it. I had to tread water while Dad hunted for fish, which completely wore me out. The swim back seemed to take forever.

Religious works are much the same way. We see a goal (like the rock) and swim vigorously towards it, only to find that we cannot rest on it. No rest is to be

found! Instead, we have to "tread water", using up all of our energy, but not going anywhere.

I have found that a sinner is much easier to witness to than a person who is very religious, mainly because a sinner is usually fully aware of their evil deeds, although they may vehemently deny that they are sin. When sinners come to the point where they hate who they are and are desperate for change, the revelation of Jesus Christ shines through their darkness and grips their hearts full-force. Once they've seen Him, they desire nothing else- they simply *must* have Jesus! They turn away from the drugs, illicit sex, partying and so on. The beauty of the Lord captivates their hearts and the love of the Father washes over them, more refreshing than a mountain stream.

A religious person, on the other hand, is usually completely convinced of their goodness. When asked how they are doing with God, they typically begin to quote all of the things they've been doing for Him. I know this first-hand because I used to do this. Their focus is on activities and service (often things we would call good) rather than their Messiah. Most of the toughest spiritual battles that I have had to fight have been in regards to religious people, for their disregarding of the grace of God opens them up to the deceptions and influences of evil spirits.

Martin Luther, who had been radically delivered from the bonds of legalism, wrote the following:

"I have seen many work themselves down to the bones in their

hungry effort to obtain peace of conscience. But the harder they tried the more they worried. Especially in the presence of death they were so uneasy that I have seen murderers die with better grace and courage. This holds true also in regard to church regulations. When I was a monk I tried ever so hard to live up to the strict rules of my order. I used to make a list of my sins, and I was always on the way to confession, and whatever penances were enjoined upon me I performed religiously. In spite of it all, my conscience was always in a fever of doubt. The more I sought to help my poor stricken conscience the worse it got. The more I paid attention to the regulations the more I transgressed them. Hence those who seek to be justified by the Law are much further away from the righteousness of life than the publicans, sinners, and harlots. **They know better than to trust in their own works. They know that they cannot ever hope to obtain forgiveness by their sins.**"⁵

I find it very sad whenever I see a new believer who was once passionately in love with Jesus deteriorate into a religious, cold-hearted "Christian". Much of the blame can be laid directly at the door of those who "disciple" young believers into how to "act" as a Christian, while failing to truly represent through their words *and* lives the most basic and essential truth of Christianity- an ongoing passionate relationship with Jesus Christ.

A true believer never "matures" beyond the point of utter dependence upon Him; they live in a conscious, daily dependence upon Him. He is their Savior, Lord and God. They are very much aware of the helplessness and powerlessness of their flesh and the incredible available power of their God. The more they mature, the more aware they are and the more they cling to their Messiah.

The more this revelation sinks into us, the more love will spring up out of our hearts for our beloved Lord. Cry out to the Lord with me for a fresh revelation of His finished work.

Chapter Five

True Repentance

Now that we have seen the truth about the incredible beauty of Christ and what He did for us, let us focus on how we encounter Him. One of the central truths in Christianity is that of repentance. Without repentance, there is simply no remission of sins (see Luke 3:3)! Put differently, without repentance there is no salvation, no redemption, no hope of fellowship with God whatsoever- for repentance is essentially the opening of our heart to His glorious covenant. Without turning away from ourselves, there is no turning to Him. Of course, as mentioned earlier, our repentance does *not* save us, but does allow for us to "connect" by faith to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Perhaps the best way I've heard someone else put it is this: "Our repentance does not move an angry and insulted

God to grant us forgiveness. Rather, we are greeted by intense and passionate love that ambushes us, to which we respond in repentance. We can give our lives away to such love."¹!

The Greek word for repentance used throughout the New Testament is "μετανοέω" (metanoeo), which signifies "to perceive afterwards...signifies to change one's mind or purpose, always, in the N.T., involving a change for the better..."². There are two words translated as "repentance" in the Old Testament. One is the word, "nocham", which basically means "sorrowful"³ and the other word is "shuwbah", which essentially means to "withdraw or retreat"³. Being sorrowful about our sins causes us to retreat from them, change our mind about them and cry out to the Lord for deliverance. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, "...thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel has said, 'In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.'" (Isaiah 30:15).

I once heard a preacher describe repentance as making a "U-turn" in life, basically turning 180 degrees from our original direction. While this is true, the question must be asked, "Repent (or turn) from sin *unto* what?" Are we to repent from (or turn from) the evil deeds of our flesh unto the power of our flesh to improve us? *No!* We must repent by turning away altogether from dependence upon the power and lusts of our flesh unto the effective power of the Holy Spirit. Believe me, I speak from personal experience- I learned this truth the hard way.

Many years ago, I was absolutely in bondage to sin. I would frequently run up

to the altar at church, weeping and trying to repent, but was still unable to get free. One day, I was up there crying out to God, asking Him why I just couldn't get free, even though I was continually repenting. As clear as a bell, I heard Him speak to my spirit, "You haven't repented of it even once!" He clearly showed me that when I had been attempting to turn from my sins *unto* the power of my flesh to correct it. Thus, instead of making a "U-turn" away from my sins, I was actually just "changing lanes" and, ultimately, still going in the same direction. Instead, I needed to turn from the sin *unto* the power of the Holy Spirit to set me free. This simple revelation began a work in me that He was faithful to complete. He delivered me completely from that sin.

Since then, I have come to realize that true repentance *always* redirects us to the power of the Holy Spirit. Without Him, we cannot truly repent! We turn from the filth, good intentions and resolutions of our flesh and turn towards the life-changing power of the Spirit, for He is the One who delivers us. I fear that many in the body of Christ today do not understand this and, as a result, are in secret bondage to sins that they could be free from.

John the Baptist came as a forerunner of Christ with a message of repentance. He was sent to help prepare the hearts of the people for their Messiah. Something fascinating to me is mentioned in Luke 7:28-30 (emphasis mine):

"I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, *having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.*"

Why do you suppose that the Pharisees and lawyers refused to be baptized by John? I believe it was because his baptism was one of repentance! John Wesley, in his commentary on verse 30, wrote, "But the Pharisees and scribes- The good, learned, honourable men: made void the counsel, the gracious design, of God toward them- They disappointed all these methods of his love, and would receive no benefit from them."⁴

By refusing to repent they rejected God's purpose for them. In order to be baptized, the Pharisees would have had to take off their special, religious robes and enter into the same water as the common people and acknowledge their need for the coming Saviour! They refused to do this, for they earnestly believed that they were good and that when the Messiah came, He would bless what they were doing and congratulate them for their good deeds. Imagine their shock when Jesus proclaimed just the opposite (Matthew 12:34, 23:33 & Luke 3:7) and condemned them for their hypocrisy. Instead of repenting and embracing their Messiah, they took offense, rejected Him and ultimately killed Him.

Whenever we refuse the humble work of repentance and suppose that our Lord will overlook our willful sin, we deceive ourselves (see I John 1:6-10). We must

never suppose that just because we've been saved, we can live however we want. As Paul wrote, "...you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." (I Corinthians 6:20). What an incredible price He paid- that of His own blood! He paid for our filth with His own life, taking our sins upon Himself and overcoming its power forever!

Awhile ago, I was preaching a series of messages on the book of James⁵ and was part way through a message entitled "Overcoming Temptations". I awoke that Sunday feeling very sick and barely made it to church. I felt like I couldn't even smile at anyone, let alone preach. I asked my Father to please fill me with His Spirit, for I was very weak and knew I couldn't preach if He didn't speak through me (this can be a very good position to be in, for truly His "power is perfected in weakness"- see II Corinthians 12:9). The message was very "ho-hum" until about twenty-five minutes into it. The Holy Spirit suddenly filled me with what I would call a righteous anger towards sin. It felt so intense, that when the message was over, I was still in shock. A person in the congregation shared with me later that night that they had felt the anger of the Lord towards sin, which was just what they needed at that particular time. God had suddenly revealed a tiny amount of His feeling towards sin and it was scary. Scary enough to sober us up and bring us to the realization that He absolutely hates it. He hates it with a fierce hatred! How sad that so many of His children fail to understand that He took care of it on the cross and they don't need to sin anymore. He hates sin with

a perfect hatred, which we must have as well if we are to walk free from it.

Now, let me clarify something here. Hating sin is not the pathway to intimacy with God, but rather the *result* of a deepening love of God. We never grow any closer to God by focusing on sin, but rather only on Him. I wish to point this out because I have seen believers who continually rail against sin and moan about how awful the world is getting. Ironically, they themselves usually have no fruit of God growing in their lives, but rather only an outward conformity to the rules of their church. They look down on sinners, expecting them to be in conformity to their rules as well.

True love of God always produces hatred and rejection towards what dampens its fire- sin. As His love grows in our hearts and as we grow in intimate relationship with Him, we begin to see and feel things more as He does. We love the sinner and yet have a holy hatred for the sin which is destroying him. We are able to distinguish the lost soul from that which is keeping him in chains and, thus, never look down our nose at him. We know that, without Christ, we would be trapped in the grip of sin ourselves.

Jesus Christ, our conquering King, completely defeated the power of sin through His death and resurrection! Paul addressed this:

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who *have been* baptized

into Christ Jesus *have been* baptized into His death? Therefore we *have been* buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self *was* crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, *so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.* Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so *consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Therefore *do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*" (Romans 6:1-13; emphasis mine)

Notice all the times he uses completed tenses to describe our relationship to sin! We *have been* baptized into His death, we *have been* buried with Him, our

old self *was* crucified with Christ. You see, Jesus Christ has freed us from sin's power. Sin has no more dominion over us, if we do not let it. The above passage is one of incredible freedom. As a result of His atonement, the following are true:

1. Because Christ has defeated sin and established the New Covenant between God and ourselves, we *are* dead to sin! Sin is no longer our master, we are no longer slaves to it!
2. We must continually reckon ourselves dead to it! We are not under its dominion anymore, so we consider ourselves as having *nothing* to do with it! It is interesting to note that the word for "consider" in verse 11 is "λογίζομαι" (logidzomahee), which means to "regard, deem or consider, to set down as a matter of account"⁶. It is essentially an accounting term, which means to add to the "log" or to record into an accounting book. Also, the Greek verb tense here indicates that we are to *continually* be considering ourselves as dead to sin, continually recognizing that, according to God's "accounting", we are dead to sin.
3. We have a choice and must make the right one. We must not *let* sin reign and must not go on presenting the members of our body to sin.
4. We must approach God in the new life that He has given us. As we walk in the new life of Christ, we reject sin for our hearts are overjoyed in His holiness; we want nothing to hinder our fellowship with Him. Since His light dispels the darkness in our hearts, we must

allow it to shine in us.

You may be thinking to yourself, "Yeah, yeah, I've heard all of this before! James is promoting this Christian perfectionism stuff! What an idealistic bunch of bunk! I know I'll sin again; after all, no one's perfect!" To this I lovingly reply, "Jesus *is* perfect and, if you are truly born again, you have His Spirit living inside you! Don't set yourself up for defeat by considering yourself alive to sin and subject to its power!"

One of the soccer teams I played on during my childhood in Taiwan was notorious for losing every single game. We sometimes would go through several seasons without ever winning. Our coach pulled us aside one day and told us that he could tell that when we went out on the field to play, we were expecting to lose. Our team was so used to being defeated that we merely endured the games, instead of striving to be victorious. Now, of course, there were some players on the team that always put their whole hearts into it, but many of us didn't. I remember going out on the field at times wondering how much we were going to lose by.

Even if we are well accustomed to defeat, we must simply believe the truth that Jesus Christ has made us "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37, KJV) or as the NASB version more accurately captures the spirit of this verse, "all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." We are on the winning "side" and, frankly, do not need to act like losers. No matter how many

times we may have fallen into sin or defeat in the past, we are able to "overwhelmingly conquer **through Him who loved us**" (Romans 8:37, NASB; emphasis mine)! Through His power, by the knowledge of His love for us, we are able to grasp the hand that He extends to us in our "pit" of defeat and let Him pull us out! We are able to agree with the psalmist who wrote, "He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm." (Psalm 40:2).

Now, we all know that, in actuality, believers do fall prey to sin at times, but it should be the exception and not the norm. We should never expect to fall. In fact believers who are really walking with the Lord find themselves surprised when they fall. When we expect to sin, we often secretly begin to look forward to it. Instead of turning our backs on sin and looking towards our Lord, we have simply set aside those sins for later indulgence. We have turned our eyes away from their rightful "target", Jesus, and onto our flesh.

If we should fall down, we must quickly get back up and keep on going. True faith perseveres! It does not derive its strength from circumstances, failures, successes or even from *anything* that is seen (see Hebrews 11:1), but rather from the pure, spotless Lamb that never fails. The various trials encountered throughout life and the attacks of the devil strengthen true faith, for they purge us of our dependence on ourselves and leave behind the spotless gold of true, desperation for a God-breathed life.

Again, the words of Martin Luther are enlightening:

"...the attacks of the old Serpent are not without profit to us, for they confirm our doctrine and strengthen our faith in Christ. Many a time we were wrestled down in these conflicts with Satan, but Christ has always triumphed and always will triumph. Do not think that the Galatians were the only ones to be bewitched by the devil. Let us realize that we too may be seduced by Satan."⁷

"Christians also fall and perform the lusts of the flesh. David fell horribly into adultery. Peter also fell grievously when he denied Christ. However great these sins were, they were not committed to spite God, but from weakness. When their sins were brought to their attention these men did not obstinately continue in their sin, but repented. Those who sin through weakness are not denied pardon as long as they rise again and cease to sin. There is nothing worse than to continue in sin."⁸

Oftentimes, we fall even though we don't mean to! Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted." The word for "caught" here is the Greek word "προλαμβάνω" (prolambano), which means "...being caught by the trespass, through his being off his guard"⁹ or "to be taken unexpectedly, to be overtaken,

be taken by surprise"¹⁰ By understanding the meaning of this simple word, we see that believers can indeed fall without premeditation to do so. We all "stumble in many ways" (James 3:2b) and must simply get back up once we've fallen. As we grow in Christ, our discernment is sharpened "to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14) and we end up falling less and less often. The mature believer is *very* quick to get back up after falling into sin and rapidly repents.

I have noticed that it seems like I am most susceptible to sin during times of my life when all is going well or even after a great spiritual victory. I believe this is because I have let my guard down during those times and become prideful, sometimes only slightly so. But even a little pride is enough for a defeat. As Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Pride is a deadly poison- it doesn't take a lot of it to severely damage or even kill a person spiritually. Pride is perhaps the most slippery of all the evils that are inherent in our fallen flesh. Have you ever tried to hold an eel? My dad caught one with a spear gun once. We quickly learned the truth of the saying, "as slippery as an eel"! Like an eel, as soon as we think that we have a grasp on our pride or that we've become humble, it slips from our grasp again, and embarrasses us. A truly humble person is one who is so focused on God that he seldom thinks of himself; he is so consumed with thoughts of His Savior that he never allows such vain thoughts to remain.

It's rarely ever easy to get back up once we've fallen, but true believers always do. We must persevere. The following true story may be very familiar to many but is a good one, nonetheless. During the 1968 Olympics held in Mexico City, a marathon runner from Tanzania named John Stephen Akhwari was expected to do very well. However, partway through the race, he suffered from a cramp and had a bad fall, injuring his leg. He finally limped across the finish line at about 7 P.M., over an hour after the race had ended, his leg bloody and bandaged. Although only a few hundred spectators remained in the stands, they applauded loudly as he crossed the finish line. A reporter asked him why he had not given up when there was no chance at all of him winning, or even coming close. Confused by the question, he slowly answered, "Gentlemen, I don't think you understand. My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race. They sent me to finish."!

Now that's perseverance! Likewise, Christ didn't call us to merely start out with Him, but to *finish* the race (see II Timothy 4:6-8). However, He doesn't intend for us to finish it in our own strength, in our own righteousness or in the power of our flesh. Never forget that you did *not* start the race of faith in Christ with human determination or willpower, but childlike dependence upon Him. Thus, we must run the rest of the race the same way, keeping in mind the words of the Apostle Paul, "Are you so foolish and so senseless and so silly? Having begun [your new life spiritually] with the [Holy] Spirit, are you now reaching

perfection [by dependence] on the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3, Amplified Version).

If we should quit our sin without true heartfelt repentance unto the power of the Holy Spirit to change us, then we will become prideful in our "victory". We will end up worse off than before, for a prideful believer is utterly useless in the kingdom of God. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (I Peter 5:5b, ESV). Every person that I have come across who has quit a particular sin apart from true repentance (and, thus, without the power of Christ truly changing that person's heart) has substituted some other sin in its place. I believe this is because that sin was meeting a need in his heart, a need he was holding back from the power and grace of Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite authors, Andrew Murray, once wrote:

"I can tell you one thing that will help you. What helped Peter?
"Peter went out and wept bitterly." It must come with us to a conviction of sin; it must come with us to a real downright earnest repentance, or we never can get into the better life. We must stop complaining and confessing, "Yes, my life is not what it should be, and I will try to do better." That won't help you. What will help you? This, - that you go down in despair to lie at the feet of Jesus, and that you begin with a very real and bitter shame to make confession,
"Lord Jesus, have compassion upon me!"¹¹

Feeling bad about our sin is not, in and of itself, repentance- though it

certainly is a start! Many believers never really repent of sin because they do not truly hate that sin with a God-breathed righteous anger. Those who are truly broken-hearted over their sin cry out painfully for mercy from their Father-recognizing that they are not able, in their own strength, to resist the beckoning calls from their old nature. They distrust their own hearts and are highly aware that "nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." (Romans 7:18).

Allow God to overwhelm you with His love, for as His love envelops you, a deep hatred of sin will arise in you! Cry out to your Messiah to enable you by His Spirit to walk in the freedom that Christ has already purchased for you.

Take the following Scripture to heart, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). Allow His kindness to overwhelm you and lead you to repentance. Choose to turn away from yourself entirely and turn to Jesus Christ. Let Him not only be the Savior that you were once so in love with, but the Savior who even now you can fellowship with!

Remember that He is the One who "comforts the downcast" (II Corinthians 7:6, ESV) and sets the captives free (Luke 4:18)! Repentance is worth it!

Chapter Six

Walk in the Spirit!

Anyone who knows me well knows that my testimony is full of years of stupidity, sin, hypocrisy and foolishness. Any victory in my life is evidence of the goodness of God! Fortunately, his mercy truly is everlasting and His grace is more than able to transform the darkest of hearts. Not that I've become some sort of spiritual super-star- far from it! I still struggle daily, especially with love towards others.

Many years ago, I came across the following Scripture, which took root in my heart and began to change me, "...Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16, NKJV). As always, the original Greek text for this verse is much more graphic; it literally says, "Continually and habitually walk in the Spirit and you shall most certainly not fulfill (or complete) the lust (intense longing especially for that which is forbidden¹) of the flesh".

Although it initially sounded too good to be true, I decided to simply accept what it said and started asking God to make it a reality to me. I had no idea what it meant to walk in the Spirit, but knew that it was the key to victory in my life. I had become convinced that my fleshly struggle was one of futility, but had no idea what else to do. I never could seem to overcome certain sins, no matter how hard I gritted my teeth! Freedom always eluded my grasp, much as the proverbial carrot dangled before the horse!

Walking in the Spirit is really one of the basic callings that each of us as believers has. As Galatians 5:25 says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." (ESV). What does it mean to walk by or in the Spirit, though? It essentially means to live every day in complete dependence upon God and to be in continual fellowship with Him. A believer who walks in the Spirit no longer makes his own decisions, but prayerfully follows the leading of the Holy Spirit. He whole-heartedly desires that his life be in conformity to the will of God at all times. When slandered or attacked, he refuses to react out of the impulses and desires of his flesh, but rather out of the grace that is his for every situation. The love of the Father flows through his words and deeds toward his accusers and, strangely enough, he finds his heart eventually filled with love towards them as he lifts them up in prayer.

Since Christ has set us free (see Romans 6 and Galatians 5:24), the new life that He intends us to walk in is not one that is full of the corruption of the old

nature, but the incorruption of His life. When we choose to stop walking in the power and passions of our old nature and, instead, choose to walk by the power and leading of His Spirit, our focus is kept on Jesus and our lives begin to be transformed into the abundant life that Jesus promised us (see John 10:10).

It also needs to be pointed out that we are *commanded* to walk in His Spirit! In the verse mentioned earlier (Galatians 5:16), the verb for walk, "περιπατείτε", (perepateite) is used in the imperative mood, which indicates a command.² We are not told to walk in His Spirit if we feel like it or to wait until we've exhausted all of our human strength before turning to Him, but rather *commanded* to walk continuously in His Spirit. Instead of viewing this as a dreadful or bizarre command, we need to embrace the absolute beauty and freedom of it.

Many people say all the right things but show *very* little evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Some loudly proclaim that they are Spirit-filled, yet are lacking the fruit of the Spirit. While some of these people may not actually be saved, it is also likely that they have simply never been taught how to walk. Some also may have simply stopped walking in the Spirit for a number of reasons awhile ago and grown accustomed to the spiritual "plateau" that they think they are on. They've gotten used to their comfort zone and their spiritual lives have begun to collect dust.

In order to walk in the Spirit, we must first be completely convinced of the necessity to do so. We must be desperate for fellowship with Him, realizing that

we *cannot* have an intimate relationship with God apart from His Spirit. We are to be people who are characterized by our continual submission to His leading and constant obedience to His commandments. Our lives should reflect His influence to the point that we are recognized as "having been with Jesus" (see Acts 4:13).

The Holy Spirit *always* glorifies Jesus Christ; everything He does is for the purpose of revealing the beauty of our Messiah and conforming us into His image (see II Corinthians 3:18). Jesus said of Him, "...when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. *He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.*" (John 16:13-14, emphasis mine).

Apart from His Spirit, we do not end up glorifying Christ but rather ourselves, no matter how "pretty" our lives may look. *Everyone* walks either in the flesh or in the Spirit. By "walk" I mean the way they conduct their daily lives, both in public and private. I want to impress upon you that walking in the Spirit is absolutely critical. If we truly want to follow our Shepherd, we *must* be able to listen to His voice and perceive what He is doing. Our greatest example of this, of course, is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; He walked continually in the Spirit and, as a result, bore incredible fruit in His life.

Just as Jesus followed His Father, we must follow Him. He truly is our great

Shepherd; as His sheep, we follow His voice (see John 10:4-5). Jesus walked in the Spirit, which basically means that He was sensitive to and directed by Him. Spiritually, He saw what His Father was doing and followed Him. We find this in John 5:19-20, "...the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for *whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner*. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Himself all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel." (emphasis mine).

Following Jesus' example is not the same as following Him; in fact, to do so is to demote Him in our lives to the role of a supreme Teacher. False religions and belief systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism, the New Age Movement, Mormonism, Gnosticism and the Jehovah's Witnesses all maintain that Jesus was a great teacher or prophet. However, Jesus Christ is far more than a mere teacher- He is God! People can give heed to His teachings and even acknowledge the wisdom with which He spoke and yet not be yielded in their hearts to Him as Savior and Lord.

Simply keeping the principles of Jesus may even yield some results, but not *true* fruit! Jesus made this very clear when He said,

"Abide in Me, and I in you. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me*. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I

in him, he bears much fruit, *for apart from Me you can do nothing.*

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire and are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

(John 15:3-8, emphasis mine)

We see in these verses the absolute necessity of abiding in Christ, which I believe is the inevitable, ongoing result of walking in the Spirit. Jesus loved to use things commonly found in the natural world to illustrate spiritual matters. Just as branches are *naturally* fed by the vine (or trunk) they're attached to, so we are fed *naturally* by our Lord as we abide in Him. Just as a branch broken off of a tree quickly dies, we spiritually die apart from our Lord. A branch cannot bear fruit that brings glory to the tree if it is consumed by disease and plagued by insects.

The deeds of the flesh are contrasted against the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-23:

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying,

drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control; against such things there is no law."

Notice that this passage does not say, "the deeds of the Spirit", but the "fruit of the Spirit". This is very important. Deeds are what we do, whereas fruit is what a vine or tree naturally produces. The Spirit doesn't "do" these things through us. The passage indicates a deeper idea than that. Perhaps A.T. Robertson put it best when he commented on this passage, "It is a beautiful tree of fruit that Paul pictures here with nine luscious fruits on it."³ His "tree" grows in our hearts and bears incredible fruits of "love, joy, peace, etc...". We can be assured that if these fruits are not growing in our lives, we are *not* walking in the Spirit, no matter how dynamic our spiritual lives may seem. Fruit always grows out of the branches, as the branches do from the vine (see Luke 6:43-45). The quality of the fruit is usually a great indicator of the health of the tree. A diseased tree will produce diseased fruit, for it is incapable of producing good fruit. You can polish the outside of the fruit all you want and attempt to beautify the tree, but if the disease is not dealt with, it will all be in vain.

A person walking in the power of their flesh may look like they are truly accomplishing a lot for God. They may use their natural talents and abilities to

do mighty works in God's kingdom, but what does God think of the fruit of their lives? The key lies in what Jesus said, "...apart from Me you can do nothing." (vs. 15:5b). In His eyes, nothing truly valuable can be done apart from Him! He is the only stable "foundation" that we can build upon, as is shown in the following passage:

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

(I Corinthians 3:11-15)

Those who try to live a Christian life apart from a daily, intimate relationship with Christ are much like wax apples. They look beautiful on the outside (in fact, they usually look better than real apples because they are unmarred by bugs, weather, etc...) but are totally devoid of nutrition. The Pharisees were certainly examples of this- they looked great on the outside, gleaming from the "wax" of their religious deeds and appeared untainted by sin. However, they were utterly corrupt inside; although they professed to know God, their hearts were far from

Him. They were full of pride and God was not glorified in them or impressed by them, no matter how many great things they did. Some of them may even have appeared to be very humble, yet the ultimate test of humility is submission to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

True disciples of Jesus Christ are connected to Him in their hearts through the covenant which He established, the New Covenant. The real, beautiful and unique fruits of the Holy Spirit grow abundantly in their hearts, because they are connected to the Vine- Jesus Christ. When we walk in the Holy Spirit, His fruits inevitably grow in us. Throughout our walk with Him in this life, those fruits mature, develop, multiply and glorify our heavenly Father.

Walking in the Spirit is not limited to some sort of intense, "goose-bump" producing mystical experience. Although we all love those experiences with God, we must realize we will all go through many, many days in our lives in which we are simply walking by faith, not tangibly recognizing His Presence and just accepting by faith that He is with us.

We must have a deep trust of the goodness of our Lord so that when we encounter rough times, we are able to rest in Him, knowing well that our precious God knows what He is doing. Contrary to some popular teachings, the Holy Spirit will often lead us into extremely difficult situations and through grueling trials for the purpose of maturing our faith. He also sometimes leads us into "desert" seasons, which are prolonged times in our lives in which everything

seems dry, God seems far away, our prayers seem unanswered and everything seems to go wrong. During these times, we often find ourselves confused and desperate, questioning everything that we believe. But it is at times like these that we are ripe for deliverance by our Lord.

You see, if we follow the desires of our flesh instead of Christ, we would choose the easy way out a great deal of the time. We would seek to avoid all problems and, if we fell into one, would seek earnestly an escape route with little regard for the Will of God. God wants us to be in a perpetual state of utter dependence upon Him, so if our lives have become comfortable to the point where we've begun to neglect Him, He will "shake us up" a bit.

A few years ago, Tara and I were in a situation in which it looked like there was no chance of deliverance. Although I am ashamed to admit it, I had become quite convinced that I was a "man of God", full of faith and strong in my walk with the Lord. I was pretty proud of myself. However, I quickly learned the truth! I was confident when everything was going well, but came apart quickly at the seams when my world seemed to be falling apart. It wasn't faith that I was full of, but presumption. I walked around feeling very sorry for myself and, frankly, was very upset at God. I felt let down, left behind and abandoned by my Lord who had claimed that He would never leave me nor forsake me. Most of my thoughts centered around the questions, "Why? Why is all of this stuff happening to me? Have I not served You, Lord? I've left everything to serve

You! Why are You doing this to me?"

One evening, I felt a strong desire to write an article for our ministry's website⁴. I had not written one in quite a while, but decided to try anyhow. As I was writing, my tears began to flow. I cried out to the Lord something like this, "I still don't understand why I'm going through all of this, but I decide to trust You! I give up my "right" to know why and decide to simply trust You. Please help me!" Something inside of me broke that day as I gave up the 'right' to know why God was doing what He was. I simply accepted that He was in control and that He knew what He was doing.

Shortly after that, our income doubled and we were able to move into our own house, which He enabled us to buy! My precious wife, Tara, had been praying for ten years that God would provide a house for us with a large prayer room that we could set aside for meetings. Guess what? It has that room in it!

Walking in the Spirit is rarely easy, for He often leads us where we don't want to go! In the famous devotional "My Utmost for His Highest", Oswald Chambers wrote, "Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One Who is leading. It is a life of Faith, not of intellect and reason, but a life of knowing Who makes us "go." The root of faith is the knowledge of a Person, and one of the biggest snares is the idea that God is sure to lead us to success."⁵

Our God *is* faithful. He knows our hearts and knows what we need to go through in order to mature. Let's decide to stop fighting against His leading, stop

questioning everything He calls us to do and simply obey- quickly! Just as little children on a road trip trust that their parents are taking them where they said they would, we need to trust God's leading. He really is taking us through this world victoriously and onward to heaven for a glorious eternity with Him.

Obedience is the product of true faith and is the key to walking in the Spirit. Of course, it's scary to follow Him at times, but I'd rather die trying to follow Him than timidly live my life out in comfort! Wouldn't you?

Chapter Seven

Don't Take His Robe Off!

One of the most beautiful and well-known stories in the New Testament is that of the “Prodigal Son”, which is found in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Luke. A foolish son demanded his inheritance from his father and ran away to a far-off country. After he wasted all of the money, he came to his senses while feeding pigs. He realized that even his father's servants at least had decent meals and were well taken care of, so he decided to return to his father and ask to be his servant. However, he totally misjudged his father. Let's join the story at this point:

“...while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the

father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the *best robe* and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it and let us eat together and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'

(Luke 15:20-24a; emphasis mine)

If we were to examine this passage in depth, a whole book could be written about it, but I would like to focus on what the father called the “best robe”. This phrase in the Greek indicates a robe of honor, one that was first-class, the absolute best in the house. Such a robe was often reserved for distinguished guests of honor and not designed for working outdoors.¹ Imagine the son's surprise when instead of becoming his father's slave, he became the guest of honor! Suddenly, all of his authority was restored, which is what the ring signified. He received sandals for his feet, which distinguished him from the servants, for they went about bare-footed. He literally went from the pig pen to the seat of honor as the result of his father's intense love- from starving in a pig pen to feasting in his father's house as the life of the party.

As believers, we are given the "best robe" ever- the robe of Christ's righteousness! As we wear this robe, we are literally shining forth the beauty of His righteousness with every step that we take through life. It's not enough for us only to put it on when we are first saved; rather, we are called to be *continually*

clothed with the "robe" of Christ's righteousness. Our spiritual lives depend on it. Jesus warned us, "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame." (Revelation 16:15). We must stay awake spiritually and keep our robe on.

Since God is perfectly holy, pure and spotless, we must have perfect righteousness in order for us to relate to Him and have fellowship with Him. Perfect righteousness is *not* something attainable, but rather something wearable. Remember what Isaiah said, "...He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness." (Isaiah 61:10)? We, as fleshly creatures, are completely incapable of improving ourselves to the point of acceptance with God; utterly powerless to achieve perfect righteousness through our works. To put it simply, we *must* be clothed by our Savior with His righteousness, for only His righteousness is truly perfect.

Perhaps a definition of righteousness will help us before we proceed any further. To be very simplistic, it means the quality of being just to the point where we relate to God and others in a "right" way, as Jesus perfectly modeled for us. As W. E. Vine put it, "This righteousness is unattainable by obedience to any law, or by any merit of man's own, or any other condition than that of faith in Christ...The man who trusts in Christ becomes the 'righteousness of God in Him' (II Corinthians 5:21, i.e., becomes in Christ all that God requires a man to be, all

that he could never be in himself)."²

Throughout the Bible, righteousness is portrayed as more than merely keeping the Law of God externally. Many people kept the letter of it, but their hearts were far from God. The Pharisees were great examples of this. They had carefully structured their lives around the observance of the Law and religious traditions, but did not recognize their desperate need for a Messiah to save them from sin. In their eyes, they were in a completely different class from the sinners around them; they assumed that God was well pleased with them, for they felt that they were wholly dedicated to Him and His Will. However, Jesus had an entirely different perspective about them- He saw through their outer shells into the dark corruption of their hearts and repeatedly exposed them.

God's purpose for the Law was two-fold: first, it revealed His heart for His children in regards to their hearts *and* behaviors, clearly showing us how God sees things. Secondly, it exposed the inherent sinfulness of *every* person, anyone who truly meditated on His Law day and night (see Psalm 1) came to the inevitable realization that they were in desperate need of a Savior (see Romans 7:7-14).

One of the greatest dangers that people fall into when they are taught that they are no longer under the Law but under grace is that they tend to look at the Law as evil, and forget that the same God who wrote the Law has a great divine purpose in it. This purpose is clearly revealed for us in Galatians 3:19-29

(emphasis mine):

"Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, *until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made*. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! *For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe*. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. *Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor*. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. *For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

Before the cross, mediators such as Moses, the prophets and priests interceded

on the behalf of the Jews and made the Word of God known to them. Although many of these mediators truly walked with God, they were fallible. However, ever since the cross, we no longer have to approach God through other men, but rather through the precious, spotless, infallible Lamb of God. “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.” (I Timothy 2:5-6). The entire book of Hebrews proclaims the awesome truth that Jesus Christ is now our only High Priest; we have no fear of our High Priest failing us, for He is perfect in every way. Not only has He accomplished the unimaginable for us, but He is our perfect Friend, the God we can trust, our all in all.

Thank God that the Law's ultimate intention was not only to reveal God's desires to us or even to expose our sinfulness, but ultimately to lead us to Christ who could give us His new nature! Otherwise, we would be miserably doomed. Although we would still be able to read about how God sees things (and, thus, quickly realize our sinful condition), we would have no hope, for how could we ever fellowship with such an awesome, holy God? We would despair that the gulf between us could not be bridged and perish in hopelessness.

The word for “tutor” in Galatians 3:24 & 25 is the Greek word “παιδαγωγός”, which means a “guardian or tutor of boys...[he] was not the instructor of the child; he exercised a general supervision over him and was responsible for his

moral and physical well-being.”³ A tutor in the Greek and Roman world was responsible for taking care of a child until he reached maturity. Part of his job was to escort the young child to school everyday and to make sure that he was learning his studies. By describing the Law as our childhood guardian, Paul is essentially telling us that the Law's intention was to bring us out of our selfish, childish immaturities and lead us to our true Teacher, Jesus Christ. Our tutor was the Law, it daily escorted us through life, bothering our conscience whenever we strayed away from it and gave us the “boundaries” needed for a godly life.

However, now that we are in the presence of our Master, Jesus Christ, we have left the presence of our old tutor (the Law), for in Christ is everything we need- all sufficiency (Colossians 1:15-20)! Everything that we need we receive by faith from Him as we submit ourselves to His authority. We are only able to learn from Him as His students because of His awesome sacrifice. He reached out to us, drew us near to Him and made us His disciples. We come into His presence by faith and stay there by faith. Should we leave, we would end up going back into the care of our old tutor, the Law- what insane foolishness that would be! It would be the equivalent of returning to our childhood homes as adults and asking our parents to raise us all over again.

The Law was never intended to be something that we pursue. We see this in Romans 9:30-32 (emphasis mine):

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue

righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, *pursuing a law of righteousness*, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.”

We must keep in mind that Paul is referring to Israel in general here, for indeed there were those in Israel who walked by faith (such as Simeon or Anna, who recognized Jesus as the Messiah while He was yet a baby; Luke 2:34-39). Those who sought the Law instead of the God who wrote it ended up idolizing the letter of it and thus, utterly unable to ever truly attain to it. Why? Paul answers that since the Law's intent was to drive them to faith in the God who justifies through the sacrifice of the Messiah, they were unable to ever reach it because they pursued it as though it were by works. Failing to recognize that the Law could not truly be lived out apart from faith, they struggled to fulfill it through their works- a hopeless and vain pursuit, indeed! Sadly, this still happens in many churches today.

The Law is unable to justify us or to produce righteousness in our lives, for it was never intended to do so! Paul emphasized this:

*“...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now **apart from the Law** the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the **righteousness of***

God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”

(Romans 3:20-28; emphasis mine)

We see here that “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight” and that God's righteousness was manifested “apart from the Law”. The Law is good, for God did create it, but it does us no good at all if we forsake the grace of God and put ourselves back under it. God justified us apart from it and He set us free from it! If this wasn't so, our Christian lives would not be one of faith in the Messiah, but rather works and confidence in our flesh.

The righteousness of Christ is received by faith, worn by faith and kept on by faith. We start out with faith in our Messiah and continue on, our faith deepening

as we go through the necessary trials and tribulations which God uses to strengthen it (I Peter 1:6-9). Faith is only as strong as the object in which it's placed. If we have faith in our ability to keep the Law, live good lives, abstain from evil, etc..., our hearts will become cold and hard towards the Lord. He will become to us a Person whom we approach legally, a distant Judge that we attempt to argue our case before. However, genuine faith is *always* placed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, it essentially is the joyful response to the revelation of who He is.

While Jesus walked the earth, He continually crossed the "sacred lines" that the Pharisees had established through their additions to the Law. He ministered to the Jews and the Gentiles, rich and poor, free men and slaves, men and women.⁴ When Jesus died on the cross, He completely destroyed every barrier imaginable. When He gave up His spirit, a horrible darkness came over the entire land and an earthquake shook it violently (Matthew 27:45-54). This affected everyone around, prophetically proclaiming that all barriers between men (in regards to their relationships with God) were done away with! Those not allowed into the Temple because of their ethnic background still experienced the darkness, felt the shaking and saw the dead saints rise (Matthew 27:51-54). Even a Roman centurion (who were well-known as some of the toughest soldiers in the world) exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54, KJV).

The good news of the Gospel transcends all boundaries, it is for everyone.

The shed blood of Jesus can wash away the sins of *anyone* who calls on His name. While on earth, Jesus didn't treat women as less than men, slaves less than free, the poor less than the rich or even the sinner less than the religious teacher. He demonstrated first-hand the awesome truth that "...there is *no* partiality with God." (Romans 2:11; emphasis mine). Perhaps we should say that His awesome robe of righteousness is "one-size-fits-all", with the only stipulation being that it has to be received and donned by faith in Christ alone.

Until Jesus came along, Jewish Rabbis had for many years strongly emphasized the importance of Jewish ancestry, often for good reason- many of them sought to draw the Jewish people back from the paganism of the neighboring nations to the worship of the one true God. However, they focused so much of their attention on the fact that the Jews are God's chosen people, that they often neglected to say much about the multiple promises God made throughout Scripture regarding the other nations of the world.⁵ Paul joyously proclaims that we are all one in Christ Jesus, spiritual descendants of Abraham and heirs according to the promise because of faith (see Galatians 3:28-29).

The link that we have to the inheritance of Abraham is that of being people of faith, people completely dependent upon God to perform His Word. We count on Him and not ourselves in the slightest. The world tells us to "believe in yourself", whereas Scripture tells us to believe in our Lord. We simply cannot believe in Him and in us at the same time, for the Spirit and the flesh are against

each other (see Galatians 5:17). What does it really mean to believe? My simple definition of this Greek word, “πιστεύω” (pisteuo), is "to be utterly convinced of, to trust and rely on whole-heartedly".⁶ As people of faith, the righteousness of Christ is visibly manifested from our hearts out to our actions. By observing our deeds, it is obvious whom we truly believe in, for our faith is seen by our works (see James 2:18).

Notice that the passage above says that we are heirs according to promise. Whose promise? God's! He made the promise (Genesis 17), to which we simply reply to and receive by faith. It is worth noting that when God promises something, it is as good as done. We hear His Word by faith (Romans 10:17), believe it in our hearts and hold onto it for dear life.

Several years ago, I was been preaching through the book of 1st John in our church services. A few weeks ago, while studying 1st John 3:3 in particular, I came across a gem; one which highly excited me and helped me value His righteousness all the more. The verse says, “...everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” While studying the Greek word for “pure”, I found this in one of my favorite commentaries,

“Though marking moral and spiritual purity, and that of a very high grade, since it is applied to Christ here, yet it admits the thought of possible temptation or pollution, thus differing from αγίος (hagios), which means absolutely holy. Hence αγνον (ηαγνον) cannot

properly be applied to God, who is *αγιός* (hagios), but both may be used of Christ, the latter in virtue of His human perfection.”⁷

Do you see it? When it says, “He is pure”, it is using a word that admits the possibility of sin, yet we know that He never sinned at all and is utterly holy (see Hebrews 4:15). I've found that when believers think of Jesus as being without sin, they sometimes think, “Of course! He's God! He couldn't sin!” However, the fact is that Jesus Christ is fully God *and* fully human. This verse emphasizes the reality of His humanity, which excites me! You see, when He was tempted, He was *really* tempted! When He was beaten, He was *really* beaten! He physically went through what we go through (actually, a lot more) and, yet never gave in to sin. I am in awe of such a Savior!

As if it weren't enough that He left heaven to come here, He allowed Himself the possibility of sin- fully experiencing the depths of humanity. He actively resisted temptation day after day. This beautiful truth causes me to value His righteousness all the more, for it reminds me of His awesome sacrifice, not only on the cross, but the daily sacrifice He went through here on earth. That daily dying to self and living to God- Jesus did it first. What a blessed, glorious, awesome truth, “...since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:18)!

With our hearts ablaze with the beauty of His character, we wrap the robe of His righteousness tightly about us and enjoy His presence. We value and treasure

it highly and continuously rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to keep it wrapped tightly about us and walk in it. We are confident that His righteousness:

...is beautiful, for it sparkles with the light of His holiness!

...is complete; there is nothing to be taken from or added to it!

...is highly valuable, for it was bought with His blood!

...is available to *everyone* who calls on His name!

...is able to keep us in perfect, eternal fellowship with God!

Now, perhaps at this point you are thinking of how naive this all sounds. Am I saying that there is no work involved in following Christ, that it's all easy-going relaxing in His robe? *No!* Just as Christ suffered, we are called to suffer as well. Paul once wrote:

"More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the*

dead."

(Philippians 3:8-11; emphasis mine)⁸

However, we are *never* to seek after establishing our own righteousness- that is *not* the suffering we're called to. Rather, our suffering comes from the offense that the world has towards us, from the daily dying to ourselves as well as laying down our lives for others. Our lives are truly no longer our own and, thus, we no longer live for ourselves, but for our gracious Lord:

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

(II Corinthians 5:14-15)

The world system daily tries to get us to take off our robe and engage in abominable sins while the religious legalists try to get us to shed it and make a "better" one under their instruction. Neither sees Christ's robe of righteousness as beautiful. In fact to them it looks foolish, out-of-date; an unnecessary encumbrance which keeps us back from our true potential. But we know better, don't we? I hope so.

Chapter Eight

The Easy Yoke

The early church battled long and hard with various heresies, which greatly influenced early Christian writings; those whom we call the "Church Fathers" wrote and taught a great deal against these heresies. Gnosticism, in particular, was one of the more dangerous heresies, for it appealed to the Christian who wanted to be more spiritual. By its strong emphasis on spiritual knowledge and hatred of anything fleshly, an unsuspecting believer could easily be duped by Gnosticism. One of these Church Fathers, Irenaeus once wrote, "Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself."¹

Gnostics treasured "secret knowledge", which they believed could bring enlightenment and, ultimately, result in salvation. This heresy produced at least two conclusions in the minds of its followers. Some of the Gnostics believed that

whatever the flesh did could not affect the spirit and, thus, one could live any way they wanted. Other Gnostics sought through vigorous denial of their fleshly appetites to purify themselves. As a whole, they denied the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His physical birth, and life and even His resurrection.

The Apostle John seems to have been addressing Gnosticism in particular when he wrote the Epistle that we call 1st John. Since Gnosticism made salvation out to be the result of a long, lifelong acquirement of secret knowledge, John combats it directly with the simple, beautiful truth of the Gospel. Throughout the letter, he draws comparisons between believers and unbelievers, with the intent of clearly showing his audience the differences. Instead of arguing against every fine point of Gnosticism, he plainly and clearly writes the truth, knowing that the lies of the devil cannot stand before the pure light of the Word. Just as the smallest flicker of a candle can illuminate a room, so the Word of God chases away the shadowy teachings of the devil.

The balance between the spiritual and natural is essential for the believer, not in some esoteric sense, but in a practical sense. It is not enough for us only to have great spiritual experiences with our God and yet live ungodly in the "natural" realms of life! For instance, a believer who worships the Lord passionately in church and yet mistreats people in his life in private is a hypocrite. I realize that this is very basic but, for some reason, many "Christians" seem to think they are free to act (and react) in the same way as non-believers. They

suppose that they are doing fine with the Lord because He has been answering their prayers, they've felt His presence in church and so on. However, as John wrote, "...the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the *same* manner as He walked." (1st John 2:6, emphasis mine).

A truly spiritual believer will always have *natural* works of love towards others. Just as a tree bears fruit after its own kind, a believer truly full of the life of God *naturally* bears the fruit of His character. One of the chief evidences of salvation is that of the fruit of the Holy Spirit growing in one's life (see Galatians 5:22-23). In direct opposition to the teachings of the Gnostics, John wrote the following:

“By this we know that we have come to know Him, *if we keep His commandments*. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

(I John 2:3-6; emphasis mine).

"Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one

who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

(1st John 3:7-10; emphasis mine).

Do you see how plain and simple John makes it out to be? To John, the believer practices righteousness; the unbeliever practices sin. Indeed, the simplicity of it may bother us. I know that when I was preaching through the book of 1st John, it sure bothered me! It just seemed too simplistic, too easy; perhaps that's why it bothered me- it didn't seem "deep" enough- it was too good to be true.

We know if we have come to know God not by how much information we may understand nor by how wild our spiritual lives may be, but by whether or not we keep His commandments. A child of God is like his Father, for he's a "chip off the old block", so to speak. Because he has been made a new creation in Christ, he ends up *naturally* keeping his Father's commandments. The spiritual "DNA" that is in him results in a life of righteousness. Now, this may not be instantly obvious, for we are all in various stages of growth in our Christian lives.

But, ultimately, our "DNA" results in an ever-increasing life of righteousness. As we grow, our attitudes, words and deeds mirror those of Jesus Christ and we truly begin to walk as He walked. We become like Him or as John wrote in his letter, "...as He is, so also are we in this world." (1st John 4:17).

Let me point out something very important here. The Greek for "he cannot sin" in 1st John 3:9 actually means that he cannot continue to practice sin. That is, someone who really is a believer is not able to continue on in sin because the Holy Spirit works it out of him sometime during his Christian growth. Before I realized that, I was very discouraged by this verse, for I took it to mean that anyone who sinned at all was not a Christian. Instead, a true believer finds himself unable to continue on in sin indefinitely; indeed, the Holy Spirit simply will not let him go. The Spirit will trouble his conscience and convict him until he is desperate to get rid of his sin. If that doesn't work, his sin will be exposed by the Spirit to others so that they may help him get free (see Ephesians 5:11-13 & Galatians 6:1).

Again and again, John makes the point throughout his writings that the visible result of being born again is a righteous life. I bring this point up for this reason- many believers consider themselves as righteous in God's eyes because of Christ, but free to live however they choose. What they fail to realize, however, is that the righteousness of Christ results in practical, demonstrable works. Those who say they are believers but do not keep His commandments are liars- they are even

deceiving themselves! They may think they have His "robe" of righteousness on, but if there is no external proof of godliness in their lives, they are sadly mistaken.

The righteousness of Christ is not *merely* a positional truth, one that guarantees us an accepted position in the eyes of God. It also is very experiential and practical! True righteousness always proves itself out in the spiritual *and* in the natural realms. A godly person leads a godly life, both publicly and privately. Righteousness is the result and evidence of a life changed by the Holy Spirit. Christ lived righteously in the eyes of His Father *and* people; as His disciples, we are called to do so as well.

Religion sees righteousness as good deeds done out of duty, whereas God sees it as a His pure life shining forth from a heart in dependent submission to Him. True righteousness is freeing, for it so fills us with peace that we no longer yearn for that which is forbidden to us. The very commandments of the Bible are a delight rather than burdensome to us (see 1st John 5:2-3); we realize that the boundaries that they set for us are for our own benefit.

Religion is always burdensome! Utterly without power to change lives and inspire love for God, it weighs people down beneath its load of "dos" and "don'ts". The Pharisees were experts at burdening people; Jesus said of them, "...they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger." (Matthew

23:4). With those words, He exposed their hearts! They had no desire to see people living in a beautiful relationship with their Creator, but rather only wanted to burden them down. Why? Jesus exposed that next, "...they do all their deeds to be noticed by men." (Matthew 23:5a). By burdening others down, they stood out in stark contrast, for they appeared to have their lives in order- not that they appeared that way in God's sight, of course.

Jesus uttered the following, incredible offer:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

(Matthew 11:28-30).

His appeal was to those who are "weary and heavy-laden", those suffering under the weight of legalism. Those who were burdened down by the loads of the rules, regulations and traditions that the Pharisees preached were welcomed by Jesus for one main purpose- to find rest in Him! The word for rest here, "ἀναπαύω" (anapauo) doesn't merely mean cessation from work, but rather involves the idea of soothing refreshment.² Compared to the Pharisees, Jesus' offer certainly is refreshing! Instead of promising a new set of restrictions, He offered abundant life (John 10:10), a life of freedom towards God and one another.³ Of course, our freedom was not given to us that we may indulge our

flesh, but that we would glorify God in everything (see I Corinthians 6:20, Galatians 5:13 & I Peter 2:12, 4:16).

What does it mean to have His yoke upon us, to be yoked together with Him? Jewish Rabbinical teachings (especially during the inter-Testamentary period) often referred to keeping of the Law of God as bearing a yoke, for it described being under the weight of something. Thus, Jesus was comparing His teachings with those of the Pharisees; offering rest to those who would obey Him, for His teaching was "easy" and "light". Interesting words for Him to choose for His yoke sure doesn't seem easy and His burden light, does it? Why would He choose such words? The Greek word for "easy" here is "χρηστος", which means "...good, virtuous, mild, and pleasant...a suitable rendering would be "kindly". The word for "light" is "ελαφρός", which means "light in weight, easy to bear".⁴ By taking His yoke upon us, we submit ourselves to Him and, thus, become His disciples. In doing so, we find that those words aptly describe our relationship with Him. To the degree that we are truly submitted in our hearts, we find being with Him to be "good, pleasant, easy to bear, etc...". Being Christ's disciple is the most pleasant, restful calling imaginable.

To take on Christ's yoke is to be in radical submission to Him in every area of our lives. We are no longer our own: we've been bought with a price (see I Corinthians 6:20 & 7:23) and, therefore, have no right to take on any other yoke but His. Every other yoke besides Christ's is burdensome, heavy and difficult to

bear because we are only empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear His yoke. The Holy Spirit will never empower us to live under religious bondage; if He did, He would certainly not be glorifying Christ, (which, again, is His chief objective). To be under any other yoke is to be in bondage. This is why Paul warned the Galatians, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1). It sounds so simple, but how often do we forget that He set us free for the purpose of freedom! To hear some Christians talk, one may think that being a Christian is very burdensome, a dreadful responsibility and a life of boredom.

We obey Christ because we love Him and, as a result, truly enjoy being in submission to His Will; we delight in following His commandments, which is true evidence of the life-changing love of the Spirit flowing in us (see John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1st John 5:2-3). Because we have tasted of His goodness and are convinced of His good Will towards us, we find it easy, restful and enjoyable to be yoked together with Him. As we go throughout life, we find that we are never alone. He goes through life with us- through good and bad times, problems and victories. Whereas we used to only have the cold, dry, dull rules of religion to guide us, we now have the awesome, all-consuming Spirit of the living God to lead, comfort and protect us.

The yoke we are under greatly affects how we approach our Lord. Those with a yoke of religion on their shoulders find that their relationship with God is very

much like a yo-yo, continually going up-and-down. However, those with the yoke of Christ are stable in their relationship with God. Instead of feeling always burdened by the expectations of a Christian life, they find themselves growing in love and gratitude for Him. Instead of going up-and-down, they find themselves moving forward, taking ground from the enemy through the power of the Spirit. As they look back on their past, they clearly see the incredible work of the Holy Spirit, for they no longer even resemble who they once were. Sins that once seemed impossible to overcome now do not even appeal to them. With each trial, they mature more and more in the Lord.

In North Carolina, we have a great problem with mosquitoes during the summer and some of them have been found to be carriers of the dreaded West Nile Virus. We have to continually be certain that we do not have any areas in our yards in which there is stagnant water in order to prevent mosquitoes from laying their eggs there. Water is a wonderful thing, but if it stops moving, it begins to attract bugs and even stinks. Moving water is always cleaner water. In the same way, believers who release what God has given them continually get filled up by His Spirit, for there is room in them for filling. Believers who store up all that God gives them and refuse to give out to others end up becoming stagnant and, eventually, stink!

Likewise, a tree grows fruit not for its own sake, but that it may bring nourishment to others. Thank God that an apple tree does not eat its own fruit but

leaves it for us to enjoy! Remember that whatever God has given you is not for the sake of storage, but rather for you to minister out to others. If you are truly walking under the yoke of Christ, you delight in serving others lovingly. Instead of being a "stagnant pool" or a "selfish tree", rivers of living water flow out of your soul and the fruit you bear nourishes those around you.

Who is bearing your burden? Are you struggling with it yourself? Are you binding yourself to the letter of the Law, which is powerless to change you? Or are you yoked with its Author, the only One whose words carry the power to change your life? As Psalm 68:19 says, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, the God who is our salvation." God is willing to be yoked with us; this has always been His intention. From the beginning of creation, He has desired fellowship with us. He created us in His image; although sin has dreadfully marred us, He spilled the blood of His precious, only-begotten Son to redeem us. He is willing to bear our burdens daily, but we must *let* Him. And that we can never do as long as we're yoked to anyone or anything but Him.

Chapter Nine

Gospel Means Good News!

These days, it is increasingly difficult to find any mention of good news anywhere. Virtually all forms of the media make most of their money from what's called "shock value", which often is news of a negative nature. Murders, robberies, rapes, corruption and many other horrendous sins are continually reported on, resulting in the desensitizing of the average viewer. Whenever something really awful happens, the media has a hey-day reporting it. Of course, they do often report good things as well, but it is commonly known that bad news sells better.

Sadly, bad things that happen in the Church often hit the news. People have become used to hearing about mis-handling of church funds, pastors getting caught in some sort of sin, etc... Many people who used to go to church have left because they were not treated well; some have been treated poorly for the way they look or dress, others for their low status in life and still others for their sins. Instead of reaching out in love, patiently helping sinners to get free of their sins through the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit, "believers" have all too often

pushed the sinners out the door of their churches. Somewhere in all of this, the message that the gospel is about "good news" has been lost.

It is highly significant that the Greek word for gospel, "εὐαγγέλιον" (euangelion), literally means "glad tidings, good or joyful news".¹ How often do we forget this? Is the Christian life to us one of drudgery, discontent and disillusionment? Is it one of disappointment and heavy burdens? Or is it great? Is our Christian life joyous, exciting, full of the Spirit's activity? The answer to those questions will expose to us what we truly believe. Obviously, those who hear good news are excited by it and love to share it with others. Skeptics of such news merely dissect it and discount it, trying desperately to show why "it can't be so" or why "it doesn't have anything to do with me". The Gospel of Jesus Christ is, at its very core and heart, good news. This is universally so, for it brings news of hope for everyone. It exposes and unwraps the beauty of the greatest mystery ever: that a gracious, holy God would love mankind so much that He would become one of us, subject Himself to temptations, misunderstandings, betrayals, persecution and even death at our hands. That He would endure such violence, torture and death for a Mankind that was completely unworthy is beyond our comprehension. It can only be received by faith, for faith alone can connect us to such a glorious mystery; only its simplicity can grab hold of the nail-scarred hand extended to us.

Have we forgotten the good news, the glory of the mystery of the Gospel?

Having appreciated its beauty at one time, is it now cast to the "back burner" of our minds, relegated to some dust-filled corner of our early Christian experience? Are we no longer passionate about the Truth? Are we so busy arguing about various doctrines and the things that meaninglessly divide the body of Christ that we have completely forgotten the good news? Is the Gospel to us a new rule for our lives or is it truly the life-saving message that God has set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2)? No longer do we have to stand in His presence in the rags of our own righteousness but in His glorious blood-washed royal robes! Instead of seeing our sins, God sees the purity of Christ; the sacrificial obedience of His holy, undefiled Son!

Do you see His goodness? Are you convinced of His glory? Do you see how good this news truly is? There is none greater. Not only are we no longer under the Law (indeed, we are dead to it- see Galatians 2:19-20 & Romans 7:4), but alive to God. Alive to God and able to fellowship in His pure light. Alive spiritually; once lost, but now found; once dead, but now alive; once angry and bitter, now full of joy; once legalistic, now set free; once serving out of obligation, now serving out of love!

Those who love God find His commandments to be life: exciting tastes of the holiness of God able to be sampled and enjoyed by His born-again children. Rather than viewing them as stifling rules, they *delight* in following His commands. Again, remember what John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that

we keep His commandments; and *His commandments are not burdensome.*" (I John 5:3; emphasis mine). And Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever...He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." (John 14:15-16, 21). His Word is life to us rather than death. When we keep His commandments, we do so by the power of the Holy Spirit and prove that the love of God has indeed set us free.

I have heard many Christians moan and groan about how hard the Christian life is. Indeed, I myself at times feel sorry for myself and mope about how hard everything is; at times, it seems like it would be so much easier to live as a pagan-for then I could do whatever my flesh desired. Asaph, who was a Levite and a seer², once lamented:

"Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning."

(Psalm 73:12-14)

Have you ever felt that way? As though the wicked, those utterly unconcerned with living holy lives, could do whatever they want and get away with it? Asaph felt that way. It seemed to him that the wicked were always at ease, never

troubled in any way, prospering in their wickedness. However, instead of letting himself get dragged into a "downward spiral" of bitterness, he chose to focus on God. The psalm goes on:

"If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children. When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight *Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end.* Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction."

(Psalm 73:15-18; emphasis mine)

Asaph chose to not speak out of the bitterness of his heart, knowing that it would drag others down as well. In the midst of his troubles, he decided to go to the sanctuary of God. There his vision was cleared by the presence of God and he saw the end of the wicked. No longer did he envy their condition because he clearly saw their destination. What looked so appealing to him faded into the shadows as he directed his attention back to God! A cry of love sprung from his heart:

"When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand.

With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire

nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

(Psalm 73:21-26; emphasis mine)

When he was bitter, he was like a beast before God; led by his emotions, fleshly desires and reacting instinctively to the physical world around him. However, God took him by his right hand, pulling him out of his despair. He revealed to Asaph the end of the wicked and, perhaps more importantly- his own end. Suddenly, he saw God as His guide on earth and the One who would take him to heaven. All of his fleshly desires suddenly did not matter anymore- God became the only One he desired. Just like Job and Habakkuk, he realized that God is all that matters (see Job 1 & 2 and Habakkuk 3:17-19).

The Gospel is a message...no, *the* message of hope. There is no substitute, no catchy way of saying it, no new revelation that supersedes it. This message of hope is for all who will receive and believe it; but first, **we** must believe it. How can we pass it on as good news if we don't really see it as such ourselves? We must lay down all our claims to our own righteousness, all our accomplishments and victories, all that we take pride in and proclaim it in its beautiful simplicity- that Christ is all that really matters, all of life is intended to enjoy and glorify Him.

In America, a great emphasis has been placed upon the importance of morals in the last few years. Deeply concerned about the rise of ungodliness and outright

perversity, preachers and politicians across this nation have been calling out for people to return to the values that helped birth and frame America. While these cries for change are necessary, I have noticed that much of what is said has focused a great deal of attention on outward deeds, but very little on the heart.

The idea that has been proclaimed is, "if we clean up our 'act, then the judgment of God will be averted". Now, of course, I am very much troubled about the sin that is destroying our nation, but am also very concerned at what is being presented as Christianity to a lost and dying world. You see, merely improving the morality of people and the moral "climate" of our nation is *not* what Christianity is all about. Even if we succeed in changing the outward actions of others, if they aren't broken-heartedly turning to Jesus, it is all in vain. Christianity is about transformation of the heart! True holiness produced in the heart by the power of God produces true morality.

The Gospel is nothing to be ashamed of, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16b). It does not promise us an easy, luxurious life. If anything, it guarantees the opposite (see John 15:20). There are genuine trials and tribulations in the life of every true believer, but the good news is that our Savior has truly "overcome the world" (John 16:33) and made us "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). Paul knew this well- if anyone has ever suffered for the Gospel, he surely did! And today as well, thousands of believers around the world who are persecuted for their faith know the truth of his

statement:

"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and *hope does not disappoint*, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

(Romans 5:3-5; emphasis mine).

Hope does not disappoint, at least not true hope. You see, hope is not merely wishful thinking, but actually "favorable and confident expectation...It has to do with the unseen and the future."³ In Scripture, hope that comes from God never disappoints because the God who gives it is faithful to keep His Word. No matter what things may look like, we can be sure that He will fulfill His Word! Our God is faithful and trustworthy. We really *can* count on Him.

As with any good news, the hearers of it must believe in order for it to do them any good (see Hebrews 4:2). Nobody will dare to receive the Gospel as truth and cast their lives on its claims if they are unsure that its messengers are telling the truth. No one will listen to us whatsoever if our lives do not clearly testify to the truth of our message. If we say that the Gospel is good news and yet walk around with miserable scowls on our faces, then why should anyone believe us? We must have a deep conviction that God's news is great. We must experientially know and taste His goodness ourselves (see Psalm 34:8). Then, we must

proclaim this goodness to everyone without any reservation. We must obey what Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16). If our light is shining as it ought, our good works will glorify our Father in heaven instead of us. People will be drawn to our precious Lord and want to know more about Him.

Christianity is about one thing- the good news of Jesus Christ. In all of history, no tidings have ever been so good. As believers, we have been entrusted with this message and, thus, must proclaim it loud and clear. We must first whole-heartedly believe it and then boldly share it with the world. Its message has been entrusted to us; we are now ambassadors of our King:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who *reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation*, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

(II Corinthians 5:17-21; emphasis mine)

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the Gospel to you once again, as the Good News it really is. Ask Him to overwhelm you with the powerful truths of His word. Repent of your self-reliance and ask Him to direct your path. Throw yourself entirely into His arms, entrusting Him with all of you. God has promised that, "...the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day." (Proverbs 4:18). In His care, we will shine brighter and brighter until we meet our Lord! Others will be drawn to our glorious King and our lives **will** make a difference!

Prologue

Maybe it's because I'm a bit of a perfectionist, but it is always hard for me to actually send off my manuscripts. There's always something else that could have been written, something that could have been put a bit differently, something that should have been clarified or re-worded. However, I am going to listen to the message of my book and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than my wording, to change your heart.

As I mentioned earlier, God burned this message into my heart through numerous trials, problems and testings. I didn't learn any of the truths I've shared easily, for I am more stubborn than a donkey! God has literally put me through a lot of fire to get me to stop relying on myself and to rest in Him. As quite a work-a-holic, rest has been one of the most difficult things for me to learn how to "do".

I urge you to seek the Lord about anything that may be unclear in this book. Most of what I have learned, I fought against passionately in my mind for many years. I firmly believe that the Lord had me write this in order to pass on the freedom that He's given me to other people. Christianity used to be boring to me, but now it's exciting! I used to dread praying, but now I look forward to it. God

truly has done something in me and I hope and pray that He will light your heart with the same fire- only hotter. May He encourage and strengthen you!

If you don't have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, it's not too late! Your life can be transformed today! All you need to do is first "count the cost"- that is, realize that entering into covenantal relationship with God is not a flippant decision, but a handing-over of your entire life, all that you are. Broken-heartedly acknowledge your sin and cry out to Jesus Christ to be your Savior! Receive Him by faith as your Savior and Lord, ask His Holy Spirit to fill you and to lead you to a great church. You will never be the same!

For those who are already Christians, let me give you a few basic lessons that I've learned from my favorite Teacher, the Holy Spirit:

1. Never trust yourself! If you no longer fall prey to certain sins, praise God for the victories, but always remain sober-minded (I Peter 1:13-19 & 5:8), recognizing that you can and will fall again if you get your eyes off of Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-13).
2. Resist the urge to brag (I Corinthians 4:6 & 5:7) about your spiritual victories, it only magnifies and glorifies your flesh rather than God and opens the door to the devil (I Peter 5:8).
3. Daily spend time with the Lord, reading His Word, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you (Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2); God can do more in your life in one short hour than you can do in years of human effort at

correcting yourself!

4. While praying and reading the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart (Romans 8:26-27, I Thessalonians 2:4)*, recognizing that He alone truly knows the condition of our hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). Trust His conviction and repent. Receive His forgiveness by faith (Micah 7:19 & I John 1:8-10).
5. Pray with passion (James 5:16-18)! Boldly approach His throne, seeking His mercy and grace! (Hebrews 4:16) He does hear you!

Rest assured that, no matter what things may seem like in your life, if you are relying on the Lord, He *will* help you grow in Him. He loves you passionately and desires a great relationship with you- even more than you want one with Him.

Please do not hesitate to contact us, we would love to hear from you. No one in the body of Christ needs to go through anything alone, so please let us know if you need counsel, encouragement or prayer.

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Endnotes

Chapter Two

¹ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible; (excerpt taken from his commentary on Galatians 4:19-20)

Chapter Three

¹ "The Ante-Nicene Fathers- Translations of The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325" by The Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D.,) and James Donaldson, Editors LL.D., American Reprint of the Edinburgh Edition by A. Cleveland Coxe, D.D. T&T Clark Edinburgh (1884); (excerpt taken from the ebook edition pages 288-289)

² The New Analytical Greek Lexicon by Wesley J. Perschbacher (Editor); Peabody, Massachusetts © 1990 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. (excerpt taken from the definition on page 63 for "ἀφοράω".

³ Basically, this is the dualistic belief that Taoism propagates. To put it simply, it is the belief that in all light there is some darkness and in all darkness there is some light. The harmony between the two result in physical, emotional and spiritual equilibrium; thus, this harmony is pursued through various metaphysical and physiological choices and activities.

⁴ "Pilgrim's Progress" by John Bunyan (aka. "The Pilgrim's Progress From This World to That Which Is To Come; Delivered Under the Similtude of a Dream.") 1853 Buffalo, NY Geo. H. Derby and Company; (excerpt taken from "The Ninth Stage", ebook edition pages 244-245)

⁵ "The God of All Comfort" by Hanah Whitall Smith (1832-1911) Grand Rapids: ebook encoded by Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999-11-27, v1.0, URL http://www.ccel.org/smith_hw/comfort.htm (excerpt taken from page 27)

Chapter Four

¹ "Vincent's Word Studies" by Marvin R. Vincent (Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature at Union Theological Seminary), New York, October 1886; (excerpt

taken from his commentary on Matthew 27:51)

² Although the terminology may vary in the Bible regarding this, the truth remains that Christ saved us, is saving us and will save us. Of course, His work was done **once** and was completely sufficient- I do not mean to imply that He is continually re-doing it. Rather, the Holy Spirit is appropriating His work in our lives, His presence daily transforming, molding and changing us. When Jesus Christ comes again, we will be completely changed- fully "saved" from this world. Read the following Scriptures for clarification. **SAVED:** Mark 16:16; John 3:16-17, 5:31, 10:9; Romans 10:9-13; I Cor. 9:18; II Cor. 2:15; Eph. 2:5-10; I Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5. **IS SAVING US:** John 14-16; Romans 12:2; II Cor. 3:18; II Tim. 4:18; Jude 1:24. **WILL SAVE US:** Mat. 10:22, 24:13; Mark 13:13; Acts 15:11; Romans 5:9-10; I Cor. 3:15; Phil. 3:20-21; Rev. 21:7. There are probably *many* other Scriptures that I forgot to include.

³"Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine; Old Tappan, NJ; © 1966 by the Fleming H. Revell Company

⁴ "Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary on the Whole Bible" by Rev. Robert Jamieson, Rev. A. R. Fausset & Rev. David Brown; Grand Rapids, Michigan; © 1961 by The Zondervan Company; (excerpt taken from the commentary on Luke 15:22-23; emphasis and brackets mine)

Chapter Five

¹ "The Lost Secret of the New Covenant" by Malcolm Smith; Tulsa, Oklahoma; © 2002 by Harrison House, Inc.; (excerpt taken from page 190)

²"Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ 1966

³ Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entries for Shuwbah and Nocham" and "The Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon"; (Public Domain)

⁴ "Wesley's Notes on the Bible" a derivative of an electronic version, Copyright 1997, by Sulu D. Kelley; (excerpt taken from the commentary on Luke 7:30, for more information visit the site at <http://www.gospelcom.net/eword/comments/luke/wesley/luke7.htm>)

⁵ Series on the Book of James "Part Two- Overcoming Temptations" by Rev. James M. Schorr © 11/3/2002; (you can download or listen to the streaming audio of the sermon at <http://www.torchministries.org/sermons.html>; excerpt is found

approx. 26 minutes into the sermon).

⁶ The New Analytical Greek Lexicon by Wesley J. Perschbacher (Editor); Peabody, Massachusetts © 1990 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. (excerpt taken from the definition on page 259 for "λογιζομαι".

⁷ "Commentary On the Book of Galatians" by Martin Luther, translated into English by Theodore Graebner; St. Louis, Missouri © 2000 by eBookMall, Inc.; St. Louis, Missouri; (excerpt taken from the Introduction to Chapter 3 of the ebook edition)

⁸ "Commentary On the Book of Galatians" by Martin Luther, translated into English by Theodore Graebner; St. Louis, Missouri © 2000 by eBookMall, Inc.; St. Louis, Missouri; (excerpt taken from page 391 of the ebook edition)

⁹ "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ 1966; (excerpt taken from the definition for "προλαμβανω")

¹⁰ "The New Analytical Greek Lexicon" by Wesley J. Perschbacher (Editor); Peabody, Massachusetts © 1990 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; (excerpt taken from the definition on page 259 for "προλαμβανω")

¹¹ "The Deeper Christian Life" by Andrew Murray; © 1895 by the Fleming H. Revell Company (eBook version, ".lit" format); (excerpt taken from page 34)

Chapter Six

¹ "The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words"; Nashville, Tennessee; © 1996 by Thomas Nelson Publishers; (excerpt taken, though somewhat paraphrased, from the definition for "επιθυμια", definition #1939)

² "The Greek New Testament"; Stuttgart, Germany; © 1998 by Biblia-Druck, D-Stuttgart; (excerpt taken from page 650, Galatians 5:16)

³ "Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament"; A.T. Robertson, A.M., D.D., LL. D., Litt.D.; © 1932 & 1933 by Broadman Press

⁴ The article I'm referring to here is named "Simply Trust" and can be found at

our ministry website: <http://www.torchministries.org>.

⁵ "My Utmost for His Highest" by Oswald Chambers. Devotional for March 20th.

Chapter Seven

¹ Smith, William, Dr. "Entry for 'Dress'". "Smith's Bible Dictionary". URL is at: <<http://www.biblestudytools.net/Dictionaries/SmithsBibleDictionary/smt.cgi?number=T1233>>. 1901.

² "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ 1966; (excerpt taken from the definition for "Righteousness", "δικαιοσυνη")

³ "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ 1966; (excerpt taken from the definition for "Instructor", "παιδαγωγος")

⁴ See Matthew 8:13, 15:21-28, 19:16-30, 26:51; John 4:4-42.

⁵ Of course, there are certainly many promises throughout the Bible that were given specifically to Jews. Gentiles in Christ are now entitled to these as well, however, since they have been grafted into Israel (see Romans 11:17). I am certainly *not* an advocate of "Replacement Theology" in the slightest. In regards to some of the promises God made concerning the nations of the world, see Jeremiah 3:17-18, Ezekiel 38:23, Micah 4:2, Haggai 2:7, Zechariah 2:10-12, 8:22-23, 14:6 and Malachi 3:12.

⁶ "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ 1966; (excerpt taken from the definition for "to believe", "πιστευω")

⁷ "Vincent's Word Studies" by Marvin R. Vincent (Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature at Union Theological Seminary), New York, October 1886; (excerpt taken from his commentary on I John 3:3; English pronunciation mine).

Chapter Eight

¹ "Against Heresies" by Irenaeus; Book 1 Point 2 in the Preface

² "The New Analytical Greek Lexicon" by Wesley J. Perschbacher (Editor); Peabody, Massachusetts © 1990 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; (excerpt taken from the definition on page 24 for "αναπαυω").

³ It must be pointed out that He first exposed the utter impossibility of truly living a godly life apart from His Spirit. Jesus revealed that the keeping of the Law was much more about the heart than merely outward conformity (see Matthew 5).

⁴ "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ 1966; (excerpts taken from the definition for "Easy", "χρηστος" and "Light", "ελαφος").

Chapter Nine

¹ "The New Analytical Greek Lexicon" by Wesley J. Perschbacher (Editor); Peabody, Massachusetts © 1990 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; (excerpt taken from the definition on page 178 for "ευαγγελιον").

² See I Chronicles 6:39 and II Chronicles 29:30; he wrote Psalm 50 and Psalms 73-83.

³ "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ 1966; (excerpts taken from the definition for "Hope", "ελπις").

Note: Some of the quotes are from ebook editions, which you can find at <http://www.ccel.org>. All quotes from ebooks are referenced as such.