

***LIVING IN THE  
GARDEN OF GRACE***

David Kuykendall

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## PREFACE

*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord,  
so walk in Him ... Colossians 2:6*

Since we received Christ Jesus our Lord by grace through faith, the message of Colossians 2:6 is that we live out our lives by grace through faith.

Yet many believers testify that their walk in the Christian life has been better described by the Apostle Paul's penetrating question to the Galatian believers:

*Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made  
perfect by the flesh? Galatians 3:3*

Paul's concern for the Galatians was prompted by some among them who were teaching one is to live by keeping the law—not by walking in the Spirit. Paul taught the Galatians just the opposite—they were to walk in the Spirit without seeking to keep the law.

In Galatians 5:4b Paul describes in a different way the Galatians' change from walking in the Spirit. He writes:

*... you have fallen from grace.*

Rejecting the life of walking in the Spirit is to fall from grace. This does not mean losing our salvation. It does mean missing out on the abundant life that Jesus came to make possible.

Many believers today admit they have fallen from grace. They have reduced their walk with God to nothing more than the keeping of commands.

Many have confessed their inability to have victory over sins in their lives. They admit failure in Christian service and a sense of being second-rate believers.

*Living in the Garden of Grace* seeks to promote what the title suggests—living by grace through faith just as we

were saved by grace through faith.

*Living in the Garden of Grace* is a companion book to our *Living By Grace*—which was the first 52 devotionals placed on our Web Site in book form. *Living in the Garden of Grace* contains over devotionals placed on our Web Site.

*Living in the Garden of Grace* has been chosen for the title because the word “garden” always brings to mind thoughts of nourishment and beauty. The same is true of grace—from which we never have to depart. The truths of God’s word always bring spiritual nourishment. The message of grace—God at work in our lives— is a beautiful message. Consider the words of the Psalmist:

*... let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, And establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands. Psalm 90:17*

I owe a special word of appreciation to Joe W. Howington who suggested the idea of writing a series of devotionals for our ministry’s Web Site that would result in materials for a book. Also, I express gratitude to Mr. Howington, Janie Kuykendall, Jerry Halbrook, and John Belken who read the manuscript of *Living By Grace* and encouraged me to have it printed in book form.

Also, I am indebted to the following for editing the devotionals before I placed them on the Internet: Joe and Joy Howington, Dan Barry, and Janie Kuykendall. And my many thanks to Joe Howington, John Belken, John Barber, Randall Foster, and Janie Kuykendall who aided in the final editing for this work.

I am deeply grateful for Dr. Joe Mosley editing the manuscript and writing the Foreword. We have used materials from his Foreword on the back cover to introduce the book.

David Kuykendall

## FOREWORD

The young pastor's little one year old daughter was in Parkland Children's Hospital in Dallas, Texas. A "freak" accident had caused a serious head injury. At the hospital I learned that she had improved. I was relieved. I had never seen this little one in person, just a proud parent's photo. I peered over the sides of the specially designed bed and was stunned. This was the most beautiful little girl I can recall ever seeing. Words fail an accurate picture. Then I was captivated by her smile—at me, a stranger—but equally memorable are her bright eyes that reached out in acceptance. For a moment, I felt special. I mumbled some kind of response to her parents. They gave me sort of a "we understand" nod, like, "she seems to affect everyone like that."

Her name is Grace.

I put that tiny infant's capacity to warm the hearts of all who encountered her with David Kuykendall's definition of God's Grace. "The Grace of God is everything God is—moving freely toward you, to meet your every need."

Where I would not attempt to describe the impact of the visage of a tiny innocent girl, David Kuykendall finds, in scripture, God's Grace to be a trove for endless descriptions and applications to the Christian life.

In personal conversation he calls this second work "an update." What a common term, but perfectly accurate. The daily news in print and by electronic means is an 'update' on "what's new?" This extension of his earlier book *Living By Grace* is Kuykendall's "daily 'digs'" into the Word of God, and he is carefully laying before our eyes new insights into the wonders of God's Grace.

You will be captivated as you read "*Living in the Garden of Grace.*"

Dr. Joe Mosley

## INTRODUCTION

*Living in the Garden of Grace* is about freedom—freedom from legalism, freedom from failure and fruitlessness, freedom from the power of sin, and freedom from worldliness.

*Living in the Garden of Grace* is about the power of God at work in our lives—power for victory over sin and failure, power in Christian service, and power for fruitfulness. It is about experiencing the abundant life. It is about being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Living by grace is living out the new-creation-life. It is putting off the old man and putting on the new man. It is living out our “union” or “oneness” with Christ. It is living out the “law of the Spirit.” It is experiencing crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. It is living “the exchanged life.”

Throughout the book we use these several descriptive terms to refer to the concept of living by grace.

The first six devotionals set forth the theology of living by grace. Devotionals seven and eight express how we live by grace. The remaining ones describe the life of grace and the blessings that result from it.

Because the truths of the first eight devotionals are basic to living by grace, throughout the book we revisit their content again and again.

I suggest devotionals one through eight be read first—in the order they are placed in the book. The order in which the remaining devotionals are read is not important.

David Kuykendall

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## **WHAT IS LIVING BY GRACE?**

*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:14*

What does the Apostle mean by the term “under grace?”

One answer involves an understanding of what it means to be “under law.” On the occasion of their receiving the law, three times the Israelites said, “What God has said we will do.” With that commitment the Israelites were under law. They vowed to keep the commandments in their own strength.

So, in light of Romans 6:14, being under grace is freedom from a commitment to keep the commands of God in one’s own strength.

The meaning of “under grace” is revealed in reading chapters five through eight of Romans. The life that Paul describes in chapters five and six as being the life of grace he describes in chapter eight as “walking in the Spirit.” Being under grace is walking in the Spirit.

We were saved by grace through faith. We trusted—God saved. Being “under grace” means: we trust—God provides.

To be “under grace” is to live out our “in Christ” position by experiencing our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

To be “under grace” is to put off the old man and put on the new man by experiencing crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

To be “under grace” is to experience the new-creation life when old things pass away and all things become new.

To be “under grace” is to live out the exchanged life.

To be “under grace” is to live out “the law of the Spirit.”

In light of the New Testament expressions about life “under grace, consider the following:

*The grace of God is everything God is—moving freely toward you to meet your every need.*

Under that all-sufficient umbrella of grace we may live.

### **POSSIBILITY OF GRACE-LIVING PICTURED IN ADAM**

If we are to understand how to place ourselves under grace, we must begin with a study of Romans 5:12-14. Here Paul writes:

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ... death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.*

Follow the passage. One man, Adam, the head of the human race, infected the entire human race with sin. He did so because he first infected himself. Think of “sin” as a sin nature. When we were born into the race of Adam, we inherited a sin nature.

Paul follows with the same reasoning about death. Because we have been born into the race of Adam, we have his death problem. We were all born dying.

Having established the truth that Adam is the head of the human race and infected it with his own problems, Paul expresses a most basic truth about Jesus. At the end of Romans 5:14 he declares Adam to be:

*... a type of Him who was to come.*

There is something about Adam that is a picture of Jesus. Putting this statement in context, you see Paul wants us to understand two things:

First, he wants us to look upon Jesus as head of a race just as Adam is the head of a race. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul names Jesus “the last Adam.”

Second, he wants us to understand that just as things true of Adam became true of us when we entered his race, *things true of Jesus become true of us when we entered His race.*

In Romans 6:3a Paul writes that we were baptized into Jesus. In Romans 6:3b-5 he explains that we were crucified, buried, and resurrected when we were baptized into Jesus. Understanding our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection is crucial to living by grace.

#### **THE BELIEVER’S BAPTISM INTO JESUS**

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*

Romans 6:3

Over and over the New Testament expresses that believers are “in Jesus.” The expression “in Jesus” and its equivalents—“in Him,” “in Whom,” “in Christ Jesus,” etc. are used more often in the New Testament to describe our salvation than any of the other terms: justification, redemption, sanctification, etc.

Our baptism into Jesus was a work of the Holy Spirit. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13a.

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...*

Paul declares Christ is one body and the Holy Spirit baptized us into that one body.

Paul follows his statement about our baptism into Jesus with expressions of the consequences of that baptism.

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death ... if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection ... Romans 6:3-5*

We were baptized into the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Now we see the significance of the statement of Romans 5:14 that Adam is a type of Jesus. We can sum up the “type” statement with the following:

*Just as things true of Adam, the head of the natural race, became true of us when we entered his race, things true of Jesus, the head of the spiritual race, became true of us when we entered His race.*

From Adam we received sin and death. From Jesus we received crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

### **BAPTIZED INTO THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS—PART I**

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*  
Romans 6:3

When we placed our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we were crucified. There are four features to the believer’s crucifixion. This devotional introduces two of them.

#### **Our Old Man Was Crucified**

*... our old man was crucified with Him ... Romans 6:6*

Briefly stated, our old man is the type of person we became by our birth into the race of Adam. We can, then, define our old man as our sin nature and all it produces in us.

Our first clue to an understanding of our sin nature is in Genesis 3:6, just before Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. The Scriptures say of Eve:

*... the woman saw that the tree was ... desirable to make one wise ...*

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they believed they would become wise. They ate. They believed they were wise. And that belief—whether conscious or subconscious—is our sin nature. That is our flesh. We received it by birth into the human race.

When Paul relates the rejection of God by all mankind, he describes us as:

*Professing to be wise ...* Romans 1:22

Our sin nature can be described as a “know-it-all attitude.” This sin nature and all it produces in us, our old man, is crucified.

### **We Died to Sin**

*How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*  
Romans 6:2

*... reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin ...*  
Romans 6:11

We should understand “sin” here as referring to our sin nature. Think of “reckon” as meaning “believe.” We are to look upon ourselves as being dead to our “know-it-all attitude.”

### **BAPTIZED INTO THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS—PART II**

Other features of our crucifixion are: we died to the law and we are crucified to the world.

**We died to the Law**

*... you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ ... Romans 7:4*

When we died to law at our conversion experience, we died to living out biblical commands in our own strength and in our own timing. We died to living by our own man-made laws and we died to living by the one law of “doing my best for Jesus.”

In Romans 8:3 the Apostle Paul makes it clear that when we engage in law-living, we are doing so in the flesh.

*For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh ...*

Galatians 5:24 provides a different expression of the crucifixion of our old man. It reads:

*And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

So, when our old man was crucified, we died to the law. With the flesh out of power we do not engage in law-living.

Being free from law-living, we are free from creating our own laws, such as determining to read the Bible and pray at a certain time and for a specific length of time.

When our life is one of responding to God, He can do and will do through us all that He desires. If the Lord desires, He will give us a schedule for prayer and Bible study. When we live out God-given schedules, we are not in legalism. We are walking in the Spirit.

**We Were Crucified to the World**

*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians 6:14*

Experiencing our crucifixion to the world and the world's crucifixion to us results in our victory over "worldliness." The experience may result in a greater victory than we might have imagined.

### **BAPTIZED INTO THE BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS**

*... As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death ... if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection ... Romans 6:3b-5*

Our baptism into Jesus by the Holy Spirit was a baptism into His burial, and resurrection. There are two features to our burial, and three to our resurrection.

#### **We Were Buried**

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4*

This passage shows we were buried with Jesus as preparation for our spiritual resurrection.

Also, the message of the burial is that since our old man was crucified, he was also buried. There is a second lock on the door to keep our old man out of power.

#### **We Were Resurrected**

The passage quoted above says we were buried so that we might be raised and walk in newness of life. In Ephesians 2:5-6 the Apostle Paul gives the three features of our resurrection. He writes:

*... even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ...*

We were “made alive,” “raised up together,” and “seated together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” All of the verbs are past tense. These three things have already happened..

### **THE OBEDIENCE THAT PLACES THE BELIEVER UNDER GRACE**

*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:14*

These words immediately follow the five commands for experiencing crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Paul is assuming the reader’s obedience to them.

Each is a command either to choose to do something or to believe something. Before reading the commands and the brief comments, think about this statement:

*There are things true of us in the Christian life that we will not experience until we believe they are true of us and choose to experience them.*

Command one: “... reckon (believe) yourself to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:11

“Sin” refers to our sin nature, and *our sin nature is a “know-it-all attitude.”* We think we are wise. We are to *believe* that we do not have to live out of our wisdom but may live out of God’s wisdom.

Also, we are to *believe* we are alive unto God, just as Jesus is alive unto God.

Command two: “... *do not let sin reign in your mortal body ...*” Romans 6:12

This is a command to give up our own point of view for God's point of view and to resist the efforts of our "know-it-all attitude" to control our lives.

Command three: "... *Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin ...*" Romans 6:13a

We are commanded to refuse to give any part of our bodies to sin—our sin nature. Our sin nature produces unrighteousness.

Command four: "... *present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead ...*" Romans 6:13b

We are to yield ourselves to God as those who are crucified, buried, and resurrected.

Command five: "... *and [present] your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*" Romans 6:13c

When we give the parts of our bodies to God, He uses them to express His righteousness.

Continual obedience to the five commands results in continually living the life of grace.

### **OUR THORNS—GOD'S GRACE**

*... a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.*  
2 Corinthians 12:7b

Whatever the "thorn" was, it was painful enough for Paul to ask God three times for its removal.

*Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.* 2 Corinthians 12:8

The Lord responded to Paul's prayer with an explanation of the purpose of the thorn.

*"My grace is sufficient for you ..."* 2 Corinthians 12:9

If I can live by God's grace through obeying the five commands of Romans 6:11-13, why would I need a thorn?

We turn again to the Apostle Paul. In Romans 7:24 Paul indicates his own lapses into law-living by crying:

*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

Paul answers his own question in verse 25.

*I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

These two verses show Paul knew the way out of his agony—and he knew when he lapsed into law-living.

Paul also knew that his thorn helped keep him in dependence on God—in grace. Our God-given thorns help keep us in grace.

Paul has yet another word concerning our need of the thorns.

*For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Romans 8:36*

The pressure of the thorns is an “all day long” matter. We need them to keep us in a state of dependence on God.

Learn again from Paul. See how *we* need to respond to *our* thorns. In 2 Corinthians 12:10 he wrote:

*I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Our “thorns” make us weak in order that we may be strong by trusting God. So we rejoice because of the thorns.

### **WALKING AS JESUS WALKED**

*He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. 1 John 2:6*

If we say that we are God's children and in fellowship

with Him, we are to walk as He walked.

In his gospel, John recorded these amazing words of Jesus.

*Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. John 14:10*

Again, we are amazed by the words of Jesus recorded in John 5:19.

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”*

On several occasions John quotes Jesus indicating His total dependence on the Father.

In light of Jesus’ testimony that He lived in total dependence on the Father, we also are to do the same.

With the words “meek” and “lowly of heart” in the famous “yoke” statement recorded in Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus taught that in the yoke with Him we would learn to be “totally available to” and “totally dependent on” the Father.

Living in total dependence on the Father is to live by grace. So, when we walk as Jesus walked, we walk in grace.

### **THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT**

*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2*

The term “law” is used here in the same sense as the law of gravity. Gravitation is called a law because there is never a variation in its force. Some can remember as children throwing something into the air and saying, “All that goes up is bound to come down.

The meaning of “the law of the Spirit,” then, is that there is something the Holy Spirit does from which He never varies.

In light of the context of the verse, the term “life” refers to the abundant life Jesus said He had come to give believers. The words “of life” can be translated “which is life.”

The words “in Christ” have the meaning of our being “in union with Christ in crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.”

The verse can then be translated:

*The law of the Spirit which is abundant life in union with Christ in crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.*

The law of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit’s continual guiding and prompting of each believer to experience the abundant life.

This means that the Holy Spirit is continually at work in believers to live out the five imperatives of Romans 6:11-13.

We are not left alone in living out the commands that result in the abundant life—the life of grace. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and our prompter in living by grace.

### **FREEDOM FROM STRUGGLING WITH GOD**

*Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”* Genesis 32:24-26

Jacob held back the angel until the angel disabled him. Then he held on for dear life. *Are Jacob’s actions familiar to you?*

Jacob's experience illustrates that our sin nature causes us to struggle against God's control of our lives.

We believe we are wise and resent someone else telling us "how to run our own business."

Perhaps the best explanation of this stubborn struggling against God is provided by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:7.

*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*

The "carnal" mind is the mind of the flesh. Paul implies that until something is done about our flesh, we will struggle against God's control of our lives.

The good news is that when we experience the crucifixion of our flesh and God sends the thorns, the struggle goes away. Rather than holding God back, we hold on to Him.

### **VICTORY OVER ANGER**

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath ... Galatians 5:19-20a*

Anger must be the most common sin among believers. Confession services in Christian gatherings almost always reveal problems with anger.

There are degrees of anger. At times our anger may be no more than an irritation in a relationship. At other times anger destroys relationships. In some cases anger results in death—at times to the angry person and at times to the angry person's victim.

Can a believer have victory over anger? The answer is "yes."

Galatians 5:19-20 expresses that anger is a work of our flesh.

Our victory over anger comes as we experience the crucifixion of our flesh.

But there is more good news about the believer's victory over anger. Galatians 5:22 declares:

*The fruit of the Spirit is love ... longsuffering.*

The meaning of longsuffering is "afar off from anger." What a thrilling thought: love and longsuffering rather than anger.

Victory over anger is within your grasp as God's child. Take it! Rejoice in it!

### **BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT**

*Be filled with the Spirit.* Ephesians 5:18

In Romans 8:9b the Apostle Paul writes, "*Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*"

The Holy Spirit resides in all believers. All believers, however, are not *filled* with the Holy Spirit. All are not controlled and empowered by the Spirit. Therefore, the Scriptures command that all be filled with the Spirit.

The command to be filled with the Spirit is in a verb tense that indicates continual action. If we continually obey this command, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit throughout each day.

We do not deserve to be filled with the Spirit any more than we deserved to become God's child. The words "be filled" indicate that the filling is something we receive—not something we accomplish. So, how do we receive undeserved filling of God's Spirit?

Jesus said to the woman at the well:

*"... whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up*

*into everlasting life.” John 4:14*

The Holy Spirit has been seeking to fill us from the very moment we received Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The Spirit yearns to fill us—and we long to be filled. Then why are we not filled? Galatians 5:17 provides the answer.

*The flesh lusts against the Spirit ...*

The barrier is our flesh. Remove the barrier of the flesh and receive the filling of the Spirit. Obey the five commands of Romans 6:11-13.

Enjoy the abundant life and become the instrument of God to a needy world by continually being filled with the Spirit.

### **STOP WORRYING!**

In His sermon on the mount Jesus said:

*... do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body ... Therefore do not worry about tomorrow ... Matthew 6:25, 34*

In Philippians 4:4 Paul encourages his readers to “*Be anxious for nothing ...*”

Are you a worrier? Most of us are. And we may feel that it is impossible to stop worrying.

Many admit that worry dishonors the Lord and damages their Christian influence. Most of us know that worry is not good for our own mental, spiritual, and physical health.

There is hope for change.

Consider this: worry is the result of thinking certain things should happen while circumstances indicate they will not happen.

So, if we could be free from our view of what should happen by experiencing the crucifixion of our “know-it-all atti-

tude,” we would have nothing to worry about. Such freedom is available.

Let us admit we worry because we think we know what should happen. Let us admit our flesh is the reason we think we know what should happen. Let us live out the new-creation life.

### **SHOULD BELIEVERS KEEP THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?**

The answer to the question is “No” and “Yes.” The Apostle Paul explains. In Romans 7:9 Paul declares:

*“I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”*

The commandment he speaks of is the tenth: *“Thou shalt not covet ...”* In the larger context, Paul testifies that he was filled with all manner of covetousness when he tried to keep the tenth commandment.

The Apostle is arguing against believers attempting to keep the commandments in their own strength. The effort results in “death.” Here he speaks of the emotional and spiritual death of failure, guilt, and feelings of inferiority.

Should a believer attempt to keep the ten commandments? Paul says, “No!” We will keep them only by living out of God’s resources.

Romans 8:3 says that God sent Jesus to condemn sin in the flesh. Then in verse four he writes:

*... that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

Yes, believers should keep the righteousness of the law. But notice the passive in the words “... *that the righteousness*

*of the law might be fulfilled in us.”*

The Holy Spirit lives out the righteousness of the law through us as we live by grace.

### **GUIDANCE FOR THE DAY**

The Lord has plans for each day of our lives. If we live out those plans, we will have days of honor for the Lord, filled with blessings for others, and fulfillment for ourselves. How can we live out those plans? Proverbs provides an excellent starting place:

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*  
Proverbs 3:5-6

Remember the revealing words of Ephesians 2:10:

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

When the Bible speaks of our being “*led by the Spirit*,” it implies that the Spirit will be talking to us throughout the day. Our place is to listen and respond to His leading.

Try it! Jesus said that His sheep know His voice. Believe He is talking to you. Believe you can know His leading.

Then, “Go with what you get.” Let us spend each day doing what we believe God is leading us to do at the moment. Our day will bring honor to God; it will bring blessing to others; it will bring fulfillment to us. And we will learn a little more about knowing and doing the will of God.

A walk like the one just described is a growing experience. Every day we will misinterpret how God is leading in certain circumstances. But we will miss the mark less and less

as we continue to do throughout each day what we believe God is leading us to do.

### **GOD'S MIRACLE WORKERS**

One of the most significant promises in the entire Bible is Jesus' promise that some of His followers would be miracle workers. John 14:12 records the promise:

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”*

The word translated “*believeth*” is in a verb tense of continual action. He speaks of those who continually live in dependence on Him in every area of their lives. To live by faith is to live by grace. So the promise is to those who choose and live the life of grace.

Examine the promise. Jesus said the one person, not the masses, who lives by grace will do the type of works He did. Then He added that the works of that one person will be greater works than His. Jesus concluded with:

*“... because I go to My Father.”*

In John 16:7 Jesus explains why those who believe in Him will do greater works than His works. He is going to the Father and sending the Holy Spirit. He says:

*“It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”*

The presence and work of the Holy Spirit make the difference. The healing of a person that is spiritually crippled is a greater miracle than the healing of one whose body is crippled.

Almost exclusively, Jesus did His miracles with words.

The person who lives in grace will do miracles with words. As we tell the spiritually dead about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, those who respond will be spiritually raised from the dead.

When we tell the spiritually deaf, lame, leprous, and blind believers of their own crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, those who respond will experience spiritual healing.

We are called to a great work!

### **PRAYING WITH RESULTS**

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. 1 John 5:14-15*

According to this verse, getting answers to our prayers is possibly not as difficult as we may think.

Consider a few basics for having a highly productive prayer life. We must be in communion with God through repentance and confession of our sins. We must have faith in God. We must believe the prayer promises of the Scriptures.

Furthermore, we must understand that there are some prayers God is not going to answer. On the other hand, we must understand there are some things God is not going to do until someone asks Him.

If all the basics are in place, we need only to ask Him to do the things He wants to do.

God knows all things about all people! God cares! God is able! Let us permit God to breathe to us His desires for our prayers and then we breathe them back to Him. These are prayers that bring results.

When we stay in the life of grace, we will always be in the best position for God to reveal His desires for our prayers.

In this quiet moment, obey the commands for living in grace and then wait for God to breathe to you His words of guidance.

### **BETTER HEALTH—MORE ENERGY!**

*But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11*

A lady telling of her heart attack said her doctors told her there was no physical reason for it. She added, “I had a heart attack because I resented God for the death of my husband.”

The medical world gives evidence that negative emotions such as anger, hate, and resentment create health problems.

Some of God’s children have testified that anger, hate, bitterness, fear, jealousy, and worry drain away 50 percent to 90 percent of the energy a night’s rest had stored in them.

Activities not led by the Spirit of God drain our energy. Decision making drains us of energy.

In our reference verse, Paul, speaking of the Holy Spirit, uses the words “dwells in you” rather than “fills you.” We are filled with the Holy Spirit—Who gives life to our mortal bodies—when we experience the crucifixion of our flesh.

Our crucifixion, then, frees us from health and fatigue problems.

There is another way the life of grace results in more energy. When a Spirit-filled person needs an unusual supply of energy for God-led activities of the day, the Spirit of God will supply the need.

It must be admitted there is one exception to what has been written here. When some type of physical problem is our God-given “thorn in the flesh,” we may have limitations of both health and energy bringing us to and keeping us in dependence on God.

### **IN ALL THINGS GIVE THANKS**

*In all things give thanks.* 1 Thessalonians 5:18

This verse is a favorite of many. We quote it mostly in times of suffering.

It is commonly known that the command “*give thanks*” is in a verb tense that means “keep on giving thanks.”

Does the command mean *in spite of* our painful circumstances we are to continue to thank God for the *good* things in our lives? Many have interpreted the command in that manner.

The Bible provides another interpretation of the command. In Ephesians 5:18 the Scriptures command us to be filled with the Spirit. There follows in verses 19-21 statements indicating the results of being filled with the Spirit. Verse 20 reads as follows:

*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ...*

A result of being filled with the Holy Spirit *is always thanking God for all things*—whether they appear to be *good* or *bad*. All who are living the exchanged life are being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When thanking God for all things becomes a lifestyle, a better understanding of God and a stronger faith in God builds in us. A peaceful heart in all circumstances grows in us. And there are times when even our circumstances change.

**REST!**

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* Matthew 11:28

Jesus was speaking about the rest that He provides for the inner man.

Why do we experience unrest? While there is no one answer to the question, most of the time we understand the cause of our inner turmoil.

Whatever the cause of our inner unrest, Jesus explains how we can have rest. We are to get into the yoke with Him and learn from Him. Read His words recorded in Matthew 11:29.

*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

One in the yoke with Jesus would walk with Him and walk as He walks. He would come to understand that Jesus walked as He did because He was “*gentle*” and “*lowly in heart*.”

The word translated “*gentle*” was used in Jesus’ day to describe a horse that had been tamed. The idea of the word is “availability.”

The “*lowly in heart*” statement indicates complete dependence on the Father.

Jesus concluded the yoke statement with:

*“For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* Matthew 11:30

And so it will be with us. When we are walking in total availability to and total dependence on the Father, we are walking in grace—and experiencing rest.

You might want to bow your head and pray this simple prayer. *Lord, I am experiencing too much unrest in my life. I*

*want the rest that only you can provide. I am going to try Your way, beginning this moment.*

### **THE ARMS OF JESUS**

*And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them. Mark 10:16*

What a beautiful picture of Jesus. Think of the pleasure Jesus experienced as he held the little children in his arms. Think of the blessing to the parents. Think of the sense of being loved and accepted the little children experienced.

Today, little children need the same sense of being loved and accepted. We can thank God many have it. Some do not. More could.

There is a reference to Jesus in 1 Corinthians 6:13 that reads:

*Now the body is ... for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*

The “body” referred to is the body of a believer. Our bodies are for the Lord and the Lord is for our bodies.

When Jesus has our bodies, He has our arms. The well-known statement that God has no hands but our hands and no feet but our feet could be revised. We could add that God has no arms but our arms.

He will use our arms to satisfy His continuing desire to put His arms around little children and others who hurt and need the feeling of being loved and accepted by someone.

And when Jesus uses our arms to hug little children—and others—they will have that sense of being loved and accepted.

“How can it be?” you might ask. Believers living out the new-creation life is the answer.

**SPIRIT-DIRECTED WITNESSING**

*“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me ...” Acts 1:8*

Thomas, a Christian, went with Lloyd, a non-Christian, to assist him with a business matter. Thomas had witnessed often to Lloyd, and he expected to use this occasion to witness again. He did witness, but in a different way than he thought.

While at the place of business, Thomas, sensing the Lord leading him to witness to one of the customers, did so. The customer said that he was not a Christian but was ready to become one.

Believing that the Lord was not leading him to encourage the man to invite Jesus into his heart in the public place, Thomas gave him a tract explaining how to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

As they returned to their homes, Lloyd said, “Thomas, there were several people in the room. Why did you witness to only one?” Thomas answered, “I did not sense that God wanted me to talk with anyone else.”

Thomas was sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leadership and witnessed to a particular person in a particular way. He was also sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leadership in not witnessing to the others.

Consider the words of John 3:34 concerning the ministry of Jesus.

*For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God,  
for God does not give the Spirit by measure.*

We also will speak the words of God—the right words to the right people at the right time and in the right place—when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

### **DO YOU NEED TO LEARN PATIENCE?**

The answer to the question is, “No.”

If the question had been, “Do you need patience,” the answer would be, “Yes.”

It is not an uncommon experience to hear someone say, “I need to *learn* patience.” They are admitting their need for patience. They are expressing a belief that it is something they can make happen.

There is a better way to seek patience. Read the words of the Apostle Paul:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is ... patience ... Galatians 5:22a (NIV)*

The Holy Spirit produces patience. To be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with patience.

A tremendous burden is taken from us when we realize patience is a gift of God and not a product of our own making.

We all need divine patience. When God gives it and we receive it, we have a more peaceful life. And those around us are delighted.

Living the life of grace assures us of a life of patience.

### **GOD’S INHERITANCE**

Early in his Ephesian letter, the Apostle Paul records a prayer for his readers that God will open their eyes so they may know several things. One of Paul’s requests is for his readers to know:

*... the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints ... Ephesians 1:18b*

Since we are so accustomed to thinking of *our* inheritance *from God*, it seems strange that *God* has an inheritance *in us*.

*You are God's inheritance. You are of great value to God.*

The value of a believer to God is not what he can accomplish for God. The value is in providing God an opportunity to live again on this earth—through the believer.

The last of the five commands for living by grace is:

*... [present] your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

God is righteous. When He has access to the body of a human being, He can express His works of righteousness to the world visibly and audibly.

When God expresses Himself in this manner, He brings glory to Himself, fulfillment to the person He expresses Himself through, and blessing to the ones receiving the ministry.

Let us walk in grace and permit God to receive full value from our lives.

### **GOD'S ENCOURAGERS**

*"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." John 16:7 (KJV)*

Several times Jesus informed his followers that the Holy Spirit would come. In four of those promises, He called the Holy Spirit "the Comforter." The word translated "Comforter" contains several ideas. One of those ideas is that of "encourager."

When a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, he knows he is useful to God and to others because God is always guiding him into a life of good works.

"The Comforter," though, does more than impress Spirit-filled believers that they are of value. He leads Spirit-filled

believers to speak to others convincing them that they are of great value.

No believer should think the Holy Spirit will use him to touch *everyone* who needs encouragement. However, every Spirit-filled believer should believe he is to be the instrument of the lifting up of *some*.

As we look to God for directions in witnessing to the unsaved, let us look for His guidance in telling believers that they are of great value.

God uses something as simple as a smile or a “Hello” to cause a person to realize that someone knows he exists. A word of commendation for a job well done can make a person’s day.

Live the new-creation life and lift the spirits of others.

### **THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD COMMAND**

You have heard people question someone’s salvation. Almost always they add, “But I know I am not to judge.” They refer, of course, to the passage in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Judge not that you be not judged ...”* Matthew 7:1

Believing the verse means we are not to question the spiritual condition of another is to misunderstand Jesus. Look at verse six.

*“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine ...”* Matthew 7:6

To obey the command we must identify the hogs and the dogs. In doing so we make judgment on their spiritual condition. In Matthew 7:16 Jesus again puts the responsibility of making a spiritual judgment on us.

*“You will know them by their fruits.”*

If we have misunderstood and misapplied the statement of

Jesus about judging, what does He mean? He followed his command not to judge with the illustration of seeking to remove a speck from our brother's eye while having a plank in our own eye.

Jesus continues with:

*“First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”* Matthew 7:5

Do you see the message? When we have planks in our eyes, we will always see specks in the eyes of others. When the plank is removed, we do not see the speck in our brother's eye. *We see clearly how to remove the speck from our brother's eye.*

The command not to judge is, then, a command not to have a spirit of criticism. How can we remove that plank?

We remove it by experiencing our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

### **WHY IS FAITH SO DIFFICULT?**

*But without faith it is impossible to please Him ...*  
Hebrews 11:6

“Let go and let God” has been a popular saying among believers.

Some of us have thought, “I would love to let go and let God, but how do I do it?”

Perhaps it seems your life is characterized more by fear and worry than by faith. You just cannot “let go and let God.”

There is hope for all of us. *First*, we must know we cannot have faith in someone we do not fully understand. Amazingly, we can be the children of God while having little knowledge of what our Father is really like.

One deals with the lack of understanding God primarily by saturating the mind with the word of God through reading

the Scriptures.

*Second*, we must understand that our natural tendency is to trust ourselves rather than trusting God. We cannot trust ourselves and God at the same time.

*God* deals with our faith in ourselves by sending His thorns in the flesh. *We* deal with our faith in ourselves through experiencing the exchanged life.

God will send the thorns. Let us experience our new life. Step-by-step we will be delivered from faith in ourselves freeing us to “let go and let God.”

### **BLESSED ASSURANCE**

*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God ... Romans 8:16*

A Christian young man who had just returned home following three years of military duty in a foreign country, said to a friend:

*“While I was overseas, I went through a period of doubt about my salvation. You cannot imagine the agony of such an experience.”*

Many church members who doubt their salvation have, in fact, never received Jesus as Lord and Savior. Yet, it is not unusual for a born-again person to have doubts. But assurance is possible.

A true believer without the assurance of his salvation goes through more than agony. Almost everything he does in his walk with the Lord is hindered. There is a sense of uneasiness in his prayer life, in his Bible reading and study, in his efforts to teach the Bible, and in his efforts to lead lost people to Christ.

The Book of 1 John lists specific signs indicating that we belong to the Lord. Read three of them.

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

*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. 1 John 3:14*

*... love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7*

The bent of the life of the true believer is in the direction of obedience (2:3). Those born of God love the brethren (3:14). God's love is in all who have been born of Him (4:7).

All believers have the evidences of salvation we have just read. When a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, these assurances become more obvious.

In addition to the 1 John evidences of salvation, Romans 8:16 informs us of an even more personal assurance.

*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

Be filled with the Spirit and live in "blessed assurance."

### **DOING YOUR BEST FOR JESUS?**

Are you doing your best for Jesus?

If your answer is "Yes," you should stop it—immediately. Such an approach is both dangerous and unfruitful. God's intention for you is that He work through you. Consider the following question: Are you permitting Him to do His best through you?

We cannot produce for God. He must do His work through us. So when we are "doing our best for Jesus," we experience the disappointment of being fruitless.

Read the last of the five commands for living by grace.

*... [present] your members as instruments of righteousness unto God ... Romans 6:13c*

When we obey all five commands, we are available for God to express Himself through us. He produces the fruit.

What is dangerous about “doing our best for Jesus?” Read Galatians 5:19-21a and understand the danger of serving God in the flesh.

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like ...*

You probably have had the sad experience of seeing someone who seemed to love God the most fall into one or more of the works of the flesh. They probably did so because they were “doing their best for Jesus.”

We do our best for Jesus only when Jesus is doing His work through us because of our availability to Him.

### **FACE TO FACE WITH CHRIST OUR SAVIOR**

You know the words of the famous and beautiful hymn: “Face to Face With Christ Our Savior,” written by Mrs. Frank A. Breck.

What a breathtaking thought—being face to face with Jesus. That utterly fulfilling experience is what we have to look forward to throughout eternity.

We do not, though, have to wait for eternity to experience a face-to-face relationship with Jesus. We can have it right now. We can have it every day. We can have it throughout every day.

In Romans 6:10 Paul declares:

*For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.*

Paul means Jesus is with God the Father. He follows that declaration with verse 11.

*Likewise reckon (believe) ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Living out our face-to-face relationship with Jesus is to be in the atmosphere of angels and “the spirits of just men made perfect.” It is to be in the presence of God the father.

God has placed all believers in the presence of Jesus. We can truly experience being alive to God through living out our oneness with Jesus.

### **HAS DEPRESSION TAKEN OVER?**

*And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell ...*  
Genesis 4:5b

Why do the Scriptures give a relatively large amount of space to the story of Cain?

Most likely it is because he was the first person to inherit the sin nature. The story of his life vividly illustrates the failures of those who live out their lives according to their flesh.

Among other things, Cain, became a victim of depression. “... *his countenance fell.*”

The Apostle John gives insight into Cain’s depression in I John 3: 12.

*... Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.*

Placing together the Genesis and 1 John accounts of the Cain and Abel event indicates Cain was driven by a spirit of competition to bring an offering to God of the fruit of the ground.

Both Cain and Abel knew they should bring blood offerings. But Cain probably had an excellent crop and decided he

could make a good impression by doing things his own way.

God's acceptance of Abel's offering and rejection of Cain's resulted in a spirit of jealousy and depression in Cain.

But the jealousy and depression were only symptoms of a deeper problem. Cain was living out of the "know-it-all attitude" he had inherited from Adam. The result was a spirit of competition, disobedience to God's will, jealousy, and depression.

We inherited from Adam the same sin problem that Cain inherited and to one degree or another we all experience the same symptoms. Most of us would confess some level of depression at different times in our lives.

While we know there are some cases of depression that need medical attention, the depression of most of us can be dealt with by putting off the old man and putting on the new man.

### **BREAK UP THAT MARRIAGE!**

In Romans 7:1-3 the Apostle writes that a lady can lawfully be married to two different husbands if the first husband dies.

Paul is not introducing a discussion on the theme of marriage. He is illustrating a spiritual truth. In Romans 7:4 Paul writes:

*... you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another.*

The first marriage of Paul's illustration depicts a believer's intimate relationship to law while the second marriage illustrates a believer's intimate relationship with Jesus.

Death dissolved the first marriage in the illustration making the second marriage possible. Death dissolves the believer's marriage to law making possible the second marriage to Jesus. That is, a believer must experience crucifixion to live as the bride of Christ.

A major question about this passage is, “How can a believer’s life of legalism be so intimate as to be called a marriage?”

According to Romans 8:3 we are “under law” through a relationship between our flesh and law.

*For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh ...*

In the flesh we zealously engage in Christian activity. We think we are wise and cannot wait for others to agree with us. We seek that agreement by achieving outstanding accomplishments.

We can be proud of attempting to follow stringent rules in Christian service.

We may even think we will receive acceptance by God because of our good works.

Our zealous involvement in our rules and activities can be a relationship so intimate as to be called a marriage—making a marriage relationship with Jesus impossible.

The believer longing to be all God wants him to be must, then, break up the marriage to law. Death is his only recourse. He must experience the crucifixion of his flesh.

We should not think in terms of crucifying self. We should think in terms of experiencing the crucifixion that became a reality in us the moment we received Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Paul goes on to say that in our marriage to Jesus, Who is raised from the dead, we bring forth fruit to God.

### **YOU WILL TAKE IT WITH YOU**

It has often been said that you cannot take it with you. There is one thing we can take with us—and we will take it with us. In his letter to the Romans Paul writes:

*... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that*

*we may also be glorified together. Romans 8:17*

We entered the Kingdom of God to become “joint heirs with Christ.” This may be the greatest promise in the entire Bible. However, the inheritance we receive with Jesus may seem strange. The promise is not of rewards and crowns—as other passages teach. It is that we will be “glorified together” with Jesus.

The glory is the radiance mentioned in Luke 2:9.

*... the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.*

The Romans 8:17 passage teaches we will be glorified with Jesus because we have suffered with Jesus. Read an explanation from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians.

*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18*

Those whose sufferings have kept them face-to-face with the Lord have an *eternal* weight of glory. All believers will receive glory at the return of the Lord Jesus. However, there will be degrees of glory.

We also have that face-to face relationship with Jesus as we live out our enthronement—being changed from glory to glory.

### **GROW IN GRACE**

*... but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18*

Like all parents, one of God’s deep desires for all of his children is that they grow. How sad when we fail to bring

our heavenly Father pleasure by ceasing to grow in the Lord as we should.

We grow in all areas of our inner lives as we experience grace. That is possibly the meaning of Peter's statement in 2 Peter 3:18.

There is such a thing as growing in more grace. That is, we can experience more grace tomorrow than we did today—and can experience more grace each day thereafter. Read Romans 6:16.

*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*

As we obey the commands for experiencing grace, little by little we are developing a habit. The more the habit develops, the more we are a slave to obeying the commands. The more we are a slave to obeying the commands the more time of each day we spend receiving the grace of God.

Notice in Ephesians 2:6 that living in the enthroned position is living in a place of grace. It is a place of growing in grace.

*God ... made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

It is a great pleasure to our heavenly Father when we grow by grace and grow in more grace.

### **FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER**

*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiv-*

*ing one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*  
Ephesians 4:31-32

This passage contains a list of the ways of our “old man” and the “new man.” It is in a context encouraging the reader to “put off the old man and put on the new man.”

Our old man is offensive and divisive. When offended, our old man responds with anger and possibly with evil speaking and malice. Expressions of our old man leave us with divided families, churches, and friendships.

When we put on the new man, we repent of our offensive actions and words; we ask forgiveness of those we have offended; we forgive those who have sinned against us; we treat them as though the offense had never happened.

One is reminded of the words of Jesus following the Lord’s prayer.

*“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* Matthew 6:14-15

Jesus knew forgiveness is possible. It may be easy for us to carry a grudge or resent someone, but when we put on the new man, a spirit of forgiveness is the result.

One person living a life of forgiveness can create a revival of forgiveness.

A husband and wife left their church because of the pastor’s words and attitude. A year later the pastor “put on the new man” and confessed to them that his words and attitude were wrong. He invited them to church the following Sunday. They forgave the pastor. They were in church the following Sunday.

They asked the church to forgive their sin of letting the church down. In a great spirit of forgiveness “the church liter-

ally erupted with applause, weeping, and shouting.”

Through God’s grace, we may be the one to begin a revival of forgiveness in our world.

Let us “put on the new man”

### **GOD IS GOOD**

Ask almost anyone why Jesus came to earth and he will say, “To die for our sins.” How good that so many understand that truth. Yet, the Scriptures express other reasons for His coming. In John’s gospel we read:

*No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. John 1:18*

Jesus came to give mankind a clear understanding of what the Father is like. The word “declared” has the idea of “explained.”

Think about the following words of Jesus.

*But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” John 5:17*

*“... the Father who dwells in Me does the works.” John 14:10*

Jesus’ ministry was filled with works of love. Simon Peter said of Jesus:

*... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good ... Acts 10:38*

When we put these verses together, we see one important truth Jesus revealed about the Father—God is good.

Our God Who is good desires to fill us with His goodness. We only need to receive the filling of the Holy Spirit.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is ... goodness ... Galatians 5:22a*

## **A FULFILLING MARRIAGE**

Surely all believers would agree that a fulfilling marriage is one that is lived according to the will of God.

The Scripture passage dealing most thoroughly with marriage is Ephesians 5:22-33. The passage begins with the following statement:

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.  
For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is  
head of the church.*

The passage goes on to say husbands are to love their wives enough to die for them, and husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. Paul then adds in verse 29:

*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes  
and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*

Paul quotes from Genesis that a man is to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.

The passage closes with the following command.

*Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love  
his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she  
respects her husband. Ephesians 5:33*

How do husbands and wives live up to this high standard? It can be done. Wives who live by grace will be submissive to and respectful of their husbands.

Husbands who live by grace are filled with God's love and light and therefore will live out the imperatives addressed to them.

## **IS THERE ANY HOPE?**

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the*

*LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11*

It is not uncommon to talk with someone who has no hope for the future. People of all ages live in such a spirit of despair.

Some people have no hope because life for them seems to be one big failure. Others suffer from feelings of inferiority. Others have experienced painful rejection. Only God knows the reasons so many people have no hope.

Regardless of our present situation, the Lord would tell us today, as He told Israel in Jeremiah's day, there is hope. There is a future for all of us. It is a future greater than anything imaginable.

Our only hope is in God. The things that cause a sense of hopelessness for many people have been steppingstones to a future, because their despair has turned them to God.

If you have assurance that you have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, meditate on the words of Ephesians 2:10.

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Say it like this: "I am God's workmanship." The Greek word translated workmanship spells out the word "poem" in the English language. As a new creation, you are God's poem. You are a person of beauty and power.

Say it like this: "I am such an important person in the Kingdom of God that He planned a life of good works for me before the creation of the universe." And He did. You are that important to the Lord.

Say it like this: "There is hope. God wants me to get up

and get on with the life He designed for me.”

Now get on with it. Experience the new-creation life. Be a blessing. Reap the fruits. Honor God. Go in grace.

### **THOSE FAITHFUL ONES**

*“Well done, good and faithful servant ...”* Matthew 25:21

On judgment day we would love to hear the Lord say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

The Book of Proverbs indicates, though, that faithfulness may be rarer than we realize. Read Proverbs 20:6.

*Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?*

The book also declares the sadness of unfaithfulness.

*Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint.* Proverbs 25:19

Then Proverbs mentions the blessedness of faithfulness:

*Like the cold of snow in time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters.* Proverbs 25:13

Surely, all of God’s children prefer the life that is “the cold of the snow at the time of harvest,” rather than being to others “a bad tooth and a foot out of joint.” We can be the blessing rather than the burden. Galatians 5:22 declares:

*The fruit of the Spirit is ... faithfulness ...*

When we are filled with the Spirit, we are faithful. God, Who is faithful, reveals His qualities through us and uses us to bless others.

**EVER-INCREASING LIGHT**

Learning to walk in the Spirit is like a child learning to walk. The child takes that first step and soon is walking through the entire house.

The believer's first experiences in grace may last for only a few minutes a day. Those few minutes can grow into hours a day.

With the increased time of walking in grace comes an increase in spiritual light. We grow in an understanding of God, of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit, of the Scriptures, of ourselves, and of all that is involved in the salvation God has given us.

Those continual gifts of light are the work of the Holy Spirit. When we are "in grace," we are filled with the Holy Spirit. When we are filled with the Spirit, He will give us new light.

*"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." John 16:11-14*

Often the new light carries with it new responsibility. When we correctly respond to the new light, we are elevated to new heights in our Christian walk and to fruitfulness in our Christian service.

We don't have to beg for the filling of the Spirit. We receive the filling—by obeying the five commands for living by grace.

**PUT TO DEATH YOUR MEMBERS**

*Therefore put to death your members which are on the*

*earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5*

The word “members” in the New Testament almost exclusively refers to the parts of the human body—whether referring to our bodies literally or symbolically, as when using the human body as a picture of the church.

In this Colossians passage, though, the Apostle Paul writes that such things as “evil desire” and “covetousness” are counted as our members. Why would non-physical things such as covetousness and evil desires be described as physical?

The answer must be that there are some sins that are so ingrained in us that it is as though they are parts of our bodies.

Paul says, “Put to death” those sins. His command indicates that we can put to death the most ingrained sins in our lives.

This is good news to one who has struggled with one or more particular sins. It is good news to a person who never knew how to have victory over sin.

The way to victory is putting off the old man and putting on the new man.

If long ago you shook hands with some sin and it is now one of your “members,” you can bid it “Good-bye.” Walk the walk of grace.

### **LISTENING!**

*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. Mark 1:35*

When the disciples found Jesus in His place of prayer, He said to them:

*“Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there*

*also, because for this purpose I have come forth.”*

Mark 1:38

In prayer, Jesus received a word from His Father that He was to leave his present location to preach elsewhere. Prayer for Jesus included a time of listening.

The following passage indicates time alone with God in the earthly holy of holies for Moses was largely a matter of listening.

*Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him. Numbers 7:89*

Let us daily live in the heavenly Holy of Holies—to speak—and to listen.

Our Father has things to say to us about guidance, correction, comfort, and explanation.

### **THAT MINISTRY OF LISTENING**

*When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel” Matthew 8:10*

Jesus said this just after he had listened to a centurion make a great statement of faith.

Someone asked a Christian group the following question: “Other than dying on the cross, speaking, and touching individuals, in what ways did Jesus serve others?”

After a brief pause someone said, “He listened.” That is a perceptive understanding of the ministry of Jesus—and an in-

sight into a needed ministry of all believers.

We are to listen to God Who teaches and guides us. We are to listen to others to show our love and interest and to understand their needs.

Someone has said, "If you will give a child your full attention, it may be the first time he has ever had such an experience." It can also be said that if we give anyone our full attention, it may be one of the few times he has ever had such an experience.

When we give God all the parts of our bodies, we give Him control of our ability to listen. As He guides us in ministry, He will use that ability to make us good listeners.

When we listen to God while listening to another person, our Father will often reveal to us the areas of deepest need of the person sitting before us. He also will often give us words of help for that person

### **THE PEACEFUL HEART**

*You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You. Isaiah 26:3*

Many of God's children have found peace through the passage just quoted, as well as in the following passages.

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7*

Paul then adds:

*... whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are*

*of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8-9*

*. But the fruit of the Spirit is ... peace ... Galatians 5:22*

When we live by grace, we will have our minds on God; we will pray with thanksgiving; we will think and live as God would have us do; and we will be filled with and led by the Holy Spirit—all resulting in inner peace.

### **CRUCIFIED TO THE WORLD**

*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians 6:14*

One of the most subtle dangers facing believers today is embracing beliefs and practices of the world. Some—if not many—conscientious believers have sought to be as godly as the best Christian they know. The subtlety is that our godly models may have features of worldliness in their lives.

There are at least two ways we can discover if we are living out beliefs and practices of the world.

First, we compare our beliefs and practices with God’s word and with the ways of the general public. Are some of our beliefs and practices in harmony with those of the general public and out of harmony with Scripture? If so, we know that there are features of worldliness in our lives.

Second, if we experience our crucifixion to the world by “reckoning”—believing—ourselves to be crucified to the world and “choosing” to experience crucifixion to the world, God will expose any worldliness in our lives.

Also, we will experience our crucifixion to the world which will result in deliverance from our worldliness.

Deliverance from a lifestyle of worldliness is one of our greatest victories. It is accompanied with abundant blessing.

### **REJECTION!**

*And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Isaiah 53:2b-3*

Many people came to see Jesus to experience His miracles and hear His teachings. Yet in the midst of all that was happening He was clearly a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. According to Isaiah, much of that sorrow and grief was the result of rejection.

In his sermon on the mount Jesus clearly announced that believers would experience rejection.

*“Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man’s sake.” Luke 6:22*

Jesus never permitted rejection to turn Him from the will of the Father or cause depression. His words recorded in John 8:29 explain His victory.

*“He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” John 8:29a*

Jesus lived in continual fellowship with the Father. His acceptance by the Father compensated for all the rejection of man. It can be the same with us when we live in fellowship

with our Father.

As we continue in the life of grace, we will be in continual fellowship with the Father and in the victory of Jesus. We will have peace even if we are being rejected.

Furthermore, according to Jesus, there is reason to rejoice when we are rejected for Jesus' sake. He said:

*“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven ...”* Luke 6:23a

### **WHAT ABOUT THE LAPSES?**

*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord!* Romans 7:24-25a

Throughout Romans chapter seven, Paul writes about the “*death*” he experiences by being in the flesh as a result of putting himself under law.

Paul’s lapses into law-living caused him to cry, “*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” His “*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” indicates that when he had his times of being in the flesh, he knew the way out.

Clearly, Paul is testifying that even though he knew how to have victory over the flesh, he had his moments of slipping into the life of the flesh.

So, what did he do when those times of failure resulted in spiritual death? He knew to turn to Jesus. And considering the overall context of the passage in which Paul’s cry is found, he returned to the five commands of Romans 6:11-13.

All who begin the new approach to life by living out the life of grace have had their lapses. Many—if not all—have asked “What do I do when I commit the sins I have been hav-

ing victory over?

The answer? We start over just as Paul did. It may be comforting to know that Paul, the man God used to teach the Christian world how to live by grace, had his times of reverting to living in the flesh. But he knew how to start over.

It is good news to know that every time we drift into the flesh; we can start anew as soon as we experience the failure of being in the flesh.

But there is more good news. The sooner we start over and refuse to permit Satan to take us completely away from the life of grace, the more we develop the good habit of living by grace and not self-effort.

Perhaps even today you are in that state of failure. You may be thinking, “What Paul taught does not work for me.” It does work for you. *Start again.*

The thorns of our *outer* circumstances enhance the life of grace. Paul also is an illustration of how *inner* despair brings us back to grace.

### **ROLL BACK THE STONE**

*And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.  
Matthew 28:2*

Because of the sudden resurrection appearances of Jesus, we can be certain that the stone was not rolled back to permit Jesus to leave the tomb. The stone was rolled away to reveal that the crucified Christ was alive.

Present day believers can “roll back the stone” for the non-believing world throughout the year.

We can “roll back the stone” with our lives by experiencing our spiritual resurrection.

According to Ephesians 2:5-6, at conversion we were made alive, we were raised up, and we were seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

In Romans 6:4 the Apostle Paul adds to our understanding of the “raised up” feature. He writes:

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

The word “dead” is in the plural. Literally, it would be translated “the dead ones.” In every New Testament reference to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead the plural of “dead” is used.

Since Jesus was raised from “the dead ones,” we should believe we have been raised from “the spiritually dead ones.”

One way we roll back the stone revealing the resurrection of Jesus is by our *close fellowship* with other believers—rather than with non-believers. We can do this without neglecting our need to relate to non-believers to bring them to Christ.

A clear demonstration of our spiritual resurrection is a clear revelation of Jesus’ resurrection. It rolls back the stone.

### **LIVE NOW!**

*“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10*

Jesus intends for us to have “life.” He says that He came to earth to make abundant life available.

The abundant life Jesus speaks of is also referred to in the Scriptures as “eternal life” and “everlasting life.” We should

not permit those words to cause us to think that we must wait until we arrive in heaven to experience the “abundant life.” It is available to believers in *this life*.

So why are many of God’s conscientious children not experiencing this fullness of life? For one thing, many are caught up in the past. The thoughts of some are on their past accomplishments while the thoughts of others are on their disappointments or sins or failures.

Some Christians do not experience “life” because their thoughts are consumed with the future. They are waiting for something to happen tomorrow. They plan and work for tomorrow. The result is the inability to “live now.”

A third reason many do not “live now” is a misunderstanding of *how* to “live now.” We must understand that abundant life comes through a continual experience of the grace of God.

Jesus came to make sufficient provision for our continual experience of God’s grace. *We can live now.*

### **ARE YOU BEING SANCTIFIED?**

*“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” John 17: 18-19*

Jesus prayed this prayer only minutes before He entered Gethsemane and only hours before the cross. Among other things, His heart was burdened for the sanctification of His disciples.

To “sanctify” means to set apart. To “be sanctified” means to be set apart. The words “saint,” “holy,” and “holiness” also have the same idea of separation. And the idea is that of separation to God.

In one sense, all believers were sanctified at the moment of their salvation. God sets believers apart from the world to Himself. In another sense, our sanctification must be worked out in our lives.

Another word that explains sanctification is “availability.” When we are sanctified, we are available to God. When we are available to God, we are sanctified.

The “Holy” Spirit is the sanctifying Spirit. He is working in our lives to bring about our full availability to God.

Our part is experiencing the grace of God.

### **SPREADING THE WORD**

*... I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*  
1 Corinthians 4:17

Timothy would remind the Corinthians of Paul’s ways *in Christ*. That is, Timothy would remind the Corinthian believers that Paul’s life was lived out of his understanding that he was *in Christ*.

Notice also in the passage above that Paul taught this message *everywhere*. The word “remind” indicates Paul had taught the message to the Corinthians.

Acts 20:20 records Paul’s reminder to the leaders of the church at Ephesus of his ministry with them.

*... I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house ...*

To the same group he says:

*For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.* Acts 20:27

There can be no doubt Paul faithfully taught the Ephesian believers of their baptism into Jesus and how to experience their crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

After two years of ministry in Asia by Paul, Luke could write the following:

*... so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Acts 19:10*

We can believe Paul was teaching the new converts the life of grace. The result: the Gospel of Jesus was preached throughout the province of Asia.

If those of us who know and experience the life of grace will respond to the leadership of the Holy Spirit to teach the message to other believers, we will experience the greatest revival in the history of the world.

When we get on with teaching the life of grace, we get on with evangelism, with Christian growth, and with the meeting of every need believers face.

### **JESUS CHRIST—OUR WISDOM**

*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God. 1 Corinthians 1:30a.*

We have occasionally heard someone refer to another person as being one of great wisdom. The statement always seems to be made with a sense of deep respect. Wisdom in another is a thing to be admired. We would love to be known as such persons ourselves.

A favorite passage of many is James 1:5-6a. The passage reads:

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith ...*

The passage has been an outstanding blessing to many. Yet, the 1 Corinthians 1:30 passage seems to take us into an entirely new dimension of understanding our possibilities of being people of wisdom.

When Christ is our “life,” He will be God’s wisdom in us. What a thrill! And many biblical passages speak of the great value of having wisdom. Meditate on the following passage from Proverbs.

*Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you. Proverbs 4:8-9*

### **THE CROSS AND THE LAW**

*And you ... He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14.*

Legalism is a great curse on modern day evangelical Christianity. When we live by law—whether the laws of the Bible or man-made laws—we are in the flesh. But Jesus did away with law-living at the cross. In addition to the passage above, read the following:

*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace. Ephesians 2:14-15*

Galatians 5:24 tells us that our flesh was crucified at conversion. We died to the law at that time.

*Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. Romans 7:4*

Being set free from the bondage of law—living through the Lord Jesus, we are now able to live as brides of our spiritual groom—the Lord Jesus. This marriage will produce fruit to God.

### **STAND IN YOUR FREEDOM**

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Galatians 5:1*

A common experience of those who have begun to experience their freedom in Christ is that of facing forces seeking to drive them back into the struggle of self-effort.

Some have yielded to these forces and have missed out on a growing experience of life “in Christ.” The churches of Galatia were among the first to experience the temptation to abandon life in the Spirit and return to life in the flesh.

After leading them to Christ, Paul taught the believers of Galatia of their life “in Christ.” The Book of Galatians concerns the danger of the Galatians turning from freedom in Christ and lapsing into a life of law-living—a life of human effort rather than a life of faith.

Because we face the same forces that the Galatians faced, we must heed Paul’s warning to the Galatians. We must:

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and ... not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

If the pressure to turn from the life of grace comes from Satan, from the very atmosphere of the world we live in, or our own flesh, we must “*Stand fast in our liberty in Christ.*”

**BECOMING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD**

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

Notice the word “might.” Just becoming a Christian does not make us the righteousness of God but it does open the door to the possibility.

Becoming the righteousness of God means that just as Jesus became the very embodiment of sin on the cross believers may become the embodiment of the righteousness of God.

The following verse explains how we may become the righteousness of God.

*For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:17.*

Believers must receive the “abundance of ... righteousness.” We can no more produce righteousness than we can produce our own salvation. “Receive” is in a Greek tense of continual action.

We continue to receive the righteousness of God by continuing to live out our union with Christ. When receiving the righteousness of God becomes a lifestyle, we will be so continually filled with the righteousness of God that we become the visible righteousness of God in action.

**DON'T DILUTE THE MESSAGE**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17*

One can only thrill at the strong emphasis of Christ living through the believer. This emphasis has been with us for at

least half a century.

But to proclaim the truth of Christ living in us and through us as the *ultimate* truth in Christian living is to *dilute* the Christian message.

We became the new creation as a result of *our being "in Christ."* Because we are "*in Christ*" "old things have passed away and all things have become new."

In 2 Corinthians 5:18 Paul states:

*Now all things are of God.*

"Now all things are of God" because we are *in Christ*. That is, living out the truths of our being *in Christ* results in all the things of our lives being those of Christ living out His life through us. This is never fully realized in our lives, but we can always move in that direction.

What is the difference in "*Christ being in us*" and our being "*in Christ*?" The major difference is when we live out the "*in Christ*" truths; we experience crucifixion, burial, and resurrection ... which include the fact of Christ in us and through us.

When we include crucifixion, we include the putting out of power of our old man which releases the Christ within us to live out His life through us.

*Don't dilute the message.*

### **THE PRUNING OF THE VINEDRESSER**

*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.  
... and every branch that bears fruit He prunes that  
it may bear more fruit ... John 15:1-2.*

During the growing season the branch of a vine may extend to several feet in length. In order to bear fruit again it must be cut back to a length of several inches. The pruning results in fruit.

God the Father purges His children that they might bear

more fruit. But what all is involved in the pruning? One man testified that God had told him to play less golf.

But we all need more pruning than that. To bear fruit we need freedom from things that harm our testimony with others; we need freedom from sins that break our fellowship with God.

God does His ultimate pruning when He frees us from faith in ourselves. We are to live by faith but we cannot trust ourselves and God at the same time. Yet, our very sin nature is faith in ourselves. According to Scripture, we think we are wise.

God purges our faith in ourselves through giving us desperate circumstances. Also, when we received Jesus as Lord and Savior, God crucified our faith in ourselves. So He leads us to experience that crucifixion through experiencing our union with Christ.

The pruning of our faith in ourselves—our flesh—is the ultimate purging we all need. We must receive this purging throughout every day because it always seeks to regain control of our lives.

### **THE DANGER OF LEGALISM**

Law-living is flesh-living—and therein lays the danger of legalism. The following passage reveals what flesh can do in our lives.

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication ... hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions ... drunkenness Galatians 5:19-21a.*

We wonder why godly people fall into such sins as listed in the Galatians passage. We wonder why we can be so repentant and prayerful about our own sins but do not have victory over them.

Most, if not all, of the time the answer is in our legalistic approach to Christian living.

We engage in legalism when we conduct our lives by seeking to keep self-imposed rules in human strength—as opposed to walking in the Spirit. We engage in legalism when we attempt to keep the commands of the Bible in human strength rather than by walking in the Spirit. Or we engage in legalism when we attempt to live by the one rule of seeking “to do our best for Jesus.”

The righteous requirement of the law will be fulfilled in those:

*who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* Romans 8:4b.

Do not be afraid to walk in the Spirit *But do be afraid of walking in legalism—and in the flesh.*

### **WITHOUT HIM WE CAN DO NOTHING**

*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.* John 15:5

Many of God’s children have a deep desire to bear fruit for God but often live in failure and disappointment.

Concerning fruit bearing, Jesus encourages us to think of ourselves in terms of a branch attached to the vine.

The vine-branch illustration reveals the necessity of an ongoing fellowship between Jesus and believers. A branch attached and then unattached and then attached again will not receive the essentials for fruit bearing.

We must abide in Him through continual fellowship and communion and by living out the truth of our union with Him. Through such abiding Jesus bears fruit through us.

One is reminded of Paul's description of Christian work as "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw."

Surely, Paul's "wood, hay, straw" statement describes those works we attempt in our own wisdom and strength while his "gold, silver, precious stones" statement describes the works accomplished by the vine through the branches. The latter will bear fruit.

### TAUGHT ALL THINGS

*"He (the Holy Spirit) will teach you all things ..."*

John 14:26

One of the many promises that Jesus makes to believers is that "*The Holy Spirit will teach us all things.*"

We should take the "all" to mean that not one segment of our Christian lives is outside the boundaries of this promise.

The promise takes on new meaning when we realize our constant need of new insights—in our families, in other relationships, on our jobs, in our social lives, at school, at church.

It is a common experience among believers to turn to the Lord for insight only after hours—perhaps years—of seeking an answer to some circumstance. The Lord gives the light and then we wonder why it took us so long to look to Him in our perplexity.

Perhaps, though, our most constant need is to rely on the Holy Spirit's teaching us in our Bible reading and study.

*... no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21*

When we look to the Holy Spirit to teach us the Scriptures, we find that the author of the passage becomes the teacher

of the passage. What refreshing times are ours when we turn to the Scriptures while trusting the Holy Spirit to teach us.

### **MOVING TEMPLES OF LIFE**

*... your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you ... 1 Corinthians 6:19*

By describing our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit the Scriptures are indicating that there is something special about them.

In the last chapters of the book by his name the prophet Ezekiel details a vision of a temple.

Chapter 47 records Ezekiel's account of water flowing from under the right side of the temple until it becomes a river flowing into the sea. Everywhere the water flowed it brought healing. The last part of verse nine says:

*... everything will live wherever the river goes.*

Jesus must have had Ezekiel's vision of this temple and its river in mind on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles when he cried:

*"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water ..."*  
John 7:37b-38.

Following his quotation of the words of Jesus, John added:

*But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive* John 7:39a.

The temple of Ezekiel was *stationary*. It produced a river bringing healing and life—to *fish and plants*.

The temple of our bodies is *mobile*. When we live out our lives in total dependence on Jesus, we take *rivers* (notice the plural) of life-giving water wherever we go—to the *spirits of people* made in the image of God.

**BURNOUT?**

*For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.* Hebrews 4:10

The term *burnout* has made its way throughout our culture. The experience of *burnout* has made its way into Christian circles—even into the lives of Christian leaders.

Has *burnout* reached you or your family or circle of acquaintances and friends?

Burnout will not reach the ones living by God's grace. They have *entered into His rest*—and have ceased from their own works.

Have no fear of becoming lazy if you *enter into His rest*. Consider the testimony of the Apostle Paul, who taught us how to live by grace.

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* 1 Corinthians 15:10

To the leaders of the church of Thessalonica he wrote:

*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you ...* 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8

Grace puts us to work. Therefore, it is a work of divine direction and divine energy. Under these circumstances we will not burn out. We will be fruitful for God.

It is our flesh that drives us. The Holy Spirit guides us.

**A HIGHER LEVEL OF THINKING AND LIVING**

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your*

*ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts”*  
Isaiah 55:8-9.

We would have a new quality of life if we would move up from our level of thinking to God’s and from our ways to God’s ways. It is possible. Read Paul’s testimony recorded in 1 Corinthians 2:16b.

*... we have the mind of Christ.*

Through his thorn in the flesh, Paul discovered that thinking God’s thoughts rather than his own made a vast difference in his quality of life.

When God sent the thorn, Paul thought, “This needs to go.” Three times he asked God to take the thorn away. The Lord answered, “Paul, you need this thorn to keep you dependent on Me.”

Consequently, Paul learned to rejoice and thank God for every type of pressure that came His way.

How do we go about receiving God’s thoughts about our circumstances and about what we are to do next? Read Colossians 3:1-4.

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

When we read the “*If then*” as “*Since*” and “*appears*” as “*revealed*,” we understand the passage, and we can live out our enthroned position.

From that position let us continually concentrate on the things of heaven and not on things of earth. Let us receive God's revelation of what Jesus desires to do through us. Then let us live out God's word to us.

### **AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST**

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20*

This verse is in the context of Paul's revelation that all who are *in Christ* are new creations, that old things have passed away and all things have become new.

In becoming new creations, we became ambassadors—which is one of the new “things” of our lives. As ambassadors, we are representatives. We represent God on this earth.

The words “*as though*” can be translated “*since*.” The idea of the verse then is “*We are ambassadors for Christ since God does plead through us.*”

Paul goes so far as to give us the words an ambassador uses in presenting Jesus to the unsaved.

*... we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20*

The word “*you*” in the passage can be misleading. The word itself is not in the Greek text.

It would seem that Paul is pleading with the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. He is not. He means that when he presents the Gospel of Jesus to unsaved people he says, “*We implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God.*”

Live out the new creation life and represent God as an ambassador to the unsaved.

## **THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE**

*... God ... made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* Ephesians 2:4-7.

Paul's "*the exceeding riches of God's grace*"—used only here in the New Testament—indicates unusual portions of grace beyond the ordinary.

The passage states that one experiences "*the exceeding riches of God's grace in the heavenly places.*"

The timing of these bountiful portions of grace is "in the ages to come." One can begin at conversion to receive these plentiful portions of God's grace and continue to receive them throughout his lifetime on earth. *They will then be received throughout eternity.*

Experiencing these unusual portions of grace in this lifetime then, means that daily we can live with a foretaste of the blessedness of eternity.

One might say, "I can believe that I am seated with Christ in the heavenlies, but how do I experience being there?"

First, we must understand that when we received Jesus as Lord and Savior, we were spiritually resurrected. Being seated with Christ in heaven is the third feature of our resurrection mentioned in the passage quoted above.

Beyond understanding, we must do two other things to experience our spiritual resurrection. We must believe we are spiritually resurrected and choose to experience it.

We are guided in our believing and choosing by the five commands of Romans 6:11-13. Each is a specific command to believe or choose.

By the time he wrote Ephesians, Paul must have been daily receiving “*the exceeding riches of God’s grace.*” He desired that all believers have the same foretaste of heaven that was his.

### **LOOSE THEM!**

*And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go. John 11:44.*

Jesus had cried, “*Lazarus, come forth.*” And Lazarus “*came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth.*”

Lazarus came forth full of life. But because of the graveclothes, he was terribly uncomfortable, frustrated, and limited. He could not see; he could not hear; he could not talk; he could not walk. He could neither fellowship nor rejoice with his sisters—and with Jesus.

Jesus said to his disciples, “*Loose him, and let him go.*” The graveclothes were removed and *Lazarus was free.*

Not long after the Lazarus event, Jesus said that those who live in continual trust in Him would do the kinds of works that He did—but *they would be greater works.* Jesus meant that those of continual trust in Him would do for people spiritually *what He did for people physically.*

The raising of Lazarus is a perfect illustration of one of the works Jesus had in mind. Those living in continuing trust in Jesus tell non-Christians about the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. When the Father draws them to Jesus, *the spiritually dead are raised to life.*

All of God’s children are overflowing with spiritual life because God’s Spirit lives in them. But all must be “*loosed.*”

Some do not hear God. Some are morally lame. Some are spiritual lepers. Some cannot talk of the things of God.

Jesus would say to us, “*Loose them.*” And we can. We tell them of their own crucifixion, burial, and resurrection and how to experience them. When they understand and respond positively to what we have taught them, the graveclothes will begin to fall away.

We live as God’s miracle workers by continuing to live out the new-creation life and by sharing our experience with others.

### **RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION**

*And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.”* Mark 3:5.

A man with a withered hand stood before Jesus in a Jewish synagogue. Jesus, in an indirect way, asked if he should be healed. He was answered with silence. Jesus responded with anger.

Jesus was angry at their lack of concern and compassion toward one in need. This type of anger has been termed “righteous indignation.”

Read a statement from Paul concerning Christian anger.

*Be angry ...* Ephesians 4:26a.

This is a command. As Jesus was angry at hardness of heart, so all believers are to be angry at expressions of hardness of heart.

Paul immediately places boundaries around his command.

*“... and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil ...* Ephesians 4:26b-27

These boundaries show that righteous indignation is to be short-term. Satan can soon turn righteous anger into sinful anger. Sinful anger can turn into hate.

Living out our oneness with Christ is our victory over our anger and hate.

Living out our oneness with Christ also results in “righteous indignation.”

### **GOD’S STRANGE FAITHFULNESS**

*I know, O LORD, ... that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. Psalm 119:75.*

*Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word. Psalm 119:67.*

“God is faithful.” We have said it often. Usually we say it when He has answered a prayer, kept a biblical promise, or protected us from some danger.

The author of Psalm 119 introduces an understanding of God’s faithfulness not commonly held. He says *afflictions* are expressions of God’s faithfulness.

Many have interpreted afflictions as indications of God’s unfaithfulness, saying “God let me down” or “God deserted me.”

The psalmist realized discomfort brought him back to God and to God’s word. So, he concluded that God’s affliction was a demonstration of His faithfulness.

We don’t like pain. We don’t like clouds that continue to hang over us—and especially if they hang over us for years. But many see those clouds as expressions of God’s faithfulness holding us close to Himself.

The guest revivalist was surprised when one of the members of the church asked him to spend the night at his home

while he was in town. The revivalist asked the pastor about it and the pastor agreed he should go.

Following the evening service and a meal with the family the night of the invitation, the host and revivalist were alone—talking about spiritual things.

As they talked, the host related to the revivalist a heart-breaking tragedy that had come to him two years earlier. He then added, “That is the reason I am here talking about spiritual things right now.” *The strange faithfulness of God.*

And for many it always leads to the life of grace.

### **WHAT ON EARTH IS GOD DOING?**

Where is God? What is God doing? These are likely questions many—even believers—are asking. While we are not privileged to know all that God is doing, we do know some things He is doing.

God is maturing his children. God did not bring us into His family to keep us in an infant state throughout our earthly lives. Consider the Apostle Paul’s words recorded in Philippians 1:6.

*... He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Romans 8:28 declares that God is working all things together for good to those who love Him.

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God ...*

Some Greek manuscripts read, “God is working all things together for good ...”

God is answering the prayers of those living in fellowship with Him and responding to His leadership. Read the prayer promise of I John 5:14-15.

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

God is with His children. Read Hebrews 13:5.

*... He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

Let us put on the new man and fully participate in all He is doing for each of us.

### **NO SPIRITUAL ORPHANS**

*"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." John 14:16-18*

The word "orphan" always stirs emotions of concern and compassion in the heart of a believer. Television has intensified those emotions by bringing into our homes heart-stirring pictures of orphans in third world countries.

Just before entering Gethsemane Jesus introduced the word "orphan" into the spiritual vocabulary of believers.

In a matter of days the disciples of Jesus would never again have his continual physical presence with them. They could and would experience orphan-like emotions. So Jesus prepared His disciples for the future by telling them that He would not leave them orphans.

Just before telling His disciples that He would not leave them orphans, Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to live in them. He added that *He—Jesus— would come to them*. In Romans 8:9 The Apostle Paul calls the Holy Spirit "*the Spirit of Christ.*"

Jesus also knew there would be many generations of believers who would need protection against orphan-like emotions. His promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers was meant for us all.

Consider the “no orphan promise.” Notice that the entire Godhead is involved. The Son asks the Father to send the Spirit. The Spirit comes to live in believers. The coming of the Spirit is, in fact, the coming of Jesus in spiritual form—“*I will come to you.*”

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are at work comforting believers with protection from an orphan-like existence. The Godhead has made provision that in the Kingdom of God there are “no spiritual orphans.”

The more continuously we experience the filling of the Holy Spirit, the less continuously we have any sense of being spiritual orphans.

Our place is to live out the life of grace and continuously be filled with the Holy Spirit.

### **GOD’S MERCIFUL SHAKING**

*He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.*  
Hebrews 12:26b-27.

The first shaking implied by the “once more” of the passage refers to the shaking of the earth at the giving of the ten commandments.

The purpose of the shaking of the things that can be shaken is that the things that cannot be shaken remain.

When God shakes, He will remain, but all other objects of our faith will not remain.

Why refer to God's shakings as "merciful?" Throughout, the Bible makes it plain that God's plan has always been for His people to trust Him and Him alone. Our natural tendency is to trust in ourselves, other people, and things.

When we trust in any person or thing rather than God, we have missed the mark for our lives. We live on a plane far below the "abundant life" level. Our strength, our joy, our sense of fulfillment is greatly diminished.

It is a merciful thing for God to awaken us from our spiritual sleep that we might admit our mistake and move to the road of faith. Trust in God and God alone will take us to life on the highest level.

All believers throughout the Kingdom have their own personal shakings. If we can see through the darkness of it all, on the other side of the low-hanging clouds we can see mercy.

God's shakings provide us excellent opportunities to turn from faith in ourselves, others, and things to faith in Him alone.

On a broader scale, think of the effect the shakings of God would have on the work of evangelism if all believers would respond to them in the way God desires.

### **FREE TO LIVE FOR JESUS AND NOT FOR SELF**

*... if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.  
2 Corinthians 5:14b-15*

Many believers have made a deep resolve to cease living

for self and to begin living for Jesus—but some have soon failed in their attempt to do so.

The deep resolve and the following failure may have gone on for years.

The failures are the result of thinking the deep resolve is the way to change. The passage quoted gives another explanation.

First, notice the promise of living for Jesus and not self is in the context of 2 Corinthians 5:17 which says:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

The words “*in Christ*” are significant. Paul had written in Romans 6:3-5 that at conversion, believers were baptized “*into Christ*” by the Holy Spirit. They were baptized into His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

Paul’s message of 2 Corinthians 5:14b-15 is that we are able to cease living for self and to begin living for Jesus because “*we died.*”

We must, though, experience our crucifixion to be free from living for self and free to live for the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **GOD’S VAST AND UNDESERVED LOVE**

*... casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7*

Do any of the following views sound familiar?

*“I don’t take my little problems to God.”*

*“God doesn’t care for an insignificant person like me.”*

*“I am too sinful for God to bless me.”*

The author Hannah Smith says that God grieves more because of our misunderstanding of Him than about our sins. She may be right.

A correct view of God's love is declared by Paul in Ephesians 3:18b-19a where he writes of "*the width and length and depth and height*" of the love of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7 the Apostle Paul asks the following penetrating question:

*... what do you have that you did not receive?*

The implication is that we should look upon everything we have as a gift of God. They are gifts of love that we do not deserve. James 1:17 declares:

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

When the prodigal son arrived at home, the father lovingly received him, bountifully met his needs, and made him the honorary guest at a joyous and lavish banquet.

Did the prodigal deserve these vast expressions of love? No! The prodigal had done two things. He had come to himself and he had come home.

If we have come to ourselves and will come on home, God has abundant provision and a joyful banquet awaiting us—and it is all a gift from His loving heart. Let us take it all by faith by putting on the new man.

### **OUR GOD IN CONFRONTATION**

*When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. 1 Samuel 5:2*

Having lost a battle to the Philistines, the Israelites thought it wise to take the Ark of the Covenant into combat with them. In their minds, they were taking God into the battle. The Philistines believed they were facing the God Who had delivered Israel from the land of Egypt.

In spite of the presence of the ark the Philistines won the battle and captured the ark. They “*brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon.*” Perhaps they believed God would worship Dagon. However, this did not happen.

*... early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD.*

1 Samuel 5:3

The Philistines picked up their god and returned him to his place. That night another confrontation took place.

*And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it.* 1 Samuel 5:4

Until the Philistines returned the Ark of the Covenant to Israel, God wrought havoc among them.

Years later there was another Dagon-Jehovah confrontation. The results were the same. As David confronted Goliath he said:

*“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.”* 1 Samuel 17:26

Those who have dared to be in confrontation with and defiance of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have not fared well—and never will.

It is to Jehovah we turn to receive grace to live in victory.

**PARTICIPATING IN THE JOY OF HEAVEN**

*“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.... Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Luke 15:7, 10*

There is great rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents—and we can participate in the rejoicing while still living on earth.

Paul teaches that we have been seated with Christ in the heavenlies to experience life in the presence of God. In agreement with this, the author of Hebrews says that we have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem to experience the presence of God. He writes:

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect ... Hebrews 12:22-23*

In chapter ten the Book of Hebrews also invites us to enter the heavenly Holy of Holies to experience life with God.

When we experience the reality of life in the Holy of Holies, we will join in the rejoicing over the multitudes that are coming to Christ all over the earth.

But there is another way we can participate in the joy of heaven.

Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we can be used of God to bring the unsaved to Christ. There are many ways in which we can participate.

We can financially and prayerfully support those who are on foreign fields telling the lost about Jesus.

We can live so that others will see Jesus in us and want what we have. We can distribute tracts. We can pray. We can use our voices to tell others about Jesus.

And every time God uses us in some way to bring a person to salvation in Jesus, heaven breaks out in rejoicing—and so can we.

### **GOD WILL USE YOU**

*So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."  
Exodus 3:4*

Bob desperately wanted all God had for him. He knew there was more. Time after time Bob would kneel most of the night at a park bench crying out to God for the more he desired.

Bob gave a radio message each morning for the church he served as interim pastor. One morning just before he was to go on the air a leader of the church arrived along with a second man.

The second man was introduced to Bob as a visitor who was in town to do a series of studies in the church. He also was to do the radio broadcast that day. As the guest speaker taught from the Bible, Bob thought, "I believe this man can help me."

Following the broadcast the two had coffee. Bob told the visitor of his spiritual need. The visitor unfolded a napkin and drew three circles. Two circles were close to each other while the third one was at a distance.

The man then said to Bob, "Let the distant circle represent God. Let the circle closest to the distant circle represent the bush God spoke through, and let the third circle represent Moses."

Then the man said, "Bob, what would have happened if Moses had been a hundred miles to the north."

In reporting the event Bob said, “I never heard another word he said all week long.” A listener who didn’t understand the message of the three circles asked Bob why he was so affected.

Bob said, “If Moses had been 100 miles to the north, God would have used another bush. *“Any old bush will do.”* The message changed Bob Hobson forever.

The guest speaker was the famous Major Ian Thomas—who with those few words alone has made a great contribution to the Kingdom of God.

A lot of us think God cannot use us. The truth is He will use anyone who lives by grace. *Any old bush will do.*

### **THOSE OTHER MIRACULOUS BIRTHS**

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* John 3:5-6

The birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah that a virgin would give birth to a son and his name was to be Immanuel—meaning God is with us. God became a man—but never ceased being God. The theologians call Jesus the God-man.

The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and she conceived. Such a birth is beyond comprehension. We can only meditate on and marvel at His birth.

Such a birth will never be duplicated. But there are births extremely similar, births that are all of God and miraculous. When we received Jesus as Lord and Savior, we were born of the Spirit. God entered our lives. Paul writes in Romans 8:9 *“Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”*

The result of this birth is not God-man, but it is God in man. The man never becomes God as God became man, but

God in man becomes reality.

Jesus testified that the works He did were proof that He was from God.

*“... the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.”* John 5:36

Later Jesus made a most remarkable statement about those in whom God lives:

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”* John 14:12

We free ourselves to live by faith in Jesus as we live out our new-creation life.

Think of the joy God has when He is able to use us to raise the spiritually dead and heal the spiritually diseased.

### **GOD’S WILLING GIFT**

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

Also the coming of Jesus to die on the cross involved several love choices on His part.

The love of the Father and the Son is “greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell.” Read the following:

*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and com-*

*ing in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:5-8*

The Father willed to send Jesus. Jesus chose to come to earth to provide life. He is God's willing gift.

We want the world to know that Jesus came to provide our glorious salvation. We want the world to experience all that Jesus came to make possible.

When, in love, Jesus came to this earth, He did so as the "Last Adam."

*"The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." 1 Corinthians 15:45*

This dimension of the divine love gift meant the creation of a new race of people—people crucified, buried, and resurrected.

Experiencing these features of our life in Jesus moves us to the highest benefit of divine love for Christian living.

### **THE REST OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY**

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

Why was Jesus born? Almost any devoted believer would say, "Jesus came to die for our sins." All evangelicals joyfully agree.

But there were other reasons for His coming. In John 18:37, Jesus said:

*"For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."*

Our Lord's words, "*If you have seen me, you have seen the Father*" express one of the most important truths Jesus came to reveal. See another passage conveying the same thought:

*No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.* John 1:18

Jesus also came to be an example of what man should be like. Read the revealing words of 1 Peter 2:20b-21:

*... Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously ...*

Jesus came to defeat Satan and deliver man from the fear of death.

*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.* Hebrews 2:14-15

By coming to earth as the "Last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45), Jesus began a new race of people *in whom and through whom* He would live again on this earth.

Presenting our bodies to God is possible because the Holy Spirit baptized us into union with Jesus.

### **OUR REASONABLE SERVICE**

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice,*

*holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Romans 12:1*

Presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God is our “reasonable service” as believers. In the Old Testament, living sacrifices were almost always killed and then consumed—either by fire or as food. We give our bodies to God to be “consumed” by Him. Our bodies remain alive, but are fully at God’s disposal.

Giving our bodies to God is reasonable because “*the mercies of God*” have made it possible. Romans 6:6 says:

*... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*

The phrase “*that the body of sin might be done away with*” can be translated “*that the body might be delivered from sin.*” Experiencing our crucifixion releases our bodies from the control of our sin nature that we might present them to God.

Paul’s appeal to give our bodies to God as living sacrifices is reasonable because of the results. As the following passage indicates, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God results in righteousness whereas presenting them to our sin nature results in unrighteousness.

*And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. Romans 6:13*

Presenting our bodies to the control of God is reasonable because it is an act “*acceptable to God.*”

To present our bodies to God as living sacrifices is reasonable because it is a step toward a renewed mind and transformed life.

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ... Romans 12:2*

### **STRENGTHEN THE TIE THAT BINDS OUR HEARTS**

*... speaking the truth in love, [that we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15-16.*

According to this passage, every member of the church has the responsibility and privilege of strengthening the fellowship of the church.

Two things make this responsibility and privilege extremely important. One is the widespread condition of broken fellowships in churches—which results in broken lives and broken friendships.

Also, strong fellowship among believers is a major theme in the New Testament. John 17 records that just hours before Jesus died on the cross he repeatedly prayed that His followers would be one.

How can we strengthen the fellowship of our churches? According to the passage, it is through permitting Jesus to live through us. The passage says that it is *from Jesus* the whole body “*is joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share ...*”

Our first step in strengthening the tie that binds our hearts is *growing up in all things into Christ—the head of the church*. Our growth into Him permits Him to express Himself through us.

We grow up into Christ through truth and through intimate fellowship with Him.

The most certain way to experience growth into Jesus is

by receiving more and more truth from God's word and by experiencing fellowship with Jesus in the heavenlies.

### **ENLARGING OUR CHRISTIAN SERVICE**

*If then you were raised with Christ ... Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Colossians 3:2*

Many of us could vastly enlarge our Christian service if we would set our "minds on things above, not on things on the earth."

Consider the Hebrews 7:25 statement of one thing that is happening in the heavenlies:

*He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

With our awareness of this prayer ministry of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will at times lead us to join our Lord in praying for the Christian growth of all believers. The result is the expansion of our Christian service to every nation on earth inhabited by believers.

Read a kindred passage to Hebrews 7:25:

*... the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Romans 8:26*

The broader context of this passage reveals that the Holy Spirit asks the Father to give believers circumstances to bring us into communion with the Father.

We cannot pray for particular circumstances in the lives of others. But under the Spirit's leadership, we can pray for God to give all believers the circumstances that will result in communion with Him. Such praying will give us a world-wide ministry.

Paul writes of the intercessory work of Jesus. Read

Romans 8:34:

*... Christ who died ... is also risen [and] is even at the right hand of God [where He] ... makes intercession for us.*

This intercessory work of Jesus is for the inner peace of believers in their difficult circumstances. As the Spirit leads, we can join our Lord in this work of intercession. The result is an expansion of Christian service to believers wherever they might be.

Our best opportunity for participating in the ministries of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is through abiding in the heavenlies.

### **THE SANCTIFICATION OF OUR LORD**

*“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” John 17:19*

In John 10:36 Jesus testified that He had been sanctified by the Father and sent into the world. “Sanctified” first of all means set apart. The Father set Jesus apart to come to this earth and do His work as Savior and Lord.

Several times in the New Testament Jesus is referred to as “the holy one.” The word holy carries the same idea as sanctified. He is the “set apart one.”

Jesus spoke the words of John 17:19 in prayer to the Father. They add a new dimension to His sanctification. Literally His words are “*I am sanctifying myself ...*”

Jesus prayed this prayer just minutes before entering the Garden of Gethsemane where He repeatedly prayed, “*Not my will but Thine be done.*” Surely, His prayer of sanctifying Himself was a prayer of availability to the will of the Father.

The availability of Jesus to the Father's will was availability to die on the cross. He sanctified Himself—He made available Himself—to die for sinners.

In the prayer of John 17:19 Jesus told the Father He was making Himself available to the Father that believers might be made available to the Father by the truth.

Jesus knew that He had come as “the Last Adam” to begin a new race. He would be crucified, buried, and resurrected so that members of His new race would be crucified, buried, and resurrected.

Members of Jesus' new race live out the life of sanctification—availability to the Father—through experiencing their own crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

When believers possess these truths and act upon them, they will increasingly be available to the Father.

### **DON'T OBSTRUCT THE FIRE!**

*Do not quench the Spirit.* 1 Thessalonians 5:19

Throughout Scripture, the word “*quench*” is used in reference to fire. The command is that we are not to quench this fiery One Who has taken up permanent residence in our lives.

The implication of the passage is that a never-ceasing fire is burning in the hearts of believers but it is possible for us to obstruct it. We will not put out the fire, but we can hinder it.

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit inhabited and filled those in the upper room. God gave tongues of fire to indicate what was about to happen—and was happening.

*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other [foreign] tongues [languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance.* Acts 2:4

Consider the testimony of Jesus concerning His own ministry:

*“The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”* John 14:10

For the most part ours is a ministry of words. In John 7:37-39 Jesus spoke of the flow of the Holy Spirit from our lives as rivers of life-giving water. He flows from our lives mostly through words.

*Don't quench the Spirit.* Don't obstruct the fire. Don't hold up the flow of life-giving words from your own heart.

But how do we obstruct the flow of life? And how do we remove the obstruction.

It is our flesh that obstructs the flow. We remove the obstruction of the flow by experiencing the crucifixion of our flesh.

James 3: 6 states that *“the tongue ... is set on fire by hell.”* Most of us can testify with deep regret of having that experience more than one time.

Let us have the continual experience of a tongue set on fire by heaven and take life wherever we go.

### **SILENT EVANGELISM**

*“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one ... that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”* John 17:22-23

A college student telling a fellow student of his recent conversion to Christ named the fellow student as one of four people who had led him to Christ.

The fellow student was shocked. He had never witnessed to the new believer.

Without knowing it the fellow student had engaged in silent evangelism. His life had been the witness. Silent evangelism goes on all the time through God-loving people who have a genuine walk with Him.

This is no recommendation that any believer should conclude silent witnessing is enough. It is not. This is to say that a silent witness adds power to the witness of words.

In His prayer recorded in John 17 Jesus reveals the power of the silent witness. A spirit of oneness between believers—individually and in churches—impacts the unsaved of the world.

The greatest burden for believers Jesus carried to the cross was that they be one. He knew that a spirit of oneness among believers would have an evangelistic impact on the lost world.

That spirit of oneness testifies to the unsaved *that God sent Jesus and that God loves believers as much as He loves Jesus.*

Should we not join Jesus in praying for a spirit of oneness among believers? Should we not live out the life of grace that we might be an instrument of oneness among believers?

Should we not involve ourselves in scattering the message of grace which would result in a spirit of oneness among those who respond?

### **TESTED BY FIRE**

*Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 1 Corinthians 3:12-13*

Wood, hay, and stubble will not withstand the test of fire.

Those words describe some of our Christian works.

Gold, silver, and precious stones—other words that describe Christian works—will withstand the fire.

Paul writes, “*the Day will declare*” our work. The reference, of course, is to the day of judgment.

A major question is—can we know now which of our works are gold, silver, and precious stones and which of our works are wood, hay, and stubble?

The Apostle Paul gives insight into the answer in Romans 8:5-16. There he presents a rather lengthy contrast between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit. In verse 12 he writes:

*Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*

By implication Paul is saying that we should live according to the Spirit.

Most of us will testify of serving the Lord in the flesh. We have served Him according to our own plans and in our own strength. We have tried to do things that only God can do.

Those must certainly be the works of wood, hay, and stubble. Those are the works that will burn.

The works of gold, silver, and precious stones are the works we do when walking in the Spirit. These are the works that will withstand fire on judgment day.

We have every reason, then, to walk in the Spirit. Our present life will be one of fruitfulness. And our works will remain throughout eternity.

### **GRIEVE NOT THE SPIRIT**

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God ... Ephesians 4:30*

The Holy Spirit is within all believers and we grieve Him

just as we grieve loved ones and friends.

Any failure on our part to walk with God grieves the Holy Spirit. The command, *do not grieve the Spirit*, however, is located in a passage of specific commands—some are negative and some are positive.

We will look first at the negative commands—things we need to cease doing because they bring grief to the Holy Spirit.

*... putting away lying ... Ephesians 4:25*

*“Be angry, and do not sin”:<sup>2</sup> do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27*

*Let him who stole steal no longer ... Ephesians 4:28*

*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth ... Ephesians 4:29*

*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. Ephesians 4:31*

The first of the positives are the opposites of the first four negatives just mentioned. We are to speak truth rather than lie, be angry (righteous indignation) without sinning, work rather than steal, and speak good words that will build up others rather than corrupt words. The remaining positives are:

*... be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32*

When we live out the exchanged life, we are not grieving the Holy Spirit. We are living out both the negative and positive commands mentioned in the passage.

### **CHRIST FORMED IN YOU**

*My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you ... Galatians 4:19*

The verse uses two analogies of childbirth. One is that of the forming of the fetus in the mother.

Paul's concern is for Christ to be formed in his readers.

The picture reminds us of Jesus being formed in Mary. The message is that just as Jesus was physically being formed daily in Mary, He may be formed in believers spiritually.

The second analogy is that of the pain that accompanies the birth of the child. Paul is experiencing that type of pain for his readers.

There is a reason for Paul's deep concern for the Galatian believers. While with them he had taught them of the presence of Christ in their lives. He had seen Christ being formed in them as they experienced their new-creation life.

After Paul left the Galatian church, though, Satan came to the church in the lives of false teachers—teachers who told the young believers Paul was wrong and that one is righteous through keeping the law.

When Paul heard of the distressing situation, he knew that spiritual growth would cease. He knew that attempting to keep the law would totally eliminate their walking in the Spirit—and the formation of Christ in them.

Paul responded with the letter of Galatians. In chapter one he referred to the false teaching as "*another gospel*." In the fifth chapter he wrote that in returning to legalism they had "*fallen from grace*."

Christ will be formed—and seen—in us only as we reject a life of living by rules and continue living the exchanged life.

**SAVED FOR GREATNESS**

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10*

This passage does not say specifically that believers are saved for greatness, but when interpreted by other passages, it does. Give attention to the words “*created ... for good works.*” Now read the following words of Jesus:

*“You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Mark 11:42b-45.*

God sees greatness when He sees one engaged in Spirit-directed service to others. With that in mind think of the words of Ephesians 2:10 that believers are “... *created unto good works ...*”

When we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we received a spirit of service to others. At that very moment we were equipped to serve.

*We were equipped for greatness.*

When we were created in Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit took up residence in our lives. “*The fruit of the Spirit is love ...*” The fruit of the Spirit is a servant spirit in the hearts of believers.

The more the service, the more the greatness. According to Scripture, the more the filling of the Spirit, the more the service. So we can say, “The more the filling of the Spirit, the more the greatness.”

We were made for greatness. So, we were made to live out our lives as Spirit-filled believers.

We live out our lives as Spirit-filled believers as we live out the new-creation life.

### **LIVING THE NEW COVENANT**

*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Hebrews 8:10*

This verse explaining the new covenant is a quotation from the Book of Jeremiah. At the conclusion of the quotation the author of Hebrews writes:

*In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Hebrews 8:13*

The first covenant—which was one of God’s laws written on stone to be obeyed by the nation of Israel—is now obsolete. Using other words, Paul agrees. He writes:

*... having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:14*

The covenant of “Do’s” and “Don’ts” written on stone died with Jesus. It is obsolete. In the new covenant God writes His laws in our minds and hearts. The Spirit of God within is continually saying, “Yes, do that” or “No, do not do that.”

The new covenant, unlike the obsolete covenant, gives be-

lievers the power to obey the “Dos” and “Don’ts.”

*... God ... sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, ... condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:3-4*

When we live out the exchanged life, we walk in the Spirit and the Spirit lives in and through us the righteous requirement of the law. He lives out the “Dos” and “Don’ts” He writes on our hearts.

### **TRUTH WRAPPED IN LOVE**

*... but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ ... Ephesians 4:15*

As we grow up in all things into Christ, we experience Christian growth in every area of our lives.

When pastors want their members to grow as believers, they give them new truth wrapped in love.

When teachers of the Bible want their students to grow in their Christian lives, they give them new truth wrapped in love.

When mentors want their disciples to grow in the Lord, they give them new truth wrapped in love.

While exhortation is a Christian responsibility, endless exhortations without new truth wrapped in love doesn’t result in Christian growth.

It goes without saying that the truth we need to speak is truth from the Scriptures. This first of all means knowledge of the Scriptures through trusting the Holy Spirit to give new light as we read and study.

And Galatians 5:22 makes plain how all believers—including Christian teachers—may have an abundance of love:

*... the fruit of the Spirit is love ...*

Christian workers are instruments of growth as they—through living the exchanged life—provide new light from God’s word wrapped in love.

### **LEFT BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

*... while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. Acts 1:9*

Jesus was gone. His followers watched Him go. Their friend, their Lord, this Servant of men was gone—to the right hand of the Father. *Jesus had left them, but He had not forgotten them.*

Our ascended Lord continues as a servant of men.

*... with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:12b*

Only days after His ascension and enthronement—on the day of Pentecost—He poured out the Holy Spirit to live in and empower believers. Acts 2:33 explains:

*Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He [The resurrected and exalted Jesus] poured out this which you now see and hear.*

Jesus began a ministry of unceasing intercession for the Christian growth of all believers upon His ascension. Hebrews 7:25 says:

*Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives*

*to make intercession for them.*

The shed blood of this resurrected Servant-Lord opened the door for believers to experience life with Him in the presence of the Father:

*And so, dear brothers, now we may walk right into the very Holy of Holies where God is because of the blood of Jesus. ... And since this great High Priest of ours rules over God's household, let us go right in, to God Himself ... Hebrews 10:19, 21a (TLB)*

Let us not delay. Do so today. Because of His shed blood, “walk right in.”

It is all of grace.

### **KINGS IN LITTLE ROOMS**

*But Jehosheba ... took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away... and they hid him ... in the bedroom ... So he was hidden ... for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land. 2 Kings 11:2-3*

Upon the death of King Ahaziah of Judah, his mother, Athaliah, had all the heirs to the throne killed—*she and others thought*. So she reigned over Judah for the next six years.

However, Jehosheba, Ahaziah's sister, had hidden Joash, infant son of Ahaziah and the one remaining heir to the throne of Judah, in a room in the temple.

At the end of six years, Jehoiada, the husband of Jehosheba who was also a priest, conceived a plan to kill Athaliah. The plan worked. Joash, released from his cramped quarters, was crowned king of Judah.

The hidden years of Joash illustrate the spiritual condition

of many believers. Read the following burst of praise to the Lord Jesus.

*For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.*  
Revelation 5:9b-10a

Jesus redeemed us to live as kings. If we sense we are “kings in little rooms,” let us break down those walls of limitation and frustration created by our flesh, Satan, and the world.

*We can!* Paul writes:

*... those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.* Romans 5:17b

We only need to continue to receive—and the tense of the verb indicates continual action—abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness.

We continue to receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness as we continue to live out the five imperatives of Romans 6:11-13.

### **THE LIFTER-UP OF MY HEAD**

*But You, O LORD, are ... the One who lifts up my head.* Psalm 3:3

The title of Psalm three indicates that David wrote it as he fled from Jerusalem and from his son Absalom.

David was possibly expressing his faith that God would restore him as the King of Judah—from which he was being driven.

The statement, however, could be a reference to his emotions. David was likely experiencing such things as fear, disappointment, confusion, and grief over his son.

Many things affect us so deeply that we give visible demonstration of our emotions by lowering our heads. Who has not heard some loving person command, “Now get your head up?”

One man who began experiencing the exchanged life was asked if his lifestyle had been affected. Among other significant things he wrote the following:

*I began walking with my head up and looking people in the face. I had walked with my head down not looking at people I came near.*

If you are now facing circumstances that have left you in an emotional state that causes you to lower your head, why not consider joining this brother? Why not immediately turn to the biblical truth of your oneness with Jesus?

The nature of our circumstances and emotions is not the determining factor in God’s ability to lift up our heads.

God can give victory as we live out the exchanged life regardless of our emotional state.

### **DEATH FIRST!**

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”* John 12:24

Jesus spoke these words just after Andrew and Philip told Him that Greeks were present and desired to see Him.

But why such a response? Why did Jesus not immediately invite them to be with Him that He might teach them?

Jesus likely reacted as He did because He knew that the

gospel would spread to the uttermost part of the earth and that many in and beyond the Jewish world would receive Him and enter into fullness of life—but not at this time.

He knew also that before the blessings would flow to both the Jewish and Gentile worlds He would die and be raised from the dead. He knew He and the Father would send the Holy Spirit.

On this occasion Jesus used a grain of wheat to illustrate the necessity of His death. Hidden beneath the hard shell within each grain there is life that can multiply into many grains of wheat. *Death releases the hidden life.*

However, the grain of wheat must be placed in the earth to die. The death is the deterioration of the hard shell releasing the inner life that produces the many more grains of wheat.

As Jesus illustrated the necessity of His own death, He surely spoke another message. *His followers will become producers of much fruit through experiencing death.*

According to Jesus, bearing fruit for the blessing of others and for the glory of God is a matter of “Death First.”

### **THE BODY IS DEAD—THE SPIRIT IS LIFE**

*And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*  
Romans 8:10

Notice that the New King James version spells Spirit with the capital “S.” The translators believe this is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Many other versions use the lower case “s” indicating a belief this is a reference to the human spirit.

This passage seemingly refers to the human spirit, teaching that the believer’s body carries in it the seeds of death while the believer’s spirit is filled with life—*because of righteousness.*

There are two types of righteousness in the New Testament

and both are the result of grace. Justification—“declared righteousness”—becomes the believer’s possession at conversion to Christ.

The other righteousness of the believer taught in the New Testament is “realized righteousness.” This is the actual righteousness of God lived out in through the believer—resulting in “life.” Read Romans 5:21:

*... that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Notice the progression to the abundant life—“grace,” “righteousness,” “life.”

Read a confirming statement in Romans 5:17:

*... those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*

The progression is the same—“grace,” “righteousness,” “life.”

Our physical death problem caused by Adam’s sin will not be reversed until resurrection day, but day by day we can live in victory in our spirits.

### **EQUIPPED FOR DIFFICULT MINISTRY**

*But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles... Galatians 1:15*

Soon after Paul’s conversion to Christ, he began teaching the Jews in Damascus about Jesus.

*Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God ... But Saul increased all*

*the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Acts 9:20, 22*

In his testimony recorded in Acts 26, however, Paul reveals that Jesus told him he was to go to the Gentiles to bring them to salvation—for a Jew a task far more difficult than going to the Jews.

In verse 1:15 of Paul's extensive testimony recorded in Galatians 1:10-3:1 Paul expresses that God's preparation for this exceedingly difficult task was a divine revelation that Christ was "in him."

Near the end of the lengthy testimony Paul shares a broader expression of the revelation. In Galatians 2:20 he writes:

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me ...*

It was Paul's crucifixion with Christ that made it possible for the indwelling Christ to live in and through him. The Christ within was the One successfully taking the message to the Gentiles "through" the Apostle Paul.

All believers are called to ministries too difficult for mere human wisdom and power. Our need is the ministry of the Christ within through us.

### **BEING WITH JESUS WHERE HE IS**

*"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world John 17:24*

One's first thought in reading this verse most likely is that this is a prayer of Jesus that His followers would be with Him in heaven when they die or when He comes again.

But on second thought, we understand that Jesus would not pray such a prayer in light of John 14:1-3.

If this does not mean being with Jesus in heaven after death or after His return, what could it mean. One verse seems to be the perfect interpretive statement explaining this passage. It is 2 Corinthians 3:18:

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

If we are beholding the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, we are with Him where He is—beholding His glory.

Also, in Romans 6:10 we are told that Jesus is alive unto God. That must mean that He is where God is. Then Romans 6:11 says we are to believe that we are alive unto God. That is, we are to believe that we are with Jesus where He is.

This glorious experience is ours through living out our union with Christ.

The experience itself is enough. But Paul says that as we behold the glory of Jesus, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.

### **FREEDOM FROM DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH**

*For He ... has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having established in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace ... Ephesians 2:14-15*

In Ephesians 2:14-15 Paul makes clear that through His crucifixion Jesus broke down the middle wall of partition that separated Jews from Gentiles. He abolished that wall—which was the law.

The truth is the law has created a wall of partition between believers.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day illustrate that one living by legalism becomes a severe critic of those who break the laws of God. The legalist takes another's disobedience to the laws of God personally.

Romans 8:3 the Apostle Paul says that keeping the law is living in the flesh. Notice how many of the flesh result in a spirit of enmity.

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, ... hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, ... dissensions, ... envy ... Galatians 5:19-21a*

When the approach of a church to Christian living is keeping the law rather than walking in the Spirit, the result is enmity. That church will have divisions.

The sadness created by the divisions is not necessary. When we received Jesus as Lord and Savior, we were baptized into the crucifixion of Jesus. Our flesh and all it produces in us was crucified.

Let us experience our crucifixion and enjoy freedom from all the forces of enmity against our fellow believers—let us enjoy the freedom from the grief of church divisions.

### **THE MATURING OF JESUS**

*... though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. Hebrews 5:8*

The Gospel of Luke provides light on the maturing of Jesus as a child.

*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. Luke 2:52*

Hebrews 5:8 provides insight into the maturing of Jesus as an adult. Both passages magnify the humanity of Jesus Who could not mature in His deity; He could only mature in His humanity.

The revelation that Jesus *learned* obedience is within a passage concerning Jesus as our High Priest. His suffering through obedience was preparing Him as High Priest for all believers who suffer.

All believers are priests and they also are equipped for their priesthood through suffering. Read 2 Corinthians 1:5-6:

*For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.*

As believers suffer in their walk with God, they know Jesus prays for them with personal knowledge of what they experience. They also know that Jesus is their example of being equipped for priesthood through suffering.

These truths have special meaning for those living out their union with Christ. Read Paul's statement to Timothy:

*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12*

### **THE OTHER YOU**

*... what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I*

*hate, that I do.* Romans 7:15

Someone confronts us and we feel a spontaneous rising of anger—unplanned and unwanted. We hate the thought of it. But at that moment our emotions are out of control.

Paul had the same problem—and knew what the problem was. He wrote:

*Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* Romans 7:20

Paul saw our sin nature as being like another person living in us.

Our desire is to exchange this unwanted person in us for one who responds to confrontation with love and peace and patience rather than with hatred and anger. *We can have that exchange.*

In writing of the filling with the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:9-11, Paul uses the word “dwell.” Paul likely uses “dwell” to place the work of the Holy Spirit in us in sharp contrast to the sin that “dwells” in us.

Our sin nature, like another person, will spontaneously respond to confrontation with anger. The Holy Spirit living in us responds to the same confrontation with love and patience.

When the Holy Spirit fills us, He becomes the other person in us responding to our confrontations with others.

Consider other unwanted responses of our sin nature:

*Now the works of the flesh are ... hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, envy ...* Galatians 5:19-21a

Thinking on these possibilities gives us added desire for the Holy Spirit to be that other person in us.

**HOW DO YOU READ MOSES?**

*But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 2 Corinthians 3:15*

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 Paul describes the law as "... the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones," "the ministry of condemnation," and "what is passing away." But he also says there was a glory about the law—a glory that was passing away.

Paul reveals that God through Moses, the lawgiver whose face shone when He had communion with God, gives a prophetic statement about the law itself. Paul writes:

*... Moses,... put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. 2 Corinthians 3:13*

When those who believe that life is found in keeping commandments read Moses, a veil lies on their hearts. They do not know that the glory of the law has passed away.

*But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 2 Corinthians 3:15*

The statement applies to the nation of Israel and also to anyone who does not understand that the glory of the law has faded away.

In verses 16b-17 Paul insists that the veil on the heart can be removed, allowing one to see that the glory of the law is gone.

*... when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

Romans 8:3b-4 explains how the Spirit liberates from seeking to keep the law in human strength:

*[God] condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous*

*requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

### **PLACING JESUS AS CRUCIFIED ON PUBLIC DISPLAY**

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?  
Galatians 3:1*

The Apostle Paul is reminding his Galatian readers that they have seen Jesus as crucified on public display.

Paul does not refer to some inanimate display of art or to an experience of their imagination. He writes of seeing with their eyes Jesus as crucified. What could Paul mean?

The answer is in Paul's testimony two verses earlier. It reads:

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me ... Galatians 2:20*

The people of Galatia must have asked Paul and Barnabas what made them different from anyone else they had ever seen.

Galatians 2:20 is possibly a restatement of what he told them. He surely had taught them that when any person receives Jesus as Lord and Savior, His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection becomes theirs.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul mentions two things that result in the life of one experiencing crucifixion, burial, and resurrection:

*... it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me ..*

When Paul experienced his crucifixion, the works of the flesh were not at work in his life and Jesus was free to express

Himself in and through him.

Christ as crucified was visibly demonstrated through Paul when he was free of the works of the flesh and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Observers of any believer who experiences crucifixion, burial, and resurrection will have a visible demonstration of Jesus as crucified.

Let us spend the rest of our lives placing Jesus as crucified on public display wherever we may go.

### **OBLIGATED TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT**

*Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. Romans 8:12*

The Greek word translated “debtors” can, and should, be translated “under obligation.” The obligation to walk in the Spirit is implied because the verse is a part of a series of contrasts between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit. We do one or the other.

But why would Paul not be satisfied writing of the *privilege* of walking in the Spirit? Why would he write of *obligation* to do so?

The context of the verse provides multiple answers to this question. First, *we have an obligation to our own spiritual and emotional welfare.* Read Romans 8:13:

*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

We have an obligation to God *to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh:*

*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*  
Romans 8:7-8

We owe it to others *to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh:*

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.* Romans 8:5

Galatians 5:19-22 reveals that with the mind on the things of the flesh we are thinking anger, hate, divisiveness, and jealousy. But with our minds on the things of the Spirit we are thinking love, peace, meekness, patience, kindness, and gentleness.

We should think obligation as well as privilege as we consider a life of walking in the Spirit—as we live out our death, burial, and resurrection.

### **SELF-PITY**

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery ... lewdness ... hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, ... drunkenness ... and the like ...* Galatians 5:19-21a

Paul's addition of the words "*and the like*" indicates there are many works of the flesh he could have added.

One work of the flesh that can be added is "self-pity." We feel sorry for ourselves when we conclude that our difficult circumstances come either from an uncaring God or someone with evil intention toward us.

Self-pity is a robber. It robs us of love because we see others as evil toward us. We cannot see the needs of others

because we are consumed with ourselves.

Self-pity robs us of joy. We fail to see the “good” in our uncomfortable circumstances.

Self-pity robs us of inner peace. We complain about our uncomfortable circumstances and those who create them. We would defeat, rather than love, those who create them.

What can believers do when we realize we have a problem with self-pity?

We can begin by believing we are in the hands of God and by understanding all things come from God’s loving heart—and for our own good. We can begin to give thanks for all things.

Believers can confess that self-pity comes from our flesh. We can experience the crucifixion of our flesh and our self-pity by obeying the five commands of Romans 6:11-13.

We will be filled with the Holy Spirit—and with love, joy, and peace.

*The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace ... Galatians 5:22*

### **ALWAYS ON THE DEFENSIVE**

*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Romans 6:12*

The verb tense of “*reign*” implies continual action. We are never to relax our defensive posture against the constant attempts of our sinful nature, our flesh, to control us—spirit, soul, and body.

But how do we defend ourselves against these onslaughts?

The command itself implies an act of our will. We must choose not to live out of our “know-it-all attitude.”

Because the command of Romans 6:12 is one of five consecutive commands for living by God's grace, a part of our defensive stand is also obeying the other four.

In obedience to these commands we believe we are crucified, buried, and resurrected. We choose not to give our bodies to our own wisdom but to God. We permit Him to express His love and shine His light through our bodies.

We permit God to express Himself through us when we accept guidance from Him. He continually gives us guidance about what to say and do next.

There seems to be one condition above all others that breaks down our defensive mode against our flesh.

*Fatigue!*

Many of us have admitted lapsing into walking in the flesh when in a continuing state of physical and/or emotional fatigue. The Holy Spirit will lead us to a state of fatigue—but *not into a state of continual fatigue.*

When we are in a state of continual fatigue, irritability, impatience, rudeness, anger, and other works of the flesh will surface.

When we realize what has happened, we must regain our defensive posture by taking time out to return to continual obedience to the five commands for walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

The Holy Spirit will guide and enable us to keep up our defenses.

### **FILLED AND FULFILLED**

*"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:10b*

*"But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting*

*life.*” John 4:14

With the terms “life abundantly” and “everlasting life” Jesus was speaking of a life of fulfillment. Such an exalted life is characterized by several things. Consider a few.

The experiences of many indicate that few things give believers a greater sense of fulfillment than meeting the needs of others by giving of one’s self, one’s time, or one’s resources.

A believer’s sense of fulfillment is characterized by the knowledge that he is growing as a Christian; he is experiencing freedom from troubling sins and being filled with desired Christian virtues.

The inner peace that comes from walking with the Lord is accompanied with a positive sense of fulfillment.

When Jesus said the water He gives provides “everlasting life”—a “fulfilled life”— He was speaking of the Holy Spirit.

The water that produces the everlasting, fulfilled life is continuously springing up. We must continuously drink of that water. The Apostle Paul describes our drinking of the water as “being filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Our sense of fulfillment is the result of our continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we do engage in sacrifice to meet the needs of others. We do grow as Christians. We do have a continual walk with God.

For the “fulfilling” we receive the “filling” of the water that is springing up.

### **WHEN GOD SPEAKS OUT LOUD**

*... we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20*

The Gospel of John records an incident in which God the Father speaks to Jesus in an audible voice.

*Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." John 12:28b-29*

Other examples of God speaking out loud are His speaking to Moses through the burning bush and Jesus speaking to Paul on the road to Damascus.

In this day of the new covenant when God writes His laws on our minds and hearts, does God still speak out loud?

Consider the following legitimate translation of 2 Corinthians 5:20:

*We are ambassadors for Christ, Since God is pleading through us.*

Many of us have come from a successful witnessing situation with the testimony, "God told me exactly what to say." We said it and God moved in the heart of the one to whom we witnessed. *God was pleading through us. God was speaking out loud.*

The word "ambassador" underlines the thought. Ambassadors are not decision makers. They are representatives of the one who sends them. When they speak, the one who sends them speaks.

And so it is with ambassadors for Christ. Often God gives us the exact words and we reproduce them—out loud.

For the sake of the unsaved and all who need a clear word from God this solemn truth moves us to live out our oneness with Christ.

**WHEN GOD'S NOBODIES BECOME  
HIS SOMEBODIES**

*But God has chosen the foolish things ... the weak things ... the base things ... things ... despised ... and the things which are not ... 1 Corinthians 1:27-28*

Evidently, the people of Corinth looked upon believers as an inferior people—even nobodies. Many in our day have the same attitude toward evangelical Christians.

God, though, has a plan for his nobodies to become somebodies. It is as follows:

*... of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption ... 1 Corinthians 1:30*

When we responded to God's call to salvation (verses 26-27) and the Holy Spirit baptized us *into* Jesus, He became our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

As we grow in the new-creation life, we progressively become God's somebodies. We grow in experiencing Jesus as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

God's changes in us are not without significant results.

As divine wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption fill our lives, God is glorified. Read verse 31.

*... that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."*

Some are brought to their knees before God's nobodies who became God's somebodies.

*God has chosen the foolish things ... to put to shame the wise, and ... the weak things ... to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things*

*...and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29*

### **DELIVERED TO GRACE**

*... you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. Romans 6:17b*

Since the entire context of the above verse concerns the believers' new-creation life, Paul must be referring to obedience to *that* "form of doctrine."

Notice Paul's statement "*to which you were delivered.*"

Those of us who share the message of living by grace have delivered it to our fellow believers with varying responses. Some of the responses are somewhere between indifference and belligerence.

In these cases we were trying to deliver the message to someone who had not yet been delivered to the message.

*How is one delivered to the message?* The Scriptures indicate two ways.

One is an inner disturbance caused by a sense of spiritual failure. Read Paul's words:

*Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more. Romans 5:20*

The passionate legalistic who has a deep love for God is in the process of being delivered to the message of living by grace. Legalism results in sin—and a sense of spiritual failure. In the heart of one who loves God a sense of spiritual failure leads to grace.

Second, Paul's thorn in the flesh passage of 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 shows that desperate circumstances can deliver one to grace.

Our fellow-believers who are not yet disturbed about their own spiritual failure and are in comfortable, seemingly victorious circumstances are not yet *delivered to the message*.

Let us keep delivering the message as God's Spirit leads. At this very moment God is delivering some to the message with whom we will have divine appointments. *Then we and some of those prepared ones will be "on tiptoe with joy."*

### **GODLY LIVING**

*... all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12*

"Godly living" can be said to be "God-like living." It is a life possessing God-like qualities.

The idea of godly living may leave many saying, "You will have to count me out. I could never arrive at such a lofty life."

Godly living, though, is not something we achieve. It is a life we choose.

The words "*in Christ Jesus*" indicate the possibility of a godly life for the believer who chooses it. The godly life is for the believer who chooses to live out his union with Christ.

When we live out the exchanged life, we put the flesh and its ungodly qualities out of power, releasing the Holy Spirit to fill us with Himself and live the godly life through us.

One result of the godly life is persecution. Those "*who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" This reminds us of words of Jesus.

*"The world ... hates Me because I testify of it that its*

*works are evil". John 7:7*

*"... because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."*  
John 15:18-19

The implication of Jesus' words is that a godly life is a rebuke to the life-style of the world.

While the world at large will hate those living the godly life, experience has shown that some will come to despise the life they are living and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Godly living also attracts some believers to choose to live the exchanged life.

### **A CHURCH OF JOYFUL GENEROSITY**

*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 2 Corinthians 8:1-2*

In an appeal to the church at Corinth to give generously to an offering for the poor saints at Jerusalem, Paul tells of the generosity of the churches in Macedonia.

Paul attributes the generosity of the Macedonians to an overflow of joyfulness produced by the *grace of God*.

The Macedonian believers had three good reasons not to be so generous in their giving. God's grace lifted them above all three.

First, the Macedonians gave generously in spite of appeals by Paul for them not to do so. In verses 3 and 4 Paul writes:

*For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,*

*imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*

Second, a state of *deep poverty* could not stop the Macedonians from giving generously.

Third, a “*trial of affliction*”—whatever it was—could not stop the Macedonians from sending a generous gift.

By God’s grace the Macedonians lifted the burdens of the poor in Jerusalem with a generous gift—and by inspiring other believers to give generously.

Even today our churches are inspired as we tell of the generosity of the Macedonian churches.

There is, however, something far more important we can do. *We can lead our members to understand and experience the life of grace.* When our churches respond, one of many results will be a church of joyful and inspiring generosity.

### **SUFFICIENT STRENGTH FOR ALL THINGS**

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* Philippians. 4:13

While thanking the Philippians for their offering to meet his needs, Paul rises above the immediate context and “shouts the ringing testimony, “*Through the strength Christ gives I can do all things.*”

Because all believers have distinctive circumstances, gifts, and callings, the “*all things*” of each of us are unique.

Our source of victory in our “*all things,*” however, is the same as Paul’s.

Philippians 4:13 is a favorite of a large number of believers, yet some have not learned how to receive the strength Jesus

gives for their “*all things.*”

The word in Philippians 4:13 translated “*through*” is usually translated “*in*” throughout the New Testament. When the word is so translated here, the verse reads:

*I can do all things “in” Christ who strengthens me.*

We will greatly simplify Paul’s meaning when we translate “*through Christ*” as “*in union with Christ.*”

It is when Paul experiences his union with Christ that Jesus becomes his *sufficient strength in all things.*

*Sufficient strength for all things* comes “custom-made” for each believer who lives out his union with Christ.

Some believers living in defeat say, “But my circumstances are different.” They are correct about their circumstances, *but they have the privilege of moving from defeat to victory.*

All believers have been baptized into union with Christ by the Holy Spirit and have available to them the same power Paul had.

### **GOD’S PENETRATING LIGHTS**

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ...* Ephesians 5:8

Jesus said He was the light of the world. He also said believers are the light of the world. The Apostle Paul writes, “... *you are light in the Lord.*”

In Ephesians 4:22-24 Paul writes that believers are to put off the old man and put on the new man. He follows with a list of specific features of the old man to be put off and of the new man to put on.

This command for believers to walk as children of light is a part of that list. That is, when believers put off the old man

and put on the new man they will “*Walk as children of light.*”

The result of our “*walk as children of light*” is expanded in verse 11 when Paul writes that our light will *expose* the unfruitful works of darkness:

*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather expose them.*

The word *expose* reveals the powerful and *penetrating* light of the new man.

When he enters and spends time in an atmosphere of darkness, those in the darkness will become aware of their own sins. The exposure is not through words of the new man pointing out sins. The exposure is in the *penetrating* light of the life of the new man.

The Holy Spirit will use the exposure to bring some of those in darkness to repentance. Some believers who have strayed into and, for a season, have become a part of the darkness will return to a walk with the Lord. Some who have always been in darkness will receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Knowing the power of being a *penetrating* light shining in the darkness is motivation enough for us to *put off the old man, put on the new man, and walk as children of light.*

### **“FIRST LOVE”**

*... I have this against you, that you have left your first love.* Revelation 2:4

Ask children who have recently received Jesus as Lord and Savior how they are different. The answers are nearly always the same. “I obey my parents better” and “I get along with my brothers and sisters better”—expressions of “*first love.*”

Recently converted adults often testify of a desire for

their family members and friends to have the salvation they have just received—expressions of “*first love*.”

The Ephesians experienced that “*first love*” and “*left*” it. Almost all believers have done the same. Leaving his first love must be what Paul was referring to when he wrote:

*I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. Romans 7:9*

Experiencing first love is perhaps the most vivid memory we have of those hours and days immediately following our conversion experience.

Some refer to days of “*first love*” and of being “*alive*” as a period of sovereign grace. We were filled with the Holy Spirit without even knowing who the Holy Spirit is.

After a brief period—the amount of time varies—many of us lost or “*left*” our first love and other of the initial changes. Many look back at those newborn days as the best days of their Christian lives.

God never intends for a Christian’s first days to be the best days. He always has something far better in mind. Our “sovereign grace” days provide us with sweet memories. But their most important purpose is to provide a taste of how we can live every day of our lives.

God gives those “*first love*” days as His greatest appeal to us to experience His grace every hour of our lives—living out our union with Christ.

### **AVAILABLE BODIES**

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God ... Romans 12:1*

The word “*sacrifice*” conveys the idea of “being consumed.” The word “*holy*” conveys the idea of “being available.” One meaning of the word “*present*” is “to place at someone’s disposal.”

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23:

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

“*Sanctify*” means to “set apart.”

Each of the words mentioned above indicates God’s desire to have total access to the believer’s body.

In light of these words concerning the availability of our bodies to God, read Paul’s thoughts of hope about his body that he penned to the Philippians.

*... [that] Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.* Philippians 1:20

As the heavens visibly reveal the glory of God, so can the bodies of Christians.

When others can *see* Christ in our lives, our bodies bring glory to God. When needy hearts *hear* our voices speak words of truth and love, our bodies bring glory to God.

As the glory of the heavens draws many to a spirit of worship of God, He uses the bodies of believers to do the same.

Paul’s encouragement to “*present*” our bodies to God in Romans 12:1 is a repeat of his command in Romans 6:13 to “*present*” our members to God to be used as instruments of righteousness.

Living out the exchanged life results in our bodies being made available to God.

### **GOD'S EARTHEN VESSELS**

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 2 Corinthians 4:7*

God's "earthen vessels" are His children—body, soul, and spirit. The implication of the term is *we are like clay pottery*. We shatter easily. Paul enlarges on the idea:

*We are hard pressed on every side ... perplexed ... persecuted ... struck down ... 2 Corinthians 4:8-9*

God sends the breaking circumstances that we might be totally dependent on Him. When we trust in Him, we are:

*not crushed ... not in despair ... not forsaken ... not destroyed. 2 Corinthians 4:8b-9*

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul quotes Jesus as calling this enabling power "grace." We are earthen vessels that we might live by grace.

When we turn to God for His grace in the throes of a shattering experience, our bodies express both the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus—thus resulting in "life" for others. We are:

*... always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. 2 Corinthians 4:10-11.*

"Broken" believers see God turn "death" into "life," as they turn to His grace for "life."

In verse 15 Paul adds:

*For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to*

*abound to the glory of God.*

By sending shattering experiences to His “*earthen vessels*,” God fulfills His intention of spreading grace to many. The result is thanksgiving by many believers and glory to God.

### **DON'T WASTE YOUR CONVERSATIONS**

*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.* Ephesians 4:29

This command is one of a series exhorting the reader to put off the old man and put on the new man. The larger context begins in verse 20. The nature of the command implies conversations with other believers.

The old man permits “corrupt” words to proceed from his mouth. The new man speaks words that are “*good for necessary edification and imparting grace*.” These are words that build up a quality of faith that trusts in God for life’s resources.

The word translated “corrupt” is used by Jesus to describe bad fish and trees that bear bad fruit. Bad fish are thrown away. Bad fruit from corrupt trees is thrown away.

Conversations of our old man may be helpful to a discouraged or disturbed believer for a brief period of time. The passage implies, though, that if our words do not build up and supply grace to our fellow-believers, we have engaged in a “throw away” conversation.

When we put off the old man and put on the new man, God will guide us in our conversations. He will provide the opportunity and words that build up and impart grace.

Paul continues this command concerning our conversations with other believers by saying:

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30*

“*Corrupt*” words in our conversations with fellow believers will fail to meet their needs and will grieve the Holy Spirit.

When we experience our oneness with Jesus, our conversations will direct others to the grace of God *and* bring pleasure to the Holy Spirit.

*We will not waste our conversations.*

### **MORE THAN CONQUERORS**

*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Romans 8:37 (KJV)*

This statement of victory answers the question of verse 35:

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

Before answering this question, Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 to show that believers’ sufferings are from the Lord and for His sake.

*As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

Following the quotation, Paul answers the question of verse 35:

*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Romans 8:37 (KJV)*

The word translated “in” can also be translated “by”—which is appropriate for this context. The idea of the verse then is:

*No, our sufferings will not separate us from the love of Christ. However, because of our sufferings we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*

When some unexplained suffering comes to a new Christian, it can be devastating. Yet, in the throes of desperation, the new believer turns to God for strength—and finds Him sufficient.

In God's timing, the process is repeated over and over. God is crystallizing in the believer's mind and heart the truth that He is totally dependable. As the believer grows in total dependence on the totally dependable God, he is becoming *more than a conqueror*.

Becoming *more than a conqueror* is not the result of self-developed inner strength or courage. It is the result of God-developed awareness of inner weakness brought about by desperate circumstances—resulting in a growing dependence on God.

*“Him that loved us”* is the One who was crucified, buried, and resurrected that we might experience our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection—hastening our development as *“more than conquerors.”*

### **THE GOD OF ALL GRACE**

*But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.*  
1 Peter 5:10

The God of all grace called us to Himself and gave us the faith to receive salvation through Jesus—*without our deserving either*.

*... the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal*

*glory by Christ Jesus ...*

The God of all grace sends *unwanted* suffering to turn us to Him as our resource for life. He then responds by equipping us for life.

*... after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you ...*

Through suffering, the God of all grace “*perfects*” us. The word translated “*perfect*” is used to describe the *mending* of nets and the *setting* of bones. Through our suffering and resultant dependence on the God of all grace, we become usable to God and to man.

Through suffering, the God of all grace *establishes* us. The word means to make strong. As our bodies become strong through vigorous exercise, through suffering—and the resultant dependence on God—believers become strong emotionally, morally, and spiritually.

Through suffering, the God of all grace *strengthens* us. “*Strengthens*” is a companion word to “*establish*.”

Through suffering, the God of all grace *settles* us. He makes us like the house the wise man built on a rock. We are able to withstand the rains, the floods, and winds of life because of our suffering and resultant faith in God,

The Apostle Paul testifies that his God-sent thorn in the flesh exposed his inner weakness and turned him to the grace of God.

### **KNOW YOUR AVAILABLE POWER**

*[I pray] that you may know ... what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe ... Ephesians 1:18b-19a*

In order to experience our available power, we must

know what power is obtainable. Paul describes this power in Ephesians 1:19-21.

He first describes the measure of the power we may have. It is:

*... according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ ... Ephesians 1:19b-20a*

Paul then writes that the power available to believers is the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned Him in the heavenlies. He begins in Ephesians 1:20b with:

*... when He raised Him from the dead ...*

Paul enlarges on the power expressed in Jesus and available to us:

*... and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places ... Ephesians 1:20c*

Verse 21 further describes the power of enthronement as placing Jesus:

*... far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*

By knowing our available power and by continuing to believe and choose our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, we experience resurrection and enthronement power.

Resurrection and enthronement power enables us to “wrestle” effectively from our enthroned position “*against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness*” far below us. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul writes:

*we ... wrestle ... against principalities ... powers ... the rulers of the darkness of this age ... spiritual hosts of wickedness ... in the heavenly places.*

Paul's prayer is that we "*may know*" this power.

### **TAKE THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT**

*And take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ... Ephesians 6:17*

This verse follows Paul's listing of the parts of a believer's armor for facing Satan—all of which are for defensive purposes.

The word of God is an instrument of offense.

The Greek word translated "*word*" means "*spoken word*." That is, the believer speaks to the forces of darkness the words the Holy Spirit gives him.

As we go on the offensive by taking the gospel to the unsaved, often the words the Holy Spirit gives us to speak to Satan will be Scripture. Matthew 4:1-4 details an encounter between Jesus and Satan. Jesus responded to each of the three temptation of Satan by quoting Scripture. Following the third temptation, Satan departed.

We should be open to any words the Holy Spirit gives as we go forward with the Gospel of Jesus.

Notice Paul's description of those who are still in the kingdom of darkness recorded in Ephesians 2:2-3: They walk:

*... according to the course of this world, according to the prince ... of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience ... fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ...*

By taking "*the sword of the Spirit*" we successfully come against "*the prince of the power of the air*." We live out the words of Jesus to Peter when He explained that Satan would not be able to stop the advancement of His King-

dom. He said to Peter:

*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:19b (NASB)*

This could be understood as the sword of the Spirit, binding Satan and loosing the unsaved to salvation.

We may take “*the sword of the Spirit*” by living out the new-creation life.

### **PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT**

*But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God ... Jude 1:20-21*

The only verb in this statement is “*keep.*” The idea of the passage is:

*Keep yourselves in the love of God by building up yourselves on your most holy faith—by praying in the Holy Spirit.*

Many have said to someone doubting his acceptance by the Lord:

*You can do nothing to make God love you more and you can do nothing to make God love you less.*

Assuming that the statement is true, why would the Bible encourage us to “*keep*” ourselves in the love of God? The statement must mean so walk with God that the One Who loves us can abundantly bless us.

The passage teaches that we keep ourselves in the love of God by faith. As we trust God with all of life’s decisions and circumstances, He pours His blessings on us and expresses His

love through us.

*Finally, the passage teaches that growing in faith is a result of “praying in the Spirit.”*

When we pray in the Spirit, we are permitting the Spirit to lead us as we pray. *When we pray in the Spirit, we are praying according to the will of the Father.*

First John 5:14-15 teaches that when we pray according to the will of God, our prayers are answered.

A continuing string of answered prayers will produce a healthy growth of an exciting faith in God.

Let us pray in the Spirit, experience a growing faith, and keep ourselves in the love of God.

The surest way to pray in the Spirit is by living the law of the Spirit.

### **THE SPIRITUAL ONES**

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness ... Galatians 6:1*

These words follow the fifth chapter of Galatians which contrasts life in the flesh with life in the Spirit. Those “*who are spiritual*” are obviously those who are walking in the Holy Spirit.

Paul makes the same contrast in 1 Corinthians 3:1.

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.*

Each passage reveals an advantage possessed by “*the spiritual ones*.” They are the church members who are capable of restoring a brother taken in a trespass—with gentleness—and they are capable of receiving the weightier truths of the Scriptures.

First Corinthians 2:15 also concerns “*the spiritual ones.*”

*But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.*

This passage says two things about the spiritual ones. *First*, they have insight into all things. This is not because of unusual brilliance, but because the indwelling Spirit reveals to them all things. This fact is underlined in the following verse, 1 Corinthians 2:16, where Paul writes:

*... we have the mind of Christ.”*

*Second*, the spiritual ones are understood by no one. The “unworldly” and “divinely empowered” walk of the ones filled with the Holy Spirit is a mystery to those without understanding of the Spirit-filled life.

“*The spiritual ones*” are those living out the new-creation life.

### **NEW “CONVERSIONS” EVERYDAY**

*... the new man who is renewed ...* Colossians 3:10

The verb translated “*renewed*” is used only two times in the New Testament—as is the noun form of the word. Three of the usages describe changes in believers. In Titus 3:5 one of the nouns describes the conversion experience.

This implies that believers can have *conversion-like* changes. 2 Corinthians 4:16b expresses *daily* renewals.

*... though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*

The above statement is part of a discussion on the theme of suffering. Verse 18 explains why suffering results in daily renewal.

*... while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:18*

Suffering changes our thinking from thoughts of this physical world to thoughts of the spirit world where God is. Romans 12:2 also presents the renewal of our minds as the basis for deliverance from worldly thinking:

*“... do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”*

Colossians 3:9b-10 shows that “renewal” comes through our thinking—when we put off the old man and put on the new man.

*... you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him ...*

When we continue to put off the old man and put on the new man, God continues to give new knowledge—leading to continuing change.

Through our sufferings and through our continually living out our oneness with Christ, we experience repeated “conversions” into the image of God.

### **JESUS CAME TO TAKE AWAY OUR SINS**

*... He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. 1 John 3:5*

Ask someone why Jesus came to this earth. If the person has an answer at all, it likely will be, “To die for our sins.”

We can praise God every day that Jesus came to this earth to die for our sins that we might become children of God.

Through the blood of Jesus we can receive daily forgiveness of our sins. This forgiveness removes the barriers that our sins create between God and us. It takes away the guilt caused by our sins.

We can also praise God that Jesus came to take away our sins.

It is *good* that God forgives our sinful anger through the blood of Jesus. It is *better* that there be no sinful anger at all.

In Jesus “*there is no sin.*” No one will ever be able to say that of us. But because Jesus came to take away our sins, we can move in that direction.

If we have a deep love for the Lord and deep hatred of our sins, we can begin today experiencing the taking away of our sins.

We only need to live the exchanged life.

When God begins taking away the sins that have disturbed us, He shows us sins we have not been aware of and He begins taking those sins away. *No sin is so deep-rooted that it is beyond His power to take away.*

It must bring much joy to the heart of Jesus when God’s children begin to enjoy the experience of their sins being taken away—a blessing made possible through His coming to earth.

### **JESUS CAME TO PROVIDE THE ABUNDANT LIFE**

*“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”* John 10:10

Jesus himself testifies that he came to make possible the abundant life.

The words “everlasting” and “eternal” are often used in the New Testament to describe the life Jesus came to give. Bible scholars report that while both words mean “a life that never ends,” they also speak of “a quality of life”—an

abundant life.

Jesus provides the abundant life by dying for our sins that we might be forgiven and become children of God.

Jesus also provides the abundant life because He entered the world as “the Last Adam.” 1 Corinthians 15:45 says:

*And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

Jesus is “the Last Adam” because he came into the world to start a new—and final—race of people. When we received Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit immersed us “into Christ” and we became new creations. We are members of that new race.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17*

When those of the new race experience the new-creation life, they testify from their own hearts that Jesus came to provide the abundant life.

### **JESUS CAME TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF SATAN**

*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8b*

First John 3:8a and 10 express three works of Satan.

*He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. 1 John 3:8a*

*In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love*

*his brother.* 1 John 3:10

Satan promotes sin, unrighteousness, and lovelessness—which is expressed in the broader passage as hate and selfishness.

Jesus came to free us from sins and to fill us with righteousness and love. Hebrews 2:14 gives one explanation of how Jesus did this.

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

To “*destroy*” means “to render powerless.” In the cross, Jesus removed Satan’s power.

Through Jesus we entered the Kingdom of God and Jesus replaced Satan in us. Read 1 John 4:4b.

*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*

When we live out the new-creation life, God is freeing us from sins and filling us with the Holy Spirit. When filled with the Holy Spirit, we are filled with righteousness and love.

When we are experiencing our enthronement with Jesus in the heavenlies, we are in a position of authority over Satan.

### **CHRISTMAS EVERY DAY**

*For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* Luke 2:11

The Christmas season attracts us all, but in a few days it is gone and the people of the world go on with their personal interests and activities.

With those who live out their union with Christ *every day* is Christmas day.

Consider the responses to the birth of Jesus.

Consider the human responses. Mary and Joseph responded with a spirit of obedience to God's will concerning the birth and care of Jesus. They responded with a sense of wonder—awe and inquiry. Mary and Elizabeth responded with praise.

The shepherds responded with excitement and a desire to tell others. The wise men responded with a spirit of worship and generosity.

Herod responded to the news of the coming of Jesus with fear and hate. He attempted to destroy Jesus.

*Every day*, believers who live out their union with Christ are aware that there are those who fear and hate the thought of the advancement of the message of Jesus and attempt to stamp it out.

*Every day*, they deeply desire that others know about the Lord Jesus and rejoice that God sends millions to guide many to Him.

*Every day*, they live with a spirit of praise and worship.

*Every day*, they live in a sense of wonder—a sense of awe and inquiry. They thrill at what they know about Jesus and long to know more about Him

*Every day*, they are excited about Jesus and take pleasure in the privilege of living in availability to Him. They experience deep fulfillment in giving away their lives for the sake of others.

For those who live out the exchanged life *every day* is Christmas day.

### **A GIFT FOR JESUS**

*"I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"* Luke 12:49

The fire Jesus came to send is the Holy Spirit. The day Jesus “poured out” the Holy Spirit on the 120 in the upper room, “... *there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.*”

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Paul writes, “*Do not quench the Spirit*”—the word “*quench*” indicating the Spirit is as a fire.

In chapters 14, 15, and 16 of John, Jesus tells the disciples that He will send the Holy Spirit to live in them—and informs them of things the Spirit will do in, for, and through them.

Jesus knew that the quality of life experienced by his disciples at the time was a poverty-stricken existence compared to the quality of life “the fire” would produce. So He said:

*“... and how I wish it were already kindled!”*

The day of Pentecost had to be one of fulfilling joy to the heart of Jesus. He knew that the fire He had sent would change everything for his disciples.

That same fire fills the life of each new believer, bringing great joy to Jesus Who made it possible.

Paul’s charge not to “*quench the Spirit,*” however, reveals that believers can reduce the blaze of the fire into smoldering embers.

Jesus, Who is “... *the same yesterday, today, and forever*” must look at some believers and churches and say, “*Oh, how I wish the fire I sent were burning brightly in them now, but they seem willing to live on with the smoldering embers.*”

That fire will burn brightly in individuals and churches that will experience the filling of the Holy Spirit—releasing the fire.

Individuals and churches that release the fire of the Spirit present a fulfilling gift to the Lord Jesus—Who makes it possible.

### **LIVING FAR ABOVE THE POVERTY LINE**

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*  
2 Corinthians 8:9

Just as there is a financial poverty line, there is a spiritual poverty line—below which many believers live, unnecessarily. Jesus became poor so believers “*through His poverty might become rich.*”

Through His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection Jesus provided entrance into the Kingdom of God for believers and made possible their own spiritual crucifixion, burial, and resurrection—resulting in spiritual riches.

Consider a statement Paul made concerning himself. In 2 Corinthians 6:10 Paul describes himself as:

*... poor, yet making many rich ...*

Jesus came to make us rich. Paul made people rich. Jesus provided the spiritual riches. Paul told people how to receive them. First, he pointed people to Jesus for salvation. But he did more. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul writes:

*I have sent Timothy to you ... who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*

In every church formed of the new believers, Paul testified of his “*ways in Christ.*” He testified of his oneness with Christ in crucifixion, burial, and resurrection and how to experience them.

We can easily conclude that Paul also told the believers in every church of the riches they could have by experiencing their own crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

Those same riches are still available for believers. One

only has to pursue the new-creation life.

If more of God's children are to live far above the spiritual poverty line, some must teach the message of the new-creation life and others must respond to the teaching.

### **FILLED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS**

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”* Matthew 5:6

According to this beatitude in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, people filled with righteousness are *“blessed.”* They are happy.

It is not difficult to teach a believer how to be filled with righteousness. Romans 5:17 states that *righteousness*, along with grace, is *received*.

*... those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*

*“Receive”* is a verb of continual action. We may continue to *receive* grace and *righteousness* by living out our oneness with Christ.

Many respond to the message of how to be filled with grace and *righteousness* with indifference and unconcern. Jesus explains why—one must hunger and thirst for it.

Only God can produce *hunger and thirst for righteousness*. Can believers participate with God in producing the *hunger and thirst* in other believers? They can.

Believers living out the life of grace and *righteousness* provide God with examples to use in creating *hunger and thirst for righteousness* in others. Believers can pray for God to produce a *hunger and thirst for righteousness* in others.

**BEFORE GOD—HOLY, BLAMELESS, AND IN LOVE**

*... He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love ... Ephesians 1:4*

This verse reaches from eternity to eternity. In eternity past, God chose us “*in Jesus*” to be before him holy, blameless, and in love. Believers who have gone on to the Lord are now in this blessed communion with Him—throughout eternity future.

Because we are “*in Christ*,” *God sees and accepts us now* as filled with love, holiness, and blamelessness.

But is there Scriptural evidence that believers can *experience* such a lofty reality in this life? *There is.*

In Colossians 3:1-4 Paul teaches that in experiencing our crucifixion and resurrection we may have Jesus as our very “*lives*.”

When Jesus is his *life*, the believer is in the presence of the Father, filled with love, holy, and without blame. One who is “*holy*” is available to God.

The experience may be only for a moment, but it is real and can be a growing experience. In Philippians 3:8-14 Paul says he has reduced his life to one thing—experiencing life in the heavenlies.

Paul knew experiencing life in the heavenlies is being in the presence of God in love, holy, and blameless. This awareness must have motivated him to reduce his life to that one thing.

In Ephesians 1:3-6 Paul states that this eternity to eternity blessing results in praise to the glory of God’s grace.

**RESTORED JOY**

*The fruit of the Spirit is ... joy ... Galatians 5:22*

When, at our invitation, Jesus entered our lives, we were filled with the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit—including joy.

That first burst of joy came without our knowing it would come and without our knowing how it came. We were filled with the Holy Spirit and did not know it.

In those first days or weeks we were in that period of “sovereign grace” which God grants to all new believers.

Along the way, most of us lost the filling of the Spirit and the accompanying joy. In one degree or another we always long for a return to that first filling of the Spirit and joy.

We were like David who lost his joy. In one of the most emotional passages of the Scriptures David cried out to God for its return:

*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation ... Psalm 51:12*

Bible scholars believe that Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 were prompted by David’s sins of adultery and murder—sins which resulted in his loss of joy.

Many of us lost the joy of our salvation because we did not understand the Christian life and began serving God in human wisdom and strength. The flesh was back in power and we were no longer filled with the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 show that David sought the restoration of joy through repentance and confession. We often do the same, but for us there is more.

We can receive the restoration of our joy by receiving again the filling of the Holy Spirit—and it can be a continual experience.

### **DOING GOD’S WILL—EVEN RELUCTANTLY**

*... Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence*

*of the LORD.* Jonah 1:3

Jonah had no intention of responding to God's call to go to Nineveh and warn the people of God's coming judgment.

While on a ship going in the opposite direction, he was thrown overboard. He was swallowed by a big fish and then thrown up on shore.

God called again. Jonah reluctantly went to Nineveh where he preached a sermon of eight words. The entire city of 120,000 people repented—and the city was spared the judgment of God.

Such a response should have caused great rejoicing for any evangelist—but not so for Jonah. The Ninevites were enemies of his people. Read his response to their repentance:

*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the LORD ... "now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"* Jonah 4:1-3

What is the message of Jonah? There may be times God has a call on our lives we want to run from. But the important thing is that we do the will of God.

When Moses met God at the burning bush, he resisted God's call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt—but he finally accepted it.

While much grief characterized the life of Moses as he led the Israelites, he did become burdened for the people he was leading—a burden Jonah never had for the Ninevites.

Yet, the message of Moses' call is the same as that of Jonah's call. God may call us to tasks for which we have no desire.

But when we live the life of grace, we make our bodies available for however He desires to use us.

**“I HAVE SINNED! NOW WHAT DO I DO?”**

*Then David ... said, “Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly ... 2 Samuel 24:17*

From Pharaoh to Judas Iscariot the Scriptures record the confessions of those crying out, “*I have sinned.*” All believers know that cry—for we all sin. Then what should we do?

First, we should recognize that while we are still God’s children, we have broken fellowship with Him. What can we do about that?

First John 1:9 is our “go to” verse. It reads:

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

When a believer sins, the Holy Spirit grieves, and His grief spills over into the spirit of the believer.

When we confess our sins, we are forgiven of our sins. God takes them away removing the barrier to fellowship with Him.

Yet, God has forgiven many believers of their sins who have not *experienced* the forgiveness. How could that happen?

We *experience* forgiveness when we *believe* we are forgiven.

One’s experience of forgiveness is often followed with the thought, “I know I will commit this sin again. What can I do about that?”

God commands that we *believe* we do not have to sin.

*... reckon (believe) yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:11*

Obedying this verse is not promising God we will not sin. It is an expression of our faith that when you received Jesus as Lord and Savior, we died to our sin nature and the

resulting sins.

We *experience* our death to sin and our spiritual resurrection when we *choose* not to sin and *believe* we are dead to sin and alive to God.

### **PASSIONATE COMMITMENT TO CERTAIN FAILURE**

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

Most of us can say that Paul's words in Romans 7:15 often express our feelings about ourselves. He wrote:

*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.*

Paul's words are in the context of a confession that he had tried to please God by keeping the commandment "You shall not covet ..." in his own strength.

In Romans 7:4 Paul teaches that our commitment to keeping the commands of the Bible can be so intense we are married to them.

Such intensity can be the result of a burning passion to be *accepted by God* or *pleasing to God* while believing that God *accepts* us or we *please Him* by our commitment to keeping the commands of the Bible.

According to Romans 8:3, when we commit ourselves to keeping the commands of the Bible in our own strength, we are in the flesh. And the "carnal mind" or "the mind of the flesh" "... *is not subject to the law of God nor indeed can be.*"

The result of the passionate commitment, then, is that

empty feeling expressed in Romans 7:15:

There is another way—and it is the way to victory. Romans 8:4 speaks of the righteous requirement of the law being fulfilled in us:

*... who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

According to Romans 8:2, the Holy Spirit is continuously working in our hearts to live out the commands of Romans 6:11-13. When we respond to that leadership, we will be filled with the Spirit and He will live out the commands through us.

The result is an inner sense of *fulfillment*—not an inner sense of *failure*.

### **THE RICHES OF GOD'S MERCY**

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ... Ephesians 2:4-6*

God's mercy is one of the great themes of the Bible. The above passage is the only place declaring that God is *rich in mercy*.

While we believe there is always richness in God's mercy, there must be some reason the word *rich* is used in this passage.

The reason is likely found in the context of the passage. Verses 1-3 describe our spiritual condition and way of life before we received Jesus as Lord and Savior. Verses 4-6 describe what God did for us in our spiritual resurrection.

In our pre-conversion condition we were:

*... dead in trespasses and sins. We walked according to the course of this world. We walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all walked in the lusts of our flesh. We fulfilled the desires of the flesh and mind. We were by nature the children of wrath. Ephesians 2b-3*

While in that condition and way of life we received Jesus as Lord and Savior. Immediately, *God, who is rich in mercy:*

*... made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ... Ephesians 2:5b-6*

Interpreted in light of the New Testament, this means that God entered our lives as He reentered the body of Jesus after His crucifixion. It means just as the resurrected Jesus left the place of the dead ones, God raised us out of close fellowship with the spiritually dead. It means just as Jesus ascended to heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father, God placed us in the same heavenly places.

Life in the heavenlies—ours through the riches of God’s grace—is ours to experience if we choose it and believe it.

What a contrast with the life we had before Jesus came into our lives! Experiencing enthronement is to be rich in mercy.

### **IMITATORS OF GOD?**

*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us ... Ephesians 5:1-2*

A God-loving person not familiar with Paul’s approach to

the Christian life would conclude that the only thing to do is increase his determination and do his very best to love like God does.

One of the rules for understanding a statement of Scripture is to interpret it in light of its context. Following that rule, we understand that Paul is not speaking of creating our own love.

In Ephesians 4:22-24 Paul explains that when his readers learned about Jesus, they learned to put off the old man and put on the new man. Following that explanation, Paul lists a number of particular settings in which we are to put off the old man and put on the new man. As a part of this series, Paul writes:

*Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ has loved us ... Ephesians 5:1-2a.*

*“Therefore” ties the statement to the previous verse which speaks of loving as God loves.*

In Ephesians 4:32 Paul writes:

*... forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

It is only as we live out our union with Christ that we can be imitators of God *“forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave us.”* Ephesians 4:32

By putting off the old man and putting on the new man we can be imitators of God.

### **A PRIMER ON DISCIPLESHIP**

*but you have not so learned Christ, if indeed You have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus that you put off ... the old man ... and that you put on the new man ... Ephesians 4:20-24*

Paul's "... *as the truth is in Jesus ...*" is best understood as meaning:...

*"...as the truth is in your union with Jesus..."*

Paul is reminding his readers of the first teachings they had received about Jesus.

With "... *you have not so learned Christ ...*" Paul refers to what he had just written—a description of the condition and ways of unbelievers. When he taught them Jesus, he left no room for continuing in sin.

With his statement "*in Jesus*" Paul reminds his Ephesian readers of the "*in Christ*" truths he had taught—those truths developed at length in Romans 5:12-8:39.

Paul had taught them that when they received Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit baptized them into the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Paul had taught his Ephesian readers that because they were crucified, buried, and resurrected, they *could* and *should* "put off the old man and put on the new man."

The passage provides an effective primer for all who would disciple others.

We should teach believers of their union with Christ in crucifixion, burial, and resurrection; we should teach them to put off the old man and put on the new man; we should continually bring them back to the "*in Christ*" truths.

### **FEEDING ON ASHES?**

*He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside; And he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"* Isaiah 44:20

*It is common knowledge that even some believers make gods of such things as an occupation or members of the family. That is, they have put people or things before God. In doing so they feed on ashes.*

One does not have to create another god to feed on ashes. One can be passionate in his devotion to God and yet be “feeding on ashes” if he does not understand the biblical teachings of how to walk with God.

The broader passage in Isaiah describes people making their own gods from inanimate objects such as parts of trees. To worship such gods is to feed on ashes. Eating a bowl of ashes provides neither pleasure nor nourishment. It does result in disappointment and discomfort.

No one has had a greater passion to walk with God than the Apostle Paul—and yet early in his Christian life he found himself “feeding on ashes.” In a post-conversion testimony he writes:

*I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. Romans 7:9*

God delivered Paul from his “feeding on ashes” when he ceased trying to keep the commandments and began experiencing his oneness with Jesus.

If we sense we are “feeding on ashes,” we can “taste and see that the Lord is good” by taking Paul’s approach to the Christian life.

### **HEALING THE LEPERS**

*Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up ... Matthew 11:4b-5*

Read another statement Jesus made about His miracle work.

*... he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. “ John 14:12*

Believers who live in continual dependence on Jesus will do greater works than He did. The things Jesus did for people physically will be done spiritually for them by those continuing to live in faith.

Lepers were among those Jesus healed. These were diseased people who were forced to live in isolation. Certainly many spiritual lepers live similarly isolated lives.

Some believers are spiritual lepers because of such things as shyness, feelings of inferiority, and fear of people. Others are isolated because of personality and character problems such as extreme arrogance, anger, bitterness, selfishness, and a critical spirit.

Spiritual lepers can be healed by one who lives the exchanged life.

When a believer who lives in dependence on Jesus teaches a leprous believer about his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, and the spiritual leper understands and believes and chooses the new-creation life, the healing process begins—and the believer has done the greater work.

In John 14:10 Jesus said the Father does the work through Him. The same is true of us. We can be God’s instrument of telling the message of crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, but only God can cause a fellow-believer to understand and respond to the truth.

*Let us apply the cure for spiritual leprosy.*

**TAKE BACK YOUR HARP**

*By the rivers of Babylon, ... we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. Psalm 137:1-2*

The psalmist had been carried with others to Babylon. Their captors wanted them to sing the songs of Zion. Obviously, it was for the purpose of entertainment—not to worship Jehovah God.

The Jewish people neither had a song in their hearts nor a desire to entertain the Babylonians. The psalmist and his friends hung their harps upon the willows in the midst of a river.

At times, God’s children have to “hang their harps.” Their song is gone. We may know—or we may not know—why our song is gone.

It is not essential that we know why the song is gone. It is essential that we understand we can take back the harp—we can sing again.

In Ephesians 5:18 Paul writes:

*... be filled with the Spirit ...*

Ephesians 5:19 expresses one of the results of believers being filled with the Spirit. They will be:

*... speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord ...*

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, there is a song in the heart. A companion verse is Galatians 5:22 says, “... *the fruit of the Spirit is ... joy.*” A heart full of joy is a heart filled with a song.

Have you hung your harp?

Take it back. Live out your union with Christ and be filled

with the Spirit—and *sing again*.

### **THOSE OTHERS**

*Others were tortured ... Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. Hebrews 11:35b-36*

One cannot read Hebrews 11, “the faith chapter” of the Bible, without rejoicing at the mighty acts of God in response to faith.

However, after relating God’s mighty acts in response to faith, the author turns to the theme of “*others*” whose faith resulted in grace of a different type.

First, consider further descriptions of the lot in life of the “*others*.”

*They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented ... Hebrews 11:37*

While there are no stories of mighty deliverances for the “*others*,” there are statements of great significance. The “*others*” were:

*... not accepting deliverance ... Hebrews 11:35*

Faith enabled the “*others*” to receive persecution in victory. Hebrews 11:38 testifies that the “*others*” were people:

*... of whom the world was not worthy.*

Verse 39a adds that the others had:

*...obtained a good testimony ...*

The author concludes that the “*others*,” along with us, will be perfected.

*God having provided something better for us, that they*

*should not be made perfect apart from us.* Hebrews 11:40

You may be one of the “*others*” of whom the world is not worthy; living in victory under painful circumstances, and awaiting God’s perfecting work upon leaving this life.

Your good testimony is an inspiration to all who know you.

### **ROADS IN THE WILDERNESS**

*Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.* Isaiah 43:19

At the time God gave this analogy of His power, the only tool available for clearing a road in the wilderness was likely an ax.

Often, we believers face a wilderness—needing a road but feeling we have nothing more than the dull ax of our own wisdom and strength to work with.

Yet, when we understand and experience our new-creation life, God makes roads in the wilderness. There are reasons He does so.

Living out our new-creation life, we move from a life of initiation to a life of response. We begin to live as Jesus lived, and His was a life of response. He says:

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”* John 5:19

This and other passages in the New Testament reveal that Jesus lived out His earthly life in response to and dependence on His Father. Every wilderness He faced was from His Father. Every road made in the wilderness was made by His Father.

When we live out our union with Christ, we not only see

every wilderness as given by the Father but we are in total dependence on Him to make the road through the wilderness.

We look at the wilderness not with our dull ax of self-effort but in total dependence on a sovereign and all-powerful God.

Time and again He makes roads in the wilderness.

### **SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG**

*He has put a new song in my mouth—Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord ... Psalm 40:3*

The Scriptures speak of the singing of a “*new song*” nine times. Two references are in the Revelation. One of the “*new songs*” is sung to Jesus and the other is sung “before the throne.”

Five of the nine references are encouragements to the people of God to sing a new song to the Lord because of His character and works.

Two of the references are testimonies of authors of Psalms.

The testimony of Psalm 40:3 follows a description of answered prayer and a mighty deliverance by the Lord.

The second testimony, recorded in Psalm 144:9, is the author’s commitment to sing a new song if God will deliver him.

While nothing more than serious meditation on the character and work of God can prompt a new song to the Lord, we are more likely to sing a new song to the Lord when He does a new work in our lives.

Every time God delivers us or others from some dreaded situation, we have a new understanding of Him which calls for a new song with new words and a new melody.

God’s new works in our lives are the result of living a

life of dependence on Him—which is living by grace.

A special new work of God which we can experience each day of our lives is that of the Holy Spirit revealing new truths about the Father and the Son. Most often these come as we read the Bible while receiving the filling of the Holy Spirit by living out the “in Christ” truths.

When one man learned the “*in Christ*” truths, he began composing songs with the words “I am in Christ and He is in me.” If we cannot do that, we can live out the last part of Psalm 33:3. It reads:

*Play skillfully with a shout of joy.*

### **THE BALM OF GILEAD**

*“Go up to Gilead and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt; in vain you will use many medicines; you shall not be cured. Jeremiah 46:11*

From as far away as Egypt people would travel to Gilead, northeast of the Dead Sea, for healing of their bodies. Egypt had needs greater than those of the body.

Jeremiah 8:22 indicates that the balm of Gilead was not sufficient for the deepest needs of the people of God.

*Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there?  
Why then is there no recovery for the health of the  
daughter of my people?*

Throughout the centuries, people have gone to the wrong places for their *inner* healings. Unbelievers seek acceptance with God through such things as baptism, church membership, and attempting to live a good life. The needed healing comes only through Jesus.

Even those of us who have found Jesus as Lord and Savior know there is a healing we still need. We identify with the

Apostle Paul when he wrote:

*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. Romans 7:15*

For our healing we go to Bible conferences, pray more, read our Bibles more, repent in tears, and try to go to greater depths of commitment and dedication.

But we have no victory over some sins and we continue in self-centered living.

The balm in the Gileads where we go for healing does not work. It is when we understand and begin to experience the exchanged life that the healing process begins.

### **PARENTING BY GRACE**

*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4*

In Ephesians 4:20-24 Paul reminds his readers that when they learned Jesus, they learned to put off the old man and put on the new man.

Interpreted in the light of Paul's other writings this means they learned that in their union with Jesus they were crucified, buried, and resurrected. They learned to put off the old man and put on the new man by experiencing their oneness with Jesus.

Following Paul's reminder of what his readers had learned about Jesus, he mentions several areas in which they should put off the old man and put on the new man.

One of those areas is family relationships—first, he writes of marital relationships and then of parent-child relationships.

In the parent-child section Paul commands fathers to put off the old man who provokes the children to wrath and to put

on the new man who brings up the children in the training and admonition of the Lord.

When the father puts off the old man, he puts off the anger and the foolish thinking produced by the old man that evokes anger on the part of the child.

The putting on of the new man results in an infusion of divine love and divine wisdom which results in bringing up the children in the training and admonition of the Lord.

### **FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD**

*... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*  
Ephesians 3:19b

This statement is the conclusion of Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians. The prayer makes one request—that God would grant the readers:

*... to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man ...* Ephesians 3:16

According to Paul's theology, this strengthening of the inner man by the Holy Spirit is the result of the readers being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Everything else in the prayer expresses the results of the strengthening. The first result Paul mentions is:

*... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ...* Ephesians 3:17a

Since Christ is already "in" believers, the word "dwell" introduces a new thought. He surely means Christ being the very lives of the readers—the result of which is:

*... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge ...* Ephesians 3:17b-19a

With Christ as our lives, our hearts will be so filled with love that we will comprehend and know by experience the vastness of the love of Christ which passes knowledge—with the result:

*... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*  
Ephesians 3:19b

To impress his readers that God is able to answer such a prayer Paul follows his prayer with:

*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*  
Ephesians 3:20-21

### **THE RICHES OF DIVINE WISDOM**

*Happy is the man who finds wisdom ...* Proverbs 3:13a

The Book of Proverbs is filled with statements declaring the benefits of possessing wisdom.

The Book of James promises that wisdom is available to those who ask for it with faith.

First Corinthians 1:30a reveals another way believers may have the privilege of possessing divine wisdom. The passage reads:

*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God ...*

Because God placed us “*in Christ Jesus*,” Jesus becomes our wisdom from God.

Some of us who are “in Christ” do not always seem to be filled with wisdom. So, we must understand Paul’s statement to include the thought of our living out our union with Christ that results in Jesus being our wisdom.

Consider the riches of wisdom that are ours when we live

out the “*in Christ*” truths:

*... her proceeds are better than the profits of silver,  
And her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than  
rubies ... Proverbs 13:14-15a*

The passage continues:

*And all the things you may desire cannot compare  
with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her  
left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of  
pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a  
tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy  
are all who retain her ... Proverbs 3:15b-18*

All is ours if we will take it.

### **GRACE IS NOT JUST ANOTHER EMPHASIS**

*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also  
will appear with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4*

Written in the context of the believer’s crucifixion and resurrection, Paul declares Jesus the believer’s “*life*.”

In developing the theme of the believer’s sanctification in Romans 5:12-8:39, Paul’s central theme is crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. In 6:11-13 Paul lists those things we do to experience our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Then in 6:14 Paul adds:

*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are  
not under law but under grace.*

When a believer experiences his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection *he is under grace and Jesus becomes his life.*

The heart and soul of Christian living is Jesus. The heart and soul of Christian living is living by grace. The heart and soul of Christian living is experiencing our crucifixion, burial,

and resurrection.

The life of grace should never be considered just another emphasis for Christian living.

If one, in teaching another believer the way to Christian growth, places prayer, Bible reading, witnessing, and personal discipline on a level of equal importance with living by grace, he has not taught Jesus as our “*life*.”

When Jesus is our life, He is our prayer life, our Bible reading life, and our witnessing life. He is our discipline.

When Jesus is our life, He guides our prayers and Bible study, teaches us the Bible, and guides and empowers our witnessing. In doing those things, He is the discipline of our lives.

When we study prayer, the heart of our study is Jesus. When we study Bible reading, the heart of our study is Jesus. When we study witnessing, the heart of our study is Jesus.

To make grace just another emphasis is to take the heart out of the message of grace and the other themes of our studies.

### **KEEPING THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT**

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.”* Matthew 22:37b-38

Jesus made this statement in answer to a lawyer who was testing him with the question, “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?*”

The immediate response of conscientious believers to Jesus’ statement is a zealous commitment to fill our hearts with love for God.

Contrast the words of Jesus and our resulting commitment

to loving God with a statement made by Paul in his letter to the Philippians while in prison. Believing God would deliver him from prison for further ministry to the Philippian believers he writes:

*... to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith*  
... Philippians 1:24-25

Why does Jesus say the greatest command is to love God while Paul implies that a believer's greatest need is faith?

Do Jesus and Paul contradict each other? They do not.

The answer to this seeming contradiction is that our commitment to love will remain an empty desire until it is mixed with faith.

We are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We are told that the fruit of the Spirit is love. We will keep the command to love God when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We are filled with the Spirit when we *choose* to experience crucifixion, burial, and resurrection and *believe* we are already crucified, buried, and resurrected.

In Galatians 5:6 Paul writes that faith works "*through love.*"

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In Galatians 5:6 Paul writes that faith works "*through love.*"

### **A CHURCH EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY**

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some*

*prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ...*  
Ephesians 4:11-12

Ephesians 4:7-10 concerns God's ministry gifts to believers. Verse 11 concerns God's gifts of church leaders who will prepare the members for the use of those gifts.

Present-day church life emphasizes mostly the last two leaders mentioned—"pastors and teachers." Respected Bible scholars believe that the two words refer to one church leader with two functions. In that sense the terms should be seen to mean "*pastors who are teachers*" or "*pastor-teachers*."

The pastor-teacher is God's gift to the church to equip the saints "*for the work of ministry*."

The pastor-teacher obviously prepares his members for ministry by teaching them the word of God.

Paul, though, must have had in mind an equipping truth that stood out above all others. In Galatians 1:15-16a he writes of how God prepared him to fulfill his calling of taking the Gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles. He writes:

*But when it pleased God ... to reveal His Son in me,  
that I might preach Him among the Gentiles ...*

God equipped Paul for taking the Gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles by revealing to him that Christ lived in him. Paul's writings indicate that the revelation included the truth that he was in Christ—and as a result he was also crucified, buried, and resurrected.

The revelation included the truth that Christ would live through him as he experienced the exchanged life.

Paul knew that the pastor-teacher must center his equipping ministry in teaching the believers to understand and experience their union with Christ.

If the equipping ministry of the pastor-teacher is to be effective, the believers must respond to his teaching.

### **NOW ALL THINGS ARE OF GOD**

*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:19a*

One can see the application of this statement both to our “outer lives” and our “inner lives.” Consider Joseph.

After the death of Jacob the brothers of Joseph feared he would seek revenge. However, Joseph responded:

*“... you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” Genesis 50:20*

But there is also reason to believe that the “all things being of God” concerns our “inner lives.” This is not to suggest that we are not free to make our own decisions. Those who would teach that reduce us to robots.

But consider “all things being of God” in the light of its context.

Paul has just written that those who are in Christ are new creations. Old things have passed away and all things have become new.

If we were to continually live out our new-creation life, the flesh, Satan, and the world would be out of power. We would be filled with the Holy Spirit.

From that perspective even in our “inner lives” all things then would be of God. Each decision would be from Him.

### **JESUS: “THE LAST ADAM”—“THE SECOND MAN”**

*The first man Adam became a living being. The last*

*Adam became a life-giving spirit... The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47*

“The first Adam”—the head of the human race—corrupted himself as God had made him. Therefore, he could not produce a race of people as God intended human beings to be.

Jesus, “The Last Adam,” being a life-giving Spirit, does produce a race as God intended humanity to be. Otherwise, why would He not be called “The Last Man” rather than “The Second Man?”

Those who receive Jesus will be delivered from the power of sin and will be filled with the Holy Spirit by experiencing their crucifixion—*true humanity*.

They will live life in the heavenlies and have power over Satan and the world by experiencing their resurrection—*true humanity*. Believers who experience their crucifixion and resurrection live a supernatural life—*true humanity*.

Consider the following passages:

*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know ... Acts 2:22*

*Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Acts 14:27*

In Acts 14:27 Paul and Barnabas describe the activities of their first missionary journey with words very similar to the words Peter uses in Acts 2:22 to describe the ministry of the *Man* Jesus.

In their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas had their experiences of true humanity. And so can we.

**GRIEVING OR BLESSING OUR COMFORTER**

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30*

*But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name ... John 14:26 (KJV)*

Being our “*Comforter*” is one of the many ways the Holy Spirit blesses believers.

Examples of His comforting ministry are His revelations of new and helpful truths about God the Father and God the Son, and giving guidance and inner peace in our times of confusion and emotional upheaval.

Yet, Paul exhorts us not to “*grieve*” our Comforter—indicating that we can and do grieve Him. Even the thought of our grieving our gentle and loving Comforter is a grief to us.

How do we grieve our Comforter?

The command not to grieve Him is in a lengthy passage in which Paul exhorts us to put off the old man and put on the new man. He lists numerous features of both our old man and our new man.

Some of the features of our old man Paul mentions are lying, stealing, bitterness, wrath, anger, and loud and evil speaking.

Some features of our new man Paul says we should put on are speaking the truth, having righteous indignation, working with our hands so that we may be able to give to others, and being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

Looking at the broader passage as a whole, we can see that we grieve our Comforter when our lives are an expression of our old man and not our new man. But our lives are a blessing

and joy to our Comforter when they are an expression of our new man.

As we experience our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, we both put off our old man and put on our new man.

In doing so, we do not grieve our Comforter, but we bring Him blessing and joyfulness.

### **WAITING ON GOD**

*But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31*

The words “waiting on the Lord” indicate a trust in God to do something. The words imply that at the moment God is not doing the thing that we are trusting Him to do.

Also “waiting on the Lord” means that we will not act in a certain situation apart from the leadership of God.

*The words do not imply a life of inactivity.* While God’s timing in a *certain thing* may not be in harmony with our timing, He continues to lead us in a very busy life.

Having to wait on the Lord can be painful. Consider those who believe God has called them to some special work but who are still uncertain of the particulars of the call.

Consider those in uncomfortable circumstances who are looking to God for victory while God’s timing has not yet produced the victory.

In spite of the painfulness of the wait, those who do wait on the Lord will move to a divine dimension in life. Consider the following verses of the larger passage.

*The Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints*

*nor is weary.* Isaiah 40:28

*Even the youths shall faint and be weary ...* Isaiah 40:30

*But those who wait on the LORD ... shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.* Isaiah 40:31

Those who experience their crucifixion, burial, and resurrection are set free from the power of the flesh and its desire to make things happen—and happen now.

They are able to wait on the Lord and move into that divine dimension of life.

### **THAT GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES**

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us ...* Hebrews 12:1

A witness observes something and then tells others about it. In this case the witnesses are both observing believers and relating a message to us.

The passage follows the great “faith chapter” of the Bible. Someone has called it the “roll call of faith” because it relates the faith experiences of many Old Testament characters.

The overall picture of the first readers of the Book of Hebrews implied by this and other verses is that some of them were wavering in their faith.

The faith experiences of those mentioned in chapter 11 provide a message to the readers.

Their faith is saying, “Keep trusting God. Your faith in God will keep you in a life of obedience. It will keep you

expecting miracles from God. It will result in miracles from God.

“Keep trusting in God. Your faith in God will keep you faithful to God even if He chooses not to do miracles for you—even if He permits you to continue in a state of suffering. If God should choose that for you, your life will be a powerful testimony to many.”

In his encouragement for believers to live by faith the author of Hebrews then writes:

*... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame ... Hebrews 12:2*

Live by faith and live by grace.

### **A MINISTRY OF CONFRONTATION**

*“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” Matthew 18:15*

One of the greatest needs in our churches today is that of confrontation—the type Jesus spoke of in these verses.

Soon after a pastor began to experience his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, he became disturbed that he had not consistently obeyed the command of Jesus to confront those sinning against him. He resolved to be consistently obedient to the Lord in the future.

Within six weeks the challenge to obey came to the pastor. In God’s timing and in God’s grace, he confronted a man who had criticized him. It was a distasteful experience. The man first became angry and denied he had been critical. Before the

pastor left, however, the man admitted his criticism and repented. Their close friendship continued.

As the pastor continued to confront those who criticized him and to encourage his members to do the same, he realized that confrontations bring an unexpected blessing. They are a major factor in keeping down criticisms and in keeping the fellowship of the churches.

A spirit of oneness among believers is the main issue for Jesus in his great prayer recorded in John 17. Over and over the Apostle Paul taught the need of oneness in the church. Many pastors and lay members pray for a spirit of oneness in their churches.

An aggressive ministry of confrontation would go a long way in healing broken fellowships and in keeping the good fellowships in many churches.

A church with some members who are living by grace will be a church engaging in a ministry of confrontation.

Living by grace makes the confrontations effective as the offended confront the offenders in the love of God and in the timing of God.

### **THE APPEAL OF HOLY LAUGHTER**

*When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." Psalm 26:1-2*

The psalmist describes the joy in the hearts of the returning Israelites to their homeland from Babylonian captivity.

Their joy could not be contained—it expressed itself in laughter and singing. We know the feeling. God’s blessings have produced the same quality of joyfulness in our hearts.

A joyfulness expressing itself in laughter and singing draws attention to itself. The joyfulness of the returning Jews captured the attention of the surrounding nations. They said:

*“The LORD has done great things for them.”*

Surely many who are looking for some meaning in life give attention to one whose outward actions indicate an inward joyfulness. They wonder, “How can they be so full of joy?”

There is an evangelistic appeal in God-produced laughter.

The one certain way we believers can possess this feature of evangelistic appeal is by experiencing our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection resulting in our being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul followed his command to his readers at Ephesus to be filled with the Holy Spirit with a series of statements indicating the results of being filled with the Spirit. The very first result he mentions is that they will be:

*... speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord ... Ephesians 5:19*

The entire statement indicates joyfulness.

In Galatians 5:22 Paul writes:

*The fruit of the Spirit is ... joy ...*

## **VICTORY OVER JEALOUSY**

*Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For*

*he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy. Matthew 27:17-18*

The viciousness that jealousy can bring to the human heart is vividly revealed in the death of Jesus. It was because of jealousy the Jewish leaders wanted Him crucified.

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are:  
... contentions, jealousies ... heresies, envy ...  
Galatians 5:19a-20b*

Could it be that the Spirit of God led Paul to put both envy and jealousy as works of the flesh because of the words he places before them? Jealousy causes both contentions and heresies. How many churches have divided, and how many new denominations have been started as the result of jealousy? Many!

A person does not become jealous of just anyone. He becomes jealous of someone in his own group. It is probably the result of a spirit of competition.

For example, it is not likely that a carpenter will be jealous of a scientist—unless the scientist is his brother who is prosperous and/or famous.

The passages above indicate the tragic result of some cases of jealousy. But there is another side to the result of jealousy—the grief it brings to one who loves God and hates himself for his jealousy.

There is good news. Victory is possible.

Joe was jealous of his preacher brethren when God used them in ways he did not use him. He repented over and over. He wept about his sin. He privately recommitted his life to God. He prayed for deliverance. He read his Bible looking for help. There was no victory.

Victory did not come until God revealed to him his union with Christ and he began living by grace.

It is a victory available to all believers.

### **THE COST HAS BEEN COUNTED**

*“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it ...” Luke 14:28*

Jesus had just said:

*“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” Luke 14:26*

Jesus is not saying we are to count the cost of yielding our lives to Him. He is saying He has counted the cost of what it will take to build His Kingdom. Perhaps this is more vividly expressed in the following statement:

*“Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?” Luke 14:31*

It is not the troops of the king that are to count the cost. It is the king himself who has counted the cost.

Jesus is building His Kingdom. He is going against the enemies of darkness that are headed by Satan himself.

Jesus has counted the cost of what it will take to build His Kingdom and vanquish His foe. He knows that the cost is a Kingdom of followers who have placed Him first. They have given up their self interest, and they are willing to bear their crosses.

When one compares what Jesus says in Luke about building His Kingdom and defeating his foe with what the life of

living by grace calls for, he finds the qualifications to be one and the same.

### **IN FEAR AND TREMBLING**

*And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. 2 Corinthians 7:15*

Paul had sent Titus to Corinth. The passage is a description of how Titus was received by the Corinthians.

*Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men ... Ephesians 6:5-7*

The passage is a description of how Christian employees should do their work.

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2-12*

This is a description of how the Philippians are to respond to the inner working of God in their lives.

*I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power ... 1 Corinthians 2:3-4*

Paul relates to the Corinthians the spirit with which he came to them with the Gospel of Christ.

The Corinthians were not afraid of Timothy, Paul was not afraid of the Corinthians, employees are not afraid of employers, and Christians are not afraid to be in the presence of God.

The message here is a passion not to fail. Every Christian should live with the same passion. Living by grace is our assurance of not being a failure in our lives.

### **DON'T FORGET YOURSELF**

*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:4*

When the Apostle suggests that believers look out for their own interests, he surely includes our own spiritual life and growth.

A spiritual leader made the statement, "I realized I had been telling others about a walk with God from memory."

He was confessing that he had not been looking out for his own spiritual interests. He had drifted from a personal walk with God while encouraging others to have such a walk.

Another spiritual leader confessed, "I realized it had been years since I had read the Bible for my own needs. I had been reading it for sermon material only."

Perhaps the greatest danger a spiritual leader faces is that of being so busy serving others that he drifts from his personal fellowship with God. Until he returns to a daily walk with God, he abandons his need for personal spiritual growth.

Life then becomes stale. Ministry becomes stale and ineffective, a personal walk with God is nothing more than a memory, and burnout could be just around the corner.

*Let us not forget ourselves!*

Our greatest safeguard against forgetting our own need of spiritual vitality and spiritual growth is daily living out the life of grace—throughout each day obeying the commands for experiencing the new-creation life.

When we live out our union with Christ, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and He will always keep us in the Scriptures, praying, and lovingly serving others.

When we keep the first things first, our personal lives and our service to others will be joyful and fulfilling.

### **A CARING CHRISTIAN SPIRIT**

*... if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Philippians 2:17*

Philippians 2:17-30 reveals a loving and caring spirit between Paul, Epaphroditus, Timothy, and the Philippian believers.

In our anchor verse, Paul reveals his love for the Philippian believers when he writes of his willingness to die for their growth in faith. Verses 19 and 25 express other concerns of Paul for the Philippians while verse 27 reveals his deep love for Epaphroditus.

In verse 20 Paul mentions Timothy's genuine love for the Philippians. Timothy's love for Paul is expressed in Verse 22.

The love of Epaphroditus for Paul is expressed in Verse 25 and his concern for the Philippians is revealed in verse 26.

Verse 25 expresses the love of the Philippians for Paul and verse 26 details their love for Epaphroditus.

Every believer and every church on earth could profit from a study of this passage. More importantly, every believer and

every church would greatly benefit from possessing a love and concern for fellow-believers as the passage shows.

Having knowledge of the Apostle Paul and his teaching, we know that this mutual love and concern had to be the result of all who were involved in living out their union with Jesus.

Since in 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul writes that he taught the “in Christ” message to every church, we can be sure that Timothy, Epaphroditus, and the Philippian believers had heard the “in Christ” truths time and again—and were living them.

### **A KINGDOM PRAYER**

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

Since Jesus returned to heaven, He has been praying for all believers to grow as Christians. He will continue this intercessory work until He returns.

It is possible for us to join Him in this fruitful work.

We understand that real growth starts when a believer begins to live out the new-creation life.

We understand that one lives out the new-creation life by experiencing his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. This becomes a reality in all who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior.

We can pray, then, for God to place a passion to experience spiritual growth in the lives of believers the world over.

We can pray that God will reveal to believers throughout the Kingdom that upon receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior they were crucified, buried, and resurrected.

Because we know that most believers come to realize their oneness with Christ through Christian literature, we can pray that the Lord will place literature in the hands of believers that will explain the new-creation life.

Since the Bible may be the only literature some believers will ever have, we can pray that God will guide them to the truths of Romans 6:3-13 and reveal to them the meaning of those verses.

Such praying is legitimate and needful and can result in great fruitfulness throughout the Kingdom of God.

While we pray in this manner, we can continue to share the truths of the exchanged life—through words and Christian literature.

There is much evidence of the need for Christian growth in the lives of believers. What a joy to know that through intercessory prayer we can have a part in the maturing of many.

### **WHERE SIN ABOUNDS**

*Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more ... Romans 5:20*

The best person to explain the meaning of “where sin abounds” is Paul, the man who wrote the words. In Romans 7:8 he writes:

*But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.*

Earlier in the same chapter Paul writes that after experiencing “life” as a new believer, he began to attempt to keep the

10<sup>th</sup> commandment, “you shall not covet”. Read the result:

*But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.*  
Romans 7:14b

As Paul tried not to covet, he was filled with every kind of covetous desire.

So, the *first* thing we can say about “abounding sin” is that it is the result of seeking to keep commandments in human strength. The *second* thing we see about “abounding sin” is that it leads to grace.

*... where sin abounded, grace abounded much more ...*

Many can testify that this is the story of their lives. They passionately attempted to keep the commandments. The result was abounding sin. In desperation they turned to God knowing that if they were to be delivered from sin, God had to make it happen.

In that state of despair God guided them to the truths of the new-creation life.

In living out their crucifixion, burial, and resurrection God began a work of delivering them from sin. The result was victorious living.

*those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.* Romans 5:17

Through grace the victorious life is available to all believers.

**A MESSAGE TO THE MATURE**

*Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind ...* Philippians 3:15a

Some believers are more spiritually mature than others. They express great faith in God, talk much about the Lord, the church, and the Kingdom. They joyfully serve the Lord, the church, and others. It is to this mature group Paul address his admonition:

*... have this mind ...*

To understand the statement, one must know the context in which it is made. In earlier verses Paul wrote that faith in God and not in himself is the way to righteousness. In verse 11 Paul expresses his ultimate goal for experiencing righteousness by faith.

*... if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Since Paul uses the words “*if*” and “*attain*” in his statement of desire, he is not speaking of the resurrection of his body.

He writes of his spiritual resurrection—which, according to Ephesians 2:5-6, has three features: God has entered his life, he is raised from the spiritually dead, and he is seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

Because Paul had already experienced the first two features of his spiritual resurrection, it is the third feature to which he refers. He desires that living out enthronement in the heavenlies will be a continuous experience.

Following the expression of his desire in verse 11, Paul admits that he has not arrived. He then writes that he has reduced

his life to one thing—an unbroken experience of life in the heavenlies.

Paul then exhorts the mature to “*have this mind.*” Restated, Paul writes that even the mature Christian should know they have more growing to do and should reduce their desires to that of experiencing life in the heavenlies.

Paul knows that life in the heavenlies is the best position for one to grow in faith and righteousness. He also knows it is the best position for receiving guidance and power from God. He knows that life in the heavenlies puts believers to work in the Kingdom.

### **GOD EXPRESSING RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH US**

*... [present] your members as instruments of  
righteousness to God. Romans 6:13c*

This command is the last of the five commands of Romans 6:11-13 for living by grace.

The second of the five commands concerns our entire bodies while the third and fifth commands concern the individual parts of our bodies. We are not to yield the parts of our bodies to the control of our sin nature resulting in unrighteousness. We are to yield the parts of our bodies to the control of God resulting in righteousness.

There are two features to the righteousness of God—judgment of sin and acts of love.

Consider a few ways God can use the members of our bodies to express His righteousness.

Through our ability to hear the Holy Spirit can reveal a speaker’s needs—and may direct us to rebuke a sin or speak a strong word of encouragement.

Through our sight God reveals physical, spiritual, and emotional conditions and leads us to expressions of His righteousness.

God can express His righteousness by leading us to use our arms and hands. We can hold a baby with gentleness and love. He can lead us to express sympathy and encouragement to some hurting person with a gentle touch. With our hands we can write a letter or meet some physical need.

Our legs and feet enable us to go to others and express the righteousness of God.

The part of our bodies God uses the most is our voices. At times He guides us to point out and rebuke sin.

More often than not, God leads us to express love, sympathy, and encouragement with our voices. He uses our voices to teach truth to those lacking in understanding.

Let us continually yield each part of our bodies to God. He will faithfully guide us to use them in expressing His righteousness.

### **RE-DIGGING THE WELLS**

*And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. Genesis 26:18*

In Old Testament days, wells were a main source of water. Abraham was a digger of wells.

The Philistines filled some of Abraham's wells with dirt. Isaac removed the dirt. He "dug again the wells." The entire series of events is a vivid illustration of New Testament truths.

In John 4:14 Jesus described His gift of salvation as a well of water. (KJV)

Later, at a celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, Jesus stood and cried:

*“... if anyone continues to be thirsty, let him continually come to me and let him continually drink. He who continues to believe in me ... out of his inner being will flow rivers of living water.”* John 7:37-38  
(Author’s translation)

John immediately follows this quotation with the explanation that Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit.

At salvation the Spirit of Jesus comes to live in the new believer. He is filled with the Holy Spirit. The result is a foretaste of what the Christian life can and should be.

In time, most believers turn to serving God in human effort. The flesh is back in power. Because the flesh fights against the Spirit, the well of water within the new believer is greatly hindered. He is no longer filled with the Holy Spirit.

When the believer becomes thirsty for the “life in Christ” he first had, he is ready to drink again. He is ready to re-dig the well. He does so by putting the flesh out of power through experiencing his crucifixion.

As he continues to experience his crucifixion, he continues to be filled with the Holy Spirit—he continually drinks from the spiritual well within.

### **DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD**

*... whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* 1 Corinthians 10:31

The verse reveals that we mortals—like the heavens—can bring glory to God. We should study it in deep meditation and humility.

The statement is in a passage concerning the believer's influence. It concerns meat offered to idols. The setting is in the home of an unbeliever. Paul says the believer is to eat whatever is set before him. If someone says, "The meat has been offered to idols," then for the sake of others, the believer is not to eat the meat.

People often say, "If doing this does not hurt me, there is nothing wrong with it." The approach of love says, "If this hurts my influence with someone else, I will not do it."

The real issue, according to Paul, is bringing glory to God. If a believer's actions cause some to doubt his walk with God, he should cease that action.

Doing "*all to the glory of God*" also brings into focus things believers should do.

When one takes seriously Paul's statement "*do all to the glory of God,*" he knows that God's will for him is about his total life.

Living out God's desire that we bring glory to Him, reduces us to a life of continually responding to His leadership.

There may be times when we are in a situation in which we do not know the right action to take or not to take. At such times we need an immediate and clear word from the Lord.

There may be times when we know what the Lord wants us to do or not to do, but we also know that we have neither the wisdom nor the strength to do it.

There is no better way to receive the needed direction, wisdom, and strength than by consciously living under the grace of God. We do so by continually living out the exchanged life.

Knowing that our living out the exchanged life results in

glory to God, that life—which is available to all believers—becomes extremely attractive.

### **THOSE OTHER “GIFTED GIFTS” TO THE CHURCH**

*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all ... 1 Corinthians 12:7*

In Ephesians the Apostle Paul lists several church leaders he calls “gifts” of the Lord to the church.

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers ... Ephesians 4:11*

He then adds that the work of these “gifted gifts” is the “*equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry ...*” Ephesians 4:12a

The larger context of 1 Corinthians 12:7 reveals that each member of the church has been gifted by the Lord for the benefit of the entire church.

The conclusion of the overall passage is that not just the leaders are “gifted gifts” to the church “but each member is a “gifted gift” to the church.

You may not be the pastor-teacher of your church, but you are a gift to the church as much as he is. You should think of yourself as a “gifted gift” to your church.

All members of the church must keep in mind two things: our church will suffer without the ministry of our God-given gifts, and our church will suffer if we seek to serve in areas where God has not gifted us.

We must have a willingness to use our gifts for the church and to use them in the appropriate areas.

*Therefore, it is necessary that we know what our gifts are.*

Some have sought to discover their gifts by self-examina-

tion. That approach is not spiritually healthy because our minds are too much on ourselves. There is a better way.

Let us live out the new-creation life and follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit. He will place us in the areas in which we have been gifted—benefiting the entire church.

### AT WITS' END?

*They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man,  
And are at their wits' end. Psalm 107:27*

The verse is in a passage concerning sailors caught in a violent storm. The vicious stirring of the sea caused the men to reel and stagger. It brought them to “*their wits' end.*”

Surely, most of the time these sailors knew what to do when they were caught in a storm. This storm, though, was so horrendous they were “*at their wits' end.*”

Verse 25 states the origin of the storm:

*For He (God) commands and raises the stormy wind,  
which lifts up the waves of the sea.*

Consider the result of the storm:

*Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, And He  
brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm,  
So that its waves are still. Psalm 107:28-29*

The God-sent storm drove these men to “*their wits' end*” and it resulted in their crying out to God. There is nothing in the passage to indicate that the storm was a judgment on sin.

God brings each of us to our wits' end time and again—pushing us to faith in Him. It is a work of love because His ultimate purpose for each of us is total trust in Him at all times and in every circumstance.

God does not keep us in the storms of life continuously, so we are not always forced to faith.

So, He uses another method to work continual faith in us. He leads us to experience the crucifixion of our old man.

As we experience storms and the crucifixion of our old man, we are freed from faith in ourselves so that we might continuously have faith in God.

### **THE MINISTRY OF EMOTIONAL PARTICIPATION**

*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.* Romans 12:15

With this command, the Lord tells us to participate in the emotions of others—in their joy and in their grief.

What believer has not been so full of joy that he had to tell someone what had happened? What believer has not had such grief he had to unburden his heart to someone? Even Jesus took Peter, James, and John apart in the Garden of Gethsemane to tell them of the heaviness of His heart.

Unfortunately, we have all had chilling and disappointing experiences of sharing a joy or a burden with someone who responded with indifference. Such an experience leaves us with an empty feeling and wishing we had kept our emotions to ourselves.

At other times, we have had the fulfilling experience of a Christian friend rejoicing with us in our joyfulness and weeping with us in our grief.

Our own experiences have shown us that “emotional participation” with others is a needed and genuine ministry.

However, we cannot participate in the emotions of others simply by deciding to do so. We can engage in emotional participation only when we are filled with the love of God.

Without God’s love in our hearts, such things as jealousy and self-centeredness produced by our flesh may result in our

*weeping while others are rejoicing and rejoicing while others are weeping.*

The only way we can fully obey the command to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep is by living out the new-creation life.

It is by experiencing the crucifixion of our flesh and the filling of the Holy Spirit that jealousy and self-centeredness will be out of power and we will be filled with divine love.

In that spiritual condition, we will rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. We will have a meaningful ministry of “emotional participation” with others in their joys and in their sorrows.

### **WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD**

*... we do not cease ... to ask that ... you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him ... Colossians 1:9b-10a*

Following Paul’s prayer for his Colossian readers to walk worthy of the Lord, he mentions four things that will result in a life worthy of the Lord and one that fully pleases Him. Those four things are as follows:

*... being fruitful in every good work ... Colossians 1:10b*

*... increasing in the knowledge of God ... Colossians 1:10c*

*... strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy ... Colossians 1:11*

*... giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light ... Colossians 1:12*

As we walk in the Spirit, we will be “*fruitful in every good work.*” As we are taught by the Holy Spirit, we will “*increase in the knowledge of God.*”

It is the Holy Spirit at work in our lives that will result in our being “*strengthened unto all patience and longsuffering with joy.*”

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be *thank-  
ing God for our salvation.*

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is the only thing that will result in our living a life worthy of the Lord and that is fully pleasing to Him.

We will be filled with the Holy Spirit as we live out our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

A life worthy of the Lord will not only please the Lord, but it will give a genuine sense of fulfillment to us. A walk worthy of the Lord will result in blessings to many others.

### **COMMITTED OR AVAILABLE?**

*And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also  
may be sanctified by the truth. John 17:19*

Many of us have encouraged others to “dedicate” or “commit” themselves to the Lord—believing that “dedication” or “commitment” is the ultimate in Christian living.

However, neither word is ever used in that sense in the New Testament.

Important words in the New Testament describing a believer’s walk with God are “saint,” “holy,” “holiness,” “sanctify,” and “sanctification.” The basic meaning of each word is “set apart.” In total, these words are applied to believers almost a hundred times.

A few times we are told to “present” ourselves to God, but

each time “present” is the translation of a word that means “to place beside.”

The conclusion of this word study is that the ultimate goal in a believer’s walk with God is “availability.”

Many times the New Testament encourages us to live by “faith.” One feature of living by faith is that of trusting God to show us what to do next—and that is availability.

In a Bible study someone said, “The New Testament does not teach *commitment* as the ultimate in a walk with God. It teaches *availability*.”

A man in supervision said, “In *the secular world* a person can be dedicated to his job without being available to his supervisor.” He went on to say, “A genuinely dedicated worker can come up with what he thinks is a better idea, even when it is not what his supervisor directed him to do.”

When this conversation was shared with another man in supervision, his immediate response was, “That is exactly right. When I interview a person for a job, the first thing I want to know is what his availability to me is.”

When we live out our union with Christ, we are available to God—and that is what God is looking for rather than commitment.

### **EXCHANGING GIFTS WITH JESUS**

*“I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!”* Luke 12:49-50

At Christmas we think about the birth of Jesus. We worship. We have family gatherings. We enjoy delicious food. We give gifts to those less fortunate. We exchange gifts with loved ones. Let us consider exchanging gifts with Jesus.

As we think about the birth of Jesus, we also think of what His coming to earth means to us. We think of all He has given to us.

In Luke 12:49-50 Jesus says that He came to kindle a fire. This is certainly a reference to His sending the Holy Spirit to live in all believers.

The coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of believers at Pentecost was accompanied with the appearance of cloven tongues, as of fire above each of the 120 in the upper room—indicating that the Holy Spirit is a fire.

The exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 for us not to “quench” the Spirit is another inference that the Holy Spirit is a fire.

Many of the benefits of having the fire live in us are recorded in the fourteenth and sixteenth chapters of John, the eighth chapter of Romans, and the fifth chapter of Galatians.

The gift of the Spirit was costly. Our reference passage indicates that through His birth and His death, Jesus prepared the way for the sending of the Holy Spirit.

What can we give Jesus in exchange for His gift of the Spirit to us?

An appropriate exchange gift is that of permitting the fire to burn brightly in us by not “quenching” it.

We are hurt and disappointed when we give a gift that is not appreciated.

We do not want to hurt and disappoint our Lord. Let us continue to be filled with the fire by living out the five imperatives of Romans 6:11-13.

**O WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM!**

*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Romans 7:25*

In order to understand this cry, look at the two previous verses.

*For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*  
Romans 7:23-24

Interpreted by the broader context, Paul is admitting that his love for the law and attempts to keep it have the negative effect of bringing his sin nature into power.

Paul's use of "*body of death*" is a confession that when his sin nature is in power, sinful passions stir in his body. He is not saying his body is sinful. The word "*death*" is used here to describe a state of spiritual defeat, and guilt. Romans 7:5 is a parallel statement:

*For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.*

New Testament words indicating the stirring of sinful passions in our bodies are adultery, fornication, murder, drunkenness, revelries, lying, and stealing. Even considering committing such things can leave one in a state of "*death*." Few, if any, are tempted to commit all of these sins. One is drawn to certain sins while another is drawn to others. Our sin patterns are unique to us.

Paul answers his own question about who will deliver him from his "*body of death*" with:

*"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."*  
Romans 7:25

The broader passage makes it plain that Paul means his freedom from the body of death comes through living the new-creation life.

By experiencing our crucifixion, we are delivered from legalism. Our bodies are released from the power of our sin nature and from being instruments of the death of spiritual defeat and guilt. Our bodies are freed to be the instruments of God.

### **GRACE VERSUS ADDICTIONS**

*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*  
Colossians 3:5

The word “*members*” is primarily used in the New Testament as a reference to parts of the body. However, Paul is identifying such things as fornication, uncleanness, covetousness and idolatry as our “*members*.”

By such terminology, Paul must mean that some practices can become so ingrained in our lives that they are as much a part of us as our hands and feet.

In recent years, the terms “addict,” and “addiction” have become a part of our everyday conversations. This is largely true to addictions to such things as alcohol, drugs, and pornography. Yet, many experience addictions to less harmful things—such as “covetousness.”

When a practice or desire becomes so much a part of us that it can be likened to our hands and feet, can there be victory? Is grace more powerful than addiction?

“Here’s Life” is one of our books teaching the life of grace. It is a verse by verse exposition of Romans 5:12-8:39—the most important passage in the Bible on the theme of living out the Christian life.

In a phone call from Los Angeles a man said, “My neighbor gave me a copy of “Here’s Life” and God has used the

truths of those verses to deliver me from alcoholism.”

He then said, “I need another copy because I have read mine so much I have to keep it together with rubber bands.”

From the Rio Grande valley of Texas, a man emailed the message that he had read “Here’s Life” 15 times. The result was deliverance from drug addiction.

When a believer continues to live out the life of grace, he permits grace to confront addition, *and grace is the victor every time.*

### **LABORING FOR THE MATURITY OF BELIEVERS**

*... (It is) Him (Jesus) we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. Colossians 1:28-29*

Over and over we hear of conflict and carnality in our churches. We hear of ineffective and declining churches. Why?

Could it be that in some cases a preoccupation with numerical growth has cast a shadow over our attention to the spiritual growth of our members?

In Colossians 1:28-29 Paul writes of his labors for the maturity of believers—this provides a model we could well follow.

Paul *preaches* the person of Jesus. This is the heart of his message to believers.

An important feature of Paul’s labors for the maturing of his fellow believers is *warning*. His warnings are mostly against legalism.

Paul *teaches* believers. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul states that in every church he teaches of his life “in Christ”—which

means that in every church he teaches the message of union with Christ in crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

Paul teaches with *wisdom*. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 he states that because God has placed us in Christ, He, Christ, is our wisdom.

Paul testifies in Colossians 1:29 that his labors for the maturing of believers are through *the power of God* at work in him for that purpose.

Christian leaders who follow Paul's example of laboring for the spiritual maturity of believers will confront many problems in the church.

A church filled with mature believers will be effective in evangelism. The members will worship in an atmosphere of spiritual power. Visitors will know they are in the presence of God.

That church will impact its community with the gospel and with works of divine love.

### **THE DEFEAT OF TWO DEADLY ENEMIES**

*So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths ...*  
Colossians 2:16

In this verse Paul warns the Colossian believers against false teachers who were seeking to influence them into engaging in certain ceremonial features of the law. Paul exhorts them not to yield to this type of legalism.

The word "So" with which Paul begins his warning ties the verse to the two previous verses—where Paul tells his readers why they should not engage in this type of law-living.

First, engaging in ceremonies of the law is unnecessary because the law is no longer in effect. He writes:

*... having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:14*

The law—an agent of emotional and spiritual death—was wiped out at the crucifixion of Jesus. It was nailed to the cross.

Second, Satan was defeated at the cross. Paul writes:

*Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. Colossians 2:15*

In John 8:44 Jesus exposes Satan as “a liar and a murderer.” Satan always has deceit and death on his mind.

Satan, an agent of death, uses the law, an agent of death. But on the cross Jesus put them both out of power.

By experiencing our union with Christ, we put them both out of power in our lives.

By experiencing our crucifixion we are free from the power of our flesh that seeks to keep the law.

Through our spiritual resurrection we are seated with Christ in a position of authority far above Satan.

### **WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE**

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4*

The verse declares three truths: believers have been buried with Jesus through baptism (by the Holy Spirit) into death; Jesus has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and believers also should walk in newness of life.

The words “just as ... also” imply two other truths: Jesus

walks in newness of life and believers have been raised from the dead—which is clearly declared in verse five.

Our attention here is on the “newness of life” of believers.

The word “should” in verse four has also been translated “might” and “may.” One could say, “Because we *might* or *may* walk in newness of life, we *should* walk in newness of life.

This passage means that believers may or should walk in newness of life because they have been spiritually crucified, buried, and resurrected.

Two, among many, exciting features of the believer’s newness of life are the filling of the Holy Spirit through crucifixion and burial—and enthronement with Jesus through resurrection.

In understanding the believer’s new life in Christ, attention must be given to verse six that reads:

*... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*

The word “knowing” ties to the word “walk.” A legitimate translation of “knowing” in this context is “by knowing.” That is, we may walk in newness of life *by knowing* that our old man has been crucified with Christ. The word translated “knowing” often has the idea of knowing by experience.

Through experiencing crucifixion, we may experience resurrection. Believers who experience “newness of life” experience crucifixion before they experience resurrection—just as Jesus did.

#### **A GUIDING WORD FROM OUR MODEL**

*Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps ... 1 Peter 2:21a*

Jesus was God-man. Because, as a man, he lived by faith

in the Father, we are able to follow his example. The passage reveal Jesus as our example in suffering, but He is our example in all things.

Perhaps nothing reveals the earthly life of Jesus more than John's statements concerning Jesus' approach in life. Five times John quotes Jesus as saying that His actions were not from Himself." The New American Standard Bible translates His "from Himself" with the words "My own initiative."

*"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."*  
John 5:30

*So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me."* John 8:28

*Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me."* John 8:42

*"For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak."*  
John 12:49

*"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 14:10

The message is clear. It is the will of the Father that we not initiate but respond to His guidance.

### **PRAYING IN THE HEART**

*And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. 1 Samuel 1:12-13a*

In our day we would call Hannah's prayer "in her heart" a "silent prayer."

Nehemiah obviously prayed a silent prayer. When his grief over the destruction of Jerusalem was noticed by the king, the king asked what was wrong. Nehemiah told the king about Jerusalem. The king asked, "What do you want?" In reporting his response to that important and highly emotional moment, Nehemiah said:

*So I prayed to the God of heaven. Nehemiah 2:4*

The silent prayers of Hannah and Nehemiah were answered.

Silent prayer can be one of the most effective features of our lives.

When we believe in and practice silent prayer, we are not limited to "saying our prayers at bedtime." We can and will pray anywhere and at any time.

While either at work or on a school campus, silent prayer opens the door for believers to pray about every task and every relationship throughout the entire day—without restrictions.

Silent prayer is not just our opportunity to ask for God's intervention as difficult circumstances arise. It is our means of trusting God to give guidance in all we do throughout the day.

Silent prayer makes it possible for God-loving people to joyfully and effectively praise God throughout the day.

Silent prayer makes it possible for us to engage in intercessory prayer throughout the day for fellow-workers or fellow-students.

Silent prayer can turn a sleepless night into a personal revival of praise, petition, intercession, and new spiritual insights—without disturbing anyone else who may be in the house.

A lifestyle of silent prayer will be developed as we continually live out the five imperatives for Christian victory.

### **CRUCIFIXION OF THE GOOD**

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Galatians 5:22-23a*

The leader of a group Bible study opened a discussion by reading the “fruit of the Spirit” passage. He then asked, “If you had never become a Christian, do you think you would have had love in your heart?” Several of the group believed that they would have.

He asked the same question about each of the other eight fruits of the Spirit. In each case a few members of the group believed they would have possessed them.

The leader explained that the point of the exercise was to show that the flesh does some good things. The Holy Spirit, Who is not present in unbelievers, does not produce the “fruits of the Spirit” in unbelievers.

The leader of the group said, “There is a danger in our trusting in our natural virtues. If we think we have enough patience, for example, we might think we do not need the patience produced by the Holy Spirit.”

Following those thoughts, there was unanimous agreement in the group that the natural virtues they possessed

were greatly limited.

For example, we have all known of young couples deeply in love who, after experiencing some of the pressures of married life, had little love for each other left. *All of the other eight natural virtues have their limitations.*

We understand, then, that when our flesh was crucified, any good qualities it produced were crucified, freeing us to be filled with the Holy Spirit-produced good qualities *that have no limits.*

A member of the aforementioned Bible study group testified that soon after his marriage, he discovered that his love was not adequate for a stable marriage. He knew that he must experience the crucifixion of his natural love in order that he might possess the unlimited love produced by the Holy Spirit.

We must all live out the crucified life if we are to possess the unlimited virtues produced by the Holy Spirit.

### **THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS**

*And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him ... Luke 23:33a*

This devotional is being written on Wednesday, February 25, 2004. It is likely that on this very day in the United States more people will be thinking about the crucifixion of Jesus than on any other day in the nation's history.

This is the day the film "The Passion of the Christ" is opening in over four thousand theatres all across the nation. The film presents the last 12 hours in the life of Jesus before His death on Calvary. In those last hours, of course, Jesus was dying on the cross.

Already thousands have seen the movie in special showings to religious and other leaders across the nation. Some do not believe the film to be totally accurate. Some have

other criticisms of the film. Most tell of being deeply moved by such a vivid portrayal of the sufferings of Jesus before and on the cross.

Has the death of Jesus not always brought forth the same type of response? Some reject Jesus and His death for them. Others bow before the crucified Lord in confession of sin and in receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior.

It is always disturbing to believers that others could be so critical of our Lord and what He has done for mankind. It is also disturbing that some believers seem to have a limited understanding of the full significance of the crucifixion of Jesus.

While all believers know that Jesus was dying for our sins and are rejoicing that He did so, there is much about the cross of Jesus that receives little or no attention.

Colossians 2:14-15 reveals that when Jesus died on the cross, the law was nailed on the cross with Him and He defeated Satan.

When Jesus died on the cross, He died as “The Last Adam,” which means that when one receives Jesus as Lord and Savior, he is spiritually crucified as Jesus was physically crucified.

In I Peter 2:21, the Scriptures tell us that when Jesus died, He died as an example for believers, revealing that followers of Jesus are to experience their own spiritual death—through choosing and believing.

### **THE EXTENDED PRAYER OF JESUS**

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

The New Testament presents salvation in three tenses.

We have been saved, we will be saved, and we are being saved. Hebrews 7:25 shows that Jesus continually prays for our present tense salvation. He is praying that we will grow as Christians. This aspect of our salvation is called “sanctification.”

Jesus prayed for the sanctification of believers just before entering Gethsemane and only hours before the cross.

*Sanctify them by your truth. John 17:17*

Jesus’ continuing intercession for the Christian growth of all believers is an extension of that prayer.

Romans 6:16 teaches that when one continues to obey the five commands for living by grace, he becomes a slave to them. We become slaves to yielding the members of our bodies to God that He might do works of righteousness through them. Then Romans 6:19 adds:

*... present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*

The result of our becoming slaves to obedience to the five commands for living by grace is “holiness.” And “holiness” is “sanctification.”

In Romans 6:22 Paul adds:

*... now ... having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness ...*

As Jesus prays for our sanctification, He is also praying for us to become slaves to obeying the five commands of Romans 6:11-13. We will honor our Lord by joining Him in praying for the sanctification of all believers.

Our heavenly Father will answer those prayers by leading and enabling believers to become slaves to obedience of the five commands of Romans 6:11-13. *The result is our sanctification.*

**LIVING BY THE FAITH OF JESUS**

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God ... Galatians 2:20*

In Colossians 3:4 Paul refers to Jesus as His life. In Galatians 2:20 Paul testifies that with Jesus as his life, he lives by Jesus' faith.

A vivid and instructive example of the faith of Jesus happened the day after he healed Peter's mother-in-law. On the day of her healing, word spread about the event. That same evening, many were brought to Jesus to be healed. They were not disappointed.

Early the next morning Jesus' disciples could not find Him. He had risen long before daylight and had found a solitary place to pray. In the midst of what was a very successful and exciting time of service to people in need, Jesus took nothing for granted.

As we consider what happened later, we know that as Jesus looked to His Father for guidance, He received direction on what He was to do next.

When the disciples found Jesus, they told Him that everyone was looking for Him. Jesus answered:

*"Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."*  
Mark 1:38

By faith Jesus went alone to His Father. His heavenly Father told Him to move on to the next towns to preach. By faith He obeyed the Father. One is reminded of Abraham:

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. Hebrews 11:8*

Faith always seeks direction from the Father and lives in obedience to those directions.

Like the Apostle Paul, each believer can experience his own crucifixion and permit Jesus to be his life. When we do, the faith of Him Who abides in us keeps us looking to the Father for directions and keeps us living in obedience to those directions.

### **THE LONELINESS OF GRACE**

*When the brethren found out, they ... sent him out to Tarsus. Acts 11:30*

The disciples sent Paul to Tarsus after the Jews threatened his life soon after his three year stay in Arabia where God revealed to him his oneness with Christ.

In Galatians 2:1, the Apostle writes that he returned to Jerusalem 14 years after the brethren sent him away. This revelation of the 14 years along with a study of the Book of Acts, shows that Paul was in Tarsus about ten years.

Paul must have needed these ten years to mature in his understanding of what had been revealed to him in Arabia. Also, he had time to mature in experiencing his oneness with Jesus in crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

Those ten years must have been lonely ones for Paul. He surely experienced rejection—and possibly by his own family. He was not in the center of the Christian movement. Most likely he had no one with whom he could fellowship about the truths of salvation by grace and living by grace.

Today, one who understands and experiences his oneness with Christ may have a lonelier life than before. God is providing the opportunity to meditate on and experience the new-creation life. The loneliness may be something he has never

experienced before. It may be difficult, but the blessings are many.

In the early days of understanding and experiencing his union with Christ, one believer testifies:

*I am now allowing loneliness to be my companion. But I am willing to experience loneliness—mostly because in it I have opportunity to live out my oneness with Christ. I am spending more time choosing, believing, and experiencing my crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. I am lonelier than I've ever been and more at peace than I've ever been.*

In different ways God creates lonely circumstances for those in the early days of understanding their union with Christ. At times the loneliness can be very painful. But growth in understanding and experiencing our union with Christ is worth it all.

### **ROBBING SATAN OF HIS OPPORTUNE TIMES**

*... when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. Luke 4:13*

Second Corinthians 2:11 reveals that believers should not be ignorant of Satan's devices.

*... for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

The broader passage indicates one of Satan's opportune times. In verse 10 Paul writes:

*Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive ... that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us ...*

Satan considers a believer's unwillingness to forgive to be an opportune time for tempting that believer.

In Ephesians 4:26-27 Paul reveals another opportune time for Satan. He writes:

*“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.*

The command to “be angry” is a reference to righteous indignation. The command that follows is that we should not permit righteous indignation to continue over a lengthy period of time. Satan can take prolonged righteous indignation as an opportune time to tempt us to such things as bitterness and hate.

Certain circumstances in our lives have created opportune times for Satan to tempt us. Many of us can testify that when we permit ourselves to live day after day in a state of physical and emotional fatigue, we are creating for Satan an opportune time.

In our times of prolonged fatigue we often lose our communion with God—a loss which is helped along by Satan. We are tempted to such things as fault-finding and damaging outbursts of anger.

When we live out the life of grace, we rob Satan of his opportune times.

### **WINGS OF SILVER AND FEATHERS OF GOLD**

*Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold. Psalm 68:13 (NIV)*

Psalm 68:12 speaks of God giving victory to His people over kings and armies—with His people gathering the plunder.

The conquest of kings and people while His people slept showed His people that their victories were from God and

not themselves.

Referring to God's people as His "dove" vividly underlines the same truth—the victories of God's people in battle were not the result of the power of man but the power of God.

The dove's wings covered with silver and the feathers of shining gold illustrate the abundance of the plunder that God's people take from the battles.

It is not difficult to see in this verse a beautiful picture of God's people today—those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior and are living out their union with Christ.

They do not go forward with faith in themselves but with faith in God. And time and time again they experience God-sent victories.

Those who receive the filling of the Spirit can appropriately be referred to as doves.

Galatians 5:22 states that the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. When we are filled with the Spirit Who is symbolized by a dove, we are filled with the same gentleness. In Matthew 10:16 Jesus sent out the twelve to be "... harmless as doves."

The plunder symbolized by the wings of silver and feathers of shining gold indicates the abundance of the God-given blessings received by those walking in the Spirit.

Those blessings are personal. We have victories over the negatives of our lives and we have the blessings of the many positives of life.

In many different ways God touches others through us when we walk in the Spirit and are available to Him—giving us a sense of meaning and fulfillment in life.

## **RESURRECTION: SOURCE OF MEANINGFUL LIFE**

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Colossians 3:1*

The word “if” that begins Colossians 3:1 would be better translated “since.” The idea is that we have been raised spiritually with Christ and are seated at the right hand of God.

Romans 6:10-11 teaches the same truth. Verse 10 says, “... the life that He lives He lives to God.” Verse 11 commands us to believe we are alive to God just as Jesus is alive to God.

From our position with Christ at the right hand of God, we are to seek the things above. According to verse two, we are to “set our minds on things above, not the things on the earth.”

“The things above,” mentioned in Colossians 3:1 and 3:2, include the plans God has for our lives because Paul follows in verse three with “For ... your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

“Hidden” means we understand what we are to do by divine revelation. Paul precedes this statement with “For you died,” meaning our know-it-all attitude has been crucified and buried. When we experience our crucifixion and burial, we no longer have to decide what to do next. We trust God—from our position at His right hand—to reveal what we are to do next.

Verse four says, “Christ is our life.” Because our life is hidden and Christ is our life, we must have a revelation of what Christ wants to do through us. When we know that, we know what we are to do.

Imagine the thought: the crucified and resurrected Jesus living again on earth through you. So we are commanded by Paul in Romans 12:1 to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God.

With the glorious realization that the resurrected Jesus will live through us day by day, we count it a privilege to give our

bodies to God. Experiencing the crucifixion and burial of our know-it-all attitude makes the gift of our bodies to God possible and easy.

Such a life is possible only because Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. The Easter Story has meaning for us at this very moment. If we live on the level Paul presents in Colossians 3:1-4, we will have a meaningful life.

### **WATCHED CLOSELY**

*... they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.*

Mark 3:1-2

It was the Sabbath day. Jesus entered the synagogue where he saw a man with a withered hand. The Jews wanted Jesus to heal the man so they could criticize Him for healing on the Sabbath.

It would have been a positive experience for those watching Jesus had they were seeking to see in His countenance the love and joy of God. Unfortunately, they wanted to see something to criticize.

In over 2000 years human nature has not changed. Today some are watching the people of God, hoping to find someone to accuse. Certainly, Satan is in the hearts of unbelievers prompting them to find fault with God's children.

The most common excuse people give for not turning to God is that they themselves live cleaner lives than some church leaders.

When Jesus mentioned "salt losing its flavor," He certainly must have meant that it is possible for some of God's children to lose their testimony and their impact for the Lord because of their attitudes and actions. Some are watching us closely for such failures.

Paul had this possibility in mind when he wrote the church in Corinth.

*... do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God just as I also please all men in all things ... that they may be saved. 1 Corinthians 10:31-33*

Even though some are closely watching believers to find reason to be critical, we can thank God that others are watching believers closely because they see something in them that they want themselves.

People need to hear the Gospel of Jesus in order to be saved. They also need to look at believers and see that God changes those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

As we live out our union with Christ, we will attract some to salvation and disarm some of the critics.

### **“YOUR WILL BE DONE”**

*In this manner, therefore, pray: ... Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9-10*

It is possible for us to know specifics about God’s will on earth.

This statement about Jesus recorded in Hebrews 7:25 reveals one thing that is God’s will on earth.

*... He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

Jesus is continuously praying for the spiritual growth of all of God’s children. Therefore, we are praying for God’s will to be done on earth when we place the same petitions before Him.

Those of us who experience our oneness with Christ know that we have grown more rapidly since we began living out that oneness.

We are confident that all of God's children would grow more rapidly by experiencing their union with Christ.

We can believe, therefore, that we are in the will of God when we pray for all of His children to understand and experience the "in Christ" truths.

We would be praying for God's will to be done on earth by asking the Father to *provide literature* that teaches the message of grace to all believers around the earth.

We also would pray for God's will to be done by asking Him to reveal the "in Christ" truths to believers whose only literature is a Bible.

Notice another petition Jesus suggested in the Lord's Prayer.

*Give us this day our daily bread.* Matthew 7:11

With these words Jesus implies that the Lord's Prayer is a daily prayer.

Think of what would happen if we would *pray daily* for God to bring all of His children to the life of grace?

### **WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION**

*... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.* Philippians 2:12b-13

The New Testament teaches that our salvation is in three tenses. We were saved when we received Jesus as Lord and Savior. We will be saved when we go to be with the Lord. We

are being saved as we grow as Christians.

In Philippians 2:12b-13 Paul writes to believers who have been saved and who will be saved concerning their “being saved.”

Paul tells his readers that God is working in them a willingness to do His will and the power to do His will. It is the believers’ place to live out that which God is working in them.

Paul also informs his readers that they will bring pleasure to the Lord when they live out what God is working in them.

In Philippians 1:24-25 Paul, considering whether he would live or die, had written:

*... to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.  
And being confident of this, I know that I shall  
remain and continue with you all for your progress  
and joy of faith ...*

With these two verses Paul reduces Christian growth to progress and joy in faith. When we work out what God is working in us, we will grow in faith—and a growing faith brings pleasure to God.

We grow in faith through reading and understanding the Scriptures and through our prayers that God answers. We grow in faith when we engage in God-directed Christian ministries. We grow in faith by thanking God for all of our circumstances.

God, then, is working in us a desire and ability to read our Bibles, to pray, to engage in Christian ministries, to be thankful for our circumstances. And He works in us the ability and strength “to do” those things He is working in us.

We arrive at our greatest ability to work out what God is working in when we live out our oneness with Christ.

**THE SUBSTITUTIONARY LIFE OF JESUS**

*When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you will be revealed with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4 (NASB)*

We have often heard of the substitutionary death of Jesus—He died for us on the cross. Colossians 3:4 expresses the substitutionary life of Jesus. This same verse also says that when God reveals what Jesus wills to do through us, we receive a revelation of what we are to do.

When spiritually uninformed people see the miraculous life of Jesus lived out in the believer, they often respond with something like, “That man is an amazing person.”

An excellent biblical example of this is in Acts 14. When Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra on their first missionary journey, Paul saw that a crippled man had the faith to be healed. Paul said to the man, “Stand up straight on your feet.” The man stood up.

*Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Acts 14:11*

In a less dramatic way, the same is true of Spirit-filled believers today. We see the wisdom of Christ in them and call them wise. We see the love of Christ in them and say, “He has such a spirit of love.”

The Spirit-filled believer knows the wisdom and love that people see in him are the wisdom and love of Christ—and not his own.

Receiving Jesus as our substitutionary life starts with a sense of need. We realize that our own quality of life—things like our wisdom and love—have resulted in failure and perhaps tragedy. When we are in that state of mind, we are ready

for Jesus to be our life.

When that desire is accompanied with the knowledge that we are crucified, buried, and resurrected, we are ready for Jesus to express Himself through us.

We receive Him as our substitutionary life by living out the commands of Romans 6:11-13.

### **THE LITTLE CHILDREN**

*And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them. Mark 10:16*

No other passage in the New Testament reveals more vividly the tenderness of Jesus than those relating His love for little children.

The Apostle Paul gave attention to children. He wrote:

*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4*

Some little children are not loved. Some are abused. The Child Protective Agencies created by government entities are testimonies to the vulnerability of little children

Little children are completely helpless and require the care of someone who is filled with love, joy, peace, patience, wisdom, meekness, and kindness to give them attention.

The Holy Spirit produces these qualities in us who are believers. Therefore, little children need the care of one who is filled with the Holy Spirit.

We can be filled with the Holy Spirit by living out the life of grace.

This realization places on those who live by grace a sense

of urgency to promote the message of grace. But how can we do so?

We can do so by continuing to provide examples to other parents to turn to the life of grace themselves.

The message of living by grace can be promoted through prayer—believers continually asking the Heavenly Father to reveal this message to other believers.

The message of grace can be promoted through personal testimonies and through teaching the Scriptures that express how one may enter into the life of grace.

There are no perfect children, but many parents have proven that living out the life of grace has enabled them to raise their children with the qualities produced by the Holy Spirit.

### **SPIRITUAL REFRESHING**

*For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. Philemon 1:7*

In this verse Paul is commending Philemon for his part in refreshing the saints in Colosse. In addition Paul commends Philemon for refreshing him. As he writes in verse 20:

*Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.*

In 2 Timothy 1:16 Paul implies that he *often* needed refreshment. He writes:

*The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me ...*

In these verses Paul expresses a need in his own life that is a need of all believers in times of difficult circumstances or depression—perhaps this need comes because of our failures.

Bible reading and prayer are refreshing. However, all of Paul's references to refreshment concern its supply coming from other believers.

We should be open to God's refreshing us through one or more of His children. We also need to be available to God as a source of refreshment to others.

Paul mentions this mutual work of refreshment in his letter to the church at Rome. He writes:

*... that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.*

Romans 15:32

How can we best provide the spiritual refreshment to our brothers and sisters in Christ?

When we permit Christ to be our substitutionary life, He becomes the source of refreshment for fellow believers through us.

### **“WHAT IS THAT TO YOU ...?”**

*“... what is that to you? You follow me.”* John 21:22

Jesus' command to Peter, which we read in this verse, took place at the Sea of Galilee—following Jesus' resurrection.

This is part of the famous discussion when Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Jesus continued that part of the conversation with the prediction that Peter would die on a cross. He then said to Peter, “Follow me.”

Jesus and Peter must have been walking alone with John following them. Peter turned and saw John and said, “What will this man do?” Jesus responded with, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow me.”

Jesus' second command to follow him indicates Peter's hesitation to follow Jesus to a cross. And who would blame Peter for his hesitancy?

Some who have been exposed to the message of their union with Christ in crucifixion, burial, and resurrection have had experiences similar to Peter's. They hesitate to enter into that life.

Some hesitate because they know very few believers who have entered into the life of union with Christ. It is not a popular message. It is not a popular life.

Even though embracing the message of living out our union with Christ unquestionably puts us in the minority among believers, Jesus would say to all those who have been confronted with the message of grace: "What is that to you? Follow me"

If you are in that mode of hesitation, those who have taken the route of crucifixion, burial, and resurrection with Christ would say, "The victories and blessings are countless. We encourage you to take that step of faith with us."

### **FORGETTING THE PAST**

*Brethren, ... one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind ... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*  
Philippians 3:13-14

In Philippians 3:13 Paul indicates that he has reduced his desire in life to one thing. In Philippians 3:10-11 he expresses that desire. It is living continually in the heavenlies. In Philippians 3:14 Paul describes living in the heavenlies as "the prize of the upward call."

In Philippians 3:13 Paul indicates that in order to realize his desire he must *forget the things of the past*.

Paul is not thinking of the thoughts and actions of the past being erased from his memory. He is thinking of forgetting in the sense of not permitting the past to hinder his spiritual desire to live in the heavenlies.

While there may be a number of things in our memory about the past that could hinder our spiritual growth, two things seem to be the most prevalent.

One hindrance is for past spiritual successes to so fill our minds that we lose the desire for possible spiritual growth in the present and in the future.

Perhaps a more devastating hindrance to our spiritual growth is continual thoughts of foolish and sinful things from our past days.

Suppose someone goes to a friend or family member with a deep sense of regret and repentance for some sin against that person. Then the offended one says, "I accept your apology. Now forget it." He is not saying the sinful acts should be erased from memory. He is saying, "Your sinful act will in no way affect our relationship."

When we confess our sins to God, He forgives us. And He does not want our sins and foolish acts of the past to hinder our spiritual growth now and in the future.

In fact, God can use spiritual failures of our past to reveal to us our need to change and to increase our passion for spiritual growth in the present and future.

**"IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE SAINTS"**

*... that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints ... Romans 16:2*

Phoebe, a lady from the church in Cenchrea, either delivered Paul's letter to the Romans or she was with those who did.

In Romans 1:7 Paul called the members of the church of Rome “saints.” Now he is encouraging them to live up to that name.

In Romans 16:2 Paul suggests that the church receive Phoebe “in a manner worthy of the saints” by giving her a warm welcome and by assisting her with any needs that she might have.

A saint is a person that is set apart to God. When a saint lives like one, he lives a life of response to the leadership of God. The saint is open to God’s direction.

For the church at Rome living up to the name “saint” meant giving Phoebe a warm welcome and assisting her with her needs.

When Paul told the church to give Phoebe a warm welcome and assistance, he put a special burden on them. This surely would get their attention. Since they were saints, they were to live like saints.

It is common knowledge among sports fans that when athletes play for teams that have a reputation for being winners, the athletes elevate their play to a higher level.

Paul uses that same type of motivation with the Romans. The believers of the church at Rome were saints. Paul expected them to live as saints.

All believers are saints—God has separated us to Himself so that He might live out His desires through us. Now the burden of living like a saint is on us.

Paul uses the words “in the Lord” to introduce the idea of the Romans living up to the same “saint.”

The point is that believers live as saints as they live out their union with Christ in crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

### **FROM FAITH TO FAITH**

*... the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

Romans 1:17

The New Testament teaches two types of righteousness. One is declared righteousness—called “justification.”

When one *by faith* receives Jesus as Lord and Savior God justifies him. That is, God *declares him* to be righteous. This does not mean that immediately he becomes a righteous person. It does mean that God will relate to him as though he is as righteous as Jesus. And it means that he has the potential to be righteous.

The second type of righteousness taught in the New Testament is *realized* righteousness. This means that we actually become a righteous person.

Realized righteousness also is ours by faith. Read Paul’s statement in Philippians 3:8-9

*I also count all things loss ... that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith ...*

From the moment Paul received Jesus as Savior and Lord, he was justified—the Lord *declared* him to be righteous. From that moment on, the Father related to him as though he was as righteous as Jesus.

But Paul’s expressions of Philippians 3:8-9 make it plain that he needed a realized righteousness.

He knew that the realized righteousness would come through his faith and not by trying to keep the law.

Romans 5:17 says we must continue to receive righteousness. Romans 6:14 states that when we obey the commands of 6:11-13, we are under grace. That is, we are now living by faith and receiving the realized righteousness. God is living out His righteousness through us.

We never generate righteousness by our own efforts. We receive righteousness—which is from faith to faith.

### **WHEN GOD WAITS ON US**

*Then Joshua said to the children of Israel: “How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers has given you?”*

Joshua 18:3

The Israelites had begun the conquest of Canaan. However, seven tribes had not yet found a place to settle. The words of Joshua reveal that God was waiting on the Israelites to press on with the conquest of the land.

While there is much in the Scriptures concerning our waiting on God, there is also an emphasis on God waiting on us. Joshua’s statement concerning the conquest of Canaan is a classic example of that fact.

When God is waiting on us to act, we know that there is a price that must be paid.

Chiefly, we hinder God’s plans and desires for spiritual conquests.

The author of Psalm 78:41 captured this truth concerning the Israelite nation.

*Yes, again and again they tempted God, And limited the Holy One of Israel.*

Surely, we are amazed at the fact that we could place limitations on God. But we do. He works through His children.

When we are not available for those things He desires to accomplish through us, we have limited Him.

When God has to wait for us to give him full possession of our lives, those He would bless through our availability to Him pay a price.

If God is waiting on us, we ourselves are also paying a price. When we are not available to God, we are not experiencing the Christian growth that God wills for us. We are not experiencing the thrill of being used by God to bring blessing to others. We are not experiencing the peace and joy God desires to give us.

If we will continually live out the new-creation life, God will not be waiting on us.

### **THE HIDDEN WISDOM OF GOD**

*However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature ... we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory ... 1 Corinthians 2:6-7*

In 1 Corinthians 2:6-7 Paul reveals several things about the hidden wisdom of God. God ordained it before the ages. It is for the spiritually mature. And it is for the glory of believers.

Hidden truths can be understood only as they are revealed by the Holy Spirit—who has lived in all of God's children since the day of Pentecost.

In 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul quotes a passage from Isaiah indicating that in Isaiah's day the hidden wisdom had not been revealed.

*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*

However, in verse 10 Paul writes:

*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.*

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:12:

*Now we have received ... the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

God's hidden wisdom is His plan of free gifts to believers.

The overall message of these passages is that God will grant unlimited blessing to all believers who will learn of these blessings as they Holy Spirit reveals them through the Scriptures.

We can continue to receive the filling of the Holy Spirit for His revelations as we continue to experience our crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

### **FINDING LIFE**

*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. Mark 4:35*

In Mark 4:35 Jesus uses the words "save" and "lose" in two different ways.

Consider the word "save." One way for us to save our lives means to be in control of our lives. On the other hand to save our lives means to experience ultimate fulfillment in life.

Now consider the word "lose." On one hand it means to give up control of our lives, while on the other hand it means to miss out on a fulfilled life.

In verse 34 Jesus introduced His statement about finding and losing our lives with:

*Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

With these words Jesus makes it plain that one loses his life by denying himself—in order to yield control of his life to God.

The phrase, losing our lives is to deny ourselves, is underlined by the statement of Jesus in verse 35 that we will save our lives by losing them *for His sake and the gospel's*.

When the Apostle Paul teaches the crucifixion of our flesh, is he referring to Jesus' statement about taking up our cross? It seems that he is.

When we experience the crucifixion of our flesh, we give up our point of view of what we are to do next. That is, we lose our lives so that God may have full control of them.

In experiencing the crucifixion of our flesh, we give up our lives. In experiencing our crucifixion, we are filled with the Holy Spirit who gives us the abundant life. In other words, when we experience crucifixion, we lose our lives and we save our lives.

### **SPIRITUAL INCREMENTALISM**

*...just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. Romans 6:19*

Romans 6:19 is a statement about “spiritual changes by increments.” Physically, this is like a person regaining his strength after a lengthy illness in which his muscle tone is lost. He gains a little strength every day.

Spiritually, the unbeliever gradually becomes the slave to sin. He goes from “uncleanness” to “lawlessness” and then to

“more lawlessness.”

This passage also speaks of incremental Christian growth. Paul writes:

*... so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. Romans 6:19*

In Romans 6:16 Paul said:

*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*

According to verse 16 we can become slaves of righteousness by continuing to obey obedience. This strange statement “obeying obedience” is a reference to our obeying the five commands found in Romans 6:11-13.

In Romans 6:19 Paul introduces a new thought to the message of Christian growth. “Holiness” is the result of our presenting ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness.

Each time we present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness, we make ourselves available to God. At that time we are “holy.” That is, we are separated to God.

When over a period of years we are increasingly available to God, we arrive at a spiritual state the Scriptures call “holiness.” This state of “holiness” is also referred to as “sanctification.” And we arrive there one step at a time.

### **THOSE OTHER EVANGELISTS**

*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:5-7*

In 1 Corinthians 3:5-7 Paul refers to Apollos and himself

as ministers “through whom you believed.” He is obviously thinking of the salvation experiences of the Corinthians.

According to the Book of Acts, Paul led some Corinthians to Christ before Apollos had arrived there. The statement in 1 Corinthians 3:5 must mean that Apollos was influential in bringing other people to Christ that Paul had previously witnessed to.

Paul’s statement about sowing and watering is similar to the statement of Jesus recorded in John 4:36-37.

*And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’*

While there is a likeness between the statements of Jesus and Paul. Paul introduces a third feature to the work of evangelism. Apollos reaped some converts by leading them to Christ. However, the term “watered” implies more. It implies that those who learned how to be saved were *encouraged* to give their hearts to the Lord.

In Christian circles today it is common knowledge that “sowers” and “reapers” are comparatively few.

It is also common knowledge that the vast majority of those involved in evangelism are those who “water.”

Jesus says that those who sow and those who reap will rejoice together. In 1 Corinthians 3:7 Paul writes that the one who sows and the one who waters will receive a reward.

Many evangelicals know ways they can encourage the unsaved to come to Christ.

If we will live out the new-creation life with a view to participating in the salvation of the lost, God will reveal the specifics of what we should do to influence souls toward Jesus.

**GOD'S FELLOW WORKERS**

*For we are God's fellow workers ... 1 Corinthians 3:9*

Some of the believers in the church at Corinth were followers of Paul and some of them were followers of Apollos.

In order to counteract this division, in 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 Paul reminds some of them of their conversion to Christ:

*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*

In 1 Corinthians 3:7 Paul follows with: "neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase."

Paul follows this statement of self deprecation by stating in verse 9 that he and Apollos are "God's fellow workers."

Paul seems to contradict himself. In one breath he and Apollos are nothing. In the next breath they are God's fellow workers. His point is: God brought the Corinthians to Jesus, but He used the human instruments of Paul and Apollos to complete the work.

It can be said that anytime God uses a mere human being to bring about His will, that person is God's fellow worker.

Jesus must have had reference to this plan of God when in John 5:17 He said:

*... "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."*

Throughout the Book of John, Jesus made it plain that He initiated nothing. He was available to the Father. He and the Father are one. But at the same time He was a fellow worker with the Father.

All of God's children have the honor of being God's fellow workers. When we are living out our new-creation life, we will be available to God and He will work through us.

God initiates and we respond. All power for success in any ministry or service, though, must come from Him.



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