

CALLED TO SERVE

CALLED TO SERVE
LIVING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

[A Partial Book]

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Called to Serve: Living the Christian Faith

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Scripture quotations are from the NASB New
American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated:
HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible
NLT New Living Translation
GW God's Word
ERV Easy-to-read Version
CEV Contemporary English Version
ASV American Standard Version
ESV English Standard Version
NIV New International Version
KJV King James Version
AMP The Amplified Bible

All quotations from Brother Lawrence are from
the Donald Attwater translation.

Contents

Introduction	1
1 What is Christianity?	15
2 Turning from Sin	35
3 The Seven Deadly Sins, Part One.....	51
4 The Seven Deadly Sins, Part Two.....	63
5 What Is the New Life?.....	79
6 The New Life: Worship and Gratitude	93
7 The New Life: Virtue	107
8 The Four Classical Virtues	123
9 The Three Christian Virtues	139
10 Faith, Hope, and Love and More.....	154
11 How Shall We Then Live?	163
12 The Faithful Perform Good Deeds	181
13 Good News About Free Will.....	200
14 Faith and Works.....	205
15 Christianity = You	219
16 A Future of Rewards	234

Note:

What is a Partial Book?

A Partial Book is a work that I didn't have time to finish, so I am posting on my Web site what I did get written.

May you find something useful here.

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Introduction



And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.

—Mark 4:20

The Purpose of This Book

This is a book for Christians new in the faith, seasoned in the faith, and for non-Christians who are wondering what Christianity is all about and whether they should become a Christian. A major source of confusion for both new Christians and seekers is that it's difficult to know exactly what Christianity involves. They look around them and find a wide variety of people with a wide variety of life styles, values, and behaviors, all claiming the name of Christ. What exactly does it mean to follow Christ? Is Christianity a set of rules? Is it a relationship? Is it a belief? Do Christians live and behave differently after they have been saved? Should they? What is required to be a member of team Jesus?

This book seeks to answer these questions, in a simple, clear, and thoroughly Biblical way. The book is not a summary (or an expansion!) of the doctrines of any Christian denomination, organization, sect, or theological school. Instead, it is an invitation to journey through Scripture to see what the Bible actually

teaches about the Christian faith and life. As you read, I encourage you to pray for guidance and understanding and consider whether what I say is right. I have included many verses to support my conclusions. I hope you will be like the Bereans:



And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.

—Acts 17:11

One reason there is so much discussion about the issues is that often people jump to conclusions about what a writer is saying or implying. I have attempted to be straightforward in my discussion, letting you know clearly what I think and why.



A PRAYER FOR GOD'S GUIDANCE

Lord, I pray that you will send your Spirit into my heart and mind, to instruct me as I read this book. Help me to understand and apply the truth that is here, and if there are any errors, keep me from being deceived by them. May the purity, honesty, integrity, and truth of the life of God be reflected in my own life, as I seek to be holy as God is holy. In Jesus' name I ask. Amen.

A Little Biographical Context

I was baptized at the age of eight, and thereafter became a rather nominal, non-Bible-reading Christian. My family and I went to church (American Baptist Convention), sang the hymns, took communion, and listened to the sermons—and then went home and ate lunch. I remember in my bedroom a picture of a long-haired rendition of Jesus. This picture, however, didn't prevent me from crying with fear when I thought that someday I would die and cease to exist. Life with the Lord after death wasn't part of my thinking then, even though I thought I was a Christian. Such was my spiritual life in my preteen years.

My teen years weren't much better. In high school, at seventeen, I wrote a one-issue magazine called *The Org*, which included this poem:

A day will pass, and then another;
I'll live awhile and then I'll die.
I'll see this world and then the other,
Then stop and stand there, asking why.

Not much spiritual confidence or optimism about life or the future, eh?¹ My life lacked meaning and purpose. It's a wonder I didn't get into rebellious mischief.

Then I went away to the university where I soon noticed that a number of the faculty had taken it upon themselves to disillusion their students about whatever religious faith they had brought with them. Christianity in particular was subject to attack as a myth that no educated individual could ever

¹ So if you're just an empty soda can floating down the river of life, know that I've been there, too.

credit, while neo-Darwinian evolution was presented as the new gospel, to be accepted – no, celebrated – by all who were sophisticated intellectuals.

I was, quite frankly, surprised at this antagonism, having grown up with a naiveté about the world and attributing honesty and pure motives to most people. That my loosely draped-on faith was being attacked and ridiculed by these exalted and profound men and women troubled me. By God's grace, however, rather than throwing off the mantel of faith and changing my worldview to conform to that of the seemingly wise and urbane faculty, I sat back and paused. I thought to myself, "I'm supposed to believe all this stuff – after all, I'm a Christian, I think. I wonder if the Bible is not true after all?" This thought was followed by another thought (thank you, dear Holy Spirit), "Maybe I should get a copy of the Bible and read it."

New Christian Assignment #1: Read the Bible

So I went to a bookstore and bought a copy of the Revised Standard Version (complete with Apocrypha) and began to read. There I was at the age of 18, reading the Bible all the way through (except the Apocrypha) for the first time, by myself, with at first no help from the commentators.² As I read, I felt the pull of God on my life.

² For a first time reader, I recommend the New International Version. Then change to the *New American Stand-*



No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. . . .

—John 6:44 (NASB)

While I had been surprised at the hostility from the faculty toward Christianity and the Bible, I was astonished or nearly so, to find such a depth and breadth of the Truth in Scripture. There it was, human nature laid bare, the cause and cure for sin, the universality and the shape of that spiritual hunger we feel—it was, to say the least, eye opening. I discovered that the Bible gave me a true and contextual understanding of the world, other people, and myself as I actually experienced them.

Yes, Christian truth was true, not in the sense that the pronouncements of gurus are true (“You must empty the teacup before you can refill it”), but, as some have said, it is “true Truth.” Christianity, I discovered, presents an objective, three-dimensional account of the way things really are.

The world is incredibly beautiful and complex, giving irrefutable testimony to its design by God:



For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made. . . .

—Romans 1:20

ard Bible, Updated. The Holman Christian Standard Bible is also very good, as is the English Standard Version.

From the operation of the simplest cell, with its elaborate structures to carry nutrients and wastes, to fend off attacks, to duplicate itself, on up to the complexity of ourselves, we see God's power and creativity and sense of beauty.



I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your
works, And my soul knows it very well.

—Psalm 139:14

The Problem of Evil

And yet, in the midst of all this powerful beauty and intricate wonderfulness, something is wrong. Much of the creation is marred by evil—disease, decay, sin, death. How can we explain or reconcile these oppositions? Even aside from natural disasters, at the human level, how can there be such love and goodness in the hearts of some and such hatred and evil in the hearts of others?

None of the alternative explanations for human evil (socioeconomic determinism, racism, patriarchal victimization, oppression of one class by another, etc.) fit as rationally as the Biblical record of creation and fall.

The evil in the world is our own fault.

Man is a fallen creature; he fell into sin and therefore mortality, and the ground was cursed because of his disobedience (Genesis 3:17). The beautiful creation is in decay:



For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

—Romans 8:22

And the Bible also presented the solution to the evil that we both suffer in our lives and inflict on the lives of others: the solution of forgiveness and a new life in Jesus Christ. As a result of this new understanding, it was with eagerness, relief, and humility that I rededicated my life to Jesus.

Briefly, then, I was converted from a very nominal believer to a real believer by learning what a true and rational and coherent worldview the Bible presented. It was there that I felt confident that I had found truth:



And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

—John 8:32

One of the important tests of truth is the correspondence test: Does a statement asserting to be the truth about some aspect of reality really correspond (match up with) what we actually see and know about that aspect of reality? For example, the theory that mankind is basically good and that all human evil comes from corrupting social, political, and economic structures never seemed quite believable to me. The account of rebellion, sin, and fall in Scripture made a much better explanation of what I ob-

served of human behavior. God seemed to be over-seeing all the world.

As a result, for me, agnosticism (advanced by many faculty) was a preposterous cop out, an excuse not to think about God: "I don't know if God exists, and I'm not particularly curious to find out." I had suddenly come to realize that whether or not God exists is the fundamental question everyone should be concerned with until it is answered. The answer will affect most of the decisions we make in life. As the seventeenth century philosopher Blaise Pascal noted,



It is therefore a misfortune to doubt, but it is an indispensable duty to seek when we are in a state of doubt, and he who doubts and does not seek is at once unhappy and unjust.

— *Pensees*, Lafuma 15

As for atheists, who say they don't believe in God because, as one told me once, "I don't see a shred of evidence for the existence of God," I thought at the time they were being intentionally blind to the evidence, which is shouted from every leaf, every tree frog, every starfish, every crystal, every coral reef.

Certainly, we have a duty to ask, "What does this mean?" and not simply to dismiss the creation. Shouldn't everyone want to know why we exist?

Quoting Pascal again:



Let them recognize that there are only two kinds of person whom we can describe as rea-

sonable: those who serve God with all their heart because they have found him, and those who seek him with all their heart because they have not found him.

—Lafuma 11

In recent years, I've read that some observers think that atheists, especially the militant ones, know that God exists but they are mad at him—because of a cruel or absent father or because of a personal disaster, such as the death of a child. Right at the point of most need, when they could turn to God for help, they reject him.

Pascal one more time:



Nothing betrays more clearly an extreme weakness of intellect than not to recognize the unhappiness of a man without God.

—Lafuma 11

Personal Moral Responsibility

And, of course, the existence of God, especially the Biblical God, implies a moral system, moral responsibility, together with guilt for disobedience. Such a fact pours cold water on following your lust wherever it leads. So the existence of God is a genuinely “inconvenient truth.”

As I read the Bible, I sensed the rationality of God's system. How logical, how filled with practical and spiritual truth this book was. I came to feel the same way toward the Bible as Richard de Bury felt about books in general:



Finally, we must consider what pleasantness of teaching there is in books, how easy, how secret! How safely we lay bare the poverty of human ignorance to books without feeling any shame! . . . If you come to them, they are not asleep; if you ask and inquire of them, they do not withdraw themselves; they do not chide if you make mistakes; they do not laugh at you if you are ignorant.

—*Philobiblon*

At that time I began to think of myself as a “real” Christian and to fill out my Christian world view. I met a missionary couple whose mission field was the university campus. I began going to their church, an Orthodox Presbyterian denomination, deeply but quietly Calvinist.

Soon I began to meet other Christians at the university, and I encountered many throughout my education. By the time I finished graduate school, I had met many varieties of Christian. Most were what I would call sincere followers of Jesus, interested in living a Biblical lifestyle. But many others were living in ways that seemed to reveal that they really did not understand what it means to be a Christian or to live as Jesus taught.

What Does It Mean to Live as Jesus Taught?

Some people believe that Jesus just came down from heaven, died for our sins, and then returned to heaven. True, he did take on the penalty for our sins, dying on the cross to save us, but he also did something else. He gave us a set of rules for living and commanded us to obey them.

For those who want to be Christians, Jesus must be more than their savior. He must be savior and Lord. He is our king, our master, our boss, our rule giver, our authority for behavior. A lord or master is someone who must be obeyed by his servants.

For example, if you yell and scream at your child or parent or brother or sister, you are not living as Jesus taught.



PASSIONATE AND COMMITTED

At a church retreat, several young people dedicated their lives to Christ. After the altar call, they met together and talked excitedly about their new faith commitment. They began to make plans to evangelize their neighbors, post Gospel messages to social media, and start a ministry to reach third-world countries.

They eagerly sought out the lead pastor at the retreat and told him their plans. He congratulated them on their enthusiasm and desire to serve. "But I have one question for you. As new believers, freshly washed from the dirt of the world, you are passionate to change the world for Christ. But are you also passionate to change yourselves for Christ?"

Accepting Jesus as your savior also means committing to live according to his rules.

Do you love God? Do you respect him? Do you take him seriously?

Do you love Jesus enough to obey him?

New (and many seasoned) Christians don't live according to Scriptural principles for several reasons. Part of the problem is a lack of Biblical knowledge among the would-be faithful. It seems that many people today—in every age group, too—simply don't read much, including (or especially) the Bible.

Another part of the problem is the easy Gospel dispensed from many pulpits. "Just believe and you're good for life," they say. The implication seems to be that once you say, "I believe in Jesus," you can relax and do whatever you want.

Jesus calls us to work, not to relax.

Yet another part of the problem includes the un-Biblical beliefs retailed as the Gospel ("It's all about you," "Claim those riches," "God will protect you from all harm") and spread among the flock by preachers seemingly more interested in filling seats than growing souls. And then there is the determined hostility against the faith by those who help shape our culture through media such as TV, film, novels, art, news, and so on.

This book offers a Scripture-based corrective to some of the erroneous views of what it means to be a Christian, by examining the Biblical texts and presenting the Scriptural facts about Christianity. To seasoned Christians, that probably sounds like a "been there, done that" exercise. However, I encourage the long-time Christians as well as the new ones to read on and not skip over what might seem to be obvious knowledge because both might find some surprising as well as helpful guidance here.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How would you define Christianity?
2. How would you describe your personal Christian faith, or if you are not a Christian, how would you describe your personal spiritual state right now?
3. How satisfied are you with your spiritual journey and where it has led you to this point in life?
4. What grade would you give yourself for how well you are now living as Jesus taught?
5. If someone (or even you) challenged you to “become more Christlike in your behavior,” what one thing would you work on first?

Activities

1. Ask a few friends and even a few strangers how they would define Christianity. Do they differ? Why? How do they compare?
2. In your small group, tell your own spiritual journey up to this point. What have been the most important influences on your journey? How are you growing now? Where do you want to go from here?
3. Ask a few Christians or discuss in your small group the question, “To what extent does the Bible provide required behavioral rules for believers?”
4. If you are a new Christian, discuss with friends how difficult or easy you have found struggling to overcome un-Christian habits, such as lying or cursing.
5. On the next page, list the most important points or ideas you have found in this introduction.

Notes

The most important points or ideas from the introduction are:

1



*You will seek Me and find Me when you search
for Me with all your heart.*
— Jeremiah 29:13

1 What is Christianity?

If you are not a Christian, you might be wondering, “Exactly what is Christianity, anyway?” Maybe you have met a number of Christians, but many of them have explained their faith very differently from each other. And even if you are a Christian, perhaps you, too, are a bit confused about what naming Jesus as your Lord really means. Is Christianity a belief, a lifestyle, a commitment, a philosophy, a social group, or what?

Since we live in an impatient culture, it seems that everyone wants instant, short answers to every question. And there is a short answer to the question about Christianity, but as you will see, the short answer needs elaboration in order to be complete. So I hope you will read the rest of this chapter carefully,

whether you are a Christian or not, so that you can have a more complete and Biblical understanding.

Responding to the desire to give a short answer, many evangelists explain Christianity by quoting John 3:16:



For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

—John 3:16 (NLT)

God loves the people he created and wants to redeem us all from our foolish and sinful ways. John 3:16 sums up the situation, but we need to go further in order to understand fully what Christianity is all about.

To be sure, in order to begin the Christian life, we must acknowledge Jesus as our savior:



And after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

—Acts 16:30-31

The question that arises, then, is, What does it mean to “believe in” the Lord Jesus?”

Here are some brief notes to help round out the definition.

1. Christianity is a belief system.

A Christian, by its simplest definition, is someone who believes in the Biblical history about Jesus Christ and agrees with his teachings. Just as we expect a Marxist to adhere to the theories and teachings of Karl Marx, we expect Christians to believe the teachings delivered by Jesus. These doctrines (or tenets of the faith) can be called Christian theology, or they could be called principles that are faithful and obedient to the teachings of Christ. Christianity includes statements of faith that Christians must believe.

For example, here is an excerpt from the Nicene Creed, a summary of the faith adopted by the early church fathers in AD 325:



I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth, And in one Lord Jesus Christ, Who, for our salvation, came down from heaven, was made man; and was crucified also for us. He rose again, and ascended into heaven. He shall come again, to judge the quick and the dead. And I believe in the Holy Spirit.

People who call themselves Christians but who do not believe in the Biblical teachings, are fooling themselves. Thus, there are no Christian atheists or Christians who believe that Jesus was just a good, moral, human teacher and not the Son of God.

Christians believe what Jesus taught.

In brief, all Christians, to be called by the savior's name, agree with the sweeping, panoramic story of creation, rebellion, fall, and redemption that defines human existence.

2. Christianity includes a set of rules of behavior.

Our definition above says that Christianity involves holding certain beliefs. But to believe in Christ involves more than just agreeing to some statements of truth and faith. Believing means following the path Jesus taught us, the path toward righteous living and moral integrity—a prescribed way of life.

The Ten Commandments are one example of these rules for living a Christian life. Jesus referred to them when he was asked about the qualifications for eternal life:



A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"

—Luke 18:18-20

Christians also keep actively obeying Jesus' commandments as part of their lifestyle, because they love Jesus and want to serve him and do the things that will please him—and avoid doing the things that will displease him.



If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

—John 15:10

Being a Christian, then, involves an active life, living an upright life, shunning sin and evil, and doing evangelism and other good deeds.

Being a Christian is something you do
as well as something you are.



AUTHOR'S ANECDOTE

When I taught at a Christian university, a colleague once told me that he had mentioned to his students that the Bible had claims on their moral behavior; that is, Christians are expected to act in certain ways in conformance to the commandments of Christ. The students, he said, were shocked. "But we're saved by grace," they protested.

When you first accept Christ as your savior, your sins are forgiven, regardless of what you have done in the past. The students in the story above are right: We are saved by grace, not by works. Plenty of thieves, con men, adulterers—even murderers—are in the kingdom of heaven.

Wait a minute. I need to clarify that. Plenty of *former* thieves, *former* con men, *former* adulterers—even *former* murderers—are in the kingdom of heav-

en. Once you are saved, you must begin a new life and reject the sins of your past. You must not continue your old life of sin.

Believing in Jesus does not give you a license to sin.



Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, having this inscription: The Lord knows those who are His, and Everyone who names the name of the Lord must turn away from unrighteousness. —2 Timothy 2:19b (HCSB)

So we accept Jesus not only as savior, but as savior *and Lord*. The other part of belief is a personal belief in and commitment to the lordship of Jesus. That is, when we say we believe in Jesus, we mean that we have chosen him to be our Lord and King, whose commandments we will live by.

When Jesus tells his disciples about his coming kingdom in Matthew 25, he says that he will put the righteous on his right hand:



Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed

Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”

—Matthew 25:34-36

Notice that Jesus doesn’t say, “You said you believed in me forty years ago, but didn’t bother to change your life to conform to my teachings, but come on in to the kingdom anyway.” No, we must demonstrate our obedience to Jesus by doing his will—by living our faith—from the day we are saved until the day we die.

In other words, belief is an activity. We might compare this to God’s remembering people in the Old Testament. When God remembers someone there, he doesn’t just call them to mind; he also performs an action for them. For example, when God “remembers” Noah (Genesis 8), the floodwaters subside. When he “remembers” Rachel (Genesis 30), she is able to have children.

Belief is an activity.

It makes sense that belief is an activity. If not, we could all say we believe one thing and do another—or say we believe in the value or necessity of something—such as work, for example, and then spend our time lying in a hammock doing nothing at all.



TEN OUT OF TEN

A man was hauled into court, charged with multiple felonies. The judge looked up from the charges to the man and back down, frowning. Two or three minutes passed as the judge studied

both the criminal and the charges. Finally, he looked straight at the man and said, “Do you realize that you have broken every one of the Ten Commandments, most of them more than once?”

“The Ten Commandments?” the man said with surprise.

“That’s right,” said the judge, not without a hint of scorn. “The Ten Commandments.”

“Well, your honor,” the man replied, “I might have broken them—and I guess I’ll continue to break them—but I believe them all.”

Once you are saved, if all you need to do to be a Christian is to say, “I’m a Christian,” then what is the purpose of the other 180,000 words in the New Testament?

Summing up, it could be said that the basic Gospel message is, “Come as you are, and then change.”

3. Christianity is a commitment to and reliance on Jesus.

Christians don’t rely on fate, chance, the Zodiac, lucky rabbits’ feet, palm readers, carved idols, the weatherman, I Ching sticks, or fortune cookies to tell them what to do or reveal what their future will be. They have one guide and support, and that is God in Christ. When the going gets tough, they don’t say, “Well, maybe I’ll try some Transcendental Meditation and see if that helps.” Once you have committed your life to Christ, you have become his faithful servant. His exclusive, faithful servant.



For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

—Deuteronomy 4:24

God is indeed jealous: he doesn't want to share allegiance with anyone or anything.



No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

—Matthew 6:24 (ESV)

A divided loyalty is no loyalty.

But when we do commit to serve God exclusively, we receive the reward of spiritual empowerment:



Christ gives me the strength to face anything.

—Philippians 4:13 (CEV)

4. Christianity is a relationship.

Some Christians like to say, "Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship." Actually, it's both, of course, but the statement does highlight the unique relationship between the believer and God through Jesus. Our God can actually be our friend (if we obey his commandments)—someone we can talk to

throughout the day, giving thanks and seeking direction or encouragement:



Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

—John 15:13-15

As far as I know, no other religion has a god who can be the believer's friend as well as his Lord. Think of it! Friends with your creator, sustainer, and savior.

Jesus wants to be your friend,
not just your king.

We can grow in our relationship with God by studying his word in the Bible, to learn more about him and how he wants us to relate to him. We can grow through prayer and by being intentional in seeking his heart and his will for our lives. We can grow by attending church services to worship God in community. We can grow by forming and developing personal friendships with fellow believers, where we can discuss the things of God and process our life experiences in Christian terms. And we can grow by reaching out to the poor, the sick, the lost, even the hostile, to minister to their needs and share

how the good news of the Gospel has brought joy and peace to our lives.

5. Christianity is a fellowship of all believers.

In Christ, all believers become brothers and sisters, all sons and daughters of God. As Paul says,



For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

—Galatians 3:26-28

Christianity transcends race, culture, caste, gender, language, ethnicity, nationality, social status, rank, economic status, privilege, and all the other dividers humans can invent.

Our physical nature is temporary.
Our spiritual nature is eternal.



THE WRONG QUESTION

“Hey, Mom. Guess what? I met this super nice girl in sociology class today, and she and I are going to be study partners for the midterm.”

“What color is she?”

“What? She’s a Christian, too.”

“But what color is she?”

“Oh, Mom. Her home church is the same denomination as ours. And we’re planning on attending chapel services together at the church across the street from the university.”

“You’re not answering my question.”

“She’s smart, charming, funny, amiable, kind – and totally cute.”

“But what color is she?”

To focus on race or ethnicity as a go/no go determiner of friendship or relationship not only irrationally constrains the number of affiliations, but it also foolishly limits the fellowship of believers.

6. Christianity is the source of truth.

Try a few of these conversational openers at your next party:

- Why do we exist?
- Where did the universe come from?
- Why do we think flowers are beautiful?
- Where did we come from?
- Where did all the water on earth come from?
- What happens after we die?
- Why are so many people hateful and bad?
- Why are so many people loving and good?
- Can your mind change your brain, or does your brain always change your mind?

The Christian faith has answers to all of these questions, all of which have been answered wrongly by people intent on keeping God out of the discussion.

The sad fact is, falsehood and deception are everywhere. Lies, propaganda, misinformation, disinformation, hoaxes, deceit, frauds, cons, cheating,

fake news, false narratives — these are all included in our daily drink from the information fire hose. Not only individuals and organizations, but whole nations conspire to manipulate people in their own or other nations. We constantly read how some group has exploited social media or fooled the mainstream media into thinking something false was really true.

Even more dangerously, many people today believe that there is no such thing as objective truth. All truth claims are merely personal (or societal) opinions or preferences. But if there is no such thing as real truth, then there is no such thing as a lie. What used to be called a lie can now be thought of as “my truth,” or an “alternative claim,” or a “competing narrative.” Christians are anchored in reason and in the confident knowledge that there is a difference between truth and error and that there is an objective right and wrong.

In the physical realm, when a confidence man wants an elderly couple to hand over their life savings, or when a seducer wants an innocent young woman to hand over her virtue, or when a spy wants a defense worker to hand over some top secret documents, the process starts, and proceeds, and concludes with lies.



He [Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

—John 8:44b

Forgive me for getting all spiritual on you, but we are in a battle not simply against con artists and crooks, not even just between lying politicians and biased news media, but between good and evil itself. And evil has a lot of resources, using lies and every other tool of darkness to advance its cause:



For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

—Ephesians 6:12

That explains why you might have been told that we are all mere animals, produced accidentally and without purpose and that life is meaningless. This lie has caused many people to stumble and either avoid joining or suffer falling from the Christian faith.

Without a solid foundation in Biblical truth people (believers and non-believers) can have their entire worldviews manipulated and distorted. So it is important—crucial—to separate truth from lies because our eternal destiny depends on it:

How horrible it would be if we were fooled into giving up our salvation because of a clever lie. Can you imagine the resentment we would feel?



Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true

faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons.

—1 Timothy 4:1

Praise God that we can know the truth.



But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

—John 16:13



So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

—John 8:31-32



Dear God, I want to be freed from deception, from both the overt lies told every day by the bold and arrogant among us, down to the subtle distortions designed to manipulate our minds and hearts. Teach me your truth and how to apply it to all of the situations I encounter. And help me to be a model of honesty and truth, respecting you and your word always. Thank you and in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

7. Christianity is the remedy for sin and guilt.

We are all quite aware of the wrongs we have done: that time we lied and hurt someone deeply, that time we stole something, that time we manipulated the truth to get something for ourselves, that time we betrayed someone. Some of us were tortured by guilt and regret over these things, until we found forgiveness through Jesus.



And He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

— Luke 24:46-47

Christianity recognizes that sin and evil are real. Evil is not an illusion, as some religions teach. Nor is sin nonexistent because our choices are fated in a deterministic universe. As much as we would sometimes like to avoid it, deep down (if not right there on the surface) we know we are guilty — responsible, indebted, accountable — for our misdeeds.

And we also know that there is nothing we can do by ourselves to expiate the growing burden of sin. We can walk on our knees 100 miles over sharp rocks and broken glass to try to pay for what we have done, but at the end of the journey, we will have gained only bloody knees and kept the same feeling of guilt and lack of forgiveness.

Praise God there is a remedy supplied by another. Where we are weak, he is strong. If you are will-

ing to obey him, Jesus will do the heavy lifting for you and carry away your sins.

8. Christianity is the way to eternal life.

God's plan for us is not only to forgive us for our sins, but to adopt us as his children and give us eternal life with him. This is God's gift through his son.



As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

—John 3:14-15

God provides not only a way for us to be forgiven, but a way to have life everlasting:



He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

—John 3:36



This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

—John 17:3

9. Christianity is a call to action.

Remember, God didn't have to create us, or to create us in his image. Further, once we messed up his creation by our sinfulness, God could have designed any of a number of ways to bring his fallen humans back to him. Finally, God doesn't really need us to be his hands acting in the world and serving him through spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. But he chose to make all of these things part of his plan.

It follows, then, that he wants us to be the channel for inviting other sinners into his fellowship and his kingdom. If we are to be worthy of the name Christian, we must not only do good works (of compassion, helpfulness, generosity) but also evangelize—spread the good word of the Gospel.



And then He told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.”

—Mark 16:15



These were His instructions to them: “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask Him to send more workers into His fields.”

—Luke 10:2

As we will see in coming chapters, this call to a life of service is often overlooked by many Christians.

We are saved to serve.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Define Christianity in one or two sentences, being as complete as possible. Discuss this definition with others. Did you omit something important?
2. The discussion mentions gaining a purpose and meaning for life when you become a Christian. For a Christian, what is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of life?
3. There are nine additive definitions of Christianity in this chapter. Would you add any? Write out a title, "Christianity is ____" and then explain the idea in a few sentences. Be sure to include at least one relevant Scriptural quotation.

Activities

1. Research the following historical Christian creeds and answer the following questions.
 - Apostles' Creed
 - Creed of Nicaea
 - Nicene Creed
 - Chalcedonian Creed
 - Athanasian Creed
 - A. When were these creeds written?
 - B. What were the circumstances that caused people at the time to feel the necessity to create each one?
 - C. What do the creeds have in common?

D. Do any of the creeds conflict or disagree with any of the others? If so, discuss.

E. Are there any doctrines in any of the creeds that are quite different from what the Church believes today? Discuss.

2. Based on what you know of the Bible and what you have read and what you have come to believe, write a Christian creed that includes the basics of Biblical Christianity.

3. Discuss with your friends or small group the nine-part definition presented in this chapter. Which of the nine parts do you emphasize in your life? Which do you think need more emphasis?

2

2 Turning from Sin

As we begin the Christian journey, just as we continue, we face the challenge of conforming our lives to the high standard of behavior set before us. Conforming to the Christian life in a world where much of the morality and behavior are in opposition to it requires a substantial effort.

Before we can turn to a faithful life, permeated by virtue and goodness and holiness, we must turn from sin and its debilitating effects. As we have said, God calls us to a changed life, a new self. The problem is that many of the bad habits from our former lives still want to hang on. To the extent they do, we are still condemned to a less-than-godly life.

God Calls Us to Turn from Sin

In addition to gaining the heart of God and his gift of eternal life, there is a really good reason to turn away from sin and to turn to a virtuous life. You might not understand this until you get to the other side of faith, but sin is really stupid. Let's think about this. People commit sins because they think that doing so will make them happy. Sin is prideful because the sinner thinks he knows better than God what

will bring happiness. It's the Garden of Eden all over again:

Snakey: "Hey, Chump, let's steal that guy's car and go for a ride."

Chump: "But God says that we should not steal."

Snakey: "He didn't really say that. That's just a fable intended to keep you from enjoying life."

Chump: "Oh. Okay. Let's go!"

Sinners are basically calling God a liar every time they sin.

God: "Do this; it's good for you."

Sinner: "No, God. You're lying. I'm not going to do it."

God: "Don't do this; it's bad for you."

Sinner: "No, God. You're lying. I'm going to do it."

As we discussed in an earlier chapter, people think that sin offers a shortcut to happiness. But the shortcut is often a quick trip to pain and suffering because sin always backfires. The teenager who thinks that taking drugs will be really fun and pleasurable fries his brain and ends up either dead in a ditch or mentally handicapped for the rest of his life. The girl who thinks that saying "Yes" to some lecherous guy will make her popular or loved ends up an unemployed single mother.

Every act has consequences.
The consequences of sin are never pretty.



WHERE IS YOUR "ROAD TO HAPPINESS" GOING?

"Who is the patient in 21C?"

"His name is Elmer Finkle. His teeth are rotted, which has given him a blood infection. He also has late stage syphilis, so his mind is nearly gone. Oh, and so is his liver. Cirrhosis. Intake also found some bootleg painkillers in his pockets."

"Well, I guess he's had quite a ride in his lifetime. How old is he? In his late eighties, I'd guess."

"He's 46. Here is his chart."

"Thanks."

"Hello, Mr. Finkle. I'm Doctor Cross. How are you today?"

"I'm in pain and I need a drink. What's wrong with you people?"

"Where is your pain?"

"It's standing right in front of me, holding a clipboard."

"I mean the pain in your body."

"Anywhere and everywhere some medical marijuana would be prescribed for it."

The point is, not only does the selfish, thoughtless sinner damage or destroy the happiness or even the lives of others, but the sin is also its own punishment. It ends up hurting the sinner rather quickly, as well as bringing punishment in eternity for disobeying God.

So, why do people sin? Sin is fun. That is, sin is fun when you first light the fuse, but when it blows your fingers off, not so much.

Are All Sins Equal?

One of the strange claims made by some Christians is that all sins are equal because all of them show disobedience to God and separate us from him. While it is true that even the smallest sin is enough to offend a holy God, it is unbiblical to say that there is no distinction among sins. Consider the following story.



SIN IS SIN

Ben: "Hey, Jake, how are—uh, what happened to your bike?"

Jake: "Hey, Ben. Well, Danny lied to me. He said that the gears worked fine, but they were all messed up. When I was changing speeds, they just froze and made me crash."

Ben: "Did you tell Danny?"

Jake: "Of course. He just walked away, laughing. He said that the gears were fine and that my crash ruined them."

Ben: "So, what are you going to do?"

Jake: "Get even. Maybe cut his tires or break his bike."

Ben: "But either one of those would be a sin. 'Vengeance is mine' says the Lord, and all that."

Jake: "Which sin would be worse—slashing his ties or totally trashing his bike?"

Ben: "Huh? Well, sin is sin. God considers all sins to be the same. There's just sin. And we are called to avoid it."

Jake: "Really? Sin is sin?"

Ben: "Yep. It's in the Bible. Somewhere."

[Months Later]

Ben: "Hey, Jake, long time no see. What's up?"

Jake: "Not much. You?"

Ben: "Nothing. Been out of town for a couple of months. Camp counselor and all."

Jake: "I did get revenge on Danny, though. Don't tell anyone."

Ben: "Don't tell me you wrecked his bicycle."

Jake: "Nope. I put a bomb in his car. Detonated it when his mom was driving him and his sister to school. Took care of them permanently."

Ben: "What!! They all died?"

Jake: "Yup."

Ben: "You murdered three people just to get revenge for a lie about a stupid bicycle? I can't believe that. That is so horrible."

Jake: "But as you yourself said, 'Sin is sin.' It's all the same to God. Blowing them up was just a lot more satisfying than cutting Danny's tires."

No, it's not all the same to God. It would seem obvious that stealing a pack of gum and flying an airliner into a crowded office building do not possess any sort of moral or spiritual equivalency. Some sins are worse than others.

The reason I raise this issue is not to excuse any sin as not very bad. I want both Christians and non-Christians to avoid thinking the way Jake did, that because all sins are the same, you might as well commit any atrocity—why stop at something less? Now that you've downloaded one song illegally, you might as well steal every song and every movie you can. What kind of thinking is that? What kind of theology is that?

But as with any question we have about sin, we can turn to the Scriptures to discover the answer.

Is all sin alike? Here is just a sampling of passages that answer this question:



Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.”

—John 19:11

Here, “the greater sin” clearly implies that of the two sins under discussion, one is worse than the other.



And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.

—Luke 12:10

In this verse, Jesus states that there is a forgivable sin and an unforgivable sin — a dramatic difference.

We can go to the Old Testament to find additional support for sins with varying degrees of seriousness:



And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.”

—Genesis 18:20

In this passage, God implies that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah exceeds some other, unstated, sin.



Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?"

—Exodus 32:21

Here, if Moses had thought all sin was spiritually equivalent, he would not have said "such great sin."



Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD.

—1 Samuel 2:17



If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

—1 John 5:16

And so on. The fact that some sins are worse than others provides zero excuse for committing any kind of sin, or for calculating how much someone can sin. Sin is sin. Sin is bad. Don't do it.

Toward Virtue

We are called to live virtuous lives, lives of honesty and integrity, where we always seek to be fair, just, and do the right thing:



Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”

— Acts 10:34-35

Remember that it is not acceptable for you as a Christian to excuse doing wrong to another person just because that person has wronged you. Christians are not to be in the revenge business.



Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

— Romans 12:17

Even worse, for those who call themselves Christians, harming others for whatever reason blackens the reputation of the faith and the faithful. Oddly enough, the world watches Christians in order to see them behave wrongly so that the worldly people can have an excuse not to surrender their own lives to Christ. That’s what doing “right in the sight of all men” means. Don’t give anyone an opportunity to say, “See? Christians are no better than we are. So why should we go to the trouble of becoming Christians?”

Stories of Christian hypocrisy are common, from full-length movies to very short streaming media pieces. Here is a snippet from late nineteenth century London:

Shop Owner: "Jenkins?"

Servant: "Yes, Master?"

Shop Owner: "Have you locked the shop door?"

Servant: "Yes, Sir."

Shop Owner: "Have you watered down the milk?"

Servant: "I have, Sir."

Shop Owner: "And have you put sand in the sugar?"

Servant: "One pound in ten, as you ordered, sir."

Shop Owner: "Fine. Now come upstairs to prayers."³



Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

—2 Timothy 2:19

Of course, you want to do what is right because that's the right thing to do. You must live a changed life if you are truly committed to be a Christian.

³ This vignette is a free retelling of a piece of dark humor circulating in London in the late 19th century. See Arthur Hill Hassall, *The Narrative of a Busy Life*. London: Longmans Green, 1893, page 43.

Christians live by fixed, eternal values.

The fact is, there are no conmen, crooks, swindlers, thieves, seducers, or liars in the kingdom of heaven:



Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

—1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Nope. None of them. There are, however, plenty of *former* conmen, crooks, swindlers, thieves, seducers, and liars in the kingdom because they repented, changed their lives, and persevered in the faith by resisting the temptation to practice evil again.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus reminds us to be on guard against temptation back into the old life, causing us to fall away:



Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of

this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance

—Luke 8:13-15

Fleeing Sin

I was going to start this paragraph by saying, “A first step towards virtue, in conforming one’s life to the requirements of Christian faith, is to stop practicing the old sinful life.” Then it occurred to me that, because we are weak and always surrounded by temptations to sin, I should write, “A constant necessity [not just a first step] for every Christian walking the path of virtue as we work to conform our lives to the Christian faith is to resist practicing any of the sins we fell into in the past.” It is resistance to the temptation to fall into past habits and behaviors that we must focus on, especially early on in our new faith.

As Paul says, we have died to sin:



What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

—Romans 6:1-2



The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation.

—2 Peter 2:9





Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

—James 4:7

This commandment applies with force to the habitual sins of the past, such as lying, cursing, disrespecting, mocking, cheating, and so forth. Those who practice such things, especially in the presence of other Christians, should be called to account:



Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

—1 Timothy 5:20

Sins of omission should also be avoided:



Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

—James 4:17

Resisting Temptation

Okay, okay, I get it. It's easy for me to say we should resist temptation, but temptation wouldn't be the devil's best tool of torture and conquest if it were easy to resist. So what are some strategies you can use in the combat against lure to sin?

1. Avoid places where temptation occurs. If you are tempted by greed to buy lottery tickets, don't frequent convenience stores. If you have given up

smoking but still feel the pull of nicotine, don't visit smoke shops and avoid parties where many people smoke. If you are tempted by lust, find beaches with few bikini sun bathers on them.

2. Strengthen your resolve in advance. When you realize that a tempting circumstance is coming, be mindful and determine within yourself that you will avoid succumbing. A friend of mine has an astonishing weakness for pastry. If she allows herself to go to a pastry shop, she can barely resist eating way too much stuff. So she limits her visits and steels her resistance in advance.

3. Pray for protection. Remember that part of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray includes, "Lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:4). Keep God very close by when you face temptations of any and every kind. Seek his deliverance and lean on his strength.

4. To combat sinful thoughts, have a set of alternative thought experiments. If you are tempted by anger to indulge hateful thoughts and violent fantasies, or if you are tempted by lust to entertain sinful imaginings, or if you find yourself grinding away with envy of someone who has more money, better looks, a fancier career, or whatever, in all these instances, have an ongoing thinking project to change to instead of the subject of the temptation. When I'm tempted to sin by indulging some wayward thought, I turn to one of my thought experiments. For example, I think about what kind of wooden toys I could make to give to kids. Trying to figure out how to attach the wheels on a wooden toy truck has gotten me out of many an idle thought. If cooking is your inter-

est, think about making a unique meal. If you like cars, think about restoring a junker.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. If you are a Christian, how difficult was it to reform your bad habits to fit the model of Christ?

2. A few habits common to non-Christians include cursing, lying, plagiarizing (as students), sometimes stealing, gossiping and back biting, and sometimes getting revenge. If any of these were your habits before you were saved, discuss how you overcame them. How easy or difficult was the task?

3. Why, do you think, that some people believe that all sin is equally bad?

4. Share with your small group some strategies you use for dealing with temptation—avoiding it altogether or resisting it when it arrives.

Activities

1. Conduct a survey of at least ten Christians, asking them whether they still struggle with sinful habits they practiced before being saved. The habits to ask about are:

A. cursing using four-letter words

B. lying

C. gossiping, back biting

D. a habit of the responder's choice

Analyze the results and comment on what the most persistent habit is.

2. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. Discuss their meaning and their role in this chapter.

3

3 The Seven Deadly Sins, Part 1

We do indeed live in an increasingly pagan culture in the United States (and the UK and Europe), and this culture encourages many kinds of sin. So, before we get to virtue, let's look at sin a little more, the Seven Deadly Sins, in particular. The Seven Deadlies hearken back to the early church, so they are useful to study in their own right. However, good Christians need to know about them very well, because they are increasingly promoted by advertisers as powerful temptations.

AUTHOR'S ANECDOTE

I have taught both college and Sunday School classes on "Advertising and the Seven Deadly Sins," demonstrating through ads in magazines and other media how these sins are recommended, encouraged, and facilitated to us. The advertisers are quite skilled in making sin appear attractive, fun, exciting, rewarding, and common. "Everybody's doing it, so join in."

I had no problem gathering advertisements promoting each sin.



Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

—1 Corinthians 6:18-20

The Seven Deadly Sins were chosen by the early church fathers as areas of temptation to be avoided. They are Pride, Anger, Gluttony, Lust, Envy, Sloth, and Greed.

Greed

Also known by its traditional name, avarice, greed is the sin of wanting too much of something. Whether it's money, food, cars, tools, cookbooks, electronic toys. Greed is a hunger of possessiveness, a gluttony of possessiveness. Too much is not enough. The greedy always wants more.

You can see how foolish this is. Once you have all you can use, wanting more is pointless, unless you run a charity or know someone who needs the superfluous, extra item you are getting.

Indeed, Paul says that greed is a form of idolatry, where the greedy is worshipping materialism.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

—Colossians 3:5

Two types of greed are greed for what you already own and greed for what you still want. Greed for what you own is that attitude of hoarding, never giving away things you haven't used in years.



But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

—Ephesians 5:3

The virtue that counters greed is generosity. Take an inventory of your possessions and ask yourself, "Which of these things have I not used in three, four, or five years? Do I really plan to use this within the next year or so?"

The critical question is, "If I give this away, will it find a better use or make a new owner happier than it is now making me, while it sits on a shelf?" Remember that generosity and giving are core elements of good stewardship. All the things in your house belong to God: You are his steward of them. Therefore, if one of God's possessions that is currently lying around unused while it is under your stewardship can help advance the kingdom if it is in someone else's hands, then give it away.

As with the other Seven Deadly Sins (and all sins), both the sinner and the sinned against suffer. In other words, this sin includes its own punishment.

Don't we all know that "get rich quick" everywhere and every day overpowers that tiny but ex-

tremely wise proverb, "If it sounds too good to be true, it's not true"?



HIGH RETURN, HIGH RISK

In an attempt to triple her money in one transaction, Nancy invested her life savings in a machine that was "guaranteed to make diamonds out of coal dust."

Unfortunately, she lost everything, including her dignity.



Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

—Luke 12:15



MAY I BORROW A PEN?

At a convention show, Tedd roamed around the exhibit hall grabbing all the free pens, scratch pads, and water bottles he could. His desire to get more and more soon led to his taking whole handfuls of the items from the counters. Eventually, the convention center staff confronted him. Seizing all the items he had taken, they told him to leave the hall.

"But the pens and such are free," he protested.

"What part of 'Take One' don't you understand," the staffers replied.

To avoid sin, practice self-discipline.

When you are tempted to sin, then, remember these facts:

- God is telling the truth. He never lies.
 - Sin is not worth the price, now or eternally.
 - God has your best interests at heart. Obey his commandments and live with joy.
 - You cannot hide anything from God. He's watching you.
-

Envy

Envy includes covetousness (one of the forbidden heart sins in the Ten Commandments) because the envious want to own the thing or be the person they envy. They desire to have what they see others have—perhaps simply because others have it and they don't. (How else could you explain envy over a fancy earring or a popular car or cell phone, each with many alternatives?)

But envy goes beyond covetousness because the envious person resents the fact that someone else has or enjoys what the envier doesn't.



DO NOT COVET

"What is it, Verde? You seem to be even less happy than your normal, miserable self."

"I feel like the good life is passing me by. Have you seen today's featured house on the Mansion Web site?"

"Uh, I can't say that I have. Like you, I live in a one-bedroom apartment. I'm not in the market for a mansion right now."

"Twelve thousand square feet on the beach."

"Ah, yes, a cozy little beach bungalow."

"Three pools, tennis courts, heliport —."

"Sold. A heliport is a must-have for my next house."

"Oh, shut up, Batey. But just think about it. Think of the parties. The place has three wet bars. Think of how everyone would look up to you."

"How much is this little shack?"

"It's 55 million dollars."

"I'll bet it's not worth a million over fifty. Do you plan to make an offer, Verde?"

"I wish I could, man. I've got to get rich enough to afford stuff like this."

"You seem to be growing increasingly obsessed with expensive stuff you'll never be able to afford. That's not healthy. I mean, worthy goals are one thing, and there's nothing wrong with reasonable ambition, but obsessing and aching to get rich beyond all reason will only bring you grief."

"So you keep telling me, pointlessly."

"Yeah, what do I know? I just park expensive cars. I can't afford one."

"That's just the point. Don't you ever want to be happy?"

"Like the way you found happiness by maxing out your credit card to impress that babe with the fancy car. When you ran out—of cash—she ran out too—from you. I couldn't believe how fast she took off."

"Well, I want be that guy who owns that car and has that beautiful girl on his arm."

"Don't forget the mansion on the beach."

"Yeah. That's so cool."

"Did it ever occur to you that you're so busy envying what other people have that you don't appreciate what you already have? Counting your own blessings would take your mind off other people's blessings, and then you could be happy instead of depressed."

"I suppose you're right. But still. . . ."



For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.

—Mark 7:21-22



Dear Lord, please deliver me from envy, for I realize that such feelings are an insult to you, who have given me so many blessings of every kind. How dare I be dissatisfied in the face of my abundance. How dare I be envious of another person when I have the greatest possession of all—your love. Whenever I am tempted by feelings of envy, remind me of all you have given to me and done for me, none of which I have deserved. And never let me forget the price you paid for my wretched soul. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like

newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

—1Peter 2:1-2

Envy can be its own punishment whether someone feel envy for others or whether someone sets out to be envied.



DON'T YOU WISH YOU HAD ONE?

"This is the latest, hottest cell phone," the salesman told Terry. "If you have this, everyone will envy you." So Terry began to make late payments on her car and mortgage and put a little water in the kids' milk to stretch it out, and she bought the most expensive model of the most expensive phone. Her walk had a definite lilt as she left the store, already anticipating her friends' reaction when they saw it.

But when she showed it, less than casually, to her friends, instead of drooling over it and panting with envy, they made lukewarm comments such as, "That is a nice looking phone, but way more in both price and functions than I would ever need," and "I suppose that's a nice phone, but if you dropped it, or worse, if you lost it, you'd be devastated." This last comment caused Terry to begin to worry about the phone and to check on it every few minutes to be sure it was still there.



EYE CANDY

In his new position as a hedge fund manager, Baxter made a deal that netted the company several billion dollars and earned him several mil-

lion in commissions, together with a huge promotion. Because of his new wealth, power, and position, Baxter discovered that he was now an enormously eligible bachelor, able to marry his choice of beautiful women. So he decided to break up with his girlfriend of eight years, who had supported him through college and graduate school. Instead of her, he chose a top supermodel because “a gorgeous woman will cause everyone to envy me.”

And they do. Baxter has become the envy of everybody at the office. Unfortunately, in place of a warm and loving companion, he now lives with a haughty, cranky, willful, materialistic, stubborn, critical wife who treats him as an inferior.

Lust

Like some of the other Deadly Sins, lust applies to more than just the desire to hop into bed with that attractive person you see on the street or at the beach. Yes, lust is usually thought of as intense sexual desire, and as such it is one of the most popular and effective sins ever promoted by marketers, salesmen, manipulators, cult recruiters, anti-Christian ideologues, and so on.

Perhaps more than any other of the Seven, sexual lust can be very difficult to avoid because its incitements—its temptations—are everywhere in our culture. No, lust is not just *in* our culture; lust *is* our culture. The TV networks and cable channels and streaming video sources and motion picture producers all seem to be in a competition over who can show the most nudity, fornication, and adultery. And if you throw in billboards, magazines, advertising mailers, and popular music (have you listened to

the lyrics to some of the pop songs recently?), then you'll understand why sex is so prominent in our thinking and why lust is always just at our elbow.



But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

—James 1:14-15

But as we said, the sin of lust goes way beyond the hunger for someone's skin. Lust applies to any kind of excess, unlawful, or inappropriate craving: I have known people who lust after dessert, not as gluttons who want ten desserts, but as nearly insane cravings distort their thinking and sometimes their values, all in pursuit of a dessert. If, when you want something, such as a collectable, you hear yourself thinking, "I really want that antique miner's lamp, and I'll pay any price; I don't care what it costs; my other bills can wait," then ask yourself if that's not an unhealthy, sinful, lust.

The remedy for lust of all kinds is learning self-control.



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

—Galatians 5:22-23

Self-control is not easy. (I guess you aren't surprised.) Perhaps the most effective way to exercise self-control is to be intentional about avoiding temptation. Teenage boys (okay, grown men, too) should avoid summertime walks along beaches crowded with bikinis. (At least don't ogle. Look at the horizon, for heaven's sake.) Foodies might well ask themselves if they should avoid spending their time imagining the taste of the pastry they will have at break time.

At its foundation, lust exalts the irrational and emotional over reason and judgment, and often over stewardship and morality. Lust is egocentric (I want this!) and therefore it is usually prideful. Sexual lust is especially sinful because it involves the desire to use another person for one's own pleasure.



You have heard that it was said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

—Matthew 5:27-28

Even lusting after something you never get can hurt both yourself and others because lust shows a subverted hierarchy of value.



NOT TO WANT IS FREEDOM

Nikki's friend hosted a Jewels Elegante show in her home. All of the pieces were very nice, but Nikki was absolutely riveted by a pair of earrings

so amazing and desirable that she couldn't stand even the thought of not owning them. However, they were decisively well beyond Nikki's budget. Nikki wavered and called her husband to get his permission, but he told her, "Absolutely not." Her begging was to no avail.

Nikki went home depressed and resentful toward her husband. She gave him the cold shoulder and silent treatment for a month, all the while dreaming about the earrings and thinking of ways she might get them. She made copies of the picture she took of the earrings at the show and put them in her desk drawer, in her kitchen cabinet, and under her pillow.

Nikki looks at the pictures frequently, and every time she does, her resentment toward her husband grows.



PROGRAMMING

As a fan of cable TV action movies, Leroy noticed that he had started to choose movies that are rated R not because of action violence or language, but because they were described as containing "some sensuality" or "nudity." When Leroy's wife noticed this, she no longer allowed the children to watch TV with their father.

So when the kids had gone to bed, Leroy sat alone watching his new selections, most of which were quite disappointing both from the sensuality aspect and from the action movie aspect.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

Activities

4

4 The Seven deadly Sins, Part 2

Pride

It has been said that Pride is the source of almost every other sin. People who think they are so important or special are willing to lie, cheat, steal, even kill to get what they “deserve.” But the sin of pride is not limited to people who go around bragging about themselves all the time. Many of us hunt around for compliments and recognition because our egos are hungry for praise and affirmation. However, if instead of man’s praise, we work to serve and please God, our pride wouldn’t get in the way of our service. We wouldn’t seek only the tasks and positions where we would stand out and be recognized.



For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.

—Mark 7:21-23

We need to take special care not to listen to the world for our self-esteem. As the saying is, if a stranger begins to tell you how smart, attractive, or just plain wonderful you are, hold on to your wallet.



For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

—John 2:16

The virtue that counters pride is humility. I hope I'm not the first one to point this out to you, but you aren't the center of the universe, and you're probably not as important as you think (after all, the cemeteries are filled with indispensable people).



You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.

—1 Peter 5:5-6

Humility is good for the soul because it reduces the amount of indignation and the number of slights we feel, leaving us happier and more positive toward others. After all, the goal of life is not self-indulgence, navel gazing, or personal aggrandize-

ment. The goal of life is to serve God and your fellow human beings.

Life: It's about God. It's not about you.



Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

—James 4:10



To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

—1 Peter 3:8-9

Finally, pride is a sin and sin hurts the sinner as well as other people. Pride is its own punishment.



YOU'RE FANTASTIC⁴

A man received a Priority Mail envelope containing official letterhead from a bank in Nigeria. The letter said that he was selected because of his excellent business reputation. It asserted that he was known worldwide for his knowledge and skill in international banking.

⁴ This story takes some details from the "Nigerian 419" con scheme; hence the choice of Nigeria.

The letter offered to partner with the man to move 100 million US dollars from Nigeria to the United States. It promised that if the man would use his knowledge and confidentiality to help, he would be paid 20 million dollars for his services.

The letter went on to urge the man not to tell anyone about this because he had been carefully selected from a group of more than a thousand candidates. Only he, with his powerful reputation, had sufficient respect to persuade the bankers holding the funds to release them.

Highly flattered, the man wired the necessary \$3,000 "transfer fee" together with his bank account number where the 100 million dollars would be deposited. The man was very tempted to tell his friends how internationally important he was, but he remained the soul of discretion and kept quiet.

The next day the man checked his account to confirm that the deposit had been made, only to discover that his balance was now zero.

The man tried many times, all in vain, to contact the Nigerian bankers. However, he was too proud to call the police.



YES, DOCTOR

A man named Hank Reacher ran a successful business making shoe laces. He was approached by the development director of a small college with a proposal to have his name put on a campus building in exchange for an appropriate donation. "Just think," the director said, "your name in huge letters on the building for all time." Mr. Reacher agreed, delighted with the prospect of seeing a building named after him.

As an additional thank you, for which he gave an additional donation, Mr. Reacher was given an honorary doctor's degree. He was so proud of this degree that he framed and mounted his PhD diploma and began referring to himself as Dr. Reacher. He soon had business cards and letter head and envelopes and address labels printed, all with "Dr. Hank Reacher" on them.

Soon, not only did he introduce himself as Dr. Reacher, but he insisted on everyone calling him Dr. Reacher, too. "I'm a distinguished person with a PhD," he thought. "I deserve to have that distinction noted."

It wasn't long before Dr. Reacher began to notice that his formerly close friends were not so close any more. "My friends must envy my credentials," he thought. "Or perhaps they resented being corrected when they called me Hank." Dr. Reacher also noticed that when he took his car in for repairs or called the plumber to his house, he was charged three times what he used to pay. "That's just the price of status," he thought.

Anger

The kind of anger identified in this sin is not the occasional righteous indignation that even Jesus felt as he turned over the tables of the money changers in the temple (Matthew 21:12) or when he saw that the Pharisees were more interested in getting evidence against him than in seeing a man healed (Mark 3:5); the anger of this sin is the ferocious rage traditionally called wrath that makes some people act as if they were insane.

There appears to be a connection between being easily enraged and being egotistical. For example,

only a person with an excessively bloated ego will get into a shouting match with the manager of a fast food restaurant because someone else's hamburger had two more pickle slices on it than his. Cursing the person who scooted into that parking spot that you know should have been yours, threatening to sue the grocer who dared sell you an apple with a rotten core, or going ballistic over a typographical error in a corporate memo—these all reveal a toxic (and sinful) sense of arrogance.

In fact, even when faced with a deeply serious issue—her boyfriend made your daughter pregnant—the response should be calm and reasonable: angry is fine, wrathful is not. There is good reason for this policy: rage inhibits reason. If you want a good solution, stay calm. And you won't risk having a stroke that could end any hope for you to contribute to a solution.



He who is slow to anger has great understanding,

But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.

—Proverbs 14:29



WRATH

"Excuse me, but I was in line ahead of this other person."

"I'm sorry sir, but we are waiting on people in the order of the number they have taken. Right now, I'm waiting on number 36. What is your number?"

"I don't have any stupid number. I was clearly ahead of this so-called number 36, and I demand to be waited on right now."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I'm helping this customer. If you take a number, I will be very happy to help you when that number comes up. Just take a number from the cassette."

"Listen, you moron. I don't want a number from your idiot cassette. I want service and I want it now. Do you know who you're talking to?"

"Yes, sir, but I don't use that word in public."

The remedy for wrathful anger is, first, to get your ego back down to a reasonable size (humble yourself), and, second, develop a sense of perspective. Why not let the person behind you go next instead of you? Think how inconsequential are most of the things we allow to upset us.



Cease from anger and forsake wrath;
Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing.

—Psalm 37:8

Remember that your model is the righteousness of God, not some movie "hero" who machine guns people by the dozen and who breaks bones and bloodies anyone who even looks at him wrong.

And remember that people are watching you, to see what Christians are like and to see if faith in God and living with the love of Jesus makes a difference in their lives.



But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,

Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.

—Psalm 86:15

Finally, anger—wrathful, furious anger—is a sin that hurts the sinner as well as the object of the anger. In other words, anger is its own punishment.



HOW DARE YOU

Everyone knew that Guy always sat in the first seat to the right of the boss, Mr. Brandt, during staff conferences. One day, when Guy arrived, a stranger was already sitting in that seat. Guy's indignation rose at this offense, and grew even greater he exclaimed harshly, "What are you doing here? Get out of my seat this instant! If you're going to work here or attend meetings here, you need to know your place. I'm the Assistant to the Director of Operations, and this is my seat. Just who are you and why are you here, anyway? Maybe you're in the wrong room. Or the wrong building."

The man, somewhat taken aback, glanced at a slip of paper briefly, and then said, "I'm Victor Gridall, the new director. Mr. Brandt will be here shortly to make the announcement. And you are?"

Later that day Guy learned that not only would Mr. Brandt be sitting somewhere else in the future, but so would Guy.



SLAM DUNK

Mr. Renny's daughter was in tears when he got home. Mrs. Renny announced sternly, "Your daughter carelessly dented my car in a parking lot and the estimate to repair it is at least \$300."

Mr. Renny immediately flew into a rage and began to yell and curse at his daughter. Crying harder than ever, the girl got up and started to leave the room. "How dare you walk out on me when I'm talking to you!" he screamed. Mr. Renny then grabbed an antique vase and threw it at her.

The vase hit the family's new, wide- screen TV, destroying it.

Gluttony

Gluttony, in the sense of the excessive eating most people indulge at buffets, is condemned in both Old Testament and New.



He who keeps the law is a discerning son,
But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father.

—Proverbs 28:7



One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

—Titus 1:12

What's wrong with gluttony? First, it is violation of the virtue of temperance or moderation. Second, excessive indulgence in food is likely to lead to excessive indulgence in other areas of life. Third, over-eating is physically unhealthy. Fourth, gluttony provides a poor witness to others. When you go back three or four times and eat six desserts, it just looks bad – worldly, carnal, selfish, lacking self-control, thoughtless. And fifth, gluttony is closely connected to greed, another of the Seven Deadly Sins. Piling one's plate full of crab legs screams greediness as well as overindulgence.

But gluttony applies to things other than the overindulgence of food. Anything consumed in excess could be considered gluttonous: binge television watching, obsessive computer gaming, gossiping the morning away.

Just as our physical food-processing equipment (stomach, liver, gallbladder, kidneys, etc.) is over-taxed by huge amounts of food, so too our minds, hearts, and spirits can be harmed by excessive amounts of junk input. For example, too much trash TV will take a hammer to your spirit and leave it dented, if not bleeding. Bubble gum for the mind has little nutritional value.

Experiences that have no point other than one's personal pleasure can also become gluttonous when indulged to excess. If you visit an amusement park more than a few times a year, ask yourself why. Those who have annual passes to the park so they can ride the rollercoaster every day four or five times need to think about their stewardship of time.



Don't associate with those who drink too much wine or with those who gorge themselves on meat. For the drunkard and the glutton will become poor, and grogginess will clothe them in rags.

—Proverbs 23:20-21 (HCSB)



HELP YOURSELF

At the weekly Friday afternoon meeting, someone brought raspberry Danish pastries, exactly enough for everyone to have one each. As the workers gathered around the table, Esmerelda grabbed the box, took three pastries, and rushed to the corner of the room, where she ate them all ravenously.

When she looked up to see if anyone noticed that she had been indulging herself, she saw that no one was smiling at her. Esmerelda said, rather sheepishly, "I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself."

Next week, everyone forgot to remind Esmerelda about the meeting, which had been changed to Thursday morning.



EAT UP

Raoul was placed in charge of onboarding a new employee. He took her to the Gourmand Grand Buffet, his favorite restaurant. He piled his plate with roast beef, turkey, barbecued ribs, fried Pollack, baked salmon, cream of mushroom soup, string beans, corn, mashed potatoes, crab legs, baked ham, focaccia bread, peas, carrots, corn on the cob—for his first plate. Raoul then

went through the line three more times. Each time as he ate, he noticed that the flavors were mingling together and that his enjoyment was diminishing.

When Raoul and the new hire got back to the office, Raoul was so sleepy and in so much stomach pain that he couldn't concentrate on telling the new hire anything of use to help her get up to speed. Raoul's boss later put a note on his record and a No on his bonus.

Sloth

I don't feel like writing anything on sloth. I think I'll just sit back in my comfy chair and take a nap.



"A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest," Then your poverty will come as a robber And your want like an armed man.

—Proverbs 24:33-34

Sloth is laziness. In general terms, sloth involves a lack of ambition, an unwillingness to expend energy on something (other than personal pleasure), and a resistance to making any effort to serve or help others.

Some healthy, able bodied Christians exhibit sloth by "going to church" on TV, watching a service instead of taking the trouble of getting dressed and driving across town.

Make an effort to serve and please God.

Think about it. You are reading a book titled, *Called to Serve*. What does that suggest about the Christian life? The Christian life should be the opposite of sloth. Instead, Christians should be energetic, ambitious, persevering, even risk-taking.

What is more important than helping fellow believers, spreading the Good News to the unsaved, and showing the love of God to those in need? Yes, I can understand your argument for staying home and binge watching an entire year's episodes of "Who Wants to Eat a Slug?" But do remember that the three things you are to manage wisely (they used to say "husband wisely") for good stewardships are the gifts of time, talent, and treasure. If you binge watch that mental bubble gum, then before you meet the Lord, you might want to think up some really good reasons that doing so is actually great stewardship of your time.



But his master answered and said to him,
"You wicked, lazy slave. . . ."

—Matthew 25:26a

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. List each of the Seven Deadly Sins, followed by an example of it.
2. To your list of the Seven above, describe a preventive strategy for each.
3. How can the temptation to sin be made less common and less powerful?
4. Have you made any attempts to fight sin in general or the Seven in particular? For example,

make an effort to give calm replies and fight anger, stop overeating at buffets.

Activities

1. Find at least a dozen Old and New Testament references to sin, and with the help of commentaries, discuss the source, degree, and result of each instance.

2. It has been said that Pride is the ultimate source of all the other Seven Deadly Sins. Think about each of the other six and write and write a sentence or two connecting or exemplifying the connection.

3. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. (For vignettes with only a narrator, have someone read it to the group.) Discuss the meaning of the vignettes and their role in this chapter.

5

5 What Is the New Life?

So, then, once someone is saved, what happens? Do you just get a ticket to heaven that you put in your wallet and wait until you die to cash it in?

Nope.

God's grand, cosmic movement through history is renewal—no, make that newness—not merely the repairing of damage caused by the entry of sin and evil into the creation, but the making of a new creation: God will “make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). This begins with a remake of his creatures known as humans, and will conclude later with a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

A Changed Life

No matter how sinful we have been—no matter how selfish, thoughtless, wasteful, foolish, ridiculous a life we have led—God loves us and calls us to come to him to be forgiven and be blessed with eternal life. This blessing has nothing to do with how good, bad, or frankly preposterous our lives have been. It's a free gift, paid for by the blood of our savior, Jesus.

Being a Christian is not a cake walk. It's tough.

However, becoming a Christian is not a call to a cushy life; sometimes being saved doesn't make the new Christian's life easier than before; sometimes, in fact, it makes the new believer's life more difficult. (Just imagine becoming a Christian in a militantly Muslim country.) Christianity, frankly, is a difficult faith because it requires a lifestyle so different from that of the believer before conversion, and usually quite different from the surrounding culture. Salvation involves a radical transformation of the way we think, speak, and act. The change is so deep and dramatic that Jesus compares it to being born again.



Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

—John 3:3

Once we are saved, we are new creatures; we can no longer follow the old life. Our salvation must bring with it a commitment to a new life, a new set of values and behaviors. There are new goals and new priorities to be established.



Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

—2 Corinthians 5:17

Salvation means not just having your sins forgiven, but repenting of them, turning away from them, and committing yourself to a life of obedience to God, living the way he wants you to, not just any way you feel like.



Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

—Mark 1:14b-15

Salvation is not just a goal.
It's also a starting point.

You have now chosen to follow, and therefore obey, the Lord Jesus Christ and his commandments. You cannot continue to live the self-centered, sinful, indulgent life you have been saved from.



So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given them-

selves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

—Ephesians 4:17-19

God has delivered you from that. Stop imitating or living like the corrupt secular world around you.



But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

—Ephesians 4:20-24

If you want a slap up the side of your head to make you pay attention, look at the Contemporary English Version to read what Paul is telling the Ephesians at this spot:

As a follower of the Lord, I order you to stop living like stupid, godless people. You were told that your foolish desires will destroy you and that you must give up your old way of life with all its bad habits. Let the Spirit change your way of thinking and make you into a new person. You were created to be like God, and so you must please him and be truly holy.

We are part of the same body. Stop lying and start telling each other the truth. Don't get so angry that you sin. Don't go to bed angry and don't

give the devil a chance. If you are a thief, quit stealing. Be honest and work hard, so you will have something to give to people in need. Stop all your dirty talk. Say the right thing at the right time and help others by what you say. Don't make God's Spirit sad. The Spirit makes you sure that someday you will be free from your sins. Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.

—Ephesians 4:17, 22-32

In other words, take your faith seriously. If you claim to be a Christian, act like one.

Salvation means a radical change.

“Born again,” “renewed,” “new self,” “likeness of God,” —these describe the new, replacement life, a life that turns from and is free from the old values and pursuits. Easy to say, but is it? Actually the Christian life can be quite a challenge, especially at first, because now, instead of lying in a hammock, gently swinging in the breeze and getting exactly nowhere, you are hiking up a steep, rocky hill with cactus everywhere. Or, to change metaphors, you’re trying to hear the Wisdom of the Ages, which is being nearly drowned out by the preachments and propaganda of modern life.

You have finally found truth and meaning, and people are mocking you for it.



And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

—Romans 12:2

Transformed? Yes, committing to serve God involves embracing all those ideas our contemporary culture has taught us to dislike: obedience, submission, duty, responsibility, deference, discipline, humility. But now you have been reborn into a new life. You are starting over. You aren't just changing clothes, or putting on your "Christian" T-shirt—you are putting in a new heart and mind and receiving the Holy Spirit to guide and instruct you. You can actually learn to practice and to enjoy those virtues that before seemed to cramp your style.

This idea of rebirth into a new life after repentance and forgiveness is not suddenly a new idea for God. It harmonizes with his desire that all his people should choose to turn from their sinful ways. Here is God speaking to Israel around 571 BC:



"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who

dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”

—Ezekiel 18:30-32

*Come as you are
doesn't mean
Stay as you are.*

Just to clarify things once again, the requirement to live a new life of obedience and good works after being saved does not mean that good works will earn anyone salvation, or even make a down payment. Good works are a subsequent requirement after salvation. Paul makes this point very clearly in his letter to Titus:



He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

—Titus 3:5-8

Note that in this passage, Paul reiterates the fact that we are saved by grace and not by good works (or as he says elsewhere, by keeping the Jewish law).

But we must be “careful to engage in good deeds.”
Salvation is not a free ride, after all.



BEACH DAY

“Hi, Ted. What’s up?”

“Oh, hey, Bill. Nothing’s up except that great big beautiful sky.”

“Just working on your tan, eh?”

“You got it.”

“You know, Ted, if you had been in Church last Sunday, there was a call for volunteers to visit the neighborhood behind the railroad yard and give the residents new LED light bulbs. In other words, you could have served God and helped the poor by being usef—”

“By grace we are saved through faith and not by works, Bill. It’s in the Bible.”

“So you’re just going to spend your life here at the beach getting skin cancer?”

“Don’t see why not. Blood of Jesus and all that. I’m saved, just enjoying life till Jesus returns.”

Think about how you are serving God right now. Are you an active Christian or a “hammock Christian”? If you should die today, would God greet you by exclaiming, “Well done, good and faithful servant”? Or would he glance up from his work and mutter, “Oh, it’s you”? Or worse, would he say, “Who are you? I don’t recognize you. Never saw you at work.” Or what if he asks,

“Can you give any evidence at all that shows you served me?”



Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?"

And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS."

—Matthew 7:19-23

To be a Christian,
you must *be* a Christian.

But can Christians still have fun?

I hope the preceding discussion has not created the impression that to be acceptable to God, Christians must act like sanctimonious, holier-than-thou, fun-killing, stuffed shirts. You might even have met a few people with that attitude.

In fact, you might have met some non-Christians with that view. They think that since a Christian won't do things they define as fun, the Christian is therefore repressed or whatever. But just what is "fun?"

Fun means different things to different people. To some, fun means excitement, while to others it means quiet enjoyment. To many young people, fun

means pushing the envelope, stretching the boundaries of action, while to older people, fun might mean vacationing in a forest and hiking to waterfalls.

Here are some activities that are, in my opinion, acceptable activities for Christians. Do you think any of these are fun?



FUN OR NOT ACTIVITY LIST

Reading a book
 Sitting around a campfire talking
 Eating something delicious
 Parachuting from an airplane
 Cleaning up with two friends after a party
 Riding a wild roller coaster
 Hiking along a forest path
 Whitewater rafting
 Eating ice cream with a friend
 Going to lunch with friends
 Traveling to a new place
 Playing with a dog
 Making a photo album, real or online
 Taking an ocean cruise
 Sitting in the backyard sipping iced tea

The important points about fun are these:

- What is fun is a learned attitude.
- Whether something is fun or not depends on the person you ask.
- Some people can make anything fun.
- Younger people often equate fun with excitement or physical pleasure (surfing, hiking, playing sports)
- Older people often equate fun with mental or emotional pleasure (talking, reading, traveling).

- Christians should avoid fun that is morally or spiritually harmful.

AUTHOR'S ANECDOTE

One day many years ago I went to an amusement park, to, um, be amused. While I in one of those mile-long lines, I noticed a little girl of maybe four or five years old standing with her father. She was smiling and singing to herself. Then she stopped and looked up at her father, possibly because we all had been doing little other than standing and creeping forward. But instead of complaining, she said, "We're having fun, aren't we, Daddy?" Of course, he said they were, indeed, having fun. The little girl laughed with joy and her eyes lit up.

The event put me mind of the time in high school when I was on a date with a girl from my class. As we drove down the street on the way to dinner, she said, "You know, I'm bored easily."

And recalling that incident reminded me of a colleague's story when I first started teaching. After the day's discussion about some author or other (in an English literature class), a student spoke up and said, "This is boring."

The professor quickly retorted, "This is not boring, *You* are boring." (This was in the 1970s, before all the talk about feeling safe in class, trigger warnings, microaggressions, and so on.)

The student, not to be shut down, said, "But the topic is simply not interesting."

The professor said, "All right. For your next paper, write 5 pages on the topic, 'What Is Interesting?'"

What about movies, TV shows, online video, music and other entertainments?

I don't want to sound like a Killjoy, but you owe it to yourself, your fellow believers, and to God not to endanger your life or the lives of others: to yourself because you should want to live long and serve God largely; to others because you have no right to endanger another precious soul; and to God, who has gone to great expense to rescue your sinful hide from death.



JUST HAVING FUN

"Hey, guys, where is everybody? Seems like the gang is getting smaller. Doesn't anybody want to have fun anymore?"

"Didn't you hear? Craig and Jill and Tim are in the hospital."

"Really? What happened?"

"Craig just got a new car and he wanted to see how fast it could go. So they drove out to Highway 31."

"And?"

"Apparently they blew a tire and crashed."

"They gonna be all right?"

"Too soon to tell."

"Bummer. And so where's Sheila?"

"She won a chugging bet."

"Awesome. But where is she?"

"Intensive care. Alcohol poisoning."

"Aw. Bad luck"

"Not as bad as Jeremy."

"Yeah, he isn't here, either. What's with him?"

"Rehab. Took some bogus pills and fried his brain."

"Is he gonna be okay?"

"He'll probably be eating through a tube for the rest of his life."

"Wow. Bad Karma. I guess I'd better not ask about Dexter."

"He and Pam—shotgun wedding. He had to get a job in a shoe store and she's waiting tables till the baby comes."

"Yikes. Poor Dexter. He wanted to work as a Mercedes mechanic."

"Hey, they both work near each other downtown. Why don't we go visit them?"

"Yeah. That would be fun."

If you are not yet a Christian, when you become one, you'll probably soon feel somewhat alienated from the non-believers you used to hang out with. Your definition of fun will have changed.



YOU'RE NO FUN

"Thanks so much for dinner and the arcade, Will. I had fun."

"Yeah, me too. Wanna smoke a joint?"

"No thanks."

"Come on, Sally. It's totally legal now, you know."

"No thanks. It would smell up my clothes."

"You could always take your clothes off, first."

"Look, Will. Whatever you've heard about my so-called reputation, I'm a Christian now, and I have turned my life over to Jesus."

"You're kidding."

"Not a bit. In fact, please take me home now. While I appreciate your treating me to dinner and the arcade, our date is over now."

"Well, how about a sip of joy juice first? One for the road as they say."

"No thanks. Even in my former life I could barely stand the taste of the stuff."

"But —."

"And whiskey is the worst. You can put it away. I learned long ago that giving a girl a drink is just a means to an end for a guy."

"Aw, Sally, you're no fun."

"Thank you!"

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss each of the two vignettes at the end of this chapter. Do they make a useful point? Are they preachy, interesting, dumb, useful?

2. How would you define "fun"? What is it about any experience that makes it fun? Discuss.

Activities

1. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. Discuss their meaning and their role in this chapter.

6

6 The New Life: Worship and Gratitude

One way to encapsulate the new life is to say that it includes the aspects of worshipping God and showing gratitude for who he is and what he has done, turning from sin and old habits, practicing a life of virtue, and living to serve God and our fellow humans.

Worship covers our spiritual and interpersonal relationship with God, our friendship with Jesus, and our guidance and knowledge through the Holy Spirit.

Practicing virtue includes a moral life, modeling and teaching good values, standing up for what is right.

A life of service involves helping others in need, taking part in church activities, using your resources (time, talent, and treasure⁵), and displaying good stewardship.

⁵ Treasure includes all the resources in your control that enable time and talent to work: money and property (giving away something or using your home for, say, a Bible study group.)

In this chapter, we will examine worship. In the next chapter, we will cover turning from sin, in the chapter after that, virtue, and then a chapter on service.

We Worship God

Worship involves obvious practices such as going to church to worship God and support other believers in the faith:



Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

—Hebrews 10:23-25

Worship also includes prayer for yourself and others, because when you pray, you acknowledge the greatness and goodness of God. Before you begin your requests, every prayer should begin with thanksgiving and praise to God for who he is and for what he has done (and is doing) in your life.



Dear Lord, I bless you and praise you for making such a beautiful world, from the flowers that decorate the mountain meadows to the colorful creatures of the sea. How wonderfully your creativity and love shine forth, even though the earth suffers under the curse of sin. I honor and

worship you, and I thank you for allowing me to be your child.

Worship occurs through Bible reading, prayer, spending time alone with God, listening to hymns or praise songs, singing songs to God, attending church. Worship can come through going to Sunday School, Bible study, small group meetings and participating in church-related activities, whether helping needy widows with their gardening or going on church retreats. Worship includes praising God for his creation as you stand on a mountain and look at the forest below or as you stand on the beach and praise him for creating the oceans.

But worship goes beyond these traditionally worshipful acts. Whatever you dedicate to the honor, glory, pleasure, and service of God is worship.

Any honest work can be worship.

Any honest work can be worship if you dedicate it to the glory of God and do a “Christian Quality” job at it.



Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

—1 Corinthians 10:31

When you work to please God, there is no such thing as a menial job. Making up the rooms at a hotel, flipping burgers at a fast-food restaurant, clean-

ing Port-a-Potties at a campground—all of these are noble and worthy employments when done for God’s glory. And they are more noble than the work of a prime minister, multi-billionaire investor, or media baron, if those people work only for themselves and not for God.



Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

—Colossians 3:23-24

In his book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence says that he found happiness by doing all things for God’s glory:



That he had found his resolution to make the love of God the end of all his actions the only satisfactory one. He was happy when he could pick up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him alone, nothing else, not even His gifts.

—Second Conversation

AUTHOR ANECDOTE

Fresh out of graduate school with a master’s degree in English, I was faced with a very difficult job market. For my very first job, I was hired to type address labels for a mail-order seed company, for \$2.10 an hour, which was the minimum wage at the time. I wanted to serve and please God, so I did a conscientious, careful job. I could

hear the label checkers gossiping among themselves with expressions of near disbelief: “No errors!” they would whisper loud enough for others to hear. “No errors on this run, too.”

Now, I doubt that my dedication to quality and accuracy ever led to the salvation of anyone at that company, but I did it not to please others, but to please God.⁶

Lest I should brag, however, in the mid-1980s a student of mine worked in an assisted care facility where much of her job was to change the urine-soaked sheets on the beds of incontinent little old ladies. She was paid, if I recall, a whopping \$3.35 an hour (minimum wage then). She did this because she needed the money for school and because she loved God. It put my service to God in the back seat.

Finally, remember that Paul says “whatever you do” should be done for God’s glory. Eating (I hope you give thanks before you eat), watching a football game (with popcorn and chips), baking chocolate brownies (surely a blessed act)—dedicate all these things to God’s glory, with thanksgiving.

A Life of Gratitude

It seems to me that many people, both saved and unsaved, are tearfully dissatisfied with life, constantly complaining, stomach-knottedly envious, grumpi-

⁶ I’m a little fuzzy on this after so many years, but I remember that my biggest challenge was to enter the city name of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. On the label machines, the field for the city was only 12 characters wide, if I recall correctly. After a few tries at abbreviating “Consequences,” my final solution was “Truth or Con.”

ly unhappy, and incurably discontent (sometimes destructively discontent). We might give a pass to nonbelievers because they are in the dark about the whole meaning of life, and whining their way through is one of the few harmless coping mechanisms available to them. But for believers to cop an attitude of resentment or discontent—such people just don’t understand the meaning of faith and joy in the Lord. They need an attitude transplant.

These “the glass is half empty and is evaporating quickly” types need to sit down and count their blessings, even if only the current, physical ones.

Therefore, as a part of the conversion into the New Life, new believers should study to develop the attitude transplant I mentioned, and change their old-life outlook from one of complaint to one of thankfulness. This is especially important because, as we will see in a later chapter, the world is watching Christians to see if their lives are any better than the lives of non-Christians. Does being saved and under the Lordship of Jesus give you contentment? Or are you just as crabby as ever?

Eighteenth-century writer Elizabeth Carter concludes her essay on the optimism offered by faith with this charge to believers:



Remember that the greatest honor you can pay to the author of your being is by such a cheerful behavior, as discovers a mind satisfied with his dispensations.⁷

⁷ Published as number 44 in Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* essays in 1750. British spelling Americanized.

Count your blessings

One place to start is with the modern conveniences that we take for granted in most of the developed countries of the world. On the next page, look at just a few of the technologies—I mean blessings—we enjoy.

What We Have	What Others Have
a safe water supply	polluted water, parasites, cholera, dysentery
clean water on tap	dirty water in a well or a ditch five miles away
water heaters	a bucket of water sitting on an open fire
electric light	candles, firelight
refrigerators to preserve food	meat and other foods that spoil quickly
central heating	extra blankets
central air conditioning	sweat and thirst
gas and electric ovens	chopping wood for a wood burning oven
telephone or cell phone	no talk, text, email: walk to talk
drains and sewer systems	outhouses or open sewers
flush toilets	a hole in the ground or neighbor's bushes
grocery stores	spend most of the day hunting and killing small, furry animals

I once started book to be titled “10,000 blessings,” listing all the blessings God has poured out on my life.

Next time you are feeling unblessed or blue, start to make a list of a few of the things—the luxuries—you enjoy without thinking. Better start with the pen and paper (or computer, tablet, cell phone) you’re going to use to make notes. And the electricity that powers them and the lights in the room. And don’t forget the table and chair (or sofa) you’re sitting in so

discontentedly. And how about the temperature-controlled building you're in while making the list: house, library, bookstore, coffee shop. And how you got there: paved roads, automobile, shoes, clothing, etc., etc.

AUTHOR'S ANECDOTE

I have been (rightly) accused of liking anything with an electric motor in it. I think motors are fascinating. And each one is a blessing. Just think what your life would be like without any electric motors. I once started to count the motors in my house. I'll spare you the list, but I counted at least 31 in the house proper (dishwasher, ceiling fans, clothes dryer), at least another 42 with two cars in the garage (windshield wiper motor, fuel pump, CD player) and at least another 11 in my office (computer fans, disc drives, printers). Even most wristwatches are essentially electric motors now.

I think you get the point. You really can discover ten thousand blessings if you just start paying attention and stop taking good things for granted. After all, what very rich king even a hundred years ago could listen to a Beethoven symphony with a hundred-piece orchestra and then switch instantly to a pop concert, all while riding comfortably down the highway at seventy miles an hour?



A SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE

Dear Lord, I realize how many blessings I take for granted, what stunning luxury I live in, with electric this and automatic that. I turn a fau-

cet, flip a switch, push a button—and what seems like a miracle happens—one that I arrogantly expect and am upset if it doesn't happen. Oh Lord, put into my heart, mind, and soul a spirit of gratitude for all these blessings. May my new thankfulness for every good thing last the rest of my life. And may I thank you in heaven for all eternity. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you, dear Lord, for everything.



GRATITUDE FOR EVERY BLESSING

Dear God, teach me to see just how many blessings, gifts, graces, and mercies you heap upon me every day. Help me to pause and thank you for that stick of gum, cup of coffee, parking spot, sandwich—and to take time each morning and evening to express my deep gratitude for the bigger blessings: for giving me an opportunity to exist, for saving me through Jesus, for friends and family, for a place to live, for your Word, and all the other gifts. I thank you and bless your holy name, and the name of Jesus, in whose name I pray. Amen.

A long time before any of the luxuries we now use without even thinking about them (and shamefully, often without feeling thankful for them), many people were deeply grateful for God's provision, for his generosity and care.

For example, King David wrote Psalm 86 as a prayer to God in approximately 1000 BC.⁸ I need not point out that the amenities of life 3000 years ago were somewhat less luxurious, even for an Israelite king, than what we have today. Nevertheless, this was David's spirit:



Teach me Your way, O LORD;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.
I will give thanks to You, O LORD my God,
with all my heart,
And will glorify Your name forever.
For Your lovingkindness toward me is great,
And You have delivered my soul from the depths
of Sheol.

—Psalm 86:11-13

Notice that King David isn't distraught because his favorite goblet broke or his living room sofa got scratched. He is joyously thankful for all God has provided.

Just to rub it in so that you really get the point, here are excerpts from a handful of other Psalms:



It is good to give thanks to the LORD And to
sing praises to Your name, O Most High.
—Psalm 92:1



⁸ See www.blueletterbible.org



Be glad in the LORD, you righteous ones, And
give thanks to His holy name.

—Psalm 97:12



Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His
courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His
name.

—Psalm 100:4



Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His
name; Make known His deeds among the peo-
ples.

—Psalm 105:1



Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD,
for He is good; For His lovingkindness is ever-
lasting.

—Psalm 106:1



Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

—Psalm 107:1



Thank you, Lord, for giving me existence,
and an opportunity to live in this beautiful,
though fallen, world. Thank you for blessing me
with so many good things, materially, physically,

and spiritually, and for the capacity to sense and enjoy all these. Thank you for the human fellowship you've given me. Thank you Lord for my savior in Jesus, for when I was lost in sin you provided me a remedy out of your love even though I didn't deserve a bit of it. Thank you for bearing my heart when sickness or setbacks or sins have attacked me.

I praise you O Lord for such love, goodness, and care for me who was nothing until I became your child. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Has this chapter helped you to feel more grateful for your circumstances? Why or why not?
2. If you are a Christian, has your life become better since you were saved? If so, in what ways?
3. If you are a Christian, has your life become worse since you were saved? If so, in what ways?
4. How has becoming a Christian resulted in changing your behavior?
5. Define "a new life" as it relates to being saved.
6. Define each of the following words:
 - A. gratitude
 - B. talent
 - C. worship
 - D. transform

Activities

1. An old man once complained to his entitled grandchildren that they didn't know how good they have it. So many blessings we take for granted are of relatively recent availability.

Do an Internet search and list the date each of the following became widely available to the general public. Comment on your findings.

- A. microwave ovens
- B. cell phones
- C. color television
- D. antibiotics
- E. personal computers
- F. Google

2. It seems that our society encourages us to react negatively to some behavioral concepts and positively to others.

Below is a list of these concepts or values. Think about each one for a few moments and then make a note of your reaction: positive, negative, or neutral.

Next, make a note of the reaction generally promoted by society (entertainment media especially).

Finally, what conclusions can you draw?

duty	freedom
obedience	liberty
restraint	power
submission	individualism
discipline	autonomy
humility	independence
selflessness	sovereignty
deference	control
authority	rights
responsibility	entitlement

3. One way to identify a few of your blessings is to go camping with a backpack. Hike to a mountain

campsite and while you're sitting around the fire, make a list of all the luxuries you miss. Here's a free start: refrigerator, coffee maker, ice maker. If you're really into luxury, you might miss these: electric blanket, adjustable bed, dishwasher.

Try to develop a list of 25 items.

7

7 The New Life: Virtue

Virtue as an abstract concept refers to moral excellence. The virtuous person demonstrates many different individual virtues which together make up a virtuous character. For example, a virtuous person is both supremely honorable and trustworthy.

In this chapter, we will identify a series of virtues whose qualities every Christian should exhibit. We will also discuss how to change our behavior and thinking so that our lives can more closely conform to one of virtue.

A simple way to think of virtue is as goodness, and all that it implies: kindness, honesty, decency, integrity. When someone tells you, “John is a good man,” or “Jane is a good woman,” that usually implies virtue.

In Hebrews 1, the Amplified Bible translation associates virtue with righteousness:



YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS [*integrity, virtue, uprightness in purpose*] AND HAVE HATED

LAWLESSNESS [*injustice, sin*]. THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS.

—Hebrews 1:9 (AMP)

Specific virtues, such as those discussed here, represent model standards of behavior. There are numerous virtues, with many including or overlapping other virtues. For example, William Bennett, in his famous *The Book of Virtues*, lists ten:

Self-Discipline	Courage
Compassion	Perseverance
Responsibility	Honesty
Friendship	Loyalty
Work	Faith

A Web site lists 25 virtues (some possibly more fundamental or important than others):⁹

Honor	Kindness
Courage	Gratitude
Compassion	Patience
Respect	Commitment
Loyalty	Tenacity
Honesty	Tact
Prudence	Generosity
Grace	Empathy
Forgiveness	Contentment
Humility	Assertiveness
Authenticity	Cooperation

⁹ Chuck Chapman, "25 Virtues Found in the Best of Men." *Goodmenproject.com*, January 29, 2016.

Excellence

Adaptability
Integrity**Jesus on Virtue**

Jesus has his own list of virtues, which he presents in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), calling those who possess them “blessed.” Note that most of these virtues reflect spiritual characteristics and to a lesser extent moral characteristics. In fact, most of these virtues reflect the need for spiritual humility.

Pride is the great destroyer of souls. And its co-conspirators arrogance, egotism, self-promotion, self-importance, snobbery, pompousness, superiority, all maintain a sturdy barrier between the person and God; or, if not a barrier, a hindrance that diminishes contact and fellowship.



And my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then i will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

—2 Chronicles 7:14

Here, then, are the spiritual virtues Jesus delivers in the Sermon on the Mount. Note that Jesus calls those who practice these virtues “blessed.”



**Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

—Matthew 5:3

Spiritually Yielding ("Poor in spirit")

Blessed are those who are not spiritually prideful or arrogant. Blessed are they who realize their deep spiritual poverty apart from God. Blessed are those who come to Jesus without preconditions or bargaining.



GOOD ENOUGH

Usher: "Hello, sir, and welcome to the Big Buck Lake Resort. May I have your name, please?"

Sir Leonard: "Simpson, give the man my card."

Simpson: "Yes, master. Right away, master. Here, mister."

Usher: "Thank you. Let's see. You are, um, Sir Leonard Winsbrook Feldspar von Dominick della Corta, Esquire."

Sir Leonard: "I see you can read."

Usher: "And you are here for the spiritual renewal conference?"

Sir Leonard: "I see my well-deserved fame has preceded me."

Usher: "Actually, um, Sir Leonard, uh, Esquire, I read it on your card here. It says, 'Best Friend Of God And Bringer Of Salvation To The Common Masses.'"

"That's correct. Someone needs to bring the Good Word to the insignificant. Someone who knows the Light."

"And that would be you."

"Correct. Is my suite ready?"

"Let me see. Uh, the twelve rooms on the eleventh floor are ready, but the sixteen rooms on the tenth floor are not quite done. Oh, but the two connecting Penthouse suites are ready."

The spiritually yielding recognize that they need improvement in their spiritual lives, unlike those who either think that they don't need God or that they have plenty of him. The Kingdom of Heaven is reserved for the spiritually humble.

Shove your ego off the throne
and let God sit down.



O LORD, You have heard the desire of the
humble; You will strengthen their heart, You will
incline Your ear.

—Psalm 10:17



**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.**

—Matthew 5:4

Repentant (“Those who mourn”)

Blessed are those who are grieving, especially for their own sins. That the text refers to those who are grieving over their own lives and actions is clear because Jesus says they themselves will be comforted.

Blessed are those whose eyes are opened enough to see their sins, then to feel sorrow over them, to repent of them, to turn from them, and then to welcome the comfort of a forgiving savior.



**Blessed are the gentle,
for they shall inherit the earth.**

—Matthew 5:5

Spiritually Humble (“Gentle”)

Blessed are those who are open to God’s sovereignty and yield their hearts, souls, and minds to him, recognizing that they need him. They are blessed who turn their all over to God without reservation.



He leads the humble in justice, And He
teaches the humble His way.

—Psalm 25:9



Humble yourselves in the presence of the
Lord, and He will exalt you.

—James 4:10



**Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.**

—Matthew 5:6

Righteousness Seeking (“Hunger and thirst for righteousness”)

Blessed are those who seek spiritual nourishment and goodness from their source in God, and do not

try to fill their innate spiritual hunger with worldly things, whether possessions or people or experiences.



Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth
Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the LORD's anger.

—Zephaniah 2:3



**Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall receive mercy.**

—Matthew 5:7

Merciful (“Merciful”)

Blessed are those who willingly help their fellow creatures in need, showing empathy, human warmth, and compassion. Mercy shows wisdom in forgiveness, too. We all have others indebted to us from time to time; each of us should thoughtfully (and prayerfully) ask, “Should I apply mercy in this case? Would it help the other person to improve, or would it be harmful?”

The more power and resources we have, the more merciful we can afford to be.



**Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.**

—Matthew 5:8

Integrity (“Pure in heart”)

Blessed are those who have spiritual and moral integrity, and are not religiously or morally hypocritical or two-faced. These people are genuine.

People with integrity can be trusted; they are honest. They are also much less likely to be conned by a cheat, because most cons involve shady or illegal behavior, and those with integrity will smell a bad odor and toss “the opportunity of a lifetime” into the filing cabinet with the round opening on the top.



**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons of God.**

—Matthew 5:9

Restorers of unity (“Peacemakers”)

Blessed are those who work to restore relationship and spiritual harmony between God and his children, and between all people. They are reducers of strife and promoters of harmony.

Restorers of unity seek common ground and mutual values. Even when there are substantial disagreements, restorers are always respectful, remembering that Christian brothers and sisters deserve to be treated with honor, and that non-Christians deserve to witness model Christian behavior. If non-Christians don’t see Jesus in you, but instead see an argumentative, loud, boorish, critical, harsh contradictor, they will wonder who would want to share a faith like yours.



To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;

—1 Peter 3:8



**Blessed are those who have been persecuted
for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

—Matthew 5:10

Spiritual courage (“Persecuted”)

Blessed are those who persevere when they are physically mistreated and persecuted. This Beatitude applies forcefully to those Christians who are injured, tortured, and killed for the sake of the Gospel. It acknowledges that persecution of the most violent sort is and will be the experience of many believers.



You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

—Mark 13:13



**Blessed are you when people insult you and
persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil
against you because of Me.**

—Matthew 5:11

Spiritual courage (“Insult and persecute you”)

Blessed are those who persevere when they are insulted, slandered, libeled, discriminated against, mocked, laughed at, demoted, passed over, even fired for the sake of the Gospel.

There are many other lists, and in the participation section at the end of the chapter, opportunity is given for you to create your own.

How Do You Become Virtuous?

How does someone who before now has lived by a set of unvirtuous values make the changes necessary to live a life of virtue? Or how does someone who lived by a handful of weak ideas about virtue take control and begin a life worthy of the name Christian?

We are blessed with multiple ways.

1. Seek God’s help.

The first way applies to any need you have: Pray. Seek God’s help in refocusing your goals and in developing virtuous habits.



Dear Lord, as usual, I need your help. And this is a big request. I want to live a virtuous life. Please help me to throw off my selfish and unvirtuous habits, that chain me to sin. Give me the strength and perseverance to develop and maintain a life of goodness, honesty, integrity, and all the other virtues by which a true child of God must endeavor to live. Thank you for your Word, which is my guide to virtue. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

The way of virtue is the way of God.



Make me know Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; For You I wait all the day.

—Psalm 25:4-5

2. Read the Bible and practice the virtues.

A second way to virtue is to read the Bible and learn what behaviors—what virtues—Christians are commanded to follow. A large percentage of Paul's epistles deals with the proper behaviors among believers. Learn these and work to practice them.

Some readers might think this suggestion is so obvious that it doesn't need to be stated. ("Harris is just trying to make the book longer so he can charge more for it." "Well, he certainly has a firm grasp of the obvious.") However, over the years, I've noticed that too many Bible readers seem to think that, when giving moral instruction, Jesus is talking only to his disciples, and that Paul is talking only to some Greek or Roman city or other. In fact, they are talking to you.

3. Find historical examples of virtuous people.

A third way is to discuss virtue and its characteristics and examples of it in action. You might join or start a small group (called "The Third Way"?) to discuss historical figures who exhibited virtue, and perhaps some who didn't. Discuss the circumstanc-

es, the challenges and dilemmas they faced, and how they triumphed.

4. Practice Aristotle's method.

For the fourth way, we turn to that justly famous ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle. We all realize that what we believe influences our actions. A mother who believes that eating lots of vegetables is good will be more likely to serve her family lots of vegetables.

Aristotle's insight comes in from the opposite direction. Not only does belief influence action, but action influences belief. That is, you come to believe in a virtue by practicing the virtue. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says,



The virtues . . . we acquire by first having put them into action. . . We become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage.

—2.1 (1103b)

Another way to put this is to say that morally, you become what you do. Virtue becomes a habit by practicing virtuous behavior. And do note the word *practicing*, for virtue is an activity, not a static condition of one's mind.

The secret to becoming virtuous:
Behave virtuously.

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were hypocrites whose lives did not model virtue, so he warned against following their example:



The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses. So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach.

—Matthew 23:2-3 (NLT)

Your character, then, is a product of what you do—what you choose to do. Aristotle again:



For a given kind of activity produces a corresponding character . . . [so] moral characteristics are formed by actively engaging in particular actions.

—3.5 (1114a)

Aristotle's way to virtue.

You can become a virtuous person—or a more virtuous person—using Aristotle's idea by following these steps (simple to describe but often challenging follow):

1. Pray for help with improving your character.

As we said earlier, whenever you face a challenging task, always get God involved and on your side. Beginning with prayer—your day, your tasks, your meals, everything—is a key to a better life.





Dear Lord, I come to you confessing my moral deficiencies and asking for your help to improve myself. Help me to become a genuinely virtuous person, someone whose goodness will radiate and be seen by everyone I meet. I realize that only through the purifying blood of Jesus can I ever be considered truly holy and righteous, but help me to strive to become the faithful servant and model Christian you want me to be. Thank you, Lord. I ask this in the name of my Savior, Jesus. Amen.

2. Think about where you want to improve.

Choose a virtue that covers your need and study it.

A. Look up some definitions

B. Find some synonyms

C. Look in a dictionary of quotations (or an online source) and locate some quotations about that virtue.

D. Write the information from A, B, and C above on a 3-by-5 card or store it in a note in your phone.

3. Focus on the virtue. Think, pray, meditate, talk aloud or even discuss the virtue with others. Refer to your notes often and add to them.

4. Practice the virtue. Put the virtue into play. If, for example, you choose kindness, practice it by saying kind words to everyone you interact with during the day: the guy at the gas station, the clerk at the department store, the employee at the bank. Do little kindnesses to others: pay for some stranger's coffee, let someone in line ahead of you.

5. Evaluate your progress.

Keep notes or a journal to record your progress in developing a virtuous action into a virtuous habit and then into a virtuous core value.

This process, this road to virtue, might seem awkward or contrived to you, but if you want to add a virtue to your personality or character, this method will help. Deliberately building a good habit creates the character improvement you want.

The key is intentionality. You must intend to change, and to change in a certain direction, or else you will either stagnate in your current character or you will change in a direction that you might not have chosen, had you been aware of it. We are all subject to intense cultural pressure to believe and behave in certain ways. If we lack the intention to resist this pressure and instead to change positively, we will be swept along unintentionally.

In his once well-known and now all but forgotten book, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, William Law goes straight for the jugular:

And if you . . . ask yourselves, why you are not as pious as the primitive Christians were, your own heart will tell you, that it is neither through ignorance nor inability, but purely because you never thoroughly intended it.

—(Chapter 2)

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Explain the idea that intentionality is a key to change. How can it be implemented in an individual's life?

Activities

1. Does the discussion about the Beatitudes give you insight into Jesus' teaching, and your own life? Discuss with your small group.

2. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. Discuss their meaning and their role in this chapter.

8

8 Four Classical Virtues

There is some evidence that the classical Greek philosophers had access to at least the first five books of the Old Testament (the Torah). But whether or not that is the case, many peoples from the beginning of history have been interested in virtue, because they discovered that the path of moral living was the path to a happy life. The simple fact is, good people are happier than bad people. Those who learn virtuous behavior and live it constantly have fewer problems with stress, conscience, others, and the authorities.

Virtue is its own reward.

The ancient Greeks and Romans identified four character traits as essential to a virtuous person: Prudence (or wisdom), Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude (or courage).

Prudence

Prudence, also sometimes described as wisdom or good judgment, includes thinking carefully and,

making informed choices with consideration of the consequences, both immediate and long term. When making a decision or solving a problem, the prudent person takes time to ask, “And then what?” Once we apply this remedy or make this decision, what will be the consequences down the road? What else might happen? Will the Law of Unintended Consequences come into play and ruin things? Will the solution become a problem?

Circumspection is another concept related to prudence. As its roots imply (*circum* = around, *spect* = look) circumspection means looking around and getting a sense of the implications and consequences of any decision, rather than rushing headlong into something without further consideration. The prudent person sometimes puts up a sign that says, “It seemed like a good idea at the time” to remind him to engage in more thought before acting.

The prudent person is wary of taking unwise or thoughtless risks:



A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF RISK

“Whoa, Bink, what happened to you?”

“Nothing much, Al. I just didn’t get across the riverbed.”

“Is that the roof of your wife’s car sticking out of the water?”

“Yeah, I thought the water wasn’t that deep or the flow so strong, so I tried to drive across.”

“Looks like you’ll be sleeping on the couch for the next six months. Why weren’t you driving your truck?”

“Well, I totaled it on Greenbrier Road.”

“You what? Totaled it? What happened?”

“I thought I could take the curve at Wembly’s place at 60 miles an hour, but what with all the

rain and stuff and my bald tires, I skidded off the road and into the culvert.”

“Um, isn’t that curve posted for 25 miles an hour?”

“Yeah, well it —”

“So is that how you got all bloodied up?”

“Naw. I was fine after the accident. Just a few bruises. I was walking home and took a shortcut across the highway where they are fixing the road from the runoff. I tried to jump across the gap they were filling in, but the skiploader guy didn’t see me and the bucket hit me as he swung around.”

“Are you going to the urgent care to get fixed up?”

“No, I’m all right. Heading home. I found this patch of mushrooms growing near where I wrecked the truck. I’m going to mix them with some scrambled eggs and have a feast.”

“Are you sure they aren’t poisonous?”

“Yeah. I don’t think poisonous mushrooms grow around here.”

Prudence includes stewardship, the wise management of God’s resources entrusted to you.

Working against prudence is the pressure to “act now while supplies last,” “limited time offer,” and so forth. We live in a world where everything either is or is presented as extremely urgent. But rushing to a decision often produces a poor choice. As Alexander Pope wrote, “For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”¹⁰

¹⁰ *Essay on Criticism*, l. 625.



The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever.

—Psalm 111:10



How blessed is the man who finds wisdom
And the man who gains understanding.

—Proverbs 3:13



Lord, guide me in my decision making to become a wise and prudent child. Make my choices

Help me to keep my wits about me and to resist the urge to indulge when I'm confronted with various temptations to spend your money unwisely. Remind me that the resources of time and money that I have are lent to me by you and that I am to use them to invest in the kingdom. May all that I do be according to your will, performed to your glory, and exhibiting the best stewardship. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Temperance

Temperance involves moderation. Perhaps the most famous classical Greek motto, next to "Know Thyself," is the motto of temperance: "All things in moderation," or "Nothing too much." Temperance is especially important today because it is so forcefully rejected by our current culture, whose motto seems to be, "Too much is not enough." Traditionally, from the ancient Greeks and Romans, down to very recent

times, the virtues were often viewed as exhibiting temperate behavior. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle places the virtues as middle points between two extremes of vice. Courage, for example, is placed between the deficiency of cowardice and the excess of recklessness.



MODERATION IS WINSOMENESS

In their eagerness as new Christians, Biff Iratea and his girlfriend Petunia Shylee decided to do some street corner evangelism. They stood outside a snack shop and waited for a customer to emerge.

Soon a man with a large ice blended drink came outside, sipping as he walked.

"Excuse me, sir," said Petunia, so quietly that the man wasn't sure if she had addressed him or someone else.

"Huh?" the man said, "Are you talking to me?"

"Uh, yes, sir, I uh, was. That is, I was wondering if you knew Jesus as your savior."

"You must be joking," the man replied, with a not very friendly tone.

"I'm sorry I bothered you, sir," said Petunia.

Just then Biff grabbed the man by the arm and spun him around, spilling this ice blended drink all over.

"Just a minute, Bucko," snarled Biff. "If you don't accept Jesus as Lord and Savior right now, you're going to go straight to the pit of hell when you die and spend all eternity in the fire."

"Uh, excuse me, " said the man, pulling his arm out of Biff's grip, "but I'm late for my appointment."

As the man hurriedly walked away, Biff shouted after him, "The agony of hell fire awaits you. Repent now or you'll be tortured with unendurable pain forever."

The man kept walking, and, in fact, increased his pace.

Interestingly, temperance might even be thought of as a principle of critical thinking. We live in a culture supremely glutted by information, encouraging those who create information (news media, academics, entertainment media, film, social media, etc.) to attempt to gain attention through exaggeration and hyperbole, by resorting excess and extremes. We therefore must be aware that we face less-than-pure and less-than-accurate claims every day, requiring us to think and investigate and be careful about believing every claim we encounter.

Moreover, we should be careful about thinking, speaking, or writing in terms of wild generalizations or overly broad claims. Even when a broad claim is true, we need to realize that our culture of excesses has made many people skeptical of such claims, and it is likely in our interest to express them more moderately to begin with.

Temperance is also the virtue that keeps us calm and modest during discussions over facts, theories, politics, and the faith. When an arguer grows angry or defensive, the opponent commonly concludes that the arguer is afraid of being wrong or weak. A confident arguer remains calm — temperate — regardless of what the opponent says.



An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

—1 Timothy 3:2-3



Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

—1 Timothy 3:11

Justice

Justice is the process of seeking fairness between two or more people when they have come into conflict with each other. Justice is a critically important idea because the agreement to live and work together under the principles of justice provides the foundation for successful families, groups, villages, towns, cities, nations, and civilizations.

We all want to live in a just society, where deviations from honesty and integrity are redressed, with the offenders paying a penalty that restores the victim and makes the whole or equal again. But the best way to live in a just society (cities, states, nations, etc.) is for individuals to be careful to live honest lives, exhibiting integrity and fair dealing in every endeavor.

Equally as important as justice itself are two closely connected concepts, equity and mercy.

The principle of equity is applied in cases where strict, by-the-book justice would result in an unfair outcome. This is best explained by an example.



JUSTICE OR EQUITY?

Mrs. Harriet Marque, an 82-year-old widow, was approached by a smooth talking and persistent salesman who persuaded her to install central air conditioning in her house. Even though she had explained that she lived on a small, fixed pension, the salesman told her she qualified, and that the first payment was only \$9.99.

So the system was installed and Mrs. Marque made the first payment. For the second and all future payments, however, her monthly payment was more than her pension. She called the company to explain, but was told, "You signed the contract, so you have to pay."

The contract turned out to be a loan on her house, so that when Mrs. Marque didn't pay her bill, the company foreclosed on her house. At the final hearing, the judge said, "This is an outrageous situation. You are taking this little old lady's home from her. And she has testified that she didn't know how much the actual cost was. And she said she doesn't understand that she could lose her home if she couldn't pay. This looks like a scam to me."

"But your honor," the air conditioning company lawyer said, "it's perfectly legal. Mrs. Marque signed the contract just under the line that says, 'I have read and understood all the terms of this contract.'"

Should the judge find for the air conditioning company and let them take Harriet's house? Or

should he make a ruling in equity and void the trust deed so that Harriet can keep her house?

Another way to think about equity is to note that the law is universal, generalized to apply everywhere. However, particular circumstances can become so complicated that in rare cases a strict application of the law would be unjust. (Unfortunately, a common defense used by criminal attorneys is this very excuse: "My client is an exception.")

Related to justice is mercy. When an authority empowered with assigning punishment on a wrongdoer decides to lessen or eliminate entirely the deserved penalty, that authority is said to be showing mercy. Mercy is the reduction in or elimination of a penalty deserved by someone.

For example, the judge might have mercy on a first time offender who shoplifted a jar of baby food for his sick child. Justice would demand that he be arrested for stealing and fined or jailed. But the judge could have mercy and reduce or eliminate his punishment because of the circumstances.

As spiritual beings, we are all in a similar situation. We have sinned and have been thrown out of the Garden and sentenced to death. However, for no reason other than God's love for us, he is willing to grant us mercy if we will agree to obey his rules. God's mercy is not simply a reduction in our sentence, but a complete elimination of it.

The practices of justice, mercy, and equity validate the commitment to fairness and provide the confidence behind trust. Trust is the foundational principle of the social contract, the interpersonal promise and expectation of good intentions that allows social groups to work together without fear.



In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

—Matthew 7:12



Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

—Romans 13:8-10



"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' "This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

—Matthew 22:36-40

Every person serves as a judge in some way during his or her life: as a parent, referee, contest judge, policy or product evaluator, manager, and so forth. Your duty as a Christian is to embody justice in all

your judgments, choosing the winner objectively, giving out deserved rewards and punishments suitable to the situation, promoting fair outcomes in conflicting rights or claims, always being impartial in your application of the relevant rules.

Rendering justice also includes admitting your own fault. When you are wrong or are responsible for a negative outcome, do not hide the truth, blame someone else, or disconnect the dots.



One morning early at the office, Logg was interrupted by his manager, Marley.

"Logg," Marley said, "production needs 10,000 more high-pressure angle stops for the XL20 fabrication."

"Yes, sir," said Logg, turning to his computer screen to start the order process."

"And I want you to order them from Feeble Manufacturing."

"But Feeble's stuff is junk, sir," protested Logg. "The reviews and our own testing agree."

"I don't care about any of that. Feeble is the choice. Order the stops right now."

"Even though they are more expensive, sir?"

Marely raised his voice. "Did you hear what I just said, Logg?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then do it."

"Yes, sir."

Six months later the new angle stops had been installed in the XL20 units. Eighty percent of the stops had begun to leak. A heated meeting was called.

"Gentlemen," growled Simpkins, the CEO, "the angle stops are leaking on all the new XL20s

we have made this year. In addition to the recall and repair of ten thousand units, and in addition to the more than forty lawsuits filed against us over damage from the leaks, the company's reputation has been flushed by at least three important industry publications. What I want to know is, How did this happen?"

Sharper, chief counsel, raised his hand. "Excuse me, Mr. Simpkins, but the tally so far is 54 lawsuits and a class action, which is likely to absorb the individual cases."

"Oh, shut up, Sharper," Simpkins barked. "What I asked is how this happened."

Logg was about to say something when Marley spoke up.

"I believe this order was entered by Logg, wasn't it, Logg?"

"Yes," Logg said, "but —"

"And you said that Feeble sold at a premium price, didn't you?"

"Well, yes, but —"

"By which I assumed they were of premium quality." Then turning to Simpkins, Marley said, "We are at the mercy of our buyers, sir. We trust their judgment when we ask them to order parts for us. In this case, it seems that Logg made a bad judgment."

Logg's protests fell on deaf ears, and Logg was soon given a cardboard box and told to clean out his office.



For the LORD loves justice.

— Psalm 37:28a



To know wisdom and instruction, To discern

the sayings of understanding, To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity; To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion. . . .

—Proverbs 1:2-4

Fortitude

Fortitude is the older term for courage. Because the historical context of courage is bravery in battle, we usually think of courage in terms of the strength of character to do something physical. We say it takes courage to walk a tightrope with no safety net. But courage is also applicable to emotional, intellectual and spiritual circumstances. Yes, it takes courage to walk a tightrope, but it also takes courage to walk with God. Especially in this age when Christian values and faith are being mocked and discriminated against, courage is needed to stand up and speak, whether defending Christianity itself, your personal faith, some value inseparable from the faith, or just some traditionally moral idea that the current cultural elites have thrown into contempt.



Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

—Matthew 5:11

Yes, courage is needed to hear yourself groundlessly called any or all of the “shame names,” (racist, sexist, etc.), and to hear yourself described as a hater.

(This unjust treatment, by the way, is another reason we must always present our case, our ideas, our criticisms, in a gentle and humble manner, standing up for the right and for our faith with a calm boldness.)



Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

—Philippians 1:12-14

There is a saying going around now, “It’s time to man up.” I think for us, it’s time to Christ up, and let go of our timidity and fearfulness.



For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment. (HCSB)

—1 Timothy 1:7

Tell the truth with confidence.

The word *fortitude* also suggests perseverance. Not giving up or giving in when things get tough.



But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

— Luke 8:15



[God] WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

— Romans 2:6-7

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Why do you think these four virtues were identified in the classical world, instead of different ones, or more virtues than four?
2. Find an example of Jesus demonstrating each of these four virtues.
3. For each of these four virtues, find two examples demonstrated by Biblical characters other than Jesus.

Activities

1. In your small group, share examples of courage that you have shown by your own actions or seen in the actions of others.
2. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. Discuss their meaning and their role in this chapter.

9

9 Three Christian Virtues

In addition to the four classical virtues, three Christian virtues have been added: Faith, Hope, and Love.

Faith

To say that you are a person of faith is to make one of the most sweeping and powerful declarations possible. The word itself carries the weight of several meanings.

1. Belief

One of the Greek words translated faith in the New Testament is *pistis* (Strong's G4102). The meaning of *pistis* is faith, trust, reliance on, or being convinced of the truth. This meaning is present in statements such as these:

"I believe in God."

"My faith includes belief in the truth of the Bible."

"I believe that the Ten Commandments were given by God to everyone."

"I have faith in God."

Here you can see the richness of the word, including both *faith* and *trust* in Jesus. Faith is not simply the assent to some statement of theology. Faith is in a heaving and tossing small boat, calmly confident in the care of Jesus.

2. Trust

Confidence in belief about the future and future promises.

"I trust God."

"She had faith that she would eventually live in God's kingdom."

An example from the Bible where *pistis* is used comes from Mark:



And He said to them, "Why are you afraid?
Do you still have no faith?"

—Mark 4:40

4. Loyalty

"He was a faithful companion."

"They were always faithful to each other."

"They remained faithful to God and his commandments."

The most famous definition of faith comes from the book of Hebrews:



Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.

—Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)

AUTHOR ANECDOTE

I have a confession to make: I never quite understood the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1, even after looking at some less literal translations such as the CEV and ERV, though the NLT did help some. So I decided to do a word study and look up the meaning of the original Greek words in this definition. To make a long analysis short, I came up with this translation of the verse:



Faith is the foundation of our hope for the future, the convincing belief that what we cannot see is nevertheless real and true.

—Hebrews 11:1 (Bob's Version 1)

Interestingly, the Greek word for *faith* is *pistis* (Strong 4102), which also means *trust*. So faith is trust. It has been said, "Without trust you cannot have a genuine relationship; without trust, all you have is a transaction." Now substitute faith for trust: "Without faith you cannot have genuine relationship; without faith, all you have is a transaction." Faith/Trust is an essential component of our relationship with Christ. The deeper our faith/trust, the deeper our love for and confidence in our Lord.

The use of *pistis* (*faith* or *trust*) in the verse from Hebrews gives us an alternate translation:



Trust is the underlying support for our confidence in the future, the conviction that what we cannot see is nevertheless real and true.

—Hebrews 11:1 (Bob's Version 2)

Thus, while faith includes belief ("I believe in God") it also includes trust ("I believe God"). Faith includes but goes beyond the acknowledgement and support of Biblical truth. Faith/Trust is that confident assurance that, whatever happens to us in this our first life, we trust (are convinced) that everything will work out according to God's plan, including our second, eternal life.

If you believe in God, believe God.



But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD, I say,
"You are my God."

—Psalm 31:14



Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out
your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

—Psalm 62:8

Our faith, our trust, in God is a solid rock, a permanent foundation.



Trust in the LORD forever, For in God the
LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.

—Isaiah 26:4

Without the help and guidance of God, we are rushing down the rapids of a fast, twisting river, unable to resist the current and barely able to breathe. We are dragged and scraped along the gravelly bottom and then bashed and lacerated by the trees and bushes along the shore—all the while being poked and punctured by the floating debris around us. But when we choose to trust God, he raises us out of the river of chaos and firmly places us on a solid rock that is impervious to the river.



From the end of the earth I call to You when
my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is
higher than I.

—Psalm 61:2

Faith is connected to loyalty and perseverance. Those who have faith are willing to go the distance and remain devoted.



Dear Lord, thank you for establishing my faith on an unshakeable foundation, a rock without crack or seam. May the fire of my love be ever fueled by your goodness and the by strength you impart to me when I am weak. When storms come, always remind me that your hand is there to hold on to me and that my feet are on solid ground. In Jesus' name. Amen.



He brought me up out of the pit of destruction,
out of the miry clay, And He set my feet up-
on a rock making my footsteps firm.

—Psalm 40:2

Hope

Hope involves confidence, often even to the point of expectation: confidence in God, confidence in the future. Because hope gives us a belief in the meaning and purpose of all activities and the ultimate outcome of existence, we can live joyful lives even in the face of personal disaster.

(If you wonder how an unhappy, grieving person can at the same time have joy, ask a seasoned Christian.)

Hope stretches the mind from the present circumstances into the future, even to the ultimate future in heaven. Hope therefore provides perspective to the events we are immersed in presently, and allows us to see both failure and success embedded meaningfully into the whole story of our lives, and in God's story of existence.

In hope, we understand that no tear is ever wasted or without a purpose.

Hope in God means trust in God. And as we have seen, in New Testament Greek *trust* and *faith* are both accurate translations of the word, *pistis*. Therefore, in some sense, hope is faith—faith in the future promises of God.



For in hope we have been saved, but hope
that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what

he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

—Romans 8:24-25

Hope is so significant a part of our commitment to Christ and the Christian faith that Paul says we must maintain hope if we are to maintain our faith:



And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

—Colossians 1:21-23

To lose hope is to lose faith.
To lose faith is to lose hope.

It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to maintain our hope in the face of negative events in our lives. We persevere in faith and hope and trust, knowing that God knows what we don't and sees what we can't.



Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will

abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

—Romans 15:13



For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith.

—1 John 5:4

To have faith is to have hope.



Dear Lord, thank you for being the God of hope, because from that we know that you are not only the God of the present but also the God of the future. When we hope in you, we have strength to endure the present, knowing that in some future, soon or late, our deliverance will come. And, God of hope, you are also the God of eternity, fulfilling our hopes if not while we praise you here, then when we praise you there in your Kingdom. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Just as God the father is associated with faith, so the Holy Spirit is associated with hope because he discloses the future to us:



But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He

hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

—John 16:13

Love

The Christian virtue Love is sometimes translated as *Charity*, and because charity is defined as including assistance, help, and offerings, we are reminded that love is shown by something you do, not just by how you say you feel. Love is a verb. Like belief, Love is an action. Love is what you do, not merely what you say.



OUT FOR THE DAY

One lovely Spring day, Arnold and his girlfriend Sally went for a walk along the river, enjoying the trees, flowers, rock formations, and of course, the sound of the water as it went over a nearby waterfall. Moved by the situation, Arnold took a deep breath and said, "I love you, Sally."

And Sally replied, "I love you, too, Arnie."

Further inspired by the scenery and by Sally's alluring voice, Arnold went over to the river bank to pluck some beautiful yellow flowers for his girl. Unfortunately, he slipped and began to slide toward the river.

"Help me, Sally," he cried. "I'm about to slide into the water."

"Oh, Arnie, I can't," Sally replied. "It would get my shoes muddy."

"Then call someone," said Arnie, in a tense and almost frightened voice.

"I'd like to," replied Sally, "but my phone's battery is low and I'm saving it in case Joan calls to make plans to get together."

"Isn't there someone nearby who can help? These weeds I'm holding onto are giving way, and that waterfall is more than a two hundred foot drop."

"Oh, I'd sure like to," said Sally, "but I don't feel comfortable talking to strangers."

By this time Arnold had slipped down over a vertical section of the river bank, throwing his whole body's weight onto the slender weeds he had been grasping. Soon the weeds began to give way.

"Sally!" he yelled. "I can't hold on any longer." He then let out a yell as the weeds finally snapped and he slid into the cold, rushing water.

"Oh, Arnie!" exclaimed Sally in a frightened voice.

As Arnie was swept down the river toward the falls, all he could say was, "Goodbye, Sally. I love you."

"I love you, too, Arnie," Sally cried.

Think about this in connection with all the Scriptural passages commanding us to love. Love means to take care of each other.

We are commanded to demonstrate that we love God by caring for his children:



But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

—1 John 3:17

We are commanded to love our neighbor:



Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

—Romans 13:8

We are commanded to love our brothers and sisters in Christ:



A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

—John 13:34-35

We are even commanded to love our enemies:



You have heard that it was said, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

—Matthew 5:43-44

At the conclusion of the "Love Chapter" in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that love is the greatest of the three Christian Virtues:



But now faith, hope, love, abide these three;
but the greatest of these is love

—1 Corinthians 13:13

“Be warmed and filled,” may express our love in words, but we are called to show it in our actions.

To demonstrate through physical actions what he meant by his love for us, God turned to the incarnation of himself. “If they don’t understand love by the laws I have laid down for them,” he must have thought, “I will go down myself in the form of a man, made of human muscle and bone, and show them in three dimensions what I mean by love and how I love them.”

And so how did God show his love through Jesus?

1. Jesus taught us how to live a life approved by God. Living a righteous life is a key to happiness. But without directions—or better, modeling—we can know only imperfectly how to strive for righteousness. And the Law that was set down for the chosen people, the Jews, was too difficult to follow. So God presented a new covenant through Jesus. The rules about how to please God and live a life acceptable to him are now much clearer.



Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU
WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is
easy and My burden is light.

—Matthew 11:29-30

2. Jesus revealed the path to eternal life. He revealed the truth to his disciples, the public crowds, and us.



For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

—John 3:16-17

3. Jesus showed his love for mankind by healing many people. In many acts of pure compassion and love, Jesus modeled the care we are to have for each other. He showed us that love is an action.



When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

—Matthew 14:14

4. Jesus fed thousands of people because he sympathized with their needs and helplessness.



In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat." And He directed the people to sit down on the

ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. About four thousand were there.

—Mark 8:1-2, 6, 9a

5. As Jesus, God demonstrated his empathy for us by becoming a man who suffered the same emotional and physical pains that humans do. Jesus grieved over the death his friend Lazarus (John 11:44). He worried over his own coming death (John 12:27). He suffered unjust insult over being called a bastard (John 8:41). He was mocked and disrespected (Matthew 26:68, 27:29). He was accused of being insane (John 10:20). He was denounced (Matthew 26:66), denied (Matthew 26:69-75), and abandoned (Mark 14:50).

Jesus suffered physically when he was spat upon, beaten, slapped, (Matthew 26:67) whipped (Matthew 27:26), pierced (John 19:34), and tortured to death (Matthew 27:32-50).

6. God sent Jesus to die in our place. The ultimate expression of love is the sacrificial, substitutionary death God provided for us.



Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

—John 15:13

Paul explicitly connects love to demonstration when he says that Jesus' death was evidence of love:



But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

—Romans 5:8

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment he named two that involve love—not duty, not legal compliance—but love.



“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.” This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.

—Matthew 22:37-40

How can we show our love for God in return? How do we put our love for God into practice? It is certainly not by occasional, perfunctory, half-hearted obedience. We show our love of God by demonstrating our firm and enduring trust in him. And we do that by joyfully following his rules for our lives, which is to say, his rules for our happiness. We obey his commandments not out of duty but out of love.



If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

—John 14:15



You are My friends if you do what I command you.

—John 15:14

Remember that the three active powers you have that enable you to serve God and demonstrate your love for God and for others are time (your 24 hours a day), your talent (your knowledge, skills, and abilities), and your treasure (your money, property, and other resources).

All three of these powers can be used wisely or foolishly (foolishly often equates to wastefully). Use these three powers to show your love. Spend your time in the same way you ought to spend your money—thoughtfully and carefully. Your time is a limited resource; don't waste it. Take time to be with your kids, to participate in a fellowship group, to help in the church, to work in a shelter, to write notes or emails of hope and encouragement, to talk one-on-one with someone who needs your counsel. And don't neglect praying for yourself and others.

Use your talents to help the needy who can't afford to pay someone to fix a leaky faucet or repair a fence. Show a friend how to cook or bake or sew. Everyone has learned how to do something that not everyone else can do. If you know math or grammar or a foreign language, tutor a student who needs help. Whatever your skill, share it with those who need it.

Use your treasure to support worthy causes. Tithe to your church, support missionaries, donate to parachurch organizations, donate Christian books to

the public library. Make your money work for godliness.

All these things—the deliberate use of time, talent, and treasure to serve and please God—are the embodiment of love. All these things make love a verb.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

Activities

10

Three things will last forever – faith, hope, and love – and the greatest of these is love.

– 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NLT)

10 Faith, Hope, Love, and More

Paul tells us through his first letter to the church in Corinth that the three Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love will last forever. That assurance makes them ideal anchors or foundational elements upon which we can build a solid, enduring, and joyful Christian life.

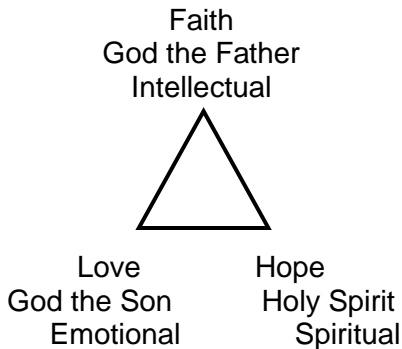
All three elements are required for the best Christian life, especially in times of trial or suffering. Working together, these foundational virtues, with their associated elements, enable us to find, first, the meaning and purpose behind the experience (the virtue of faith); second, the feeling and care God has for us through our ordeal (the virtue of love); and third, the confidence that at future point, whether in this life or the next, all will be made good (the virtue of hope).

But my main purpose for presenting this model is to help you understand that the best (happiest and

most productive) Christian everyday life comes from a strong connection to all three of these virtues, and especially to the associated elements through which we experience our faith lives.

Life is about meaning, not experience.

If anyone asks what you mean when you say that a good life is built on virtue, you can refer to the discussion in this chapter, mentioning that three virtues in particular form the grounding for a successful life.



Christianity as we are meant to experience it consists of an emotional element (love), an intellectual element (faith), and a spiritual element (hope). Keeping your experience interconnected with all three of these elements—centered in the middle of the triangle, I like to say—will keep you grounded and fulfilled.

Without the participation and interconnectedness of all three elements, your faith can become distorted and weakened. In other words, you should be care-

ful not to allow your faith to be taken over by any single element.

1Th 1:3 We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Religious emotion is powerful, desirable, and even necessary to a complete and satisfying life as a follower of Jesus. For many believers, emotion is the primary way they experience a connection between them and the Lord. Given the choice between reading the Bible for an hour or singing worship songs in a church service for an hour, many believers would chose to sing, to feel the heart-stirring music and to feel the power of God's presence. It is a wonderful experience, to be enjoyed by Christians everywhere.

The emotional element is connected to love because love involves our feelings to a pronounced extent. And the two are associated with Jesus because he came to demonstrate God's love for us, as we have seen earlier.



[May God grant you] to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

—Ephesians 3:19

But, as crucial as emotion is to a heartfelt faith, a sturdy, courageous, confident, fearless, solid faith needs the other two elements to make it strong and permanent. A faith commitment and experience rest-

ing exclusively on our feelings leaves us open to being led astray (because emotions are easily manipulated). And in times of trial or spiritual dryness, if our only connection to God is emotional, then when we feel no emotional connection with God, we are in danger of spiritual harm.



What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

—1 Corinthians 14:15

The intellectual element of Christian faith is absolutely necessary to a sane, rational life of faith. You need to know what you believe as well as whom you believe and why you believe. Reason and the logical propositions supporting the faith are wonderful allies when someone asks you why you believe. There have been and are many brilliant, incisive defenders of the faith, and they deserve honor for using their minds for Christ—as we all should. Great Christian minds of the past and present supply us with knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

Those who attack the faith often use arguments and evidence that need to be responded to with counterarguments and counter evidence. To respond to anti-Christian arguments by saying, “Only believe” (this is the fideist school of apologetics) has historically proven ineffective for many people. Just witness how many college students, entering as vibrant Christians, have lost their faith when confronted with the neo-Darwinist claims about evolution.

Our intellects are also crucial for understanding and interpreting the Book of Truth. God's word in the Bible is rich and deep and sometimes challenging. The more you read and think about Scripture, the more you will understand the heart of God. If you put your mind to study, say, the powerful rhetorical strategies Jesus uses, the logical fallacies committed by the Pharisees, or the argumentative style Paul uses, the more rounded your appreciation of the Bible will be and the more you will truly *know* God's word.

But intellect forms only one-third of the foundation. A faith that is only intellectual misses the joy of relationship with Jesus, and the soul stirring worship in song and praise that the emotional element makes possible. Love is a powerful emotion, and often has little to do with the intellect.

There is a big difference between knowing about Christ and knowing Christ.

The third element of the faith is the spiritual. This, of course, is the realm of the Holy Spirit. Notice how the Spirit is described by Jesus, who uses the Greek word, *parakletos*, meaning an encourager or advocate, someone who comes up beside you and supports you. Here is John 14:26 in the Amplified translation:



But the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Inter-

cessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, Standby), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things. And He will cause you to recall (will remind you of, bring to your remembrance) everything I have told you.

—John 14:26 (AMPC)

If you contemplate these names for the Spirit, you will see why he is associated with hope. All of these names involve the future, which is where hope is always directed. We never hope for the past; we remember it. We never hope for the present; we experience it. Instead, we hope for something to be true in the future. As John says, the Spirit teaches us and helps us remember (John 14:26, just quoted), gives life (John 6:68), helps our thinking and teaches us what to say (Mark 13:11).¹¹ These are all promises that give us hope, even as the hope is fulfilled.

Now, you are free to criticize or even reject this diagram and my way of mapping out the connections between the persons of the Trinity and the ideas of faith, hope, and love. For example, you could plausibly argue that the Holy Spirit should be connected to the Intellectual element, since the Spirit teaches and inspires believers. I present this as a scheme for thought and understanding, not as a foundational plank in the Church of Bob. (And you won't go to hell if you don't like my diagram.)

But I do maintain that a sturdy presence of all three foundational elements is necessary for the best experience of the Christian life.

¹¹ The Holy Spirit also helps the thinking and writing of those who write books about serving God.

1Th 5:8 But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. As we saw in an earlier chapter, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that each virtue is a mean or center point between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency. For example, generosity is a center point between stinginess and extravagance. Courage is a center point between cowardice and recklessness. (See Book 2, Chapters 7-9 for more examples.)

A. Take the seven classical and Christian virtues and put each of them between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency.

B. Comment on your results. Was this difficult? Was it useful?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 13 (the "Love Chapter") and discuss the nature of love.

A. How is love treated as an action in this chapter?

B. Define love in two sentences.

3. Rephrase the Golden Rule in 10 different ways. For example, "Treat others the way you would like to be treated," or "Behave toward others the way you want them to behave toward you."

Discuss the effect of different wording.

4. Why these Seven Deadly Sins? Can you think of others that are more dangerous?

5. For the list of 10 virtues supplied by William Bennett at the beginning of this chapter, define each one and give an example of how it would be applied.

6. For the list of 25 virtues listed by Chuck Chapman at the beginning of the chapter, define each one. Then reduce the list from 25 to the 10 most important, explaining why you are keeping the ones you do and why you are deleting the ones you do.

7. Some words describing virtues are now rarely used. Define each of the following and use each in a sentence: probity, rectitude, scrupulousness.

Activities

1. Research the concept of virtue and create a definition in two or three sentences.

2. Individually or working with others as a team, research virtues and create a list of as many virtues as you can. Examples: kindness, sympathy, generosity. Define each one in a sentence or two

3. Use a search tool and locate all the references to love in the New Testament, using a close-to-literal translation (NASB, HCSB, ESV) and, combining them, explain or define love as a New Testament concept.

4. From the list you created in Question 2, create a list of the 10 most important virtues. Give an example of the application of each.

5. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. Discuss their meaning and their role in this chapter.

6. In your small group, discuss the merits and criticize the defects in the three-foundations discussion at the end of the chapter. Is it helpful, mislead-

ing, valuable, problematic, or what. Be sure to be specific as you support your view.

For Further Reading

The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories, by William Bennett, contains many stories designed to inculcate moral literacy in young people.

Thinking, Fast and Slow, by Daniel Kahneman explains how our fast-thinking mental apparatus often suggests poor choices to us and that the slow-thinking apparatus is often much more reliable.

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the classical standard book on ethics that everyone interested in virtue should read. If you are afraid that you won't understand someone as famous as Aristotle, or any philosopher, be reassured that he is quite accessible. When I taught the book to undergraduates, they were surprised at how easy he is to understand. We used a translation by Martin Ostwald.

Cicero's *On Duties*

11

11 How Shall We Then Live?

The question now is, How do we translate the Christian faith into our practical, every day behavior? How do we apply the theological doctrines to our actions? Just what is a Christian life style? To a large extent, the translation is done for us, by both Jesus himself and by Paul (and others) in their epistles.

The Basic Rule

The basic rule of Christian living is to be holy.



You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.

—Leviticus 20:7



As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be

holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

—1 Peter 1:14-16

What is holiness?

When we say that God is holy, we mean that he is pure, sacred, righteous, good, and just. He is the perfect example of the absence of evil, duplicity, self-interest, bias, ill-will, and wrongdoing.

For us human imitators of God's perfectness, holiness includes being deliberately moral and upright, physically innocent, spiritually dedicated, and conforming our lives to the purposes of God. A holy person is spiritually oriented, just, fair, righteous, innocent of wrongdoing.

Think about those people Jesus calls blessed in the Sermon on the Mount. They are the ones who want to be holy, because they "depend only on him [God], are humble, want to obey him more than to eat or drink, are merciful, have pure hearts, make peace" (Matthew 5:1-12, CEV).

Perhaps the best way to translate this idea of holiness into practical terms is that the new believer has converted from a previous set of values and behaviors to a new set. The roots of the word *convert* are *con*, meaning *thoroughly*, and *vertere* meaning *to turn around*. Seeking holiness requires a change, not only in your spiritual state, but in your moral outlook and behavioral practices.

Let's get even more specific.

Obey the Ten Commandments

God summed up the rules for human behavior and happiness more than 3,000 years ago when he gave the Ten Commandments to Israel. As you will

see, they still form the foundation for a righteous and holy life.

1. Do not worship other gods.

Most of us moderns don't have the temptation to worship other actual deities, but by extension we might be guilty of worshipping something that comes close to being another god. A useful question to others and to ourselves is, "What is the single, most important thing in your life?" The answer to this question identifies your god. If the answer is, "God," whom you genuinely put before everything and everyone else, then you are a keeper of the first commandment.

On the other hand, if your answer is, "My speedboat," or "Sex," or "My position as chairman of the board," or "Recreational drugs," or "My house," or even, "My boyfriend/girlfriend," then that thing you named is your god and you are breaking this commandment.

2. Do not make and worship idols.

In the modern world, few of us actually carve out a god or two from a block of wood and then pray to it. We are just too sophisticated and hip. But too many of us treat objects as if they were divine.

Do you look at your car and fawn over it, getting upset when you find even a tiny scratch? Do you spend more money washing, waxing, detailing, polishing, and accessorizing your car than you give to your church? Do you caress your car more than you caress your spouse? Hmm.



IDOL WORSHIP

[Phone rings]

"Hello, this is John."

"Hi, honey."

"Oh, hey Cindy. What's up?"

"I was in an accident."

"With the car? Cindy, how could you? You know that car was my dad's pride and joy. It's an heirloom. Weren't you being careful? What happened?"

"I collided with a truck."

"Oh, Cindy. I've spend a fortune restoring that car. The paint job itself cost \$8,000."

"I know. I'm so sorry."

"And more than 3400 hours of work."

"I'm sorry."

"Now don't start crying. Just tell me, how bad is the damage?"

"The front area is crumpled and the car is hissing, like steam."

"Yikes. That car is one of a kind. Do you have any idea what it will cost to repair it?"

"I have idea, John. I know it will be a lot, and I'm sorry."

"Who was at fault? Let's hope the other guy's insurance will pay."

"I think I might be at fault. The truck stopped suddenly and I couldn't stop and I hit him."

"Oh Cindy. How could you do that? You've got to be more careful. This is going to really cost us."

I know. I'm so sorry. But at least we have good medical insurance."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"They're telling me I will be here in the hospital for at least a week."

Or do you drool over some beautiful young actor or actress, collecting pictures and constantly seeking news and gossip about him or her? Is your first act every morning to jump on the Web to look for news of your favorite one, rather than to open the Bible or pray? Hmm.

Or is your living room—or your whole house—a showcase of perfect style, newness, and modernity, a place you brag about and show off (but won't let people in because they would defile it)? Do you understand now?



Dear Lord, thank you so very much for blessing me with such an abundance of material goods, including a variety and quantity of food, a nice, comfortable place to live where I can keep warm and dry, and many useful tools and possessions. I accept them all with gratitude and humility. May I always view them as indications of your great love for me, and never as objects to be pursued or exalted for their own sake. Keep me from idolizing any of these blessings or to hoard them out of selfish idolatry. Thank you again, in Jesus' name. Amen.

3. Do not take God's name in vain.

This commandment obviously forbids using God's name in cursing and in common swearing that includes God's name. It also prohibits the frivolous use of God's name, such as the habit of saying, "Oh, my God," whenever someone is even mildly surprised. But if you flip the commandment into its positive expression, "Use God's name only with rever-

ence,” it’s easy to understand the broader sense. Always use God’s name with due respect and holy intent, never flippantly or lightly.

4. Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Most Christians observe Sunday as the Lord’s day instead of the Jewish Sabbath. And it is true that the day of the week is not critical. Paul says,



One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

—Romans 14:5

But the issue is not which day to observe. The issue is the command to set aside a day dedicated to the things of God, separate from the other, common days of the week. It is a time for rest and worship, and doing God’s work. Take specific day of each week to reserve for communing with the Lord, reading his Word, talking with others (spouse, children, friends) about spiritual things, or engaging in a ministry. And remember to take a nap.

5. Honor your father and your mother.

Look, your parents aren’t (or weren’t) perfect. They might be mean, unfair, constantly critical, selfish, manipulative, and controlling. This commandment, however, doesn’t list any exceptions. Whether or not we can love them, or even like them, we are all still commanded to honor our parents. We honor them by being kind and respectful, caring about their health and welfare. If we live with them, we are

also to be obedient (unless they order us to do something immoral or unbiblical). When, in later years, they become dependent on us, we honor them by caretaking and support.

Honor also includes a deferential attitude toward our parents, never yelling at them in anger or treating them with insolence. The commandment doesn't tell us to care for them if they need or deserve it. We must honor them and care for them always.



FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Candace was born into a stormy nightmare of a family. Harry and Frieda already had three wild and disobedient children, and both parents reminded Candace regularly that she was an unwanted accident. They sometimes referred to her as “our last mistake.”

By the time she was four, Harry had begun to abuse the girl sexually. When she finally went crying to her mother, Frieda told her, “Candy, you are never going to amount to anything if you keep telling lies and come running to me in tears every five minutes. If you continue with these wicked stories, you will destroy our family and be taken away to prison where you will really know what bad treatment is.”

Whenever Candace made a mistake, such as spilling a little soup, or forgot to do a task, such as refilling the salt shaker, she was subjected to angry recriminations, whipped harshly, and then locked in the dark attic for several hours.

All this time, Candace took seriously the commandment she had learned in Sunday School, to honor her parents. She always treated them with deference, was compliant to all their

demands, and answered with, “Yes, sir,” and “Yes, ma’am.”

Later in life, after her parents had closed their eyes for the last time on earth, Candace revealed her situation. “I can’t say that I loved my parents,” she said, “except in an intellectual sense. But I gave them respect as the people who were the means of giving me life. Yes, they were bad parents, but their treatment of me ultimately drove me to Jesus Christ, in whose arms I have found deep love and perfect contentment. For that, I am forever grateful.”

Regarding this vignette, someone might ask, “What if your parents ask you to do something illegal or immoral?” or, “Should Candace have willingly obeyed her father’s incestuous demands?”

Where Biblical truth conflicts with parental orders—or with any human orders or laws—show them the Scripture. Discuss a moral or Biblical substitute. Remember that in the end, Biblical commandments, rightly interpreted and applied, take precedence over human orders.



But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

—Acts 5:29

6. Do not commit murder.



A TRUE STORY

Two sailors on shore leave ran into two tough guys in a seedy area of the waterfront. As

their eyes met, one of the tough guys sneered at the sailors and demanded, “What are you looking at?”

One of the sailors replied with a contemptuous, “Not much.” This response caused the tough guys to attack the sailors. In the end, the two sailors were killed.

Murder is a result of giving in to oneself, usually by committing one of the Seven Deadly Sins. You can see in the above story the actions of Pride (the thugs couldn’t bear to be disrespected), and Anger (the thugs flew into a rage at the insult).

As much as Hollywood films attempt to justify revenge killings, murder for vengeance is prohibited by this commandment. Let God take care of those you think deserve death as punishment for an evil deed.

7. Do not commit adultery.

Life is a difficult job for most people, a job with so many challenges that it almost requires a helper, a companion, a fellow laborer, in order to flourish, or even to get through. And such a fellow laborer must be a dependable, reliable—and faithful—partner, someone who’s “got your back.” That’s why in God’s plan men and women are paired as husband and wife: to be trustworthy partners through the chaos and fluctuation of living. The trust and fidelity form the solid bedrock foundation that supports the partnership through every storm and disaster life can bring.



Two are better than one because they have a

good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

—Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Think of it this way. If a robber points a gun at you and says, “Give me your money,” you know the situation. The robber has identified himself as an evil person by pointing a gun at you. The rules of this transaction are clear to both parties. Give the man your money or expect violence.

But adultery is a hidden act of betrayal that violates the bond of trust that forms the foundation of the relationship, as indeed with every close relationship. In adultery, the trust between two married people that has taken time and effort to build is destroyed, often without the immediate knowledge of the innocent party. The adulterer is therefore deceiving the spouse into thinking that the trust is still there.

It might be said, then, that adultery commits the offenses of lying to, cheating on, betraying, and deceiving one’s spouse. The adulterer secretly transfers the feelings of love, commitment, and affection from the spouse onto the other guilty party. Such a fraud furthers the breakdown of the bonds of society, because the betrayal of trust in the most significant interpersonal relationship makes the victim wonder if anyone can be trusted for any reason in any circum-

stance. If you can live a lie where you must pretend to be faithful and committed, then you could be involved in many lesser, easier lies and betrayals.

When adultery is exposed, a divorce frequently follows. If the adulterous partners marry each other, one or both of them will always have the thought in the back of their mind, "If my lover was willing to betray his or her spouse in order to cheat with me, how do I know I in turn will never be cheated on?" So a new relationship that results from betrayal can never have that essential trust that an innocent relationship can have.

8. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Lying in court about something that unjustly harms another person is prohibited by this commandment. By extension, any lie told with an intent to hurt someone or take advantage of someone is forbidden. This includes criminal acts such as confidence schemes, fraud, and counterfeiting.

But personal deceit is also forbidden, such as lying about how many miles are on the car you are selling, or whether the roof leaks on the house you have for sale.

And even on a relational scale, bearing false witness includes lying to one's parents about where you were last night, lying to one's boss about why you weren't at work yesterday, and lying to a customer about which parts need to be replaced. Why is that prohibited? As the discussion under adultery makes clear, lying for immoral gain or to fool someone else is a breach of trust, which is the foundational principle of all relationships. Once your friend, your fa-

ther, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, employer, customer learns that you can't be trusted, the relationship will be severely damaged.

Lying by omission is another forbidden act under this commandment. For example, suppose you are a stock broker and you know that a major recall of Zhunk Corporation's main product is about to damage the company and drive its stock toward the basement. When a prospective investor says he wants to buy the stock, your neglecting to mention the coming recall amounts to telling a lie.

Finally, lying by telling only the truth is also prohibited by this commandment because it produces a deception or false conclusion by the person receiving the partial information. A lie can be understood not only by what you say, but by what you imply.



IMPLY THE LIE

"Hey, Marcus. Have you seen Hank?"

"No, boss. He should be here, though. So far, he's been coming in sober and on time every day this week."

- ➔ Marcus is telling the truth, but by telling only a partial truth, he is also lying. The whole truth is, Hank has come in to work every day at 7:00 am for twelve years and has never had even a sip of alcohol, so he has been sober not only every day this week but throughout his life.



TRUE, BUT

Sal: "Hey, Karla. Wait up."

Karla: "What is it, Sal?"

Sal: "Deano asked me out to dinner Friday."

Karla: "Oh, wow."

Sal: "What? Do you think I shouldn't accept?"

Karla: "Well, the last time he went to dinner with a girl, he spent all of five dollars on her at a fast-food joint."

- ➔ Karla is telling the truth. But she is also lying, knowing that Sally will misinterpret what Karla is saying. The last time Deano went out to dinner with a girl—his sister—they were taking a break from making a set for a play and didn't have much time to eat. Usually, when Deano asks a girl to dinner, he takes her to Le Maison Haut Couture and drops a bank-roll.

9. Do not steal.

Do not take, use, or borrow anything without permission when that thing doesn't belong to you. This commandment, by the way, provides the protection of private property.

This commandment is most often broken today by those who illegally copy software, copyrighted information, movies, music, and the like, because, "It hardly seems like stealing." Some people need to tune up their moral detectors, so that there will be a beep of recognition when they are tempted to shoplift that lipstick or that candy bar, or when they use

up or destroy something of value without permission or payment.



REFUND PLEASE

Rep: "Hello, Madam. How may I help you?"

Woman: "I'd like to return these dresses for a refund."

Rep: "Certainly. Do you have a receipt?"

Woman: "Yeah. Here."

Rep: "Thank you. And reason for return?"

Woman: "Well, the dresses are too short. Winter's coming and these are summer dresses."

Rep: "I see. Now, your receipt is dated in May, so the dresses were summer fashions."

Woman: "I just said that. Are you hard of hearing? Anyway, as most of the clued in on the planet know, it's November, now. I need to go shop for winter dresses."

Rep: "These dresses look like they've been dry cleaned a few times."

Woman: "Well, duh. You don't expect me to put a sweaty, dirty dress back in my closet without having it cleaned first, do you? I mean, what's wrong with you?"

Rep: "Okay, okay. But then, you have already worn these dresses?"

Woman: "Let me talk to your manager, or someone who understands that you can't know whether a dress fits or not until you've put it on."

Rep: "That won't be necessary, Madam. Here's the store credit for the dresses."

Woman: "Finally. Now, I'd also like to return these shoes, this belt, and this necklace."

10. Do not covet.

How can we not covet stuff when one of the principal goals of advertising is to get us to want things? And when advertising's frequent method is to use envy of our neighbor's goods?



ON SALE NOW

Frank: "Hello, sir. My name is Frank Upsell. How may I help you?"

Man: "Uh, I've got an old tube TV, and I've heard a lot about these new, smart TVs."

Frank: "Well, sir, you've come to exactly the right place."

Man: "My neighbor has a Drizzle 55-inch LED TV. I was thinking about something like that. Only I feel bad about, you know, coveting his TV."

Frank: "Oh, sir, sir, no problem. No one wants a dinky 55-inch TV these days. And Drizzle is, frankly, sir, not at the, um, top of the list, if you get my meaning."

Man: "Really?"

Frank: "Really. No need to covet that loser. Here's what you need to impress your neighbor. The 80-inch Frimpsonic XLED TV with Supreme Dynamic Range, Ultimate High Definition, 480 Hertz screen refresh, 50 million-to-one contrast ratio, OmniLit screen. It's cutting edge. Nothing can touch it until the new models come out next month."

Man: "How much is it?"

Frank: "How does \$199 a month sound?"

Man: "Uh—."

Frank: "Did I mention this baby has the Z20000 processor chip set?"

Man: "That's good?"

Frank: "Everyone will envy you instead of your envying them. This TV will put an end to your coveting your neighbor's TV."

Man: "Okay, I'll take it."

Practice the Golden Rule: "Whatever you want others to do for you, do so for them." (Matthew 7:12)

The Golden Rule:
Treat others the way
you want to be treated.

The Ten Commandments: What to Remember

As you read over and contemplate the Ten Commandments, consider these truths:

1. The Ten Commandments are indeed old, but truth is old. Moral and spiritual truth do not change or come and go, in spite of what some people claim. God intended his commandments to apply to all people everywhere, always. After all human nature is the same and, until we are regenerated for the Kingdom, will remain the same. God, who designed us, implemented the Ten Commandments to help us regulate the sinful nature we brought upon ourselves through the fall (see Genesis 3).

2. The Ten Commandments were given for our benefit, not as ways for God to control or oppress us. God made us and knows the damage we did to ourselves and the cosmos. He also knows how we can behave to regulate our rebellious hearts. Our ultimate happiness—both in this life and in heaven—is

the end goal of instructing us to live by these commandments.

3. Just as the ancient Israelites were given a choice whether or not to follow and obey God, so too we have the same choice, where obedience will be rewarded and disobedience will be punished. Failure to obey these commandments results in negative consequences here on earth (adultery breaking apart a marriage, lying breaking down a society that needs trust and honesty in order to flourish), and negative consequences for the next life.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Define holiness in your own words.
2. Do you want to be holy? If so, what steps are you taking or could you take to move your life toward that goal?
3. Does being holy sound boring to you? If so, why?
4. Does being holy sound exciting to you? If so, why?
5. List the Ten Commandments in the order of difficulty or temptation they have for you to break them, from least difficult to most difficult. In your small group, discuss your lists and explain the order you have chosen.
6. For the three Commandments you find the most difficult to keep, explain how you avoid falling into temptation to break it.

Activities

1. Look up all the Scriptures containing the word holy or holiness

12

12 The Faithful Perform Good Deeds

So far, we might summarize the way we have described Christianity as including two areas. First is belief, a faith commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We enter into a personal relationship with Jesus, and we adopt the accompanying theology – the deity of Christ, his death as payment for our sins, his resurrection, his return to rule, and so forth.



Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

—John 14:1

Second, we agree that Jesus is not just our savior, but he is our Lord (our Master, Ruler, King), to whom we owe obedience. This means we must pursue a transformed life, avoiding sin and evil and instead cultivating a virtuous life. We are required to keep the commandments of our Lord.



If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

—John 14:15

And now we will look at the third requirement for the Christian: We are called to serve.



Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

—Galatians 6:9-10

While it is true that being a faithful Christian involves avoiding a number of popular sins, that is not really the heart of the faith. Christianity is much more than a list of behavioral don'ts. Christianity is about relationship—relationship with God and relationship with other people. In both instances, the relationship focuses on love. Just as we are called to love and serve God, so too we are called to love and to serve people, our fellow Christians first, but also those who still live in spiritual darkness, those who are emotionally hurting, the sick, the poor, the dispossessed, the persecuted.

The coming of Jesus as God in human form showed mankind what God's love for us means in human terms: compassion, mercy, and sacrifice.



A PRAYER TO MODEL THE LOVE OF JESUS

Dear Lord, as I go out into the world today, let me be aware of the needs of those around me. Help me to model the true Christian life, being a light to those who need light and a friend to those

who need a friend. May I be the answer to someone's prayer today, bringing comfort and compassion, guidance and direction, or hope and faith. May I engage every person with love and care, as is their due as people made in your image. In Jesus' name I thank you and praise you. Amen.



A PRAYER TO REMEMBER TO SERVE

Dear Lord, please remind me today that I am here on earth as your child not merely to accumulate a bunch of consumer products or eat a bunch of meals. Remind me that I am here to serve you, to nurture my brothers and sisters in Christ and to be a witness to the lost. Please give me the opportunity to be a light and a helper to someone who needs what I can supply. And may all of my time, talents, and treasure be used to serve and please you. I thank you and praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Time includes priorities, appointments,
willingness to persevere
Talents include skills, emotional support
Treasure includes giving, lending, using
or assigning.

Aristotle noted that one cannot be considered virtuous simply by sitting around. Virtue, he said, is an activity of the soul – with stress on activity.

John the Baptist noted the distinction between expressed faith and demonstrated faith, when he told the Sadducees and Pharisees that they had to do more than merely say they repented:



But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

—Matthew 3:7-10



He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

—Titus 3:5-8

C

So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

— Acts 26:19-20

Let your behavior reflect Christ in you.



Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me

— John 14:23-24



Then summoning him, his lord said to him, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?” And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

— Mathew 18:32-35



And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" 17 And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." 18 Then he *said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; 19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 20 The young man *said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

—Matthew 19:16-21

Mar 8:34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

Luk 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

Luk 14:27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

L

Joh 12:47 "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

Joh 12:48 "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

joh 14:15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

Joh 1

Rom

Co 3:11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1Co 3:12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

1Co 3:13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

1Co 3:14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

1Co 3:15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

1Co 3

Paul's

Finally, James is reconciled with Paul. Salvation is by grace, but it must be maintained by a life of good works or it will be lost:

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,"

and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

—James 2:14-17 (NASB)

What is a Good Deed?

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Give a million dollars to a college or charity
Sit quietly next to someone grieving

Remember earlier we quoted Aristotle saying that action leads to belief. Think about that. It means that if you spend time serving worshipping, praying, serving in a ministry where you work for the glory of God, you will deepen your spiritual relationship with God.

Applied Christianity

Wherever you go ask yourself:

1. What can I learn from this to gain wisdom and insight to

A. make my own life better

B. Share this truth or wisdom with others

2. How could this place, these people, or this process be improved by an application of Christianity (fairness, kindness, generosity, morality the seven virtues

A. praise God aloud

B. Suggest an improvement to the appropriate people,

C. Be a quiet witness

3. Be a quiet witness

A. Pray openly over your food.

B. Encourage other Christians who may be too shy to pray; you model a strong Christian. Many Christians feel under siege. We can't know the spiritual state of strangers.

With the Jehovah's witnesses and Mormons going around, it's difficult to be listened to. But we can still rely on God's calling people. Let your sweet, winsome demeanor proclaim that you are joyous believer. Pass out cards for the Jesus film

encouragement

card, text, email, cup of cold water, friendliness, listening ear, pay for the person's coffee in line behind you, donate some Christian books or DVDs to the public library or the Church library

Evangelisms

make disciples

Seven Steps to Jesus

1. The individual recognizes a spiritual need or hunger that is not being met. "Is this all there is?"
Danger point: try thrills, drugs, alcohol, sex

2. Start thinking about God and religion

Danger point: get involved with TM eastern cults, etc.

3. Observe those with belief. Are they happy? Do they welcome me? Danger: Some who call themselves Christians are anti-witnesses

4. Openly seeking God. Bible reading, trying out church Danger: easy Gospel church

5. Believing in God and getting to know him.
Seeking the fellowship of believers.

6. Accepting Christianity, repenting, turning
from sin

7. Developing a relationship with Jesus.

character is how you act in the dark.

virtue

Col 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily,
as for the Lord rather than for men,

Col 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive
the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ
whom you serve.

Col

col 3:17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all
in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through
Him to God the Father.

Eph 6:5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your
masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling,
in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;

Eph 6:6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-
pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of
God from the heart.

Eph 6:7 With good will render service, as to the
Lord, and not to men,

Eph 6:8 knowing that whatever good thing each
one does, this he will receive back from the Lord,
whether slave or free.

—Ephesians 6:5-8

M

*

Working for Team Jesus

Here in a brief form is the salvation message:

- God calls you and you accept his call and put your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. You are saved.
- You demonstrate your faith in Jesus as Lord by changing your life and obeying his commandments. Belief is an activity of behavioral commitment, not simply a verbal statement.
- You perform good works as part of the requirements of being a Christian.
- You endure tribulation and remain faithful to (continue to trust in) God.
- If you stop believing, stop working to obey Jesus' commands, you are in effect giving up your faith and therefore your salvation.

First, it is crucial to underscore the fact that God does promise that your faith cannot be taken from you by any external source other than God. Your faith is secure from all enemies.



For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be

able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

— Romans 8:38-39

Salvation also has two contingencies.

1. You must continue to believe in and trust in God. If you stop believing in God or in salvation through Christ, you are no longer saved. In such a case, you have lost your salvation by your own choice, by your own free will. You have walked away from eternal life.

2. You must continue to obey God's rules. If after being saved you do not change your sinful life, or you return to a life of sin, or you behave in a way that violates God's commandments, you can lose your salvation by God's choice. Your name can be blotted from the book of life.



Obedience

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

— Matthew 16:24

Joh 8:51 "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death."



Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.

—John 14:23-24



For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

—Hebrews 10:26-31





Mat 18:35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."



Mat 19:17 And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."



Joh 14:15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.



joh 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.



joh 15:6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.



Joh 15:10 “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.



Joh 15:14 “You are My friends if you do what I command you.



Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.

—John 8:51

Jesus comments on only one petition in the Lord’s prayer, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” He says,



For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

—Matthew 6:14-15

We must be merciful to those who wrong us, emulating the mercifulness of God. If we don’t forgive those who wrong us, we won’t be forgiven for our own sins. And if we aren’t forgiven, our sins remain unpaid for and we cannot go to heaven. Talk about a sobering comment.

Jesus reiterates this teaching in the parable of the unmerciful slave (Matthew 18:23-35), which concludes this way:



Then summoning him, his lord said to him, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?” And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

— Matthew 18:32- 35

In the book of Revelation, Jesus warns the church in Sardis that its members need to wake up and repent or else he will erase their names from the Book of Life. Only those who overcome the challenges they face will keep their names written in the Book of Life:



“I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent..... He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will

confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

— Revelation 3:1-5

Faithfulness



And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

— Colossians 1:21-23

Col 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Rom 11:21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.

Rom 11:22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.



for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.

—1 Thessalonians 3:7-8



But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

—Hebrews 3:6



For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.

—Hebrews 3:14



Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

—1 Corinthians 15:1-2

As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard

from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.

— 1 John 2:24-25

You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.

— Matthew 10:22



List



Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

— Hebrews 4:1



Jesus must remain your Lord
if he is to remain your Savior.

13

13 The Good News About Free Will

The truly good news is that *God has given us the freedom to choose him every day*. Think how powerful a concept this is. Imagine this:

“Darling, even if we weren’t pledged to each other for life, I would be honored to choose you to be my spouse again today.”

“Leslie, I am glad that I can once again choose to be your friend today.”

Such freedom allows us to re-choose to serve God (or be a loving, willing, happy, grateful spouse or friend) each and every day. And the act of choosing gives both us and the person we re-choose a boost. We are happy to make the choice and the person we choose is happy to be chosen. Have you thought about it? Aren’t we at least a little bit happy when an airline steward or call center agent says, “Thank you for your business. We know you have choices and we are glad you selected us.”



CHOOSING GOD AGAIN TODAY

Good morning, dear Lord. Thank you for bringing me to the beginning of a new day. Once more I am honored to choose you to be my God and savior. Help me to serve and worship you today. Give me the knowledge, insights, and

wisdom to make the right choices, and the strength and perseverance to see them through. Thank you for creating me and for allowing me to choose you to serve. May you be honored in everything I do. In Jesus' name. Amen.



CHOOSING GOD

Thank you, my dear God, for drawing my heart to yours. Once again I gladly lay my will down at your feet and choose you to be my guide, my savior, and my friend. Please help me to be obedient to your word and your will, seeking your glory and honor, and not my own. May I ever be your faithful and humble servant, showing others the love you show me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

However, when you are saved, you do not give up your free will. You can still choose to walk away from your faith.

Paul is more explicit about some believers falling from faith because they believe the lies of the world and “deceitful spirits”:



But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstain-

ing from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

—1 Timothy 4:1-3

Timothy, Paul says, should be careful to be sure that his teaching and life conform to the demands Jesus has placed on his disciples:



Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

—1 Timothy 4:16



Salvation is a free gift that must be treasured and cared for, preserved

Serve God and do good works
not because you have to
but because you want to.
That's love.

Mat 3:8 “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

So if Christianity involves much more than just “being” a Christian, but living the Christian life, what does that look like in three dimensions?

A life of virtue: honesty, integrity, honoring truth.

A life of action, doing good works.

A life of sharing the Gospel.

Service might be divided into three overlapping parts.

Worship of God

(prayer, fellowship, evangelism, Bible study, applying Scriptural truth to your life)

A moral life

honesty, integrity, morality

discussed in chapter 10 ****

Honoring the Ten Commandments

Positive action

Perhaps a place to start is to discuss the seven virtues adopted by the early Church fathers. They combine the four classical virtues with the three Christian virtues

Questions for Thought and Discussion

Activities

2. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. Discuss their meaning and their role in this chapter.

The If of Salvation

A powerful and enlightening way to see how thoroughly the doctrine of conditional salvation is established in the New Testament is to perform a search on the little word *if* using a Bible software application and a close-to-literal translation such as the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), or the English Standard Version (ESV). Here are some of the results as they relate to salvation.

14

14 Faith and Works

The Relationship Between Faith and Works

I hope we have already clearly established that Christians are saved by God's gracious gift of forgiveness, our sins having been paid for by Jesus' sacrifice. Works did not and cannot save us: We simply couldn't do enough good to pay the debt of sin.

Faith is an Activity; Faith is a Verb; Faith is Obedience



If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

—John 14:15



Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father who is in heaven will enter.”

—Matthew 7:21



If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

—John 15:10

Not “keep the [ceremonial] law,” but “keep the [moral] commandments”:



And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

—Matthew 19:17



Salvation requires obedience to the savior. Jesus is our Lord and savior. Sometimes we think or speak only in terms of Jesus as our savior and neglect the Lord (master, king, boss, manager) part. Frankly, we like the Savior part, where Jesus does all the work and ignore the Lord part, where we have to do the work of obedience.

Which is more likely to be sung in a modern church service?

This worship chorus:

Love you, Jesus; Love you Jesus,
Love you, Jesus; Love you Jesus,
Love you, Jesus; Love you Jesus,

Or this hymn:

Trust and Obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
Than to trust and obey.



He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

—John 3:36



But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

—Romans 2:5-8

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

—2 Thessalonians 1:6-8

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

—Hebrews 5:8-10



What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

—James 2:14-17

James means that faith must be show results. WE must live in a way that demonstrates our faith.



Jas 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

James and Paul reconciled: Abraham's faith produced an act of obedience.

An Analogy

Perhaps the best way to explain the relationship between faith and works is through an analogy.



HIRED TO WORK

A young man went to law school and studied to become a defense attorney. He was a child of his times, and money and material things meant more to him than anything else. So when he passed the bar and became a defense attorney, he decided to specialize in defending drug dealers, rapists, and child molesters, because "that's where the money is."

Then one day when he was eating lunch with a few associates, bragging about an idea to get a murderer off on a technicality, the waiter came over to him and said, "That gentleman by the window wants to talk to you." The young man looked over and noticed a very well dressed man looking at him invitingly. The young man thought that he might as well see what the gentleman wanted, so he walked over to the table.

"Thank you for heeding my call," said the man. "My name is Theo Patrias, and I am the owner of Triangle Law Associates. I've looked over your resume that you posted online and I'd like to make you an offer. Instead of working to

support the vicious, how would you like to join my firm and support ethics and virtue?"

"Is there any money in it?" the young man asked, in a skeptical tone.

"Of course," Theo replied. "But the real pay-off will come in the smiles of gratitude you'll see on the faces of the poor and disempowered. Oh, and our retirement plan, called *Eternal Sunshine*, is unmatched."

Working for a smile didn't much appeal to the young man, but in spite of himself, he began to feel interested. He heard himself ask, "How much does it cost to become a member of Triangle Law? I think I've heard of them. Isn't it pretty expensive?"

"Yes," said Theo. "The entry fee is 100 billion dollars."

At this, the young man gave a blowing tsk, accompanied by a cynical smile. "Excuse my French," he said, "but there's no way in Hades that I could ever afford that."

"And likely not on earth, either," added Theo. "However, if you are willing to commit to the firm, and work hard to advance our goals, my associate Mr. Christos will pay your membership fee for you and you will join his team."

The young man was shocked. "But even at a high dollars-per-hour rate and working night and day, I could never pay the membership fee back."

"Of course not. We never expect you to try to pay us back, even partially. But we do expect loyalty, obedience—and energetic service. It's not an easy job. If you just sit around and brag about working for Triangle Law Associates, you'll be fired."

"But everybody says that at Triangle, 'Once hired, never fired.'"

"Unfortunately," said Theo, his face taking on a serious expression, "we've had to let go quite a few people who thought that. The fact is, we call people to service, not to idleness."

"I'll have to think that over," said the young man.

"Count the cost," as we say. You will be rewarded for every job you do, large or small. Even if you just bring a client a cup of coffee or cold water. Compensation is wonderful."

And so after some careful thought, the young man decided to dedicate his life to virtue and work for Triangle Law. He put up a sign in his office that said, "Be a Servant, Not a Slacker."

Faith involves actions.



For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

—Matthew 5:20



He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

—Revelation 3:21



CONTINGENCY

"Well, Mr. Bargle, in spite of the fact that you have no relevant work experience, and your let-

ters of recommendation are lukewarm—even though they come from your friends—and your mother—we’ve decided to take a chance on you and offer you a position here with Heavenly Cupcakes.”

“That’s great! Thanks, Mr. Devine.”

[One Month Later]

“There you are, Bargle. I’m glad to finally catch you in your office. I’ve been meaning to speak to you, but you don’t answer your phone and you don’t return my voice messages or reply to my emails. And you’ve missed the last three weekly team meetings.”

“Sorry, Boss. I’ve just been really busy.”

“Really? Then you must be making good progress on the Feemster account. About finished, are you?”

“What’s the Feemster account?”

“That’s your main assignment. Haven’t you been working on it? We need to deliver an analysis and recommendation in less than a week.”

“Feemster, huh? Never heard of it.”

“Then what exactly have you been doing for the last month?”

“Acclimatizing myself to the corporate vibe—you know, the organizational zeitgeist.”

“The what?”

“The company aura. I need to find a safe space and get my rhythm.”

“I guess that explains the pillow under your desk.”

“You got it, Mr. D.”

“You know what, Bargle?”

“I’m on ya.”

"I don't think you're going to work out for us here. I'm afraid we're going to have to let you go, to, uh, pursue other options."

"Let me go? But what about, 'Once hired, never fired'?"

"What are you talking about?"

"It's in the Operations Manual. Maybe the exact words are 'Once hired, always hired.'"

"The manual never says that. Have you ever read the manual?"

Well, no. It's too long and boring. But someone told me that once you get a job here, you can never lose it."

"Well, Bargle, you're just about to demonstrate how false that belief is."



Paraphrasing Faith and Works

Yet another way to think about the relationship to faith and works is to paraphrase James' comment that "Faith without works is dead."

Let's begin simply. Substitute belief for faith and action for works. Then we might say,

Belief without action is wishful thinking.

Now, let's substitute promise for faith, because when you put your faith in Jesus, you are making a promise to him. Then, in place of works we can put in fulfillment. What is a promise not kept?

A Promise without fulfillment is a betrayal.

Next, we often speak of a faith commitment, so let's substitute commitment for faith. A commitment is something that needs to be followed through to completion or actualization. Not to do so means that the commitment was false.

A commitment without follow through is a lie.

Faith without works is a false promise.

A claim without evidence is only an opinion.

I trust Mr. Yeshua to be my guide.
Then why are you not following him?



SEEING IN PART

"Hey, Gil. I have a very important question for you."

"Shoot."

"Do you know the Lord?"

"Oh, no worries, Tama. I became a Christian when I was eight, at summer camp."

"Really? I've known you for three years and I never would have guessed."

"Oh, yeah. They even gave me a New Testament when I accepted the Lord."

"That's great! What's your favorite Scripture?"

"Well, I haven't ever gotten around to reading it. Too much *thee* and *thou* and all that. I still have the book, though."

"Did you ever get a modern translation of the whole Bible?"

"No, but that's an idea."

“Tell me, then. How would you explain Christianity to someone?”

“Simple. Christ forgives your sins and gives you eternal life.”

Can you see here that Gil is right up to a point, but that he is also quite misled by his partial belief? It's as if Tama had asked him, “How do you explain driving?” and had replied, “You just get in the car, step on the gas, and go.” Wouldn't mention of the need to steer (or if you're in a driverless car, the need to choose a destination) be a little more accurate? Roads, traffic, alternate routes, refuelling—mentioning a few more details would be much less misleading. But in Gil's case, his explanation seems to reflect the depth—or rather shallowness—of his belief.

Faith is demonstrated by obedience to Christ's rules.



Mat 12:50 “For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”



But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one.

— 1 Corinthians 5:11



Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”

We must demonstrate our faith by living according to the moral code expected of believers, keeping Jesus’ commandments. Action is the evidence of belief.



Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act¹² on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall.

—Matthew 7:21-27

No one can take your salvation away from you.

¹² act = *poieo* (4160) do, make, act, perform, practice

When you accept Jesus as your Lord and savior, you are immediately forgiven for all of your past sins, justified before God, and granted eternal life. No man, woman, angel, or demon can take away your salvation when you stay faithful:



Who will separate us from the love of Christ?
Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or
famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
— Romans 8:35

God's love stands eternal, ready to help us, guide us, strengthen us, and teach us, regardless of our circumstances or which kind of attack is sent to us:



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

Questions for Thought and Discussion

Activities

2. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. Discuss their meaning and their role in this chapter.

15

15 Christianity = You

You may or may not be paranoid, but the fact is, they are watching you. Who is this “they”? They are both other Christians and non-Christians who want to see how you, as a Christian, live and act. Most people seem to make generalizations based on only one or a few samples,¹³ so your words and actions will tell others what a Christian is like, and therefore what Christianity has to offer.

In other words, you are an advertisement for Christianity. Do others see that you have the joy of Christ even as you pass through times of sorrow or defeat? Are you an encourager whose positive demeanor invites both Christians and non-Christians to come to you for counsel? Or are you negative, bitter, complaining, and resentful?

As a salesman for Jesus, how good a product representative are you? Remember that your personality and demeanor and mood are the first things

¹³ The logical fallacy of hasty generalization occurs when someone makes a generalization based on too little or non-representative evidence.

people see, way before they hear about your religious commitment.



AUTHOR'S ANECDOTE

One fine September in Southern California, as the day was heading toward twilight, I found myself walking along a mostly deserted beach, listening to the waves tell of the night, persistence, and goodness of God.

At one point, I came to a spot near some rocks where I saw two girls, probably in their late teens, sitting on a blanket and talking softly. I was much too shy in those days, even to say hello, so I didn't interrupt them. However, I did get a good look at their faces.

My immediate conclusion was that they were both Christians. Their faces radiated that quiet joy, that settled sense of spiritual contentment, that only Christians possess. I've seen the faces of many non-Christian teenage girls, and the difference is unmistakable.

Had I been a non-Christian and not so shy, I certainly would have approached them and asked, "Why are you girls so happy?" They were indeed an excellent advertisement for the grace and goodness Jesus offers.

You've heard the saying, "People want to know who you are before they want to know what you believe." This concept goes back to ancient times when speakers were introduced by someone known to the audience. The introducer gave the speaker's credentials, describing his character or ethos, and answering the question, "Why should I believe this guy?" The practice continues into current day, when

speakers are introduced, often by someone the audience knows, and when books contain prefaces, forewords, or introductions by a famous person testifying to the value of the author's work.

Evangelism, then, should be about what God has done for you. Successful evangelism is more likely if you model the joy and behavior of a sincere Christian.



SELLING JESUS

"Hey, buddy. Are you a Christian?"

"Why, no. I'm not even sure what that means."

"If you're not a Christian, then when you die you're going straight to hell where you'll burn in agony for all eternity."

"Uh, taxi!!"

Ask yourself how you would respond to this person. Does this approach appear to be an effective way to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19)? Does it make you want to hear more from this person?

And now consider another possibility:



CHRIST IN YOU

"Hey, buddy. Are you a Christian?"

"Why, no. I'm not even sure what that means."

"Would you like to hear my story about how becoming a Christian brought meaning and joy into my life?"

"Why not?"

“Okay, great. God offers us a personal relationship with him through his son Jesus. That’s where I finally found happiness.”

Here are some facts to remember when you want to present the Gospel to someone:

People won’t accept the message unless they think they can trust the messenger.

That’s why friendship evangelism gets such big publicity. Develop a relationship with those you want to be saved and then begin to make them curious about God. After all, people don’t like to be told, “You’re bad,” true though it may be. And the approach of “You’re going to hell and I’m not,” comes across as insufferably arrogant and egotistical. Not a very good way to build a bridge between you.

Start by discovering something you have in common.

This is a fact that every salesman knows. It’s called affinity marketing. People are more likely to trust and listen to someone who shares their interests and values. For example, when you drive up to an automobile dealership, the salesman will look on and in your car to see what interests you have (pro football fan, fishing enthusiast, bistro coffee drinker, recent store shopper, etc.) and will start the conversation there.

Match yourself to the same emotional and spiritual level as they are.

This doesn’t mean you have to pretend to share their current psyche. But if someone you meet is sad, don’t laugh yourself silly trying to cheer them up

with jokes. If they are happy, don't try to bring them down by threatening them with hell. If they're quiet, don't be loud; if they speak slowly, don't race through your sentences. Use compassion and understanding. Sympathize with them.

Stories are much more persuasive than facts.

A list of reasons, evidence, or theological propositions, in our non-intellectual society, has much less impact on people and their decision making than personal narratives. Telling someone about a personal tragedy that you went through, trusting God even though you couldn't understand will give that person much more comfort in their own sadness and much more trust in God.

Everyone is searching for meaning and purpose in their lives.

Many people are secretly frustrated and dissatisfied with their lives because they feel an emptiness that they can see no way to fill. Pascal says,



All men seek happiness; there are no exceptions; however different the means used, they all tend towards this goal. . . . It is the impulse behind all human actions, even those of men who go and hang themselves.

—Pensees 300

The desire—for something, we know not what—is an infinite emptiness, a hunger of imagination, a spiritual emptiness, a



bottomless gulf [that] can only be filled by an infinite, unchanging object, that is to say, by God himself.

—Pensees 300

Even those who aren't overtly dispirited and despondent are often inwardly sad or frustrated about their lives. They have been told that life is an accident that has no meaning or purpose. And unlike the bold and arrogant world lovers, these people feel the emptiness surrounding them and inside of them. Let them see the God-created and God-centered joy in your life and you'll go far toward bringing them to faith in Christ.



Heavenly Father, I am so grateful for all you have done for me and continue to bless me with. And I know that I don't deserve any of your kindness, nor can I repay you for it. But what I ask is that you help me not to keep your generosity a secret. May your goodness to me be reflected in my attitude and character. May it shine through me regardless of my immediate circumstances as I strive to model the love of Jesus each day. In his name I pray. Amen.

Perseverance Through Suffering

What seems to be a surprise to some new (and some seasoned) Christians is that becoming a follower of Jesus does not protect you from all harm. You may hear about some people who don't buy fire insurance on their houses because "God will protect us and keep our house from burning down." As I

discussed extensively in my book on prayer, God is not an insurance policy or a magic talisman. If you leave a candle burning on the mantle and it falls over onto your sheepskin rug, don't expect God to pause the laws of physics and flammability just for you. He might, of course, do just that, but *expecting* him to do your wishes would make you the master and God the servant. Remember, God is more concerned about your soul's health than your body's health.

To God, your soul is more important than your body.

But just what does Scripture say about the suffering of those who believe?

Frankly, it's time to toughen up, to man up and woman up. The battle is coming, and it's not just all spiritual. Your very faith is at risk unless you can persevere through tribulation.



Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

—Matthew 24:9-10

Many Christians will lose their faith because of the persecution they are faced with. Jesus says this again in the Parable of the Sower:



In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.

—Mark 4:16-17

Part of the message of this parable is that our purpose on earth is to develop a “strong root” in our belief in and commitment to Christ. Perseverance with joy—right in the face of tribulation, persecution, illness, rejection—prepares our souls by giving us the spiritual maturity we need.



These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

—John 16:33

Paul says we should view tribulation positively, because it does our souls good:

Some tribulations, trials, and sufferings are appointed by God for the benefit of our souls, while God can use for good the evils we bring onto ourselves or which are just a part of life on a fallen planet:



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

—Romans 5:3-5

The apostle John himself suffered from persecution:



I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

—Revelation 1:9



After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

—Acts 14:21-22

Jesus tells us that we will face trials as Christians, in order to improve us:



For they [our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

—Hebrews 12:10-11

Did you ever wonder why we still live on earth after we have been saved? Why doesn't God take us home immediately into his bosom, where we can begin to live in eternity, apart from the pains and sorrows on this suffering globe? One reason is that our souls need improving before we get to heaven:



I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

—John 15:1-2

To me, pruning sounds like having my fingers and toes cut off. That would be quite unpleasant, to say the least. But God can turn every bad thing to good, as an aid to the growth and development of our souls, and as a witness to the world that Christians are special in their trust in and love for their creator. As I have said before, the world is watching, to see how Christians respond both to good things and to bad things.

THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

John: "Hey, Amy. Is that a tear in your eye?"

Amy: "Oh, hi, John. I'm sorry. I've just received some bad news."

John: "Oh? What's going on?"

Amy: "I've got cancer."

John: "Oh, Amy, I'm so sorry. Is it bad?"

Amy: "Stage 3."

John: "What does that mean?"

Amy: "With treatment, I can have a 72 percent chance of living five more years."

John: "Amy, Amy. This is so bad. I'm so sorry."

Amy: "It's all right. I'm ready to go anytime. My trust is in God to sort out and regulate my life according to his will. He works all things for good, remember."

John: "But you're such a nice person. Why would God do this to you?"

Amy: "God permits lots more stuff to happen than he actually appoints. I doubt that he wanted me to get cancer. But this fallen world is in decay, and stuff like this happens. Besides, I've got to die eventually from something."

John: "Oh, Amy, that's not funny. You're only 24 years old."

Amy: "As the saying is, When life hands you a lemon, squeeze it, add the sweetness of your response and the living water of Christ, and make lemonade."

John: "Gosh, Amy. It must be nice to be a Christian."

Amy: "It is. Let's talk about it."

Amy's courage and optimism, together with her hope and trust in God, not only provide her with a positive response to the tragedy besetting her, but they offer a powerful witness to those she will meet along the way to the future.

ANOTHER MEANING OF SUFFERING

Cindy: "What's wrong, Zelda? Why the sobs? Are your parents okay?"

Zelda: "I've got cancer! And I'm going to die!"

Cindy: "Oh, I'm sor—."

Zelda: "Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Why is God punishing me, Cindy? Why does he hate me so much?"

Cindy: "Well, God might not have wanted you to get cancer. Maybe he only permitted it."

Zelda: "But why did he permit it? Why is he so cruel? He could have prevented it."

Cindy: "God still loves you and will help—."

Zelda: "Loves me? He hates me."

Cindy: "No, Zelda. Let's pray that God will heal you or at least see you through this with strength and confidence."

Zelda: "I'm not praying to God for anything. I hate God."

Cindy: "But Zelda, aren't you the one who has always gone around telling everyone how much God loves them and how they ought to find happiness in Christ?"

Zelda: "Just shut up. I'm through with God. Now leave me alone."

Zelda has forgotten that the three purposes of life on earth are to improve our souls (growing toward sanctification), to help other Christians along the path, and to share the Gospel with a dying world. Unfortunately, her lack of trust in God renders her life a negative witness that will cause the unsaved to see no reason to want to serve Jesus.

For better or for worse,
your life is a witness.

Jesus sums up the fact that we will all be faced with challenges, and that these challenges are—or can be made—to contribute to our development:



For everyone will be salted with fire.
—Mark 9:49

This verse tells me that all believers will be seasoned (salt is a seasoning) through trials and sufferings (fire is certainly a vivid way of symbolizing suffering). Fire can be used to burn off rust to get to the fresh and pure metal below. Maybe the next time a setback comes, we should think, “Just a little rust burning off.”

We need to learn and practice perseverance through every challenge if we want to keep our spot in the Kingdom:



But the one who endures to the end, he will
be saved.

—Matthew 24:13

By remaining “firm in your faith,” “the God of all grace” “will perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you”:



Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

—1 Peter 5:8-10



These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

—John 16:33

When you become a Christian,
your life will soon get better.
But your circumstances might not.

Questions for thought and discussion

Look up the words *repent* and *convert* and check their meaning based on the meaning of the roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Write a 50-word explanation about the relevance of this root knowledge to the meaning of the modern word.

Activities

2. In your small group, choose people to play the parts in each of the vignettes in this chapter. Act out the vignettes. Discuss their meaning and their role in this chapter.

16

16 A Future of Rewards

Contrary to what you might have been told, God does keep score.

And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.

—Matthew 10:42

One of the most terrifying texts in the entire New Testament:

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

—Matthew 12:36-37

All Are Rewarded According to Their Deeds

Jesus tells us that those who believe in him and serve him will have a living place in the house of God:



In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

—John 14:2-3

But when you get there, will you be given a small townhouse or a country mansion? The answer depends on how well you served God with the resources he has given you.

The story Jesus tells his disciples about the Master returning unexpectedly in Luke 12 must be taken seriously by all Christians because Jesus directs it to us. "Be like men who are waiting for their master" he says, and be on the alert:



Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, "My master will be a long time in coming," and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

—Luke 12:43-46

The disobedient believer will be assigned a place with the unbelievers. Disobedience to Christ's commands amounts to a rejection of salvation.

Note once more that each of us will be rewarded or punished based on our individual capacity, talents, resources, and knowledge. In the parable of the talents, three slaves (who symbolize three Christians) are given money to work with according to their ability or "talent."



For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.

—Matthew 25:14-15

Then master returns to settle accounts. The slave who was given five talents has gained five more, and the slave who was given two talents has gained two more. Note that in each case, the master implies that they both have produced to the level of their ability, so that both slaves receive the same commendation:



His master said to him [the slave entrusted with five talents], "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

—Matthew 25:21



His master said to him [the slave entrusted with two talents], “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

—Mathew 25:23

On the other hand, the slave (Christian) who does not use his talent to serve the master (Jesus), will end up being cast out:



But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave. . . . Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. . . . Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Good and faithful,” “the joy of your master” — or, “wicked,” “lazy,” “worthless.”



And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

—Luke 12:47-48



Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

— 2 Corinthians 5:6-10.



But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

— Romans 2:5-11



For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.

— Matthew 16:27



Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

— John 5:25-29



Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

— 1 Corinthians 3:8



If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

— 1 Corinthians 3:14



You say that God is your Father, but God doesn't have favorites! He judges all people by what they do. So you must honor God while you live as strangers here on earth.

— 1 Peter 1:17, CEV



And all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

— Revelation 2:23



And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

— Revelation 14:13



And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

— Revelation 20:12-13





Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.

— Revelation 22:12

Matthew 10:42



Psa 62:12 And lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, For You recompense a man according to his work.



[God] WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

— Romans 2:6-10



For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

— 2 Corinthians 5:10



And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.
 – Matthew 10:42 (NASB)



Luk 6:23 “Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.



Luk 6:35 “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.



1Co 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.



1Co 3:14 If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.



Rom 2:8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

Rom 2:9 *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

Rom 2:10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Rom 2:11 For there is no partiality with God.



Mat 16:27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.



2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.



John 15:8 “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples.

We all will stand before judgment



Luk 11:32 “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.



Joh 5:24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Jo



Joh 5:26 “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;

Joh 5:27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.

Joh 5:28 “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,

Joh 5:29 and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.



Rom 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your

brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Rom 14:11 For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."

Rom 14:12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

We are not to judge



1Co 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

1Co

Judged according to available light



And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. "But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the

master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

— Luke 12:42-48



Mat 11:20 Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.

Mat 11:21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Mat 11:22 "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

Mat 11:23 "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

Mat 11:24 "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

You don't lose your free will after you choose to be saved.



For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell,¹⁴ severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.¹⁵

—Romans 11:21-22 (NASB)



Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?

—2 Corinthians 13:5



A TIME OF TEMPTATION

As a young man, Norman accepted Christ as his personal savior and participated in his church's youth ministry until he graduated from

¹⁴ fell = pipto (4098) fall

¹⁵ cut off = ekkopto (1581) cut off, cut down

high school and left his hometown to attend a prestigious university.

Sadly, Norman was corrupted by the secular environment and yielded to its temptations. But he continued to profess to be a Christian. He told the gang he got drunk with every Friday night that he was a Christian; he told his friends in the dormitory he bought drugs from that he was a Christian; he told the girls he slept with that he was a Christian. By his senior year, norm had discovered that he could support his tuition costs by making child pornography videos and selling them on his website. If anyone asked him, he would still say he was a Christian. Even after he got his medical degree and opened an abortion clinic, Norman still professed to be a Christian.

Who can be saved?

Your name is on the invitation list, because God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1Timothy 2:4).

Mat 18:12 “What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?

Mat 18:13 “If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.

Mat 18:14 “So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

Joh 6:44 “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

Jo

How can we be saved?

How can you be saved? In a word, answer the door.

Prayers



Help me, dear Lord, to persevere in goodness, kindness, mercy, and compassion to all people, for to do so is merely to follow the example of Jesus my savior. And in my faith, my trust in you, empower me to do more than persevere but to grow in confidence and strength of heart. If trials come, grant me the wisdom and ability to conquer them with vigor. Should illness attend me, be my sustainer through it. May my every thought and every act be pleasing to you and in the service of your purposes. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Thank you, Lord, for teaching us in your Word that you reward every good and righteous action, even the very small ones. But Lord, help me to do good deeds not for a reward but for my love for you. You have given me so much, helped me so much, guided me, protected me, blessed me—all this and heaven, too. How can I not be so deeply grateful that I rejoice to please you by

helping, blessing, and serving others? Show me how I can please you more, grant me the energy to do it.



FOR HELP WITH A WISE DECISION

Lord, we are rightly called your children, for children can sometimes be selfish, disobedient, and willful. In this decision I have to make, help me not to be like a self-centered child, thinking about only what benefits me the most. Instead, please send your Holy Spirit, the giver of wisdom and fairness and justice, to guide me to make the decision that pleases you the most and that is in your will and therefore is the best for everyone. Thank you for loving me, your child. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Dear Lord, I know that when I tell others that I am a Christian, they look at my words and actions to see what that means and how well I measure up to their idea of a believer. Many of the lost are eager to pounce on my slightest error or misstep so they can mock my faith. Others are simply at sea in a sinking ship without a guide to get them to shore.

For everyone I meet, seeker or cynic, may your goodness shine through me as I do my best to model the grace and love of Jesus. May your Holy Spirit give me the words to speak that will burn in their hearts and bring the cynics to the truth and the seekers to the harbor of faith.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of your kingdom and to represent

Christ in my life. May you always be pleased with me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Addenda



[God] WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

—Romans 2:6-10

How can I serve God better?

How can I know God's will?

--Mistaking our own desires, especially in the area of romance, is one of the most common frailties among Christians. When I was teaching at a small Christian college, the story got out that the very good looking senior class president had been approached by six different women students, each of which told him that God had revealed to her that she was to be his wife.

Those of you who know some theology will know that one of the pillars of Calvinist doctrine is

eternal security, summed up in “once saved always saved.” In my view, however, this doctrine has problems.

Looked at briefly April 29, 2020

Worked on November 15, 2020

Out of time for this project, hope to have more time later.

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