

2. OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

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The Bible is a book about our relationship to God. The first four commandments of the Ten Commandments describe directly from God how we should relate to Him:

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”
[Exodus 20:3]

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands to those who love Me and keep my commandments.”
[Exodus 20:4]

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”
[Exodus 20:7]

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it”
[Exodus 20:8-11]

2.1 Role of Christians

The table below identifies the roles and responsibilities of Christians. Since we as a family profess faith in the trinity, consisting of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, then all of these requirements apply to every member of the family.

Table 2-1: Role of Christians

#	Responsibility	Description	Scripture(s)
1	Fear God and keep his commandments	Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.	Ecc. 12:13-14
2	Do not marry unbelievers	Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.	2 Cor. 6:14-16
3	Submit sexually to your marriage partner	Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise, the husband	1 Cor. 7:2-5

#	Responsibility	Description	Scripture(s)
		does not have authority over his own body but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self control.	
4	Pursue harmony at home	But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand."	Matt. 12:25
5	Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven	Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy <i>against</i> the Spirit will not be forgiven men.	Matt. 12:31
6	Take care of your own	But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.	1 Tim. 5:8
7	Show compassion and be courteous	Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.	1 Pet. 3:8
8	Persevere under trials	Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.	James 1:12
9	Demonstrate humility	Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.	Phi. 2:2-4; Eph. 4:2
10	Consider trials and difficulties as joy	Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."	James 1:2-3
11	Do not be greedy for gain/selfish	He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live.	Prov. 15:27
12	Seek knowledge	The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.	Prov. 18:15
13	Do not be proud	Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.	Prov. 16:18-19
14	Exercise self-control	He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.	Prov. 16:32
15	Do not isolate yourself	A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment.	Prov. 18:1
16	Seek wisdom	He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who keeps understanding will find good.	Prov. 19:8
17	Do not lie and hate lying but not liars	A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are his delight.	Prov. 19:9; Prov 21:6 Prov. 12:22

#	Responsibility	Description	Scripture(s)
		A righteous man hates lying, but a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame.	Prov. 13:5
18	Put an end to arguments	It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel.	Prov. 20:3
19	Do not love sleep	Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes and you will be satisfied with bread.	Prov. 20:13
20	Be diligent	The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.	Prov. 21:5
21	Do not love pleasure	He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.	Prov. 21:17
22	Watch what you say	Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.	Prov. 21:23
23	Having credibility is more important than great riches	A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold.	Prov. 22:1
24	Watch your steps	A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.	Prov. 22:3
25	End contention by casting out the scoffer	Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease.	Prov. 22:10
26	Do not make friends with angry people	Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.	Prov. 22:24
27	Excel at your work	Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men.	Prov. 22:29
28	Buy the truth and do not sell it	Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding.	Prov. 23:23
29	Avoid and do not envy evil men	Do not be envy evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devised violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking.	Prov. 24:1-2
30	Do not rejoice when your enemy falls	Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him, and he turn away His wrath from him.	Prov. 24:17-18
31	Rebuke the wicked	But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.	Prov. 24:25
32	Don't visit your neighbor too often	Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, lest he become wary of you and hate you.	Prov. 25:17
33	Do not answer a fool with his own folly	Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him.	Prov. 26:4
34	Do not involve yourself in other people's arguments	He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own, is like one who takes a dog by the ears.	Prov. 26:17
35	Do not praise yourself	Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.	Prov. 27:2
36	Don't speculate or boast about tomorrow	Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.	Prov. 27:1
37	Favor integrity over affluence	Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich.	Prov. 28:6
38	Confess your sins	He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have	Prov. 28:13

#	Responsibility	Description	Scripture(s)
		mercy.	
39	Do not trust in your own heart	He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.	Prov. 28:26
40	Do not be hasty with words	Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.	Prov 29:20
41	Choose your friends very carefully	The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray.	Prov. 12:26
42	Homosexuality is wrong	You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.	Lev. 18:22
43	Love your neighbor as yourself	You shall love your neighbor as yourself.	Matt. 19:19
44	Do not worship idols	You shall not make yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands to those who love Me and keep My commandments.	Exodus 20:4-6
45	Do not swear	You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.	Exodus 20:7
46	Keep the Sabbath day holy	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep I holy.	Exodus 20:8
47	Do not murder	You shall not murder.	Exodus 20:13
48	Do not commit adultery	You shall not commit adultery.	Exodus 20:14
49	Do not steal	You shall not steal.	Exodus 20:15
50	Do not bear false witness	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Exodus 20:16
51	Do not covet anything of your neighbor's	You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.	Exodus 20:17

2.2 The Holy Spirit in Christian Living³

As a loving wife and mother tenderly watches over her child, so the Holy Spirit cares for the children of God (1 Cor. 6:19).

1. The Holy Spirit indwells Christians. The Bible teaches that all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). The purpose of this indwelling ministry is to control the newly created nature given at conversion (2 Cor. 5:17); Eph. 3:16).
2. The Holy Spirit fills believers. We are admonished to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). The word “fill” means “to be controlled.” The filling does not mean that the Christian gets more of the Holy Spirit, but rather, He gets more of us!
3. The Holy Spirit sanctifies the believer (Rom. 15:16; 2 Thess. 2:13).

³ The Open Bible, New King James Version, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997, p. 1652.

4. The Holy Spirit produces fruit in the life of the believer. This fruit is described by Paul: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).
5. The Holy Spirit imparts gifts to Christians (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:7-12). A spiritual gift is an ability imparted to every Christian (1 Cor. 7:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). The purpose of these gifts is twofold, namely, to glorify God (Rev. 4:11) and to edify the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12-13).
6. The Holy Spirit teaches believers. He will instruct us in all spiritual things as we read the Word of God (John 14:26) and abide in the Son of God (1 John 2:24-27).

2.3 Christian Character and Behavior

The following subsections describe the essential character attributes of Christians and their origin in scripture. Note that in addition to these characteristics, Christians also will attempt to live righteously, which means take the time to learn about and obey God's commands in the Bible and keeping their lives free of the sins mentioned in section 8: Sin and Dysfunctional Behaviors.

2.3.1 Church Involvement

The Lord Jesus is the head of the church and He is building it and it is His body and He has called us to be a part of it (Eph. 5:23). And if you're not a part of it, you're disobedient. You are forsaking the assembling of yourselves together though you're commanded not to do that. You're to be together with God's people because you must stimulate one another to love and good works. And you are to be reminded that the church gathers for the breaking of bread and for prayer and for fellowship and the apostles' doctrine. And in that environment the power of God operates. You are to be reminded also that if you are indifferent to the church to any degree, it raises the question of whether you're a Christian or not because Christians are known according to 1 John 3:14 because they love the brethren and love of the brethren results in the longing to be with those of like precious faith. And Christians are also known because they hear the Word and do it...Jesus said...and they love to submit themselves to the authority of the Word of God and obey it.

It's a very dangerous thing to isolate yourself from God's people and it's very indicative of the heart if you're not faithful. Proverbs 18:1, "*He who separates himself seeks his own desire.*" It's very clear. When someone is unfaithful to the assembly of the saints, unfaithful to the worship of God and fellowship and the breaking of bread and the hearing of the apostles' doctrine, it is because they have other personal desires that are far less noble than those that mark out the devoted Christian. I'm calling you to faithfulness to the church. I'm calling you to the attitude of the psalmist who in Psalm 122 said, "I was glad when they said to me let's go to the Lord's house." There ought to be a gladness to be a part of God's people, a part of His church. There are a lot of reasons in today's church why that gladness often doesn't exist, which we will now talk about.

There is very much of a consumer mentality in today's church and it leads to some interesting perceptions. It seems to me that today we have a lack of commitment on the part of people to the church as such. And I'll tell you what I mean by that. We have a consumeristic view of the church. It's sort of the mood of the mob in this particular time in which we live in our culture. People have about the same commitment to the church they do to the mall. If there's something there that interests them, they'll go there. They might even make a financial exchange, you know, they might give a little money for services rendered, if the services seem to fit their need. People have seemingly no more commitment to

the church than they do to the mall. They look and say, "Well is there something there that I can get?" It's kind of a marketplace mentality, there's really no responsibility, there's no accountability that I have to the local church, but I'm willing to go there if they offer me something." That's a selfish attitude on the part of parishoners that puts the church into the compromising position of having to always feed baby Christians who never want to grow up. Have you ever been at this kind of church when they ask people for volunteers? People start looking away. They come there to receive, not to give, and its an obviously unhealthy environment of political correctness instead of God's truth responsibly and faithfully portrayed.

And second thing that I would notice as a contributor to a lack of real commitment to the church which, of course, leads to a lack of understanding of the church is not only the consumeristic mentality but the privatization of spirituality. We live in a time which basically rejects authority as such in favor of personal rights. We don't want to submit ourselves to an authority, we want to make sure that we have the personal right to do and be and believe and act in any way that we want. That's kind of in our culture. Personal rights dominate our culture. And personal rights contribute to a privatization of spirituality. By that what I mean is I'm the person who will define for me what my spiritual life is going to be. I'll pick and choose, I'll assemble my own Christianity and with a proliferation of tapes and books and radio programs and Christian TV and all of this, there's no end to the options. You can formulate any kind of Christianity you want. You can pick and choose from fifteen different views of Christianity and assemble your own...it's kind of a Burger King mentality, have it your way kind of thing. And you have the individualization, the privatization of spirituality and Christianity and it all sort of eclectically is pulled together at the whim of any individual. And the idea is that my personal relationship with Jesus Christ and my personal spiritual life transcends any compelling corporate life that a church might oppress upon me or hold me to.

In this time in which we live there is a sad but true contributor to the lack of interest in the church and that is disillusionment with church leadership. Christianity is full of people who have been deeply hurt and wounded by church leaders and that contributes to their distance from the church and contributes to their indifference to submitting themselves under the authority of teachers and leaders. They're reluctant to do that because they have been exposed in the past to false pastors and false teachers and false leaders who were either unholy in their conduct or unholy in their teaching, or both. Some of you fall into that category. You've kept your distance, you're here but you're not integrated into the life of the church, and maybe it's because you've been exposed to preachers who secretly brought in heresy, they always do it secretly, and they tell you they're teaching you the Bible or they have something that God has given them to say, but they are basically unbiblical and you were exposed to that. And you've come to understand that and your trust level has been severely hampered by it. Maybe you even have been exploited by certain leaders for personal gain while they were asking you to make sacrifices, they were getting wealthy at your expense. It is also possible that you have been under leadership that indulged sexual appetites and as the New Testament says "Had eyes full of adultery" and destroyed your trust by having been engaged in sexual sin which came to light. And that continues to be a sad, sad tale.

You have been exposed to leaders who didn't know much about the Bible and who cheated you because they didn't feed you the way you should have been fed. They contributed to your spiritual weakness, rather than your spiritual growth. You may have been exposed to teachers who were authoritarian or pastors who wanted to dominate your life. You may have sat under people who had some oratorical ability but said nothing of value. And so you've sort of interpreted the church in the light of these things. You may have been in a congregation of people where there were a number of hypocrites, where there

was little that God seemed to be doing, where there was a lack of power. And all of these things contribute to a sad kind of distance that people have from the church.

A fourth thing that contributes to people's indifference toward the church is some kind of expectation for perfection that is really unrealistic. The expectation that the church should be everything that the Bible says all the time without any failures leads people to a certain kind of disillusionment. People leave a perfectly wonderful church, a marvelous church, a good, healthy, whole, sound ministry because of some perceived weakness or some real weakness, or some real weakness, or some perceived failure or real failure or some disappointment that came along and they wander away. I hear about people, and it's always amazing, who think about, "Well, we'll leave Grace Church and we'll go out and all four of us will start our own perfection because we found a failure there."

Sad to think about that but that's not an uncommon thing. I often wonder what people like that would have done in New Testament times when there was one church per city and that was it. So many people in so many places in the world would give anything and everything to have a good church, a noble church, a place where the Word of God was faithfully upheld. And yet some people will foolishly disregard that and the value of it in favor of something far less. You find a church committed to the true teaching of salvation, you find a church that believes in the inerrancy of Scripture, you find a church that interprets Genesis 1 to 11 historically and literally, you find a church where Jesus Christ is presented as the only way to heaven and that He is both Savior and Lord, you find a church that believes in the virgin birth of Christ, His substitutionary death on the cross, His bodily resurrection and bodily return to set up His Kingdom, you find a church that is committed to male leadership according to the scriptures, that believes in a literal hell, a church that exercises church discipline, proclaims sound doctrine, loves people, evangelizes the lost and disciples the saved and when you find it, thank God you found it. And pour your life into that place and don't have unrealistic expectations of perfection and worst of all, don't believe you're worthy of perfection.

It's sad that people don't get involved in the church, the only institution the Lord ever built. God grieves over this consumer mentality that views the church as selling something. And if you want to buy it, you go and buy it but if it really doesn't interest you, you'll go some other place or no place. God grieves over the privatization of spirituality where we have people assembling their own spiritual lives in some kind of an eclectic fashion, controlled only by their own personal desires. God grieves over the continued disaffection of the church toward leadership because of the terrible tragedy of sin among church leaders. God grieves over that. God also grieves over people establishing unrealistic expectations for what a church should be and expecting perfection, and when they don't find it, having a half-hearted or less than that commitment to the church.

2.3.2 Contentment

*Two things I request of You
(Deprive me not before I die):
Remove falsehood and lies far from me;
Give me neither poverty nor riches.
Feed me with the food allotted to me;
Lest I be full and deny You,
And say, "Who is the Lord?"
Or lest I be poor and steal,
And profane the names of my God.
[Prov 30:7-9, Bible, NKJV]*

5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.
6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.
7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.
[1 Tim. 6:5-7, Bible, NKJV]

CONTENTMENT: What a rich word. It means to be satisfied. And yet there are so many Christians who are dissatisfied with the church and it's at a rampant level. We hear all about those ministries that are directed at felt needs. And I was reading a book recently that has a telling tale. It's a research project on the whole Seeker-Friendly Church which is built around needs. And with the help of the people who have started that movement being interviewed at great length over a two and a half year period they affirm that the whole driving issue in their ministry is to bring people to self-fulfillment, to recognize that people are not fulfilled, they're not satisfied and they need to be fulfilled and satisfied.

Well that may sound okay at the start but when you structure a ministry that is designed to approach people on the basis of a lack of satisfaction and build everything around that and by that woo them to Christ, you have still sold everybody self-satisfaction as a buyable goal. And then when you've got those people to Christ they are still going to be consumed with whether or not they are satisfied. You've promised them Jesus, we'll satisfy you. And I don't know about you but there are lots of things in life even in Christ that aren't from the human comfort level very satisfying. As one writer says, "In endeavoring to identify with this unchurched person and identify all his needs and pick out his need for satisfaction, in endeavoring to move him from the world to the church, you have just moved the church into the world because you've redefined his greatest need as personal satisfaction. Now you've got a church full of people who have been taught that the compelling issue is personal satisfaction defined in human terms." What a tragic situation to have to deal with.

And so, in our culture we are constantly being sold dissatisfaction, that's how the whole advertising world works, to make you discontent and dissatisfied and to make personal satisfaction the most compelling issue in your life. The truth of the matter is, it really doesn't matter at all. Nothing in this world that's going to burn up, nothing in this passing world really should be tied to our contentment, or our satisfaction, nothing.

Contentment is a biblical word. Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:6, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." And then in 1 Tim. 6:8 Paul said, "Having food and clothing, be content." The writer of Hebrews in chapter 13 verse 5 said, "Be content with what you have, for He said, I will never leave you or forsake you." So the Bible talks a lot about contentment and basically commands us to be content. It's another one of those essential spiritual attitudes in the life of the church. The church needs to be content. You need to be content. You're commanded to be so.

Well as I thought about that marvelous attitude, that wonderful attitude that should pervade our lives, I asked myself: where in the Scripture would I go to find the greatest illustration of that? And I found it easily, the first place I turned, Philippians chapter 4, turn to it with me. Philippians chapter 4. Now as the Apostle Paul writes this epistle to the Philippians you need to know a little about his circumstances.

At the time he is writing he is a prisoner. He is a prisoner. He is in the city of Rome, the great metropolis of the Roman Empire. And because of his preaching of the gospel which has stirred up so much trouble among the Jews and the Gentiles, he has been made a prisoner. It is a somewhat modified imprisonment because he has some kind of private quarters that he is in rather than being thrown into the dungeon with everybody else. Apparently there is some kind of a private environment in which he is chained to a Roman soldier. Now we do know that he was incarcerated in the filthy prison, probably the

Mamertine Prison which is still visible if you go to Rome. But in this particular occasion it seems as though he is imprisoned in a private environment in which he is in very sparse conditions chained to a Roman soldier. He is in isolation from his friends, from people. He cannot go and come as he chooses, he cannot preach and minister. He has lost all freedom and he has lost privacy, continually chained to a Roman soldier. He has only the basic issues of life, a bare minimum of food and drink and clothing. He is afflicted with the difficulty of being a captive. And in some ways, being chained to a person would be worse than being in a prison cell or even in a cell full of prisoners. He has only the very basic issues of life. In some ways this is the worst possible human condition. Only a few friends occasionally are able to find him and commune with him. He is in this condition waiting for a trial before Nero, a trial which could end in his execution. He knows that. He has been deprived of every human comfort. He is a lonely man, as it were, humanly speaking. Every movement of his hand as he writes causes the clanking of the chain to which he is linked to the soldier. It is in that environment that we read Philippians 4:11.

"Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."

What a blessed lesson to learn and he had learned it. You don't get that without learning. There's a process to learn contentment. Here he is in this horrible condition, isolation, no privacy, chained, imprisoned and he says, "I have learned to be content." Here is the description of a contented man. And this is the kind of man you need to learn from because this is a man with nothing, absolutely nothing.

First of all, I want to point out that he knew nothing of a victim mentality. He knew absolutely nothing of a victim mentality. He has nothing to say about the difficulty of his imprisonment. He has nothing to say about the unfair judicial process to which he has been exposed. He has nothing to say about the undeserved hatred from the Jews, or the undeserved hostility from the Gentiles. He has nothing to say about himself being mistreated, maltreated, abused, etc. He knows nothing about being a victim.

Boy, in our society it's a far cry from the mentality of today, isn't it? Where everybody is a victim of everything. It's just incredible how in a hurry we are to identify ourselves as victims.

The word "content" here, very interesting word, it means basically to have enough. A simple word, to have enough, to be sufficient. In fact, Lightfoot, the great Greek commentator says, "It refers to someone who doesn't need any aid." It refers to somebody who doesn't need anything. And when you look at Paul and you say...Well there's a man who doesn't need anything...by today's definition that would be ridiculous. He has nothing but doesn't need anything. Now that's content, that is absolute contentment. To have nothing and need nothing. "I have learned", he says, "to be content."

Down in Phil. 4:12 he says it again toward the end of the verse. "I have learned the secret." Again he uses this verb "to learn." In the Greek it's a verb to be initiated into. It was used, for example, of the initiation into the secrets of the mystery religions...it's, for your Greek students, *mueo*. Some of you follow me in your little Greek New Testament...*mueo*. It means to be initiated into the inner secrets of some religion. In fact, they used to say in ancient times that a person was an initiate, that is to say they were learning the inside secrets of their religion. Paul says I've learned the secret, I've been initiated, I have learned how to be content. That is a secret that eludes most people. And frankly, folks, and this is one of the hardships you must bear in our culture, the more stuff you have the harder it is to learn this lesson. It's a lot easier for people who don't have anything. It's a lot easier for people in India to learn to be content than it is for us because we define life so much in terms of what we have...we're so used to these things. Paul says I've learned.

Now the question that comes in my mind is how do you learn this? How can you be so content? How can you get to the place in your life where you can say I have nothing and I need nothing? How can you get there? How can I learn that lesson? How can I get initiated into contentment? How can I stop riding that mood roller coaster up and down dependent upon on how things go? How can I get over the hump of having been mistreated by my spouse, or my family, or my parents, or my friends, or my boss, or my teacher, or my professor who gave me a low grade? How can I get above feeling like a victim, like I'm not getting what's fair and what's right? And I'm being this...how can I rise above that and say "Hey, I have nothing and I don't need anything? I am sufficient, content, I don't have any needs." How can I get on that kind of plane and just stay there and not rise up and down, dependent upon how things are going in my world?

Well we're going to find out in this passage. There are five principles that you must learn if you would be content...five principles. They are the secrets of contentment. And when you learn them you will move to contentment.

Number one, trust in God's providence...trust in God's providence. Now this is only alluded to here, but I think in a wonderful way...trust in God's providence, have confidence in God's providence. Let me just say a word about providence. Providence is a term that has been used by theologians for years to describe the fact that God works everything to His own will. That's what it means. It means that God takes the millions of contingencies that occur in the universe and out of them all orchestrates His own will perfectly. And as I've told you in the past in talking about providence, providence to me is a greater miracle than a miracle. If God just stopped the normal process of things and injected a miracle, He could do anything He wanted, and you could understand that. He has great power. He created things so He can stop the normal processes of the natural operation of the way the world goes and just inject a miracle. But what He does in providence is let all those contingencies take place, millions of people making millions of choices, doing millions of things and demons and all of the host of Satan working their whole system, and then you've got all of the physical factors in a physical universe, all of the complexity of those millions upon millions of contingencies and God with them all perfectly blended together creates His own purposes and brings them all to pass. That is beyond imagination to me. You put a few components in my life and I get confused and I can't get where I'm going if there are too many components, it gets too complicated.

I've often thought that intelligence...and this is purely a non-professional definition...intelligence to me as it increases is the ability to handle greater and greater complexity, okay? Really, really dumb people, just plain old every day ordinary folks that aren't too smart, can't handle too much that's complex, but as you keep going up that IQ ladder, the higher you get the more complexity people can handle. But even when you've got up to the strange folks, you know, who are up there around 175 and above, and start getting...they can handle a myriad of complexities but can't find matching socks, you know those people...well, even when you get up there there's an end to what they can handle. But when you're talking about God, you're talking about a level of genius, you're talking about a mind that can handle all the existing complexities in the universe and pull them all together in a perfect plan to absolutely effect His will. Talking about something that is inscrutable, to put it mildly and that's why you don't understand all the theological issues because your brain bails out...most of us long before we ever hit 175. By the way, the average IQ is about 100. The average college graduation IQ is about 120 to 125, so we do pretty well to figure out the things we figure out in this world. But not even near the genius of God.

There was a little circumstance God fit into the whole program in Paul's life, look at Phil. 4:10. He says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly..." he said..."I rejoiced for this reason, now at last you have revived your concern for me. Indeed you were concerned before but you lacked opportunity."

Now why is Paul rejoicing in the Lord? Why is he not thanking the Philippians? Why is he not saying, "I want to thank you guys for what you did? He's rejoicing in the Lord because he knows who brought it all to pass. Here's the situation, if I can just kind of paint the picture for you a little bit. For ten years the Philippian church had never sent Paul any support. And he was basically an itinerant preacher who worked and owned his own living the best he could. But once you get into prison or once you're incarcerated, it's a little tough. For ten years the Philippian church had been unable to send him support.

When you get into the story a little bit of those ten years and you ask the question why, there's two answers that come up. One, because they were poor and they barely had enough for themselves. Now remember, it was ten years earlier from the writing of Philippians that Paul had gone into the city of Philippi. And he first went to that synagogue, really wasn't a synagogue, it was a group of Jews down by the river, there weren't enough to start a synagogue. And he went down there and there were some men and women by the river and they were Jews and they were worshipping Jehovah and he went and met with them. And you remember how the story goes, and he preached the gospel and then some demon-possessed came along and Satan tried to cooperate with God to gain a little ground and Paul cast the demon out of the girl, doesn't want publicity from Satan, and then you remember what happened...Paul eventually preached the gospel in the city of Philippi, was put in jail. And while he was in stocks he and his friend Silas were singing praise to God in the middle of the night, an earthquake came, broke the walls of the jail, kicked all the stocks open. You remember the jailer was converted and a church was planted in Philippi. Ten years have passed since that time. Ten years since Acts 16 records that incredible story.

And Paul says in Phil. 4:10, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before but you lacked opportunity." During those ten years they never had the *kairos*, that's the word opportunity, the season. We don't know the specifics why but it was certainly partly because of their poverty. There was persecution of Paul in that town and surely there was some difficulty for that young church in that town, but even beyond that there was Paul's...Paul's inaccessibility for one thing, he was always on the move and may have been a little hard to track down. And secondly, he was busy earning his own way as he worked with his leather work and his tent making. But recently he got himself, of course, in a situation where he had no way to earn his own living anymore and his needs were great and it was at that very appropriate time, ten years after he had started that church, that they revived their concern for him. And what he's referring to here is that they sent him a gift. They sent him a gift. They sent him something to care for him...it may have been clothing, food. We're not sure what it was specifically but he sent...he was sent a gift.

You'll notice down in Phil. 4:16, "Even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once...not that I seek the gift." So here recently they've started to meet his needs. They sent him some gifts in Thessalonica and now in the situation that he's in, in the prison in Rome they have sent him gifts again. They're starting to be able to do that and the Lord is making it happen at the time of Paul's great need.

By the way, the term "revived" there is a horticultural word, just so you understand it. And it has to do with something that blooms or flourishes, comes to bloom. And he is saying your concern has blossomed, your concern has bloomed and you've been concerned before but you didn't have the opportunity or the capability and now you have. And that's why I rejoice in the Lord greatly.

You see, he knew what the writer of Hebrews said was true, that you don't ever need to be anything but content for I will never leave you or forsake you. I mean, he knew that God was there. He knew what Proverbs 16:9 says that a man, the mind of a man plans his ways but the Lord directs his steps. He knew what Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans of a man's heart, but the Lord's counsel stands." Paul knew that he didn't have to sort out all the issues because as he said in Philippians 2:13, "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." He knew that his life was in God's hands. He knew the Old Testament. He knew the providence of God in the life of Joseph. His brothers sold him into slavery and the fact that Joseph ended up in Egypt, became Prime Minister was what preserved Israel. He knew the story of Esther how Esther was planted in a pagan king's palace to stop a conspiracy that would have been genocide and wiped out the Jewish people...the providence of God. You don't even read the name of God or the word God or any reference to God in the whole book of Esther and He is unseen doing His will providentially in every verse.

You remember the story of Ruth and how God providentially worked through that incredible story to bring about the line of David and ultimately the Messiah. God working with all those millions of contingencies. And Paul knew all about that. He knew it from his understanding of Scripture. He knew it from his experience. He had learned that God was in control of everything.

Now there's a second principle that you must learn...not only the providence of God that at the time and the place when it is needed God will act, but secondly you need not only to trust in God's providence, but to be satisfied with little...to be satisfied with little. This is not easy.

Phil. 4:11 is where we get to this principle. "Not that I speak from want..." Paul wants to put a little caveat in here. He's rejoicing in the Lord because the Philippians just at the appropriate time have met his needs, but not because of his own personal wants, because he says, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." It's not...it's not that I'm rejoicing because of my wants, look, I'm content any way. I don't have any needs. I mean, I'm rejoicing in what little you gave me, but that's plenty for me, I don't need anymore. It's not because all of a sudden my longings are being met, I just need the basics and through you the Lord provided them. I trust He'll always do that providentially. But it's not because I need more.

Can you imagine somebody saying this today? I have no needs. I have no needs. That's very hard for us in this consumer mentality to say, isn't it? I don't have any needs. I don't need anything. There's nothing I need. And we have so much more than the Apostle Paul who said there's nothing I need. I mean, we had a few years ago, you know, the booming of the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel didn't last long because the poor got poorer giving their money to the prosperity preachers. So the prosperity gospel had a short life. People didn't get rich. It didn't kind of pan out that way. Just...it's like a pyramid scheme, you know, just the ones at the top got rich. And the prosperity gospel kind of went away, it's kind of fading. And in its place has come the needs theology. We've got a lot of needs and we're all victims and we've all been kicked around, beat up and hammered and nobody understands us and life isn't fair. Like that court case I heard about where the court awarded an employee eleven point two million dollars because some other employee said something to him which he interpreted as a racial slur. Now I don't think you should do that. But somebody said to this person something that he interpreted as a racial slur...which is not appropriate to do to anyone...and the court awarded him eleven point two million dollars. And I was glad to see that this week another case overturned that and said...Hey, that's life...that's life, fellow, give us a break. Do you think you're going to go through life and sue everybody who you perceive makes you a victim of some unkind statement? That's life, this is

the world. I was thankful for that judge, I don't know anything about him but at least somebody out there has some sanity in the middle of this.

But we have a new theology that's built on need and the idea is I've got all these needs and God better meet my needs and Jesus better meet my needs, and boy, I've got to be satisfied and I need to be fulfilled and I need...I need to be successful and I need to flourish in my business, and I need my marriage to be what it ought to be. Boy, when you start down that track, that is a track to disaster. And in reading about this church, this Seeker-Friendly thing all predicated on the foundation of fulfillment and personal satisfaction, what has happened is they've got thousands of people in their congregation every year going for psychotherapy. Why are they going for psychotherapy? Because they've been told that when you get into this Christian deal you're going to get satisfied and you're going to have your needs met and they're living in a culture which tells them there's no end to those. And so they've got to run off and get fixed...somebody's got to be there to tell them you're just a poor victim, poor you. That kind of thing is a tragic, tragic thing.

The compelling need that you and I have is we need to escape hell and we need to worship the true and living God. It doesn't really matter whether we have anything in this life or don't. You know, sometime...and we have so much, I mean, we're so rich and that's fine, God has blessed us and that's okay. You can take it, you just have to keep realizing you don't need it. In fact, the more of it you get, the more you know you don't need it and pretty soon you don't even want it. When people say, "I want to give you a gift," they tell me sometimes I want to give...I say, "Look, if it isn't combustible or consumable, don't give it to me." If I can't burn it or eat it, I don't want to stick it some place. There was one other thing. If I can read it, give it to me.

Paul says, "I have learned to be content. I've learned to be satisfied in whatever circumstances I am." He's not denying that life has difficult circumstances, that's life. He's not denying that he's mistreated. But he is no victim. He has no victim's mentality. He is triumphant. He is satisfied with little. He never forgets what he really deserves, right? He also never forgets what is coming. "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for them that love Him," right? So he's trusting in God's providence, to meet his needs. He knows the Lord never forsakes him and he is content and satisfied with little.

This...this sort of Christian humanism that says I'm the center of the universe and my needs are the driving compelling force is certainly an unbiblical approach. I don't want to say when I say Paul was content that there aren't some...some areas where he wasn't content. Let me suggest a couple. He refused to be content with his own spirituality. He was not content with that. He said, "O wretched man that I am." He was not content with his pursuit of holiness. He was not content with his goal of becoming like Christ. He said, "Not as though I have obtained it or attained it, I press toward the mark." He was not content with the way the world was treating Jesus Christ. He was not content with the blasphemy against him. He was not content with people going to hell and rejecting the gospel. There were a lot of things that he wasn't content with but they had nothing to do with his physical circumstances. It was enough for him that God had willed those circumstances and that God was showing Himself faithful and powerful in those circumstances. He could say with the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none on earth beside Thee, my heart and my flesh fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." To have God was to have everything and he needed nothing. He had learned that the chief end of man was to glorify God and the chief joy of man was to love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. And, listen, the love that he had for God in the relationship was enough...it was enough. It's like that kind of pure wonderful love that

sometimes we even experience when we first fall in love with that life partner, or that love that we cherish with that little child, it's so pure in itself that it.. it has no regard for circumstances.

So we could say that the Christian's life must be a life liberated from need...liberated from need. Be satisfied with little. Let me take you to a third point, and this one is related to the second one, it's the third element in the fabric of contentment. You need to be independent from circumstances. You need to be independent from circumstances. If you're going to be a person who is satisfied, you must be satisfied with little and you must be confident that the little is really what God has providentially provided. And thirdly, you must be independent from circumstances. And you see this independence in Phil. 4:12, it's a most interesting verse. It's a verse in which he cancels out everything, watch how he does it. "I know how to get along with humble means, I also know how to live in prosperity, in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."

"In any and every circumstance," that's the key, that little phrase right in the second line, "In any and every circumstance." In other words, it doesn't matter. Circumstances are irrelevant. You will learn to be content when you have learned to trust God, providentially to care for everything. When you have learned to be satisfied with a minimum and when you have learned to be indifferent toward your circumstances. I know how, he says, I know how. I know how to get along with humble means. Literally the verb here has to do with just the basic bare necessities. I also know how to live in *perisseuo*, abundance, overflow in the matter of earthly goods and supplies. I know both of those. I know how to get along with little and I know how to get along with a lot. And sometimes that's tougher, isn't it, and keep your perspective because in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret again, I've learned it. I've learned how to be filled and to go hungry, how to have abundance and how to suffer need. And what he's doing is canceling everything out. He's just saying I'm content, it doesn't matter what the circumstance is. That is real spiritual maturity.

As I said earlier, so many people just ride the roller coaster of their perceived satisfactions. He found all his satisfaction in the relationship with the Lord, all his satisfaction in the hope of the future, all his satisfaction in being useful to God for Kingdom purposes, all his satisfaction in ministry. He had suffered profoundly. In fact most of his life was, I think since he became a believer, most of his life falls into the category of humble means, going hungry and suffering need, rather than living in prosperity, being filled and having abundance. I think that was the exception rather than the rule. But what he is saying is it really doesn't matter, it's not an issue. If I have it, if God provides it, fine. I want to be a steward of it and thank Him for it and understand its usage. And if I don't have it, that's fine, too. And he remembered, you know, 2 Corinthians 12 the experience that God was putting him through all through his life culminated in that 2 Corinthians 12 passage where he says he was content in persecution, distress, insults, weaknesses, because those were the things that humbled him, drew him to God and made him powerful.

So, beloved, contentment is an elusive thing in this society because this society wants to make you a victim. This society wants to emphasize and glorify your personal rights. This society wants to personalize and privatize and individualize your spirituality and your Christianity so that it's everything you think it ought to be. This society wants to turn Jesus into the genie, you rub the bottle, he jumps out and gives you what you want. This society through advertising wants to dissatisfy you with absolutely everything. And I admit there are troubles and issues in life, and there are struggles in life, but so many of them stem from the selfishness that this sinful approach breeds. When you bring...introduce your selfishness into your marriage, it will mess it up. You introduce it into your family, it will mess it up. It

will mess up the church. It will mess up any relationship. It will mess you up if you're driven by self-satisfaction. That's a terrible thing. That's a tragic thing. And when you tell people that Jesus...they should receive Jesus because He will produce self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction, you have put them on a road to disaster. Some of them may actually come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and then spend most of their Christian experience wondering why it didn't work out the way you were promised it would.

If you're going to be selfish, if you're going to be a victim, if you're going to take very wound personally, if every time somebody says something that offends you, or something you didn't like, you're going to strike out, then you will destroy all relationships. You will destroy your own life. But if you will recognize that your circumstances are by the providence of God what He intended for you and that you should be satisfied with little and utterly detached from your circumstances in terms of their ability to change your contentment, then you will learn to be content. And wouldn't it be wonderful if we were all so contented because it would turn to great praise for God.

Now let's come to the fourth principle. And this is a very important one and a very obvious one. It is brought to bear on this issue in Phil. 4:13. Let's say it this way. If we're going to be contented, we have to trust in God's providence, be satisfied with little, be independent of circumstances and be sustained by divine power...be sustained by divine power.

Phil. 4:13, "In spite of what my circumstances are," remember he was a prisoner when he wrote this, chained to a Roman soldier in the worst kind of circumstance. But in verse 13 he says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." And I believe what Paul knew here was that nothing was ever too hard for the Lord. His adequacy came because he was attached to the power source. And what I want to say to you at this particular point is contentment will only be yours when you are plugged in to that power source. If by virtue of sin and if by virtue of iniquity in your life you have begun to walk in the flesh, you're going to disconnect yourself from the resource that sustains you and you're going to forfeit that contentment. It might even be that God will deprive you of the things that you are promised if you're an obedient believer and you will sink into dire circumstances more than you can bear and the Lord might even do that to bring you to repentance.

That is probably what went on in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 where a man in the church was sinning grossly by having an affair with his father's wife, probably his stepmother. A form of incest and he was parading it and he was proud about it and the church wasn't doing anything about it. And the Apostle Paul says, "Turn that person over to Satan for the destruction of...what?...the flesh." There will be times in the life of a believer when the basic subsistence needs will not be met. To the Corinthian church the Apostle Paul had to say, "Some of you are weak and some of you are sick and some of you have died because of the sins you have committed in the way you have approached the Lord's table."

Now the Lord is always sufficient for the obedient believer, always sufficient for the trusting and submissive believer, always sufficient. And that's Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." That strength is available. That's why the Apostle Paul prayed in that wonderful prayer of Ephesians chapter 3 verse 16 that God would grant you according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. And the way that you experience that power is to be yielded to the Spirit in the inner man. It is to say to live a Spirit-controlled life, to walk in the Spirit to use the language of Galatians, to be filled with the Spirit to use the language of Ephesians chapter 5, another way of saying letting the Word dwell in your richly so that you respond to it in obedience. Adequacy comes, contentment comes from being connected to the power source, to the One who can strengthen you for everything. I can do all things. Literally he is saying I am able, I have the strength, I have the strength to do all things. And by the way in the Greek the "all things" is emphatic,

all things I am capable of doing. All things I can accomplish. Why? "Because of Him who strengthens me." When you're connected to the power source you can go through anything, any difficulty, any deprivation, or any overabundance and even respond to that rightly.

And I believe the "all things," just to stop and take a look at those two words for a moment, I believe the "all things" that is in the emphatic position has to do with the issues of Phil. 4:11 and 12. And those are issues of material comforts and worldly circumstances, or earthly circumstances. And what he is saying is I can go without the food that I might want to have, I can go along on a bare subsistence level. I can go with just a minimal wardrobe, limited comfort, less warmth than I might desire, less freedom than I might desire, less personal care than I might desire. I can go through that, I can endure the pain, I can endure the threats, I can endure the punishment and the danger because I am infused with strength from the One who strengthens me.

He is literally talking about having the ability to overcome the most difficult, physical circumstances because of the great mercies of the Lord that were dispensed to him. He abides...he was abiding, as it were, in the vine--to borrow the language of John 15:5--and the Lord's life was being, as it were, pumped right through him.

The statement at the end of Phil. 4:13, "through Him who strengthens me," *endunamoo*, *dunamis* from which we get the word dynamite with the preposition at the beginning of it intensifies it and the preposition *en* means into. So the verb means to infuse dynamite into, to infuse power into, to infuse strength into. And thus the Apostle Paul is simply saying in the midst of any situation, the Lord Himself infuses strength into me.

Now you always want to be in a relationship to the Lord like that so that you are infused with the strength to endure any difficulty. In 2 Timothy 4 there is a marvelous illustration of this from the life of the Apostle Paul. This is, of course, the last letter he wrote, as you know, and he was this time in prison for the last time and about to be executed. And in verse 16 of 2 Timothy 4 he says, "At my first offense no one supported me, but all deserted me, may it not be counted against them," a prayer like the prayer of Stephen when he prayed that the Lord would not hold the sin against the people who stoned him and like Jesus who prayed that God would forgive His crucifiers. Here Paul asks the Lord to be merciful to those who have abandoned him in the time of his great trial. He obviously was brought to trial in Rome and Christians instead of coming to stand beside him all fled just as the disciples had done when Jesus was taken prisoner. They deserted him and he doesn't want it held against them, that's how much he loved him.

Here he is in the most difficult of circumstances and no one is there to defend him. All those lives he influenced, all those people he led to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, all those churches he planted, all those people and they've gone and there's nobody there. That has to be a sad way to end such a faithful life. One thing to get persecuted by the unbelievers, another thing to get deserted by the Christians. One thing to get deserted by the Christians you don't know, another thing to get deserted by the ones you poured your life into. Don't expect too much. People are greatly capable of disappointing even the noblest of Christian servants. But in 2 Tim. 4:17 he says, "Even though nobody was there the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." And I'm not exactly sure what all that means, I'm not exactly sure what he meant by that. It certainly would include some kind of infusion of strength to go through a very trying physical ordeal, emotional and mental ordeal, and certainly it includes great spiritual strength so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished and all the Gentiles might hear and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth.

The Lord gave him strength at his defense to preach the gospel and strength to use his mind and his energy to give whatever kind of message needed to be given to postpone the inevitable...at least for a season. And even in the end when death does come, 2 Tim. 4:18, "*The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed and will bring me safely to His heavenly Kingdom.*" The worst they could do was send him to heaven. The indwelling Spirit is his strength. That's why he was being humbled by the Lord so he'd learn to trust. Remember again 2 Corinthians chapter 12, a monumental scripture, by the way, that all Christians need to know, where Paul has this thorn in the flesh that is tearing up his life. He prays for it to be removed. The Lord says I'm not going to remove it but I'm going to give you sufficient grace to endure it. I'm just going to crank up the grace so that you can endure the pain. In fact, the pain is good because it humbles you. So he says, "I'll boast about my weakness that the power of Christ may dwell in me." The weaker you become the more dependent you become on the power of Christ. If you are to be a contented person you need to recognize that you have to be plugged in to the power source.

And Paul was. He says in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." He saw Christ alive and at work in him. "For to me to live is Christ," he said earlier to the Philippians. And this was his passion. And he can say here, "I have the capability, I am capable of all things through the one who regularly and faithfully infuses His power into me.

Beloved, if you're struggling with discontent it could be because you don't trust the providence of God. You don't trust that God is orchestrating everything for His glory. It could be because you're not satisfied with little and for some reason think you deserve more and have talked yourself in to some kind of victimization mentality. It could be that you're not living independently from your circumstances but you're all sucked into them and you're riding the roller coaster of the up and down trends of life. Or it could be that you have allowed sin in your life and as a result of that sin there is a short in the connection between you and the power source that provides the strength for every situation.

It may seem like it's a stretch for you to grasp this but I can tell you this from my own limited experience in life and that is this, I have learned to embrace the joyous product of suffering, pain, misrepresentation, misunderstanding, false accusation. I have reached a point where that kind of thing actually causes a smile in my heart because I understand its perfecting purposes instead of an attitude of retaliation...and through all of the difficulties, whatever they might be. And sometimes you think you're at the end of your strength, it's amazing how God infuses you with the strength necessary to accomplish that to which He's called you.

Well one last point and this is a very basic and a very important one. Without this you will continue to struggle with the matter of contentment. You must have confidence or trust in God's providence, satisfaction with little, independence from your circumstances, sustenance by divine power and finally preoccupation with the well being of others...preoccupation with the well being of others.

Selfish people are never content...never. This is such a basic element of people's contentment, unselfishness, being much more concerned with how others are doing than how you're doing. Much more concerned about that. And I'm always thrilled to get into a conversation with somebody who is suffering and have them want to talk about nothing but how I'm doing. That's such a mark of the work of God in the heart, such an evidence of contentment. Let's look at it here in this wonderful passage of Philippians chapter 4 because it unfolds.

Phil. 4:14, follow the flow, "Nevertheless you have done well to share with me in my affliction. I'm really glad you sent me the gifts, I'm glad you shared with me in this time of my affliction, and you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone. You're the only ones. In Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." Now here's the issue. "Not that I seek the gift itself, my concern is not that you sent me a gift for my sake," I love this, he says, "but I seek for the profit which increases to your account." He says the reason that I am so glad you sent me a gift is because of what it means to you.

What does it mean to you? Very simple, "It profits to your account." What does that mean? If they were poor and they gathered together the little they had and sent it to Paul, how did it profit to their account? Very simple, they were laying up treasure...where? In heaven and it would bring an eternal reward. That's the issue with Paul. He's saying I don't have any needs. I'm connected to the power supply and my God is supplying my needs and I'm able to do everything through His strength. But I'm glad for the gift because of what it means to you. Phil 4:18, "I have received everything in full and I have an abundance, I am amply supplied." This is pretty grand language for a prisoner. He is in tribulation, pressure and trouble, he says that when he refers to his affliction in Phil. 4:14, it's the word *thlipsis*, pressure. And he says you're the first to help me.

He founded the church, as we noted, in Acts 16, signaled the beginning of the gospel's penetration into Europe. He had preached at Philippi, then moved on to Thessalonica and Berea. And when he left that region to go to Achaia, the Philippians were faithful to help him in those early years to get started, and then there had been years since they were able to do anything. And now at the appropriate time they send to help him to meet his needs. But he says to them, it's not that that blesses me, it's not because I wanted it, it's not that I might consume it upon myself, that's not the source of my joy. The source of my joy is the profit that increases to your account.

The word "profit" there is actually fruit, it's actually the Greek word for fruit. It's...it produces fruit to your account. It puts your treasure in heaven for which you will receive an eternal reward. It fulfills Luke 6:38, "Give and it shall be given unto you." Interest is already accruing with God and God will bless you in life and in eternity. He really didn't want them to give because it would satisfy him. He wanted them to give because it would mean tremendous blessing to them. That is the heart attitude of a contented man. All he can see is benefit to somebody else. He holds everything very lightly, gives it up very readily, gives it up very easily, gives it up very generously because he is far more concerned about others than he is himself.

His needs are not an issue. His needs now are not an issue. his needs in the future are not an issue. What is an issue is that God be glorified, that spiritual life and growth take place. So he can say in Phil. 4:18 I have everything, I have enough, I have more than enough, I'm amply satisfied. He says I don't need anymore because...follow it in Phil. 4:18..."I have received from Epaphroditus, who had come from their church, what you have sent. It is a fragrant aroma. It is an acceptable sacrifice. It is well pleasing to God." That's why I love your gift, not because of what it means to me, but because of what it means to you because it was given to honor God.

That is sacrificial language, by the way, not accounting language. That is sacrificial language. He transitions out of the agricultural fruit, out of the accounting terminology which is used there, increasing to your account, and he turns to sacrificial language and he sees the gift for what it really is. And what it really is an offering to God. It's an act of holy worship. It's a spiritual act of sacrifice on the part of those Philippians. And he knows that because it is that it will accrue to their spiritual benefit.

I mean, he is living out here and illustrating what he said earlier to the Philippians. If you look back at chapter 2, familiar passage, verse 4, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interest but also for the interest of others." You'll never be content until you do. You'll never have enough. You'll never be satisfied. You'll always be grasping.

One of the sad definitions of sin is the desire to get things, to consume them upon your own desires. Paul was grateful not for what the gift meant to him, but for what the gift meant to them. Beloved, I can't stress this enough. Contented people are consumed with meeting other people's needs. That's just basic. And until you are willing to do that, and until that is the priority, you will battle the temptations of discontent. And you will feel yourself personally harmed if someone does something to you, takes something from you, cheats you out of something...etc., etc. Or if you don't gain all the things you need to gain, or if you don't have stockpiled all the pile you think you need to hedge against tomorrow, if that's what's consuming you, you will struggle with contentment. But when you recognize that the most important issue is somebody else and the meeting of their needs, you are free from dissatisfaction.

He sums up the reason for his joy in Phil. 4:19, a great verse. Wish we had time to develop this verse, he says, "*My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*" How can he say that? How can he say to those Philippians confidently, "My God shall supply all your needs," God is going to meet all your needs, how can he say that? He can say that because there is a principle working and it is the principle of giving that says you sow and you will...what?...you will reap. You give and it will be given to you. That is a spiritual principle. Luke 6:38, 2 Corinthians chapter 9, sow sparingly, reap sparingly; sow bountifully, reap bountifully. The issue is what you sow with God He returns. And God has pledged and promised that you cannot out give God. You can go back into the Proverbs and it says you bring to God your firstfruits and your barns will be full. That's the principle.

And Paul knows that principle and that's why he rejoices because he says your gift to me is clear indication that you have stepped into that principle, and God in response to your giving is going to pour out gifts on you. My God is going to supply all your needs.

There are conditions for that. That's just not something you can sort of yank out of the context. If indeed you are honoring the Lord with what you have, He'll make sure all your needs are met. That is the issue. And that passage which we studied some months ago in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 is so important. It says in 2 Cor. 9:6 "*Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he is purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver,*" all right? You sow, you reap. How much should you sow? Whatever you want. You purpose in your heart, you sow it, don't do it grudgingly or under compulsion, legalistically, do it cheerfully, give whatever you want. And here comes the response, "*And God is able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in everything you may have an abundance for every good deed.*" God will pour out blessing upon you. Scripture says...Test me and see if I'll not open the windows of heaven and pour out more blessing than you can even receive.

"*He who supplies seed to the sower,*" it says in verse 2 Cor. 9:10, "*and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; and you will be enriched in all things for all liberality.*" You give and you sow and God pours back blessing. That's why he can say verse 19 is true. That's why he can say to the Philippians, "*My God shall supply all your needs, according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus,*" because you have taken the first step in that operative principle and you have given generously and sacrificially, and you have sown and you will reap. That's the principle. When we learn this we are blessed.

Now, you see, that is why Paul was so greatly encouraged. It wasn't that he was encouraged because he received what he received, but because the Philippians would receive from God the blessing that comes because of their generosity. It's not hard to understand why he was content, is it? Really not hard. In fact, it's fairly obvious when you go through this text.

Here was a man who had absolute confidence in God's sovereign control over everything, and he knew that God knew his circumstances and that God was aware of every single issue in his life and was in charge of every contingency in existence in the universe and all of it was working together for God to fulfill his purpose for the Apostle Paul. Secondly, he had learned to be satisfied with very little. Thirdly, he lived independently from his circumstances. They were really immaterial. Fourthly, he walked in the Spirit and so he stayed plugged in to the power source that provided to him the strength for every issue of life. And fifth, he was utterly preoccupied with the well-being of others.

Faith, humility, submission, dependence, unselfishness, those are the kinds of virtues that make a contented Christian. And Paul was that. So much so that he closes this little paragraph in the midst of his dire circumstance as a prisoner by saying in Phil. 4:20, "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen." And that's all that mattered to him was that God be glorified.

Contentment...a wonderful blessing and a glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. If we say we belong to Him we ought to be content with whatever it is that He has called us to endure and with whatever provisions He has made for us. And for those of us to whom He has given much, the challenge is even greater to be content and to be willing to divest ourselves of that for the benefit of others, for the sheer joy of seeing God pour blessing on them. What a tremendous privilege.

Father, again we have traversed the Scripture and been reminded of principles that are so foundational in our lives. It's not enough, Lord, not enough at all, in fact it is a serious, serious violation of Your will for us to know this and not act upon it. So, Lord, I pray that You would lead us by Your Spirit in the days to come, teach us the lessons that produce contentment. Teach us how to be indifferent to the circumstances around us, how to be satisfied with little, how to trust You for everything. Teach us how to lose ourselves in love for others and be more concerned about their blessings than ours. Teach us that kind of humility. Teach us that we need to walk in the path of righteousness so that we're always connected to the power source we need in the times of our great need. And we know that if we respond properly You will meet all our needs and we with the Apostle and many others will give You glory. To that end we pray because You are worthy. Amen.

2.3.3 Discernment in Choosing Friends

Jesus tells us to love everyone, even our enemies (Luke 6:27,35). But Proverbs 13:20 says: "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed." Therefore, if we are to grow wise, we must walk with wise people. If we choose "fools" as companions, we'll suffer harm.

A "companion" is much more than an acquaintance; he or she is one who becomes a close friend, a "traveling buddy," an intimate coworker, or even a mate. Companions are people who we spend our free time with, who we invite to our house for dinner, and whose house we go to with our family on special occasions. They are also the people we spend time with at parties and social events. Companions are the people who our children observe us with and who serve as examples to our children. If we choose companions who don't love God or don't act according to His Word, we're told in no uncertain terms that we're walking straight into trouble.

As parents, our job is to protect our children from harm. Therefore, our job is to teach them to choose friends wisely. And this lesson is every bit as important for us as it is for our kids. Our companions are either making us wiser or leading us right into harm's way.

The Bible doesn't contradict itself at all on this issue. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. But choose your friends with care. Prov. 12:26 sums this up: "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray."

With that said, we should also remember that we don't have to be someone's close companion or friend to help them or show charity towards them. We can still donate our time to the sinful, the destitute, the widows, the poor, and the orphans as Jesus expects us to. We can still have a big and forgiving heart and act kindly toward people who are practicing even serious sin, but the Bible reminds us that we can't make them into friends or companions because we will suffer harm. For occasions when we are with these kinds of more sinful people who might make us unwise, the approach we need to take is described in Ephesians 6:11-17:

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..

The apostle Paul told us that we should not have as friends people who are brothers and sisters in Christ who do any of the following behaviors mentioned in 1 Cor.5:11-13:

"But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

Therefore, we agree to avoid making friends or companions of people who act as described below:

Table 2-2: People Who We Won't Have As Friends or Companions

#	Behavior	Description	Scripture(s)
1	Don't marry or date unbelievers	Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.	2 Cor. 6:14-16
2	Refuse to work	But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from	2 Thes. 3:6-12

#	Behavior	Description	Scripture(s)
		every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us...For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,...For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.	
3	Argue at home	But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand."	Matt. 12:25
4	Blasphemers against the Holy Spirit	Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy <i>against</i> the Spirit will not be forgiven men.	Matt. 12:31
5	Do not take care of their family	But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.	1 Tim. 5:8
6	Greedy	He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live.	Prov. 15:27
7	Proud	Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.	Prov. 16:18-19
8	Liars	A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are his delight. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Prov. 19:9; Prov 21:6 Prov. 12:22 Exodus 20:16
9	People who sleep too much	Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes and you will be satisfied with bread.	Prov. 20:13
10	Hasty to get wealth	The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.	Prov. 21:5
11	Pleasure seekers	He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.	Prov. 21:17
12	Unwise	A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.	Prov. 22:3
13	Scoffers	Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease.	Prov. 22:10
14	Angry	Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways	Prov. 22:24

#	Behavior	Description	Scripture(s)
		and set a snare for your soul.	
15	Violent	Do not be envy evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devised violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking.	Prov. 24:1-2
16	Meddlesome	He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own, is like one who takes a dog by the ears.	Prov. 26: 17
17	Won't admit fault or accept blame	He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.	Prov. 28:13
18	Hasty to speak	Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.	Prov 29:20
19	Homosexuals	You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.	Lev. 18:22
20	Idol worshipers	You shall not make yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands to those who love Me and keep My commandments.	Exodus 20:4-6
21	Cussing	You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.	Exodus 20:7
22	Murderers	You shall not murder.	Exodus 20:13
23	Adulterers	You shall not commit adultery.	Exodus 20:14
24	Thieves	You shall not steal.	Exodus 20:15
25	Covetous	You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.	Exodus 20:17
26	Wink eyes, shuffle feet, point fingers, devise evil continually, stir up strife	A worthless person, a wicked man, walks with a perverse mouth; he winks with his eyes, he shuffles his feet, he points with his fingers; perversity is in his heart, he devises evil continually, he sows discord. Therefore calamity shall come suddenly; suddenly he shall be broken without remedy."	Prov. 16:12-15

2.3.4 Faith

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
[Hebrews 11:1]*

The first issue of the heart, the first heart attitude that we want to see in the life of God's people is faith...faith, trust in God. I mean, if that's not there it's going to be very difficult to get you to believe anything that God says or to rely on His promises. It's clear that the Bible says that if you obey the Lord your life will be blessed, if you listen to His Word you'll be happy and fulfilled. If you obey His Word you'll prosper spiritually and you'll have good success, Joshua 1:8. God has made a myriad of promises.

You stay in the circle of obedience you'll experience the fullness of His love. You'll enjoy His protection. You'll enjoy the assurance of your salvation. You'll have peace and joy and love and all of those things. And the Lord will meet every need of your life and He'll take away all your anxiety and bear it for you and all of those promises of Scripture but they mean nothing if you don't believe Him, right? So the first attitude is an attitude of faith.

Now how do you...how do you engender in people an attitude of trust in God? Well there's only really one way to do it, you trust someone you know, right? You have to know Him well enough to trust Him. When you come to church or when you come to hear a message or a Bible study or a lesson or read a book or do your devotions or prepare a Sunday-school lesson, whatever you do you should constantly be exposed to the character of God revealed in Scripture. And as you come to know your God, with that knowledge comes trust.

Let me show you an illustration of this. Let's go back to the little minor prophet Habakkuk. Happiness is sitting next to somebody who knows where Habakkuk is. Habakkuk...Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk...Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi...fifth from the last in the Old Testament, Habakkuk.

Now Habakkuk has a problem...a big problem. Judah, the people of God, the southern kingdom, Judah, the people of God are unfaithful to God. They're not just unfaithful, they're downright sinful, they're hypocritical, they're wicked. And the prophet Habakkuk does not understand why God doesn't intervene. And so in Habakkuk 1:2 his oracle, or his sermon, or his burden is, "How long, O Lord, will I call for help and You will not hear? I cry out to You about this violence and You don't save. Why do You make me see this iniquity and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me, strife exists and contention arises, the law is being ignored," and he means by that the divine law, "justice is never upheld, the wicked surround the righteous," and that means for evil purposes, "and justice comes out perverted." Now that's his basic burden here. He's saying, "Look, this is Judah, this is the southern kingdom made up originally, of course, of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. These are Your people and they're defecting and they're wicked and they're iniquitous and I keep telling You this and I keep crying out to You and You don't do anything."

It might have been that Habakkuk's first request was that God would come down and bring a spiritual revival and they'd all repent. But he also must have included in his petition that God ought to step in and judge because people shouldn't be getting away with this. And he's got a real dilemma because God isn't doing either. He's not coming down with a great move of salvation and restoration, and He's not coming in judgment, and he doesn't understand how God can just look at this and not act.

And here comes the answer in Habakkuk 1:5. *"Look among the nations, Habakkuk, observe, be astonished, wonder because I am doing something in your days and you wouldn't believe it if you were told."* In other words, He's saying to him...I can't tell you about it because you wouldn't believe it, I have to wait till you see it...but I'm doing something, I am doing something.

What is He doing? Habak. 1:6, *"Behold, I'm raising up the Chaldeans that fierce and impetuous people,"* and they were a vile and wretched and wicked people. *"And I'm raising them up, those people who march throughout the earth, to seize dwelling places which are not theirs."* They were plunderers, they were murderers, they were wicked, they were marauders. They slaughtered people. In verse 7, *"They are dreaded and they are feared. The only justice and authority they have is that which they invent. It originates with themselves. They were vicious and efficient warriors. Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen*

come from afar. They fly like an eagle, swooping down to devour." Very graphic terms, descriptive of the fierce and formidable work of devastation wrought by these Chaldeans. "All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it." You know what that means, when they had a fortress with all the stone walls, the way you took the fortress was to pile up rubble and make a ramp out of it and just march right up. And that's what they did.

And at the end of Habak. 1:11 he says, "*They'll sweep through like the wind and pass on. They will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god.*" They worship nothing but their military might. They are a wicked, vile, vicious people.

Well that's not the answer he wanted, I don't think. I really don't think that's what he wanted. I think he wanted a revival and if he couldn't get a revival he wanted God to sort of step in supernaturally and do some judging that would cause the people to repent. But not the Chaldeans.

Then...now he's got even another question. First question--God why don't You act? Second question--God, You're going to do that? He didn't understand why God didn't act and when God said I'm going to act he couldn't understand why God would use the Chaldeans. Why? Because the Chaldeans were far worse than the Judeans. How could God use a far worse people, not a covenant people to come in and to slaughter the covenant people? That didn't make sense in terms of how he understood the covenant's people relationship to God which he thought was a saving delivering relationship. And it certainly didn't make any sense that God would make the judge a worse people. He's got a major dilemma.

To put it in simple terms, he didn't understand why God was doing what He was doing. Ever wondered about that? Didn't make sense. Why are You doing this? Why aren't You doing this, why are You doing this? I suppose you could ask the same question in our environment. You could say the church in America, America itself is in iniquity and wickedness and it escalates and it escalates and it escalates and now You're lifting up in authority people who are at the heart of the problem, rather than solutions. Why? This is the problem history that he has. He doesn't understand why it's all unraveling, particularly with regard uniquely so to the covenant people.

Well how is he going to solve his dilemma? He's going to solve his dilemma by his theology. Habakkuk 1:12, he starts musing, he starts talking to himself, really, in actually what is a prayer to God but it's his own thoughts. "*Aren't Thou not from everlasting?*" First thing he does...he is on...he is on quicksand right now, he is sinking into the quicksand of his dilemma. He can't solve his problem. He doesn't understand it and he starts sinking and he's looking for a rock and he finds that rock in what he knows to be true about God. First thing he says...Aren't Thou not from everlasting? Oh yes. God, You're eternal, You were here before this problem started, You're going to be here after this problem is over. You are bigger than this problem. This is a small little deal, this is a little period of time in the middle of history and You are the eternal God from eternity past to eternity future who always existed and always will, You are far greater than this little moment in history.

See what he's doing is reaffirming what he knows to be true about God and that becomes the rock on which he can find his footing. You're bigger than this problem, You obviously understand how it fits into the eternal plan.

And then he says, "O Lord my God," and he uses the term here for sovereign one. Not only are You transcendent and eternal and this fits within the full eternal scheme and it's a little tiny moment in the

midst of eternity, You are far greater than this and You also are the Lord, You are *adonai*, You are ruler and sovereign, You are omnipotent, You are in charge of this, nothing is beyond Your control.

And then he says, "*My holy One.*" What does he mean by that? You don't make mistakes. Whatever You're doing fits Your perfection.

And then he says, "*We will not die.*" What does he mean by that? God is faithful. You will not destroy Judah because You have a covenant to fulfill with them. God had made a covenant with Abraham that must be fulfilled with God's people. You have made promises to them of a kingdom and a future and salvation.

And so what is Habakkuk doing? He's reaffirming that God is eternal, God is sovereign, God is perfect and God keeps all His promises. And on the rock of his knowledge of God he finds secure footing. And he says, "I see, You have just appointed them to judge and Thou, O rock," see, he's on the rock, "You establish them to correct." I understand, Your eyes are too pure to approve evil and You can't look on wickedness with favor, and so You are going to use them to judge. I see it.

And the real sum of it all comes at the end of Habak. 2:4, I wish we had time to go through all of it, look what he says, "*The righteous, or the just, will live by...what?...his faith.*" The just will live by faith. That is such an important statement, you ought to underline it, put a little asterisk by it, or a check or something because that becomes a key statement in the New Testament, doesn't it? Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38, repeated in the New Testament, the just shall live by faith, the just shall live by faith. And that's where he was, he was anchored by his faith in God. He knew God was eternal, far beyond any event in time. He knew God was sovereign, *adonai*, Lord, in charge of everything. He knew God was holy and never made a mistake and he knew God was faithful and wouldn't violate His promise. God was doing what had to be done.

Now you know, Habakkuk feels a lot better now and his circumstances haven't changed. And I love the way he wraps it up. Go to the end of the book. Habak. 3:17, now this is language that would mean so much to people then and doesn't mean as much to us today until we understand the background. "*Though the fig tree should not blossom,*" guess what? Fig trees always blossom. "*And there be no fruit on the vines,*" and there was always fruit on the vines, "*and though the yield of the olive should fail.*" And I'll tell you one thing about an olive tree, they last. When you go to the Garden of Gethsemane now, they will point to some trees they believe were saplings when Jesus lived and they're still producing olives. "*And the fields produce no food,*" and the fields did produce food, "*though the flocks should be cut off from the fold.*" In other words, animals stop calving and there aren't any more. "*And there's no cattle in the stalls.*"

In other words, if everything that is common, ordinary, every day dependable kind of natural happening all of a sudden stops...in other words, if everything goes upside down and everything you can always count on stops happening, if the whole world goes nuts, upside down, inside out and backwards...Habak. 3:18, "*Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,*" that's what exult means, "*I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*"

In other words, he's saying this...when I don't understand the circumstances I do understand my God. You understand that? And then Habak. 3:19, the sum of it all, "*The Lord God is my...what?...strength. I know my God, He's my strength and He has made my feet like hinds feet.*" Hinds are mountain goats. Ever see a mountain goat? Flying around in Alaska right close to those mountains and those rugged rocky cliffs you see these white kind of...call them sheep but they're more like a goat...and they're standing right on the edge of a ledge with absolute safety and security. And he's saying God is my

strength and I might be on the precipice in my ignorance and I might be in an unsolvable dilemma and I might be in a circumstance from which it looks like there's no escape but the Lord makes my feet like the feet of a mountain goat and He makes me walk all over the high places with safety, security and confidence. You could walk on any precipice that you ever face in life if you have enough confidence in your God, right? And how do you get that confidence? By getting to know your God and learning that He is eternal, He is sovereign, He is holy, never makes a mistake and He always keeps His promises. That's faith. That's faith. And that's the inner heart attitude that God's people must have. That's crucial to the internal systems of the church. Give me a people that believe their God.

That's one of the reasons that we don't have lots of people in our church falling apart. As somebody once said years ago, in fact a Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't. When you know your God you can ride out the storms, you can walk on the high places in complete safety.

In Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me...I love this...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." Oh, this is so rich. On the one hand I live by faith in God, and on the other hand I live by faith in Jesus Christ. And what is Paul saying here? I live trusting the Son of God. Now why...why would you trust the Son of God? Why would you trust Jesus? Why would you trust Him totally with everything? His answer, "Because He loved me enough to do...what?...to die for me." And as Paul said in Romans, "If while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, how much more now that we belong to Him shall we be saved by His living intervention." I live by faith in my great God, I live by faith in my great Savior who is personally devoted to me as the one for whom He died. I know my God and I know my Lord. And I know my Lord has promised that He will sustain me, that He will protect me, that He will guard me. He is the shepherd, isn't He? He is the one who protects His own sheep. My God sticks closer than a brother. My God will never leave me or forsake me...neither will His Son who has taken up residence in my heart. And the Lord Jesus Christ seeks every good thing for me. My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by...whom?...Christ Jesus. In other words, Christ Jesus is the means, the indwelling powerful ever-present Christ is the means by which God fulfills that promise, the means by which God meets all our needs is through the ever-present indwelling Christ.

I have faith in God, don't you? I have faith in the greatness and the power of my God, the faithfulness of my God and the perfection of my God and the holiness of my God and I have faithfulness...I have confidence and faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and I have faith to believe that what He began He will finish. I have faith that when Jesus said that all that the Father gives to Him will come to Him, and whoever comes He will receive and whoever He receives He keeps and whoever He keeps He raises. I have faith that Jesus will bring me to glory, don't you? I have faith that He'll supply my needs. I have faith that He'll never let anything come into my life that I cannot bear but always will make a way of escape. I have faith that He'll pour out blessing upon my obedience. I have faith that He will use me. I have faith that He'll overcome every trial in my life victoriously if I am obedient to Him. I have faith in Him, I trust in Him, I believe in Him. That's the beginning attitude. It starts at salvation because salvation occurs when you trust in God, doesn't it? You trust Him to forgive your sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's the beginning of faith, it's not the end, that's just the start. And then the just shall live by faith. That's the first great attitude.

So, what does the...what does the preacher, what does the leader want to produce in your heart? The confidence of the Apostle Paul who in 2 Corinthians 5:7 said this, "We walk by faith, not by sight." We don't evaluate life by what we see and feel and smell and touch. We evaluate life through the eyes of faith and faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, but it's not wishful

thinking, it's built on the rock of the character of our God and the character and work of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you have that faith you can face anything in life. When you know that God works all things together for good to them that love Him, then you can accept anything. When you know that nothing shall ever separate you from the love of Christ, absolutely nothing, not life or death or things present or things to come or height or depth or any other creature, not anything, when you know that and believe that you can trust Him in every situation. And that's the initial, that's the beginning attitude.

Faith becomes the shield, Ephesians 6:16, you quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one with faith. When Satan tempts you to do something, it's quenched by your trust. I told you this a few months ago. Sin is what you do when you're not satisfied with God. And if you're not satisfied with God it's because you don't know Him. So what shields you from temptation is faith. James 1 says, "Ask in faith and you'll receive." Hebrews 10:22 says, "Draw near in faith." Hebrews 12 says, "Run by faith." Romans 4 says, "Be strong in faith, like Abraham."

So the first attitude is to trust in our sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, wise, loving, gracious and just God and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ who has promised to save you eternally and that attitude is the attitude upon which you build your life.

2.3.5 Hating the Things God Hates

In Prov. 6:16-19, we learn about what God hates. We also talk about what God hates in section 5.10.14. Below is a list of the things God hates compiled from this scripture:

- **Pride:** God hates "haughty eyes," because he knows just how ridiculous it is when any person thinks he or she is better than another person. In God's eyes, we are all of equal value.
- **Lying:** God is Truth, and he hates it when we tell big lies, "little" lies, or any lies.
- **Murder:** God hates "hands that shed innocent blood." We see a lot of this today—drive-by shootings, terrorist acts, bombings. God hates such senseless destruction of human life.
- **Conspiracy:** God hates a "heart that devises wicked schemes," or that plots and plans to do evil.
- **Willingness to do evil:** God hates "feet that are quick to rush into evil." feet that act out the wicked plans of the heart.
- **Betrayal:** God hates it when people lie so that other individuals will be hurt.
- **Dissension:** This sin could include gossiping, cheating, stealing, lying—anything that pits one person against another and takes their focus off their identity as God's children.

Here we have a very clear list of actions and activities that God hates or finds detestable. They all have to do with things that distance us from himself and from living peacefully with others. These seven things can be summed up with one little word: sin. As a perfect being, God abhors anything that rebels against his perfection, and this listing contains several types of rebellion. As we are careful to avoid doing the things on this list, we will find ourselves being drawn closer to God and to others.

The Bible teaches us that we should hate all the same things God hates. Psalm 97:10 says: "*Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.*". An interesting consequence of following this command to hate evil is that we can't hate what we can't discern. Therefore, we must discern and judge a behavior as being evil before we can hate it. Jesus commands us to exercise righteous judgment in the process of doing this, as we talked

about in section 3.5.2. However, as we pointed out in item 11 of section 1.4, we are commanded to hate sin and evil but never hate the sinner, or the person who does the evil.

Contemporary society tries to distort the Christian approach towards hating sinful *behavior*, and this is especially true of homosexual activists. Homosexual activists, for instance look at the Christian attitude about hating *bad behavior* and try to confuse, distort, and lie about it by saying that *all* Christians hate *them as people instead of hate just the bad behavior*. This tactic provides a convenient excuse to promote the homosexual agenda in the name of "human rights" and tolerance. It also makes them into "helpless victims" deserving of state protection. Christians should believe that human rights are a noble goal insofar as they relate to race, gender, and religious beliefs, for instance. However, homosexuality is *not* a religion: it is a discretionary physical preference that is a product of *choice* and upbringing and conditioning. When it comes to discretionary preferences, and especially abnormal and harmful preferences, there is no basis to approach these issues as human rights issues at all. There is plenty of science behind this idea. For instance:

1. *A large number of people who end up being homosexual were sexually abused as children by members of their same sex.* This creates low self-esteem in them during a vulnerable point in their youth that leads them to avoid the opposite sex out of shame, which predisposes them to associate with people they are most comfortable with of their same sex.
2. *Homosexuality and gender-conflicts are much higher among single-parent families where divorce has occurred.* We alluded to this in section 4.14.3: Statistics on divorce, in item 1.9. This is because boys who grow up with single moms will resent and hate their mothers more often than in two-parent families when a father figure is not present to administer discipline. This anger and resentment will predispose them to alienate themselves against *all* females and pursue homosexual relationships. The story is similar for girls who are raised by their divorced fathers in a single parent home.

If science suggests that homosexuality is a preference or a behavior, and not an inherited trait, then it should not be treated as a human right, in the same way that murder or rape are sinful preferences or behaviors that we willingly choose that are also harmful. However, homosexual activists have tried very hard to deceive heterosexual population to have them believe that there is science behind the idea that homosexuals are genetically different from other people, in order to perpetuate the idea that their choice of lifestyle is an inherited trait that is a product of their physical makeup. This promotes the convenient idea that they are victims of their circumstances who don't have to assume responsibility for their sin. That way, they don't deserve to be criticized or scorned or judged for their sinful choices. It also removes the moral justification of the state to condemn them because of their bad choices and behaviors.

Even though homosexuals make up a small minority of the overall population, currently about only 2%, they have maliciously tried to oppress and suppress the rights of the rest of the 98% of us heterosexuals by forcing us to accept and condone their lifestyle at the expense of our sacred personal and deeply-held religious and moral beliefs, which is not something that people should ethically be forced to do. You could say that they have used hate and discrimination on the part of the state to eliminate hate and discrimination. Clearly, two wrongs don't make a right here. Either hate and discrimination is wrong, or it is right. If it is wrong, then no one, including the state, should be using or promoting it. However, we also can't expect to legislate morality, which is what this clearly is an attempt to do. Here are some of the unscrupulous tactics that homosexuals have used in this pursuit of their selfish political agenda:

1. *Homosexuals have tried to pass laws that would make it illegal not to hire someone for ANY kind of job based on their sexual preference.* This includes teachers, who are supposed to be an example of

good behavior for our children and who spend more time with our children giving moral instruction than we do as parents.

2. In Boy Scouts of America V. Dale 120 S Ct 2446, homosexuals filed a lawsuit that went all the way up to the Supreme Court in order to make it illegal for private organizations such as the Boy Scouts to not allow homosexuals to be scout leaders. Fortunately, the lawsuit affirmed the right of privately funded groups like the Boy Scouts to decide who should be in the group. The response of homosexuals in August of 2000 was to petition all U.S. state, city, and county governments to eliminate public funding of the Boy Scouts. They also petitioned the United Way, an alliance of charitable organizations, to terminate support of the Boy Scouts. It was a malicious attack on an otherwise very honorable group that has existed for centuries, all in the name of "tolerance". Hypocrisy!
3. Because many homosexuals are intelligent middle class citizens that are actively involved in the media, they have tried to publicize the idea that homosexuality is a genetically inherited trait and therefore it is not a choice or a discretionary behavior, but a characteristic of people. Section 8.5.8 (It's Genetic) of this Family Constitution addresses this approach to sin. One doctor did a study on this, who by the way refused to disclose that he too was homosexual, which of course biased his study. His study was eventually dismissed after several years as self-serving nonsense, but it did succeed for a short time in convincing some people with lies in the name of science that homosexuality was an inherited trait. However, when homosexuals are proved wrong on this point by the testimony of former homosexuals who turned straight and renounce their former lifestyle, the response of the homosexual community is a kind of intolerant, rude, hateful, and obsessive contradiction of the facts and science of that situation in pursuit of selfish ends. There is no science behind the idea that homosexuality is a genetic trait and there never will be, but lies and misinformation about this situation abound because the liberal media has a political agenda that they want to relentlessly and selfishly promote.
4. Lobbying for legislation to force public schools and schoolteachers to promote their lifestyle in the schools. They have tried, for instance, to get school textbooks and curricula that portray their lifestyle as acceptable and ethical among young children. This may be behind the desire of parents for vouchers, so they can remove their kids from this kind of godless, morally bankrupt environment.
5. Trying to pass "hate crime" laws that make it a criminal offense to say or think things that could contribute to violence against people of a certain race or homosexuals. This gives rise to "thought police" who then have state sanctioned broad discretion to invade the lives of law abiding citizens and maliciously prosecute them all in the name of "tolerance," which instead is really a form of legislated malicious *intolerance* toward people based on their nonviolent, moral and religious beliefs. In our opinion, *no one but God* should ever have the right to evaluate or judge our thoughts and it sets a very dangerous precedent to allow the state to be in this position. Such laws could eventually be used as a means to institute political persecution of people based on their religious or moral beliefs.

Once again, we wish to emphasize that there is *nothing* rude, intolerant, obsessive, or radical about hating, punishing, judging, or preventing wrong, harmful, sinful, or illegal behavior, including homosexuality. As a matter of fact, that is precisely the foundation of all law, which is based on the public interest. The public interest clearly isn't well-served by promoting homosexuality and the oppression of the 98% majority for the selfish advancements of the 2% minority, and it is a *big lie* on the part of Satan to label doing this as tolerance or the advancement of human rights. It is clearly wrong to label or hate people, but not to label or hate their behavior. As Christians, we should follow Jesus' command to love everyone, love people (but not their behavior) and love our neighbor, including homosexuals, but we can still hate the bad behavior and make it illegal.

The thing we also should remember as we emulate God in hating sin and evil in our lives is that as we mature spiritually as Christians, there should be a continual effort to eliminate sin in our lives and sin should lessen. *"He that hath My Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him"* (John 14:21). However, the little sin we have at the end of that maturity process we should hate more than the larger amount of sin we had when we weren't Christians or were less mature Christians. This attitude should be a natural consequence of the process of learning about and knowing God, becoming more like Him, and being perfected in our faith in the tribulations that He puts us through.

As we mature spiritually and become more like God for His sake, we are also told in no uncertain terms that the world will *hate* us as Christians. As a matter of fact, the more like God we become, the more likely it is that non-Christians in the world will hate us:

"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."
[Matt 13:13]

Another natural consequence of becoming more like God is that we will become more selective about the friends we keep as we will talk about in the next section. One consequence of not becoming friends with everyone or being very discerning about our selection of friends will be that some of the people we won't be friends with will hate us. We wish to emphasize, however, that we are just as bad as them if we hate them back. Instead, we are commanded by God: *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."* (Lev. 19:18).

2.3.6 Humility

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others."
[Phil. 2:3-4]

Apart from faith and obedience as a general category, probably there is no more important spiritual virtue than this matter of humility. At the very heart of life in the church comes this matter of the virtue of humility. How do we learn to become humble? It is done by being thankful! Jesus said those who are most humble will be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven:

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom."
[Matt 18:3-4]

Turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 5...Matthew chapter 5. If there was anything true about the Judaism of Jesus' time, it was that it bred spiritual pride. If there was anything true about the Judaism of Jesus' time, it was that men paraded their external religion and expected the accolades of the crowd. We remember reading in Matthew 23 how the leaders of Israel always sought the chief seats and the high places. When they did their alms they blew a trumpet or when they did their fasting they went into public and threw...public places and threw ashes on their heads that everyone might see how devout they really were. Legalism always is the companion of spiritual pride, true spirituality has the virtue of humility coming alongside. And so when Jesus started the Sermon on the Mount, He attacked the religious of His day with a direct hit.

Opening His mouth in Matthew 5 He began to teach them, and the first thing out of His mouth, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied."

The promises that come at the end of each of those verses have to do with the realm of salvation. He's talking about people who are saved, they're being in the Kingdom, they're being comforted, they're ultimately inheriting the earth and they're being soul satisfied. Those are all descriptions of features of salvation. Those all describe what it means to belong to Christ, to belong to God, to know that you're in the Kingdom, to have comfort in all the issues of life, to have the promise someday of inheriting the earth in its ultimate and final form...the glories of the new heaven and the new earth in the eternal heaven and soul satisfaction. Those things belong to the redeemed.

And the redeemed here are described in these ways...they are poor in spirit, they mourn, they are meek, and they hunger and thirst. All of those are descriptive of various facets of humility.

First of all, that phrase "blessed are the poor in spirit" captures a Greek word in the verb form, those who are poor in spirit, *phoneo* which means to be so poor that you have to beg. The best way to describe it as that they are bankrupt and they have no means of support. They have nothing and they have no means of getting anything. It's a term used for beggars who had no skill, or were disabled so that they could not function, could not work. They are the utterly destitute. The Kingdom belongs to the destitute, Jesus is saying. The Kingdom belongs to people who know they have nothing, who have come to the realization of their utter bankruptcy. And, of course, He's not talking about material things here but spiritual ones.

It doesn't belong to the people who believe they have achieved great spiritual ends. It doesn't belong to people who think they have accumulated merit with God. It doesn't belong to people who are counting on their circumcision, their having been born into the race of Israel, having been born as the Apostle Paul, for example, into the very noble tribe of Benjamin. It doesn't belong to those people who manage to maintain all the externals, the traditions and who outwardly conform to the law and consequently have filled their gain column with personal religious achievement. It belongs to people who are beating their breasts saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

If you've ever wondered how people in the Old Testament were saved, they were saved the same way people now are. They were just on the other side of the cross. And the manner of salvation was, first of all, the conviction of sin which was brought about when someone knew they couldn't keep the law of God. God gave His law, laid it out very clearly to Moses, it was written down for all to see and read. And people endeavored to keep it and failed, could not keep the law. Went through the repetitious response of the sacrifices, never ever having soul satisfaction because the blood of bulls and goats couldn't take away sin and so there was a sort of endless repetition until they came to the point where they recognized their bankruptcy, they recognized their utter inability to keep the law of God and the utter inability of animal sacrifices to take away their sin. And in the bankruptcy of all of that, threw themselves on the mercy of God and pleaded for forgiveness. In fact, that publican in Luke 18 beating on his breast is an illustration of how an Old Testament person, a person living pre-cross was saved, pounding on his chest, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Can't even look up toward heaven because he's so embarrassed and mortified by his unending iniquity. He cries out for the mercy of God. And at that point God steps in the words of Jesus and that man went home justified. The righteousness of Christ was imputed to him, just as it is imputed to us on this side of the cross. Brokenness, humility is the issue.

The one who understands his spiritual bankruptcy and notice in Matt. 5:4, the one who when contemplating his spiritual bankruptcy has an attitude of mourning. There's an attitude of desperation, there's a depth of sorrow and an agonizing over this condition. It is followed in Matt. 5:5 by meekness, almost a timidity, a fear to even approach the throne of God because of one's utter unworthiness. And that is reflected in the man in Luke 18 not being able to even lift his eyes up toward heaven but being down on the ground.

And then finally, Matt. 5:6, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness they know they do not have. The Apostle Paul, we're reminded in Philippians 3, spent the first nearly forty years of his life accumulating self-righteousness and it was utterly unfulfilling. In a moment of time on the Damascus road he met Christ and he says Christ gave to me a righteousness not of my own, but the righteousness of Christ imputed to me by faith.

This is all about humility, spiritual bankruptcy, mourning over sin, meekly coming before God, almost afraid to look up, and recognizing you're utterly devoid of what you desperately need, and that is righteousness. That's how you come into the Kingdom.

This is further emphasized in Matthew chapter 18. Just so we understand how it all starts, in Matthew chapter 18 Jesus really speaking in the same general area about how one enters the Kingdom and emphasizing the matter of humility says in Matt. 18:3, "*Truly I say to you, unless you are converted,*" and the disciples desperately needed to be converted, literally that means to be turned around and go the other direction because you remember, if you know the background of Matthew 18, the disciples were having an argument at this point and their argument was about who was going to be greatest in the Kingdom. When they joined up with Jesus they knew they were in the presence of a very remarkable man. They came to understand that He was the Messiah. That was articulated a couple of chapters earlier in no uncertain terms when right out of Peter's mouth it came, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." You're the Messiah, God incarnate. They knew that this was the Messiah and the Messiah was bringing a Kingdom. And the more they knew about the Kingdom, the more they began to argue about which of them was going to sit in the chief seats.

It isn't long after this incident, showing how hard it was for them to hear with hearing ears and believe, even when Jesus told them what He told them, it wasn't long after this very incident that James and John sent their mother to ask personally if Jesus would allow them to sit on His right and left hand in the Kingdom. So the argument was going on, it was even going on in John 13 the very night Jesus was being betrayed. Instead of them being sensitive about what was going to happen to Jesus, He had told them that He was going to die, they were all arguing about which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom. In the middle of this argument, Jesus sitting in a house in Capernaum, maybe even Peter's house, some think that was his home, pulls a little child to Himself, a little baby. Sets the little baby in His lap and uses that little baby as an illustration and says, "Unless you turn around and go the other way and become like children, you'll not even enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." The Kingdom belongs to the humble. You come in humble.

Now what does He mean humbling himself as this child? Very simple, a child is absolutely dependent, that's part of it but maybe that's the minor part, the major part is that a child has achieved nothing. A child has achieved nothing...a child has accomplished nothing. There's no great record of achievements. You come bankrupt with nothing, as the hymn writer so magnificently says, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling." That's how a child comes...no record of achievement, that's how you come. You come in as a little child.

Further emphasizing this, I want to take you to one of the great evangelistic texts of all the New Testament, James 4. And I want to start in verse 4 because I think it sets the context for us. *"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be the friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."* That's very much what John said in 1 John, *"If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him."*

James 4:5, *"Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?"* And then verse 6, *"But He gives a greater grace."* This transitions from the very strong language of verse 4 about being a friend to the world and thus being an adulteress and an enemy of God and to verse 5, a very difficult verse to sort out which means rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit to the fact that in James 4:6 God still gives grace. You may be a friend of the world, you may be at enmity with God, you may be resisting the Spirit but there is grace available. And I really believe he's talking here to the unregenerate, and I'll show you why. In James 4:8 right in the middle of this context you see, *"You sinners, cleanse your hands, you sinners."* There is no place in the entire New Testament where believers are ever so designated. That is not to say we don't sin, we do. But never are we called sinners. In fact we are called even though we sin just the opposite, what? Saints. We are not double minded in the sense that there is some interest in spiritual things, but a captive interest in the world.

That's exactly what he was talking about in James 4:4. You may think you're the friend of God but if you're double minded and attached to the world, you're not. You're like that soil in Matthew 13 where the weeds, the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choked out the truth.

So he's talking, I believe, to the unregenerate who can be classified as adulteresses, who are friends of the world, who are hostile toward God, who are enemies of God, who are in verse James 4:8 called sinners. And in verse 6 he says there is an available grace but please notice to whom it is given. Verse 6, *"God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble."* That statement is recorded both in the Psalm and the Proverbs. Saving grace is for the humble, those with the Beatitude-attitude, those who are spiritually bankrupt and know it, mourn over their bankruptcy, come to the Lord meekly, almost hesitant to come into His presence they're so ashamed, but they're so hungry they'll come because they know what they most need they lack.

Now how is this humility demonstrated? Follow this. God gives grace to the humble so here's how to manifest that humility. James 4:9 *"Submit therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you, draw near to God and He will draw near to you, cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you doubleminded be miserable and mourn and weep,"* and there's that Beatitude language again. *"Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom, humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you."*

I really believe that is one of the great evangelistic texts of the New Testament. We don't have time to sort it all out but the whole intent of that is to call to the sinner and the one who loves the world to humble himself. And that humility means you submit yourself to God and that is to say you submit yourself to God as revealed in Scripture. You turn, as it were, from the devil. You draw near to God. You confess your sin. You cry for the purging of your heart with a miserable, mourning, weeping attitude. And in such humility the Lord will lift you up.

Now this is the way it all begins, folks...the way it all begins. You come in humble and broken with a contrite heart. I think that's essentially the same thing as you have in the Old Testament, there really isn't any difference. I don't...I don't like it when people make some kind of great difference between

how people in the Old Testament came to the Lord and the difference say between those in the New...it's really the same.

Listen to Isaiah 55, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near, let the wicked forsake his way and let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him and to our God for He will abundantly pardon." There it is again, you come realizing your wickedness, you come realizing the absence of righteousness, you come broken, casting yourself on God's mercy. That's how you came into the Kingdom. You came in humble.

And may I suggest to you, all of that to say this...nothing changes...nothing changes. You are no more worthy now of salvation than you were when you came, right? You are no more worthy now of God's goodness in Christ than you were when you came. You're still a sinner and it is still God's grace that sustains you. There's no place for pride in your life ever. Whatever good, whatever noble, whatever godly features may exist in your life are the work of the Lord and not you. That's why Peter in 1 Peter 5:5 says, "Clothe yourselves with humility," and quotes those same Old Testament passages, "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:6, "*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time.*" And here he's talking to believers, the principle is the same. I think in James he's talking to unbelievers, sinners, and adulteresses and friends of the world, but here he's talking to young men...some of them may even be in the ministry serving as elders because that's the immediate context. But certainly he's talking to believers here. And the command is to humble yourselves...to humble yourselves.

To keep himself from exalting himself, the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 12:7, says, "There was given him a thorn in the flesh." Really a stake, not just a little thorn like in a rose bush, the word means a stake, like a sharpened pencil only the size of a shaft and it was designed to ram right through his otherwise proud, human flesh to keep him from exalting himself. It was a thorn in the flesh from God, we know that because in 2 Cor. 12:8 he entreated the Lord three times that it might depart. And the Lord said no. So the Lord must have allowed it because the Lord refused to remove it. And furthermore if it was sent to humble him, Satan is in the business of humbling people.

But you say, "Wait a minute, it was a messenger of Satan to buffet him." That's right. And God will use demons if need be to humble His own. That's why it's so silly for people to run around chasing demons away, even if they could chase them away they might be chasing away the ones the Lord had sent to do His work. And the Lord had allowed this...this demon-possessed person, I think this is a particular reference to the ring leader of the Corinthian conspiracy that was just tearing up that church and in the tearing just breaking the heart of Paul. That's what this whole epistle is about. And Paul didn't like it and he probably prayed the imprecatory Psalm and wished the guy was dead and said, "God, kill him." But the truth of the matter was the Lord wanted him there to drive that stake through Paul's flesh because so many successes and so many revelations would norm...would make a normal man and even a good man like Paul proud and God wanted him humble. And God will go to whatever extremity He needs to humble His own, even if it means sending a messenger from Satan to plague them, even if it means trouble in the church as there was in Corinth, even if it means an attack on his character, the character assassination that was going on in the Corinthian church was directed right at Paul. And you know what they said about him, he's in it for the money, he's seeking sexual favors from women, he is self-centered, he lies, he's a deceiver and on and on and all of that comes out of 2 Corinthians. And there are times when God will even allow the tearing up of a church and the assassination of a man's character if it humbles him. That's how important humility is.

Why is it so important? 2 Cor. 12:9, "*He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in...what?...weakness.*" And God crushed him because when he was at the end of himself and he had nothing, then he was most useable. Paul learned that. So most gladly, therefore, he says in verse 9, "I will rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me." You see, he knew that power was the direct relationship to humility, to brokenness. "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake for when I am weak then I'm...what?...strong." He learned to embrace adversity. You're being falsely accused, you're being maligned, you're being misrepresented, embrace it...embrace it, search your heart, let the humbling work go on, be content because it's in your weakness that His strength is perfected. He wants you humble and He will go to whatever extremities necessary.

The humility of the Apostle Paul, I think, is manifest as clearly as anywhere in Philippians chapter 3. If you'll turn over to that chapter. The point is humility, and if anyone in the spiritual realm had achieved, it was Paul. If anyone had achieved what could certainly please God and bring Him accolades, it was Paul. And I suppose from the world's standpoint that's why they named a city in Minnesota after him and that's why they name cathedrals all over the place after him, and churches all over the place after him, and little boys after him. But I want you to know how he viewed himself in Phil. 3:12. "*Not that I have already attained, I have not already arrived, I have not become perfect, I press on...I press on...I press on.*" When he wrote to Timothy at the end of his life he said it as simply as he could say it, he said, "*I am the chief of...what?...sinners,*" 1 Timothy 1:15, "*I am the chief of sinners.*" And he says, "*You know why God saved me? He saved me because I was so bad that He could put on a demonstration of mercy of a unique kind with me in order that me...he says...as the foremost, the worst might allow Jesus Christ to demonstrate His perfect patience, using me as an example.*" As if to say...if He could save me He could save anyone. And nothing's changed in the heart of Paul. He says, "I haven't arrived, I am as unworthy now as I've ever been." Read him in Romans 7. He says there's still a law in my members warring against the law of my mind that leads me to this conclusion, "*O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?*" I'm like a murderer with a corpse strapped to my back eating its way through me. That's humility...that's humility. Not that I have already attained or become perfect, but I press on...*dioko*, I pursue, I chase. And I'm just trying to lay hold of what I was laid hold for. And why did God lay hold of him? Romans 8, "*Predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ.*" God saved him to make him like Christ and He'll do it ultimately, that's going to be the prize of the upward call, Christ's likeness, that's the goal in eternity and that's the goal in time, so he says I'm just pursuing the very thing for which God laid hold of me and that was to make me like His Son. Some day He'll do it in eternity, but until that time I pursue it here and now, I haven't arrived.

And that's the way you measure yourself, beloved. If you want to know how far along you are spiritually, compare yourself not with someone else...you remember 2 Corinthians, Paul says we don't compare ourselves with ourselves, or measure ourselves by ourselves at a human level. If you want to know where you are spiritually, compare yourself with Jesus Christ, that will keep you humble. And before honor, Proverbs 15:33, comes humility. Before honor comes humility.

God wants you humble. You came in humble. You have no reason to be proud now, none at all. You're no more worthy of salvation now than you were before God saved you. You're still wretched and unworthy in and of yourself, it's just that you've been covered by the righteousness of Christ because He paid the penalty for your sins. But you in yourself are no more worthy now. And when God brings those things into your life that humble you and push you down and break you and shatter your self-confidence, those things you can't fix, you can't make right, you can't undo, when the criticism comes and it's like blowing a dandelion into the wind, you'll never get the pieces back and you wonder what it

will do to you...just remember that what it's most likely to do to you if you deal with it rightly is to humble you and make you more useful.

The place to close our little discussion of humility as we come to the Lord's table is Philippians chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2 and we'll start at verse 3. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than oneself."

You know, there's something true about a humble person and that is this, they see their own sin as worse than everybody else's. That's a mark. If you are more critical of other Christians than you are of yourself, you lack humility. It is pride that allows you to crawl up out of your own hole and condemn others. And I'm not talking evaluating truth, I'm not talking about being discerning, I'm talking about being preoccupied with criticizing the sins of others. That's hard to do when you're overwhelmed with your own. When the sins that most offend you are yours, when the sins that most grieve you are yours, when the sins that you would want to prevent are yours and when the effects of those sins that impact the church are your sins and not somebody else's, you have a measure of humility and you're able to do what it says here...regard one another as superior to you.

It also involves in Phil 2:4 not looking out for your own personal interests but also for the interests of others. When you are more concerned for the enterprises of others, the successes of others, the blessings of others, the benefits of others than you are yourself, you have a measure of humility. When your personal interests are not what matters, when you could care less about your own personal successes and you could care less about your own personal achievements and you could care less about your own personal privileges, popularity, reputation, but you are consumed with those things in regard to others, you have a measure of humility. It has to do with how you view your own self...negatively with regard to your sin and positively with regard to your successes. Are you more concerned about your sins than anybody else's? And more concerned about others blessings than yours?

That was the attitude of Christ. He was more concerned about us than Himself. The attitude that is expressed in Phil 2:5, "*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.*" He was perfectly willing to give up His privileges to bear our sins. He was willing to be separated from God and endure agony which is inexplicable and incomprehensible to us in order that we who are unworthy might be saved. And it's this marvelous passage familiar to us that points this out. "Although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God something to hold on to." He was willing to give it up. He emptied Himself. "Taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men," this is the condescension right here, the kenosis, as it's called, the self-emptying. "and being found in appearance as a man He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross." In other words, He came all the way down for us, all the way down for us.

What is this humility that God seeks for us? It is a sense of one's spiritual bankruptcy and utter unworthiness as manifested in the Beatitudes and in the sermon Jesus preached in Matthew 18 and in the book of James. It is an attitude that continues after our salvation when we recognize that we are no more worthy now than we ever were in the past. It is an attitude that realizes the suffering and pain that comes into our lives that cuts so deeply and buffets us...and that's a word from 2 Corinthians 12 that means fist, it's a blow to the face, the very same word used of the soldiers who punched Jesus in the face. And when we get punched around in life and falsely accused, we embrace that because we understand that through it God humbles us and the humbler we are the more powerful He is through us. It's the kind of humility that is more concerned about our sins than the sins of everybody else or anybody else. It's the kind of humility that particularly looks on the interest of others demonstrated in the condescension of

Jesus Christ...that's humility. And that, beloved, is an attitude of the heart that is at the very center of spiritual virtue.

Father, as we think about this we all are feeling guilty in our hearts, I know I am. You have given me many blessings and from the standpoint of ministry in the church, You have opened up many avenues and many experiences and many privileges. And, Lord, such a privilege necessitates a humbling and I understand that and I thank You for those things that come into my life that bring me quickly to the end of myself and cast me on You, I thank you for the insults, the distresses, the misrepresentations, the false accusations, I thank You for the trials and tribulations, the distress that comes to the church, the difficulties...yes, even satanic enterprises, demonic enterprises. I thank You for all of those that are not a result of iniquity but are the unfolding of the purposes that You have for the humbling of your servant. And I thank You for the same in the lives of these beloved people, I thank You for doing what You need to do to humble them so they can know how to depend on You, so they can be driven to intimacy with You because they have no where else to go, so that they can be powerful.

If Jesus humbled Himself to the cross, O God, give us this same attitude, may we be like Him and humble ourselves. As we come now, Lord, to this table and we look at the very humility of Christ in its most graphic demonstration, we see Him humiliated, the Creator, the One who spun the whirling worlds into space and splattered the stars across the heavens, the One who created the universe in six days and rested, the One who is infinitely holy and perfect, untouched by sin, who interacts in this wicked world like a sunbeam in a dump, untouched by the pollution, pure and bright. But, Lord, we know that we so often forget Your grace and mercy and the extent of Your humiliation. That's why we need this table, that's why we need to come here and be reminded again that You humbled Yourself for us. You came and were made sin for us when You knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God through You. You became sin only in the sense that You were treated as if You had committed our sins, when in fact You never committed any, so that we could be treated as if we committed none and had done only Your righteous acts. This is wondrous grace and condescension.

And as we look at the cross, there are so many perspectives. But we want to see there Your humility, Your condescension as a model for our own. May we humble ourselves realizing the sinners that we are so utterly unworthy and may we therefore humble ourselves before you and before one another, expressing that greater love can no man have than that he would lay down his life for his friends. Humble us, Lord, by whatever means necessary that we might manifest the very character of Christ whose we are and whose image we long to reflect.

2.3.7 Joy

Being joyful means we are hopeful, excited, thankful, and enthused about God and our salvation. We want God to operate in our lives.

The apostle Paul also identified joy as one of the many fruits of the spirit in Gal. 5:22:

But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against these there is no law.

Solomon saw in Eccl. 8:15 that joy was commendable and an important goal of life:

So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

The apostle James also told us to consider difficulties we encounter as joy in James 1:2-4:

My brethren, count it all joy [be thankful] when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Having joy is about having a good attitude in spite of our circumstances and letting God determine that attitude instead of our emotions. It means being positive, constructive, and helpful in whatever we are doing. Joy is about thankfulness, and our speech, to be edifying, should always reflect that thankfulness by focusing to some degree on praise and thankfulness for the many gifts that God, in His infinite wisdom and grace, has bestowed upon us all through the blood of Christ Jesus. Joy is the opposite of being cynical or uncaring. A joyful person can't be angry, but joy is often the best antidote we know of to overcome anger.

There would be a number of places in the Scripture we could go to pick up this next spiritual attitude that should characterize believers and the church, there could be a lot of scriptures. In fact, most notably the book of Philippians would be a place to go because it rings this chime again and again. But I want us to go to 1 Thessalonians because it's so concise and it's so inescapable and it's so direct, turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 16 we read this very short verse. "*Rejoice always.*" That's it. In fact, in the original language the adverb comes first and so it goes like this, "Always...and the command is in the present tense to the latter part would be...always continue to rejoice...always be rejoicing."

Now that is the command of verse 16 and the attitude I want to talk about is joy...joy. There's plenty of reason in the world in which we live to be sad, distressed, disturbed, upset, concerned, anxious, stressed out, full of fear, doubt...but not for the Christian. We are commanded to rejoice always. And that's not an isolated command...seventeen times in Paul's letter to the Philippians he talks about joy. Just a few of those come to mind...Philippians chapter 2, "Even if I am being out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all and you too rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me," no matter what's going on. Even if I am a prisoner and even if I might lose my life and wind up being a sacrifice to get the gospel to you, I rejoice, I share my joy with you, I expect you to rejoice and share your joy with me.

In chapter 3 verse 1 of Philippians, "*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.*" In chapter 4 verse 4, "*Rejoice in the Lord always..and again I will say rejoice.*" **We are commanded to rejoice. We are commanded to have joy.**

I'm going to make a statement now that might seem a little bit hard if not impossible to believe, but I mean what I say and I'm going to try to show you why. Here's the statement. There is no event and there are no circumstances in life that should diminish the Christian's joy. Let me say that again. There is no event and there are no circumstances in life that should diminish the Christian's joy.

In fact, let me go further than that. If there are circumstances or events that do diminish your joy, you have sinned...you have sinned. Does that sound ridiculous given the woes of life? Does that sound like

an impossible thing to believe? But the Bible commands rejoice...how often?...always. In case you didn't get it, again I say rejoice.

Now let's look at this command here and let's see why what I just said is true, why there is no event or circumstances that occur in the life of a Christian that should diminish that Christian's joy. Let's look at the command, first of all, "*Rejoice always*," and as I said, it is not isolated, such a command is repeated certainly in Philippians and elsewhere. I think about 1 Peter 4:13, it says, "*Keep on rejoicing even to the degree that you share in the sufferings of Christ.*" Paul said, "*Even though I am suffering I'm rejoicing.*" Peter says, "*To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, to that degree keep on rejoicing.*" It's sort of like as your suffering escalates, so should your rejoicing. Scripture has a lot to say about this...a lot to say about it.

You remember that in the discourse that our Lord had with the disciples in the upper room on the night of His betrayal, John 13 shows Jesus sitting down at the table with the disciples and from then flowing through chapter 17 He has this amazing dialogue in which He leaves a legacy to them. I call that section the legacy of Jesus. And one of the things that Jesus leaves is His own joy...and eight times in that section He refers to joy or full joy. He even says, "*Everything I'm saying to you is so that your joy may be full.*" I'm leaving, I'm going to die, I'm going to be crucified, I'm not going to be here, I'm not going to be with you. You're going to have a lot of trouble in this world, you'll have tribulation. They'll pursue you. Those who are leading the synagogue will come after you, they'll take your life. If they've persecuted Me, they'll persecute you...and all of that. But I'm telling you all these things because I want you to have full joy.

Wow. In the midst of frightening circumstances, the death of the Lord, the loss of Him who was their life, as He was going to leave them in the midst of the anticipation of terrible suffering and persecution and even death, in all of that He said you should have full joy. Continually this is stressed. And adversity doesn't change it.

Let's go back to Matthew chapter 5 for a moment. It doesn't matter how severe the difficulty is, it doesn't change the requirement. Verse 10 of Matthew 5, "*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad.*" Boy, that's not always easy to do when you've been insulted, persecuted and all kinds of evil things have been said against you falsely. Rejoice and be glad.

There's a very similar passage in Luke's gospel. Luke 6:22 and 23 says, "*Blessed are you when men hate you,*" and the word "*blessed*" means happy. "*Happy are you when men hate you and ostracize you and cast insults at you and spurn your name as evil because you're associated with Christ.*" Listen to this. "*Be glad in that day and leap for joy.*" Leap for joy? Jump for joy? That's like when you come home and after a day at work and you're whistling a tune and singing a song and a smile is from ear to ear and you're skipping along and just kind of feeling in a bouncy mood and maybe you do a little jig...and your wife says, "*What happened to you?*" Oh, I was persecuted today, I was insulted, ostracized and all manner of evil was spoken against me.

I was having a conversation not long ago with a friend and he was telling me about how terribly he was being treated and about how terrible things were being said about him and terrible insults and misrepresentations were being poured out against him. And he was sick of it and he was tired of it and he didn't like it and it wasn't fair.

And I was listening, endeavoring to be sympathetic to a degree. And I finally said, I said, "*Could I ask you a question?*" I said, "Apart from the fact that you don't seem too joyful, have you ever thought about what it is that God is trying to accomplish in your life through all of this?"

"Well...he said...well He's probably...He's probably trying to show me I ought to be careful who I say things to."

"Oh? I wouldn't think that would be the point. I'm not talking about that...what do you think He's trying to do to you? What do you think the Lord is trying to accomplish in you? Do you think maybe He'd like to make you more like His Son?" Boy, that's a convicting thing to say to somebody who is just wallowing in their misery and feels justified. "How about leaping around for joy, does that seem like the thing you ought to be doing?"

"Are you kidding?"

But if you obey this command "rejoice" how often? Always, even when you're suffering, even when you're persecuted, alienated, ostracized, all kinds of evil is spoken against you, even when you're mistreated and misunderstood and misrepresented and you are to respond by rejoicing, how can one do that?

Well certainly the Apostle Paul he was good at it. He had to be because his whole life was one of pain. James was very instructive when he said in chapter 1 verse 2, "*Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.*" You ought to be happier about your trials than you are about the good times because the trials are much more refining, aren't they? They're much more spiritual productive, aren't they? They're much more likely to strip off your self-centeredness. They're much more likely to convince you that you're not in control of everything and break your pride. They're much more likely to humble you. They're much more likely to make you dependent. They're much more likely to enhance your prayer life. They're much more likely to give you sympathy with the pain of Christ and everybody else's pain.

Oh they have such a good work. James says, "*Count it all joy when you fall into various trials because the trials of your faith, or the testing of your faith produces endurance and endurance has a perfecting work.*"

Do you rejoice in your trials? Do you rejoice in your suffering? Do you rejoice in your pain, in your difficulty? Well that is what the Bible calls you to do.

Now you say, "Well wait a minute, it says in Romans 12:15, 'Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.' I mean is that a contradiction? I mean, isn't there a time to stop rejoicing?" Well in an outward sense.

Yesterday I was in this conference in Chicago. We had a great time. But there were other speakers speaking and I was standing outside the auditorium while someone else was finishing up. And one of my dear, dear friends came out and he came up to me and he was just frustrated. You could see it everywhere. "Oh...he said...oh...he said...I just can't believe it." I said, "Well let's talk about it."

So he came over and he started to cry. And, of course, that gets to me, you know, my friend is crying and I put my arm around him and I for a moment understood what it was to weep with him who weeps. That didn't effect my joy. He was traumatized by something that was happened that broke his heart. It didn't effect my joy and it really didn't effect his either. Through my sympathy and empathy I smiled at

him and I just suggested that maybe the Lord was still on the throne and maybe He had a purpose to unfold.

There's something about outward identification with normal human emotion, of course we share that. There's something about a tender embrace for someone who is in pain and sorrow. There's something about sharing a tear. There's something about understanding sympathetically someone's sorrow and showing them compassion. But that doesn't touch the deep down abiding joy. It shouldn't.

I think the balance is expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:10. The Apostle Paul says, "*As sorrowful yet always rejoicing.*" That's the balance he's talking about...as sorrowful yet always rejoicing. Sure, there's a place for normal human sympathy, but always rejoicing. Under those tears and under that sympathy is this unending joy, at all times rejoicing.

This is so much a part of the early church, by the way, that their greeting...and I wish we could get this started...their greeting was *chairote*. You know what that is? That's rejoice, that's rejoice. And you know who initiated that? Jesus did. On the morning after His resurrection, you remember He came out of the grave and then He met with His disciples, the first thing He said in their greeting was, "All hail." What a crazy translation. All hail, as if Jesus was British. I suppose if Americans had translated the word they would have said, "Hi." The word is *chairote*, rejoice, that's what He said. And that was the right thing to say, wasn't it? After the resurrection He comes in to these guys and they're all moaning and weeping because He's gone and He shows up and says, "Rejoice," and that became the greeting. It's sure a lot better than "hi." Can't we get that started? Rejoice...good morning, rejoice. That's...that's the common greeting that they used...rejoice, and well they should because there was constant reason to do it and it was a command. And you need to be reminded of that command a lot.

In Acts 15:23 they sent a letter, you remember the Council of Jerusalem sent a letter. The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch, in Syria, and Cilicia, who are from the Gentiles, greetings. Greetings? They really said "rejoice...rejoice...rejoice." And certainly we have every reason to rejoice, we're commanded to. Scripture says our joy is to be great, it is to be abundant, it is to exceeding, it is to be animated, unspeakable, full of glory and awe. All of that is what the Scripture says.

It's not like the joy the world has. The world's joy is a whole different deal. I mean, when you think about the joy of the world, if you wanted to define it biblically, this is how the world's joy would be described biblically. First of all, it is derived from earthly pleasures. The world's joy comes from earthly pleasures. For example, in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 verse 10, chapter 11 verse 9, both those places it talks about earthly joy. And it says that people rejoice by following the impulses of their heart, which I translate as their emotions rather than the Holy Spirit. In other words, when you get a emotional passion or a longing or a desire or a lust for something, and you get it fulfilled, you have joy...that's earthly joy, completely connected to the fulfillment of earthly desires. But Proverbs 14 says this is delusive because it says the end of joy may be grief. People want, want, want, want and they rush toward that want driven by their impulses, they fulfill that want and very often not long after they have fulfilled that lust it turns to grief. It is short-lived...this pleasure, it's only as good as the time you're enjoying the pleasure that you can enjoy the joy. The joy doesn't last beyond the pleasure, because it is primarily physical and emotional, rather than spiritual. That's why Job chapter 20 verse 5 says, "*The joy of the godless is momentary.*" It is completely connected to some transient physical or emotional pleasure. When the pleasure ends the joy is gone and often turns to grief.

In fact, Ecclesiastes 7:6 says that worldly joy is like kindling wood, it just burns up. James said it often has turned into mourning, let your joy be turned to mourning. And that means it has the implication of

judgment. It's very possible that when you have fulfilled your short-lived pleasure, the pleasures of sin for a season, when you have fulfilled it and it's turned to grief and in the aftermath you've got the hangover of emptiness, what you have to look forward to is the judgment of God for such indulgence. That's why Isaiah 16:10 says, "*The joy of the godless will be taken away.*" That's judgment.

So we're not talking about that kind of joy. We're not talking about some kind of...some kind of pleasure fulfillment. We're not even talking about something that's sort of a personality trait, some people are naturally more bubbly and buoyant than other people and some people have a sort of a natural approach to life where they can put a positive spin on things better than others. Some people we call them "moody" people, don't we, who just seem to sink under everything. They just tend to be that way as if their sort of psychological makeup was some excuse for their failure to obey the Word of God. We're not talking about some kind of natural characteristic, some kind of ability to bounce above things. We're not talking about a sort of a Norman Vincent Peale positive thinking approach, or Robert Schuller positive thinking approach where you try to recreate your own fantasy world of positive things in the midst of negative reality. We're not talking about playing mental games. It's not a natural thing we're talking about here. We're talking about something that has to transcend that because that's only good for so long and in some rather shallow circumstances.

We're talking about a supernatural joy here. We're talking about something that belongs only to Christians, something that's deep down. It is as to its source identified in Galatians 5:22 as a fruit of the Spirit. "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy...*" In fact, in Romans 14:17 it says the Kingdom of God is made up of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We're talking about a spiritual joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, like spiritual peace and righteousness and love. We have a love that is not earthly love. We have a righteousness that is not self-righteousness. We have a peace that is not the peace the world gives. And we have a joy that is different. It's a deep down joy. It's not the kind of joy the world knows. It comes from God through Christ, is dispensed by the Holy Spirit. And no circumstance...I say it again...no circumstance, no event should cause the absence of that joy.

There's only one thing...one thing that legitimately should steal your joy. What is it? Sin and it shouldn't steal it for very long because you immediately should...what?...confess that sin and rejoice in God's forgiveness.

Now let me give you a definition of this joy just so you know what it is, it isn't a natural joy, it isn't this worldly joy, it isn't something that some people have because they put a positive spin on life. Here's what it is. It is the experience of well being that springs from the deep down confidence that God is in perfect control of everything for my good and His glory. Okay? It is the experience of well being. It is feeling okay, good, on top, positive, triumphant, victorious, not because of the circumstance but because of the deep down confidence that God is in charge of everything and that it is all moving for my good and His glory. All of us can respond to everything in life with joy if we believe that God is effecting His glory and our good out of that. That's why I said to my friend, "What do you think the Lord's trying to do through this? Think He's trying to make you more like Christ? Boy, you ought to be happy, you ought to say thank You, Lord, for this trial, thank You, thank You."

All of us should be in the habit of constantly expressing joyful wonder when you just think about what God is doing in your life. Now, that's the command...rejoice always. Let me give you the reasons to obey it, okay? And I'll just give you a little list here...real simple, straightforward. Here are some good reasons for you to be thankful:

1. Number one, **because joy is an act of proper response to the character of God.** And I'm starting right where I just left off. Joy starts because I know my God is sovereign, gracious, loving, merciful, kind, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and He has my well being in His mind. Right? That's the deep down confidence...I know my God. And my God says they might mean it for evil, but I mean it for good. My God says I work all things together for good to those who love Me. Wow...wow, I know my God and I can rejoice in my God. I can't always rejoice in my circumstances but I can rejoice in the God who controls my circumstances.

I can rejoice in the character of my God. Are you...are you not glad that your God is unchanging? What if God changed the way He operated from time to time. Whoa...what a frightening thing that would be. What if His grace was whimsical and only dispensed on certain occasions when He felt like it? What if His justice came and went? What if He had mental lapses? What if He had a few moments, you know, like Greg Maddox(?) had yesterday in the baseball game in the third inning? What if God had lapses in His abilities? Most of the time He's pretty good, you know, seven out of eight innings he's great. What a frightening thing that would be. The consistency of our God's character, the absolute immutability, unchanging, wisdom, sovereignty, power, grace, mercy...that causes joy in my heart. It causes me joy to know that what my God says He does. What He promises He fulfills.

2. Secondly, **joy is a proper act of appreciation for the work of Christ.** Joy is a proper response, a proper act of appreciation for the work of Christ. When I realize that Jesus Christ bore my sins in His own body on the tree, that Jesus Christ who knew no sin became sin for me, when I realize that God laid on Him the iniquity of us all, when I realize that I was redeemed not with corruptible things like silver and gold but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, when I realize that when I was an enemy, when I was hated, when I hated God, when I was His enemy and when I was against Him and a blasphemer and mocker in mercy and in love, God sent His Son to redeem me. When I understand that the cross takes away all my sin, when I understand that His perfect substitutionary atonement covers me with the righteousness of Christ, when I understand that therefore heaven is eternally mine, when I understand all that Christ has accomplished, that gives me an abiding joy that any trivial passing circumstance of life should not effect.
3. Thirdly, **I ought to have incessant joy as an act of confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit...**an act of confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit. When you think about...what is the Holy Spirit's work? Well I've told you Romans 14:17 says He brings righteousness, peace and joy. In Galatians 5 He produces love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self- control. Second Corinthians 3:18, you remember that wonderful verse says that the Holy Spirit is moving us from one level of glory to the next, ever increasingly like Jesus Christ and He's doing that all the time. The Holy Spirit is showing us the things of Christ. No man knows the mind of God and the mind of Christ but the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of Christ lives in us and He shows us Christ and He leads us into all truth and He brings all things to our remembrance and He teaches us all things. And He is the anointing from God that we possess. And He is the arrabon, the down payment, the engagement ring, the first installment of our eternal inheritance...all of that that the Spirit of God is doing in us. He protects us from sin. He seals us unto the day of redemption. He fills our mouths with praise. And that goes on all the time.

So, your joy should start in the reality of the triune God, in the unchanging character and greatness of your God, in the glorious finished work of Christ your Savior and in the ongoing sanctifying power of the indwelling Holy Spirit who lives in you. That's the deep down confidence that all is well.

Well let me give you some more reasons. We move from the workers to the work. We are rejoicing over God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, but let's look at what the work is that they do.

4. Fourth, **we are to rejoice as an act of reasonable response to spiritual blessings continually given.** It never stops. For example, Ephesians 1 says, "We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies," and that just keeps going on and on and on and on. God just keeps pouring out spiritual blessing.

You say, "Well what do you mean by that? I don't feel like my life is really too blessed right now." Let me tell you something. Every single time you sin and it is instantaneously forgiven, that is a monumental blessing, the absence of which would catapult you into hell. Every time God moves you one step more toward the image of Jesus Christ, that is a monumental blessing. Every time God refines you through the trials of life, that is a great bless...God is pouring out forgiveness, He's pouring out provision. God brought you through another day and spared you some agony the likes of which you perhaps could never have known and would not know because you never experienced it because of His mercy. Blessings are poured out on you constantly. He is even now, and I think about this so often, preparing a place for us. Some things are going on up in heaven just to get ready for us, blessings we will yet to experience. God is pouring out His blessing upon us, pouring out His forgiveness, pouring out His guidance, pouring out His wisdom, pouring out His power. All spiritual blessings unendingly poured out upon us. Every wonderful rich joy in this life comes from Him and blessings seen and unseen.

Do you ever think about the Holy Spirit interceding for you all the time with groanings which cannot be uttered? This is going on all the time. The Holy Spirit interceding for you, constantly calling on God to do that which brings you blessing and joy and brings Him glory. And the Holy Spirit always prays according to the will of God, Romans 8 says, so His prayers for you are always being answered. And Jesus Christ's intercession for you never stops either. He's constantly before the throne of God interceding on your behalf. There are endless blessings...endless blessings.

5. Number five, **joy is an act of proper response to divine providence.** And we've talked a little about this but let me make it a specific point. Joy is an act of proper response to divine providence. By divine providence I simply mean the fact that God orchestrates all circumstances to bring about your good. Divine providence, I've always said, is a bigger miracle to me than a miracle. If I was God it would be a lot easier if I wanted to do something specific, if I wanted to reach a certain goal, like if I had an objective and a plan and a purpose and an end and I wanted to achieve that to just step in and make it happen. You know, that's my nature anyway. People who know me and work with me know that if I have a goal in mind, I just as soon go do it. Other people they want to say, "Well now, John, don't be in too big a hurry here, you know, we ought to have a committee and we ought to talk to these people and we ought to get them involved and we ought to get these people involved, and there's this process here and we took..." Okay...and, you know, I sort of step back and say...Yeah, but, I mean, you know this is right. Yeah, sure, this is right. See, if I were God...and of course that would be an unthinkable thing...but if I were God I would just say...forget the providence deal, I'm doing a miracle now...bang, it's done. But God says, "No, we're just going to let all this stuff happen and I'm just going to control all this stuff...this billions of contingencies and it's going to all come to the end that I want." What genius is that? And God controls all of that that goes on in your life for His end which is to conform you to Jesus Christ.

You should imagine if God was just up there saying, "Oh, whew, I didn't expect that deal to happen. Oh, how am I going to fix that?" But what a deep down confidence to know He's in control of all of it. Amazing.

6. Number six, **joy is an act of proper response to the promise of future glory**. The reason I wrote the book on heaven was because I...if Christians don't have that view you get so messed up just getting stuck down here. If you can lose yourself in the glories of what is to come, this all of a sudden fades, doesn't it? I mean, you know, when the Apostle Paul told the Colossians set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth, He wasn't trying to say something to them that was going to be excruciatingly painful...do this even though it hurts. He was telling them something that would free them from all the debilitating preoccupation with stuff that doesn't matter anyway. I mean, your joy should never ever be touched.

I said, "You know, the worst is that you're going to be in the presence of the Lord, in the glories of heaven."

She said, "And that's my confidence." And she said they sent a psychiatrist in here today in the hospital with somebody and they said we're going to put you in group therapy and we're going to put you under special therapy because we want you to get in touch with your inner child. And she said, "No thanks." She said, "I don't need to get in touch with my inner child, thank you. I'm in touch with my Lord Jesus Christ, everything is fine, everything is fine."

You can face any kind of situation with that kind of hope in your heart. That's an essential part of maintaining your joy. I never really get too disturbed about what goes on here because it's so temporary and I can't fix it all the time anyway. And it makes heaven all the more wonderful and alluring.

7. Seventh in my little list, **deep down joy should always be there as an act of appreciation for answered prayer**. Ask and you shall receive that your joy may be full, John 16:24. What have I ever asked for that the Lord didn't do that was consistent with His character and His purpose? The Lord has answered my prayers over and over and over again. And as an act of appreciation for all the answered prayers and for those prayers yet unanswered that I know He'll hear and answer, my joy can be untouchable.
8. Number eight, **as an act of appreciation for the scriptures**. Psalm 19 verse 8, one of the...you know that's one of my favorite Psalm, I'd preach on it all the time if I could. I would ring that bell over and over. "The precepts of the Lord are right rejoicing the heart." The scriptures bring me joy. Jeremiah says, "*Thy words were found, I did eat them and they were in me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.*" The psalmist, Psalm 119, just read Psalm 119, how many times does David say that the Word brings him joy, that the Word is his delight?

You should...you should have that deep down appreciation of the Word of God that brings you joy, thanking Him for all that He has given. Listen to what John said, "These things I write unto you that your joy may be full...full."

9. Number nine, **you should rejoice always as an act of appreciation for Christian fellowship**. What a sweet benediction Christian fellowship is. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 3:9, "For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before God because of you?" Paul says I just have joy because of you.

I can say that. I have so many...so many causes for joy in my life because of you and how God is using you and blessing you and how you're receiving the Word and serving the Lord and how...I go places in the world and around the country and people come and tell me what the Lord means and what the Word means.

When I went back to Chicago I was at dinner and this guy said to me, "I've got to tell you a story." He said, "I went to a place called a Hundred Mile Post."

I said, "What kind of place is that?" It's a town in Canada. When you leave civilization going north in Canada toward the Arctic Circle, you go up into the lumber area, they put a post every fifty miles so there's fifty-mile posts, hundred-mile posts, hundred-and-fifty-mile posts and two-hundred-mile posts. And it's up toward no place.

And he said, "I got to a place called Hundred Mile Post to speak and I met a guy. And there was a church there." And he said, I think he said it was a church of a hundred and fifty or two hundred people in this place that hardly had that many people. And he said he told me how this story started. Some missionary flew in there, this is a lumber...a bunch of lumberjacks. This missionary had come in there and given them some Grace To You tapes fifteen years ago. And they had no ministry at all and this guy started listening to tapes and he got saved and he started getting more tapes and more tapes and more tapes. Now there's a church of two hundred people in a place Hundred Mile Post. And this guy was rejoicing in the fellowship and the fact that there was such commonality because they had...they were sort of an extension of Grace Community Church because of the teaching.

Is there anything sweeter than that? Christian fellowship when you need it, a friend, someone there to pray with you and be your strength.

10. Finally number ten, **we should have constant joy as an act of appreciation for the privilege of witnessing**, the privilege of gospel preaching. What a privilege to proclaim Christ...what a privilege, what an honor.

You remember the apostles in the early part of the book of Acts and they whipped them and they flogged them and they beat them. And then they sent them out of there and what did they do? They went on their way...what?...rejoicing because they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. It was such a thrill for them to be able to preach the gospel no matter what it costs.

Well those are the reasons. You know, there are things that are going to hinder you. If you don't have joy in your life, may I suggest what it might be?:

1. **It could be that you're not saved or not a Christian**. That's right. It could be false salvation. Remember Matthew 13, the seed went into the soil but the soil was rocky and it sprung up and there was joy and the sun came out and burned it and it died and there was no life there. There can be a momentary sort of initial psychological bump or boost or emotional joy, and it disappears. If you're struggling and you just don't have joy in your life, and you just can't get on top of it, maybe you don't really know Christ and you ought to examine yourself to see whether you're in the faith.
2. **Maybe you're being tempted**. Maybe you're under some very strong temptation because if there's anything Satan would like to do, it's steal your joy. He goes around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, Peter says. And so Peter says here's the solution...casting all your care on Him. Maybe you're carrying too much of your load, that will turn into a temptation real fast because you're not off-loading it, casting it on Him.
3. **You might have false expectations**. Maybe you think you deserve more than you're getting when the fact is you deserve less. Is that not true? What does an unregenerate people deserve? What does a wicked sinner deserve? Hell. God in His mercy gives them life and sunshine and rain and food and family and love, much more than they deserve. God does that even for those who aren't His own, and look what He gives to us who doesn't deserve anything...so much.

Why do people expect everything? One woman left the church and went to a charismatic church that preached the prosperity gospel. She came back and said, "I don't want to go there, they won't let you be poor or sick." Hey, in life some people are poor and sick, some people are just poor and some people are just sick. What do you expect out of life anyway? Happy, rich, successful, constantly healthy and full of miracles? You'll set yourself up for a real problem.

4. **Your life might be prayerless.** Prayerlessness will take your joy and that's back to what I said earlier, because you're going to carry the load yourself. You're just going to carry the whole deal. You don't need to do that, just give it up, just get it before the Lord, hand it over to Him, let Him carry it for you. Cast all your care on Him. Philippians 4, get involved in prayer. "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication let your request be made known to God." And as a result, the peace of God will take over.
5. **Too much reliance on feelings and emotions.** This is a common problem, especially among women. If you run by feelings and operate by feelings, you're going to have a hard time sustaining joy. People say, "Well I...I just...I don't feel like being happy. I don't feel like rejoicing. And how can I rejoice if I don't feel like it? And how can I control my feelings?" Let me tell you, you better. I mean, if everybody ran around doing what they felt like doing, what in the world kind of place would we have? We all control our feelings to some degree. It's silly to go around saying, "Well I...I just don't feel like it." Well you control your feelings all the time. You have to. And the way to control the kind of feelings that steal your joy is by your mind being filled with truth. And now I'm getting to the main deal here, and the main deal is this, the number one contributor to the lack of joy is ignorance. You don't know the truth of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, you don't have the mind of Christ, you don't know about God's sovereignty, God's mercy, God's providence, all those things we've talked about. When your mind is filled with sound doctrine and you believe it with all your heart, it takes over control of your emotions. And then you're not running around just flying off emotionally. You are a rational being and your feelings must be controlled by your reason, by your mind. And your mind when filled with the truth of God will control your emotions. I mean, it could be as simple as you're flying in an airplane and the thing...something goes wrong, loses an engine and you start to bump and bounce and flop...emotions take over initially. And then you say to yourself, "Oh, this could be the most novel experience of my life. I could be...this could be flight 841 to heaven. I could see...I may see the Lord soon. God's work will go on. Isn't this a marvelous potential?"

See, reason has to take over and whatever...whatever is in your mind controls your emotions. Some people would say, "I'm not going to break up, I'm not going to get panicky, I'm going to...control yourself, you don't want to embarrass yourself." You know, the mind takes over at that point in a superficial way and that person grits their teeth and hangs on for dear life.

That happened to me taking off from LAX, an engine went out just on lift off and this woman sunk her fingernails into my arm, you know...yikes. And I just...I just kind of smiled, you know. Sure you have emotional reaction to that but you're...all of a sudden I'm thinking about all this that's the reality of what might happen.

You see, you have to...your emotions can be controlled by your mind. So if your mind is controlled by the truth of the Word of God, that's how your emotions are going to respond, right? And so they'll have true responses to the reality that is most important, and that's the spiritual reality.

6. **Pride.** It could be the sin of pride, the ugly, ugly sin that says, "I don't have enough, I want more of this or that, or that." And, you know, the whole culture sells dissatisfaction, right? I mean, they put...they put women on the screen on the TV to make you unhappy with the one you've got. They put men on the screen to make you unhappy with the one you've got. They put cars on the screen to make you unhappy with the one you've got. They put all that stuff before you to make you dissatisfied. The premise of all marketing is make them dissatisfied.

So the culture blasts you with that. And you, you go home to your wife and your husband and your car and your life and your job and it's not the fantasy that they try to sell you but it is exactly the dissatisfaction that leads to you purchasing or giving up what you have for the deception. Pride will make you chase that stuff endlessly and ingratitude will eventually kill your joy. It will make you anxious and obsessive about getting "things" and needlessly pursuing the praise of the world and of people around you.

2.3.8 Love

Love is the most important evidence that the holy spirit is working in our lives. See section 4.8.3 for a detailed definition of love. We won't list it here to avoid repetition. One way to know if we are loved is if we have fears or phobias. The Bible is clear on how love makes us feel:

*"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."
[1 John 4:18]*

Below is a great quote about love that helps sum up what it is about:

I've learned-that you cannot make someone love you. All you can do is be someone who can be loved. The rest is up to them.

I've learned-that no matter how much I care, some people just don't care back.

I've learned-that it takes years to build up trust, and only seconds to destroy it.

I've learned-that it's not what you have in life but who you have in your life that counts.

I've learned-that you can do something in an instant that will give you heartache for life.

I've learned-that you should always leave loved ones with loving words. It may be the last time you see them.

I've learned-that regardless of how hot and steamy a relationship is at first, the passion fades and there had better be something else to take its place.

I've learned-that my best friend and I can do anything or nothing and have the best time.

I've learned-that true friendship continues to grow, even over the longest distance. Same goes for true love.

I've learned-that just because someone doesn't love you the way you want them to doesn't mean they don't love you with all they have.

I've learned-that maturity has more to do with what types of experiences you've had and what you've learned from them and less to do with how many birthdays you've celebrated.

I've learned-that you should never tell a child their dreams are unlikely or outlandish. Few things are more humiliating, and what a tragedy it would be if they believed it.

I've learned- that no matter how good a friend is, they're going to hurt you every once in a while and you must forgive them for that.

I've learned- that no matter how bad your heart is broken the world doesn't stop for your grief.

I've learned- that our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, but we are responsible for who we become.

I've learned- that just because two people argue, it doesn't mean they don't love each other and just because they don't argue, it doesn't mean they do.

I've learned- that we don't have to change friends if we understand that friends change.

I've learned- that you shouldn't be so eager to find out a secret. It could change your life forever.

I've learned- that two people can look at the exact same thing and see something totally different.

I've learned- that your life can be changed in a matter of hours by people who don't even know you.

I've learned- that even when you think you have no more to give, when a friend cries out to you, you will find the strength to help.

I've learned- that the people you care about most in life are taken from you too soon.

I've learned- that it's hard to determine where to draw the line between being nice and not hurting people's feelings and standing up for what you believe.

2.3.9 Forgiveness

In today's psychologically seduced culture, in today's culture bent on exercising and glorifying the sin of self-esteem, forgiveness is mocked and vengeance is exalted. This is just the opposite of what the Scripture teaches us. We must express an attitude of forgiveness.

Jesus says in the Bible says about forgiveness in Matt. 6:14-15:

14 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will you Father forgive your trespasses.

Also, in Luke 17:3-4, Jesus further details how many times we should forgive people who have sinned against us:

3 "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him".

What all of these scriptures teach us is that God commands us to forgive people who have sinned against us when they repent. But, even when our brother doesn't repent, sometimes we should forgive him or her anyway. An example was when Jesus was on the cross in Luke 23:34, when he said:

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

Dr. James Dobson very aptly described what it really means to forgive people:

"Forgiveness means giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me."

Even for those who aren't Christians, there are several practical reasons to forgive others:

1. We release and surrender our anger to the Lord.
2. We release our bitterness and resentment.
3. We remove the offending party's ability to continue occupying our thoughts in negative ways and thereby continue to hurt us.

All of these outcomes are healthy for our bodies because they lower our stress level and our blood pressure. This helps us live longer and happier lives.

It is important to remember that forgiveness is the most godlike act a person can do...forgiveness is the most godlike act a person can do, because it manifests the same kind of grace towards others that God manifests towards us. Nothing is more godlike than forgiving someone, and never are you more like God than when you forgive.

If it is your heart's prayer to be like Christ, to be as God's children, beloved children who manifest His character, then you must necessarily be characterized by forgiveness. Forgiveness is a marvelous thing. Forgiveness is a promise. Forgiveness is a pledge. Forgiveness is a statement of undeserved, unearned love that says no matter what you've done there is no anger, no matter what you've done there is no hatred, no matter what you've done there is no desire for vengeance, no matter what you've done there will never be any retaliation. I pass by that transgression completely. I do not hold you guilty. I do not blame you. I feel no self-pity for myself because I've been offended, rather I pass by that transgression completely and extend my love to you fully. That's forgiveness and that's godlike.

Reminding ourselves of that we go back to Exodus chapter 34. In Exodus chapter 34 we read this in verses 6 and 7, "Then the Lord passed by in front of him..." that is in front of Moses who had asked, you remember, to see His glory. Lord is identifying Himself here as He passes by Moses and lets a small portion of His glory be manifest. The Lord introduces Himself in verse 6 with these words, "The Lord...the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness...that's another word for grace...and truth who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin." There is the characteristic of God that we want to identify. He is by nature a forgiving God.

Psalm 32 verse 1 says, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity." Psalm 85 further expresses God's forgiving heart when it says in verses 2 and 3, "Thou didst forgive the iniquity of Thy people, Thou didst cover all their sin, Thou didst redraw all Thy fury. Thou didst turn away from Thy burning anger." Again and again in the Psalm the theme of forgiveness is brought up.

Another one that is worth noting is in Psalm 130 and verse 4, "But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." Feared meaning worshipped, treated with awe and respect and honor. God gains worship from those whom He so graciously forgives.

In the book of Isaiah, Isaiah the prophet speaks about God's forgiveness in the forty-third chapter of his prophecy. Recall that much of his prophecy has to do with judgment and then it sort of turns in the middle and the latter part is all about forgiveness and a glorious future. In Isaiah 43:25 we read that God speaks and says, "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake and I will not remember your sins." What a great statement. "I wipe out Your transgressions for My namesake." What does that mean? That I might put My character on display as a forgiving God and therefore be worshiped as such by those who are grateful for such forgiveness.

And then that great text in Isaiah 55 verses 6 and 7, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near, let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

The prophet Jeremiah spoke much of the same way. Just one passage, a marvelous one, Jeremiah 33:8, "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me." God reiterates the significance of the transgression and then repeats twice His attitude of forgiveness.

Jesus taught many parables. When we come, of course, to the New Testament they dominate much of His teaching. None of those parables is as well known, perhaps, as the one that we call the parable of the prodigal son. It is actually not the parable of the prodigal son, it is the parable of the forgiving father. That would be a better title for it. It is that most familiar of all stories recorded in Luke 15 where God is seen like a father who totally forgives an unworthy and undeserving son. The son in that parable was not unlike many sons, greedy, self-centered, indulgent, anxious to get his hands on the wealth he had not earned, foolish, wasteful in the way he spent it on fast living with those who, by the way, exploited him and left him in misery when his money ran out. Slowly coming to his senses, dying of hunger, eating pig slop, he was in a condition that really mirrored his life and said to himself, "My father's servants live far better than I, I'm going to go home."

He didn't really expect forgiveness, in fact that was the last thing he expected. He said I'll just go home and be a slave, just to take the chance to say what a bum I've been, what a terrible son I've been. I don't expect to be a son, but I will go back and ask if I can just be a slave. All I want was a roof over my head, all I want is a decent piece of food to eat, something better than pigs get. And he started on the road back.

When he arrives near the house of his father, Jesus teaches us what it means to forgive. Because what does the father do? The father doesn't wait for the sinner to arrive. As soon as he sees him coming he runs to meet him, while he's yet afar away the father runs. When he starts to open his mouth and speak, before he can even say the "ssss" of sorry, before he can get a sentence out of his mouth, the father throws his arms around him and starts to kiss him and love him, calls for him to be dressed in the best outfit, for a ring to be put on his finger, calls for a festival, a party, a celebration, to get the best meat, cook up the best meal that anybody could ever imagine, start the music, call the friends. That's the lavish character of forgiveness.

You say, "Well how did the Lord know he wanted forgiveness?" Well He knew that because he had come back. Obviously he had started in that path. When God sees the sinner moving in His direction

and hardly having said the "sss" of sorry, God throws His arms around the sinner and hastily lavishes His forgiving love on that sinner...that's forgiveness the way God forgives.

God grieves deeply over people who carry bitternesses. It is so ungodlike. It is so unlike the character of Jesus Christ. God grieves over people who think they have to retaliate for every wrong that was rendered against them. Somehow they've got to get their pound of flesh. Somehow they have to react back to preserve their ego and their pride, they become divisive. God grieves over those people who want to undermine the church of Christ and undermine the work of God, undermine the life and ministry of faithful servants.

The forgiving father can only say that he loves the unworthy son. He can only say that he will always love that son who has committed such gross sins. And sins committed directly against that father. And he will do nothing but rejoice over that son and lavish him with the expressions of forgiveness, and he'll do it not for any personal gain but for the sheer joy of reconciliation and the sheer love of virtue. And that's why I say forgiveness is the most godlike thing you can do.

It's very hard to divide a church full of forgiving people because you can't get anything started. No matter what failures your pastor may make, or your leaders may make, or you might make, or somebody around you might make, when there's a rush to forgive it's very hard to bring about those divisions that so dishonor the Lord. Jesus hanging on the cross looked out over the people who were taking His life, the sinless Son of God, and lifting His eyes to heaven on their behalf He said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." And Stephen being crushed under the bloody stones of those who were smashing his life away looked up to heaven, saw Jesus Christ in a glorious vision and said, "Lay not this sin to their charge. O God, don't hold them responsible for what they're doing."

It was Sir Thomas More, the lord chancellor of England, after having been tried at Westminster and condemned to death for no just cause, Thomas More said to his judges this, and I quote, "As St. Paul held the clothes of those who stoned Stephen to death, and as they are both now saints in heaven and shall continue there friends forever, so I verily trust shall therefore most heartily pray that though your lordships have now here on earth been judges to my condemnation and death, we may, nevertheless, hereafter cheerfully meet in heaven in everlasting salvation," end quote. He prayed for the salvation of his executioners...that's forgiveness...that's godlike. God has been overtly and blatantly and unjustly offended and blasphemed and dishonored by all of us and yet eagerly lavishes us with the expressions of His forgiving love.

Now this is Paul's salient point in Ephesians chapter 4. Turn to it if you will, Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 32. In Ephesians 4:32 we read this, "And be kind to one another."

We ought to stop and talk about that for a moment. Ours is such an unkind world, such an unkind society, so angry, so hostile, so merciless. Simple kindness, overlooking errors, overlooking misjudgments, overlooking failures, overlooking weaknesses, overlooking sins and treating people with kindness, overlooking self...self-centeredness, selfishness, one's own agenda, one's own expectations and just being kind whether people conform to all your supposed standards or not. And that kindness includes being tenderhearted. That's a simple phrase to understand, tenderheartedness...treating people tenderly. And here is one way to do it, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

And again I say, you are never more like God than when you forgive, when you express kindness, when you are tenderhearted and forgive just as God has forgiven you. And it's not a shallow forgiveness, it's a deep forgiveness, it's a lavish forgiveness.

In Colossians 3:13 Paul unfolds the same great truth, "Bearing with one another and forgiving each other whoever has a complaint against anyone just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." Forgiving with the same kind of magnanimity and the same kind of generosity with which the Lord forgave you from the heart.

Remember the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." See, that manifests a forgiving heart. Why? Verse 45, "In order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." And again I say, you're never more like God, you're never more evidently His son than when you forgive. And back to that text of Ephesians 4 for just a moment. It says in verse 32, as I read, "Forgiving each other as God in Christ also has forgiven you," and then I wish there wasn't a chapter break there because immediately in verse 1, "Therefore be imitators of God." And again you imitate God when you forgive.

By the way, Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians, those two letters that call for forgiveness from a jail where he was unjustly and hatefully imprisoned. He was practicing the very virtue he was exhorting the believers to manifest.

A second thought as we think about forgiveness is this, whoever has offended you has offended God more...whoever has offended you has offended God more. You say, "What's the point? The point is, if God can forgive when He has received the greater offense, can't you forgive who have received the lesser?"

You say, "What do you mean by that?" I mean by that what is clearly indicated in Psalm 51. Psalm 51 was written by David as was Psalm 32, both of them at the time when David was overburdened with the iniquity of his sin with Bathsheba and the death of her husband Uriah. And in the midst of his penitence he wrote Psalm 32 and 51. But in Psalm 51 and verse 4 he makes this very important point about his sin. Remember now, he had violated Bathsheba by engaging himself in sexual relationship with her. He had violated Uriah by making sure that Uriah was put in a compromising position on the battlefield so that he lost his life. So he was guilty of adultery and he was guilty of murder. It certainly sinned against those people. But notice in verse 4 what he says in this prayer. Verse 3 he says, "*I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me; against Thee and Thee only I have sinned.*"

Psalm 51 provides a an excellent example to us all on how to repent. This psalm contains the actual words of confession and repentance uttered by King David after his great sins of adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11). David's prayer can serve as a pattern to Christians when guilty of sin today that they want to repent to God for.

1. David begins his prayer by freely admitting his sin (Ps. 51:3,4). This honesty is vital in our confession. God will graciously forgive all our sins but not on account of our excuses.
2. He then displays real sorrow over his sin (Ps. 51:17). Paul writes (2 Cor. 7:10) that the main characteristic of true confession is godly sorrow.
3. He asks God's forgiveness (Psalm 51:1,7-9).
4. He believes that God has heard him and will restore him (Ps. 51: 12-15).
5. In the new testament the most important single verse concerning confession is 1 John 1:9. In essence John tells us the means of forgiveness and cleansing is the blood of Christ, while the method of this forgiveness and cleansing is the confession of the Christian.

Like David, we must admit our sin, regret the actions of our sin, plead the blood of Christ, and believe that God has indeed done what He promised, namely, to cleanse us from sin and restore us to fellowship and service.

When you really look at sin you must agree that sin is primarily against God, for God is the holy standard whose law it is that we violate. Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned. Although it would seem to us a major sin against Bathsheba and a major sin against Uriah, it is really a minor infraction against them and a major infraction against God Himself.

Psalm 41:4 also attributed to David, "As for me, I said, `O Lord, be gracious to me, heal my soul for I have sinned against Thee."

Listen, God is perfectly holy. He is thrice holy...holy, holy, holy. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, cannot look upon iniquity. He cannot tolerate sin. He despises sin. He hates sin. And while He is forgiving there will be an end to His patience and He will not endure sin forever. There will come a time of judgment and justice. He says that all the way back in Exodus 34 and verse 7. At the same time that God is forgiving, there is an end to His forgiveness because ultimately His holiness will take over where there is impenitence. He is perfectly holy and ultimate, ultimately does require a just punishment for sin...either from the sinner or from a substitute for the sinner, namely His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. To say that is to say that God is holy and sets a holy standard, so much so that ultimately sinners unforgiven will be damned to an eternal hell of punishment. There's no question about the extent of God's holiness. And that in itself makes His forgiveness all the more astonishing. God then who is most holy, God who is most supremely offended forgives.

We who are unholy shall we not forgive? What is it, some kind of God complex people have who won't forgive? Indeed it is. You have an elevated opinion of yourself who will not forgive. You have exalted yourself to a standard higher than God.

Now let's take note of one thing, and that is that from the heart we are to forgive all offenses all the time. My enemies and those who persecute and hate us are unlikely to ask for my forgiveness, and yet Jesus said, "Love your enemies and do good to them." That manifests an attitude of forgiveness. And there are going to be Christians who offend you and me. There are going to be Christians who are bitter and full of vengeance and want retaliation and want their pound of flesh and are going to do things that hurt us because they've been hurt by us or imagined they have. And I really believe that from the heart it is essential that we extend to them a kindness, a tenderheartedness and a forgiving love with the understanding that there can never be a restoration of the relationship until there is a real repentance on their part. The relationship can't be what it ought to be until there is a real seeking on their part of that restoration through forgiveness.

But let me tell you something. You can't wait for that in every situation. Look at it in your own home, look at it in your own marriage, look at it in your own family. Are you just going to accumulate a whole long litany of iniquities that someone may have committed or offense that may have committed and they haven't come and confessed them all and pled forgiveness for each and every single one of them? Are you just going to accumulate that and accumulate that and accumulate that? I think not. I think in the magnanimity of your love you pass by those things, love covers a multitude of...what?...of sins. There may be a breach in that relationship until forgiveness is sought, but from the heart that forgiveness has to be proffered and offered or you will accumulate bitterness.

We are so incidental to sin. Sin is not primarily against us, it is against God. And God forgives it in His children, shall not we? He who is most offended forgives freely, shall not we?

Another point that I want to make and I think this is all that I'll have time to make, and it is an important one. By the way, if you want another text to attach that to, Matthew 18. Matthew 18, that story about the man who came before the king, you remember, verses 21 to 35, and he was forgiven such a great debt and then went out and strangled another man who owed him just a small debt. And the point Jesus is making is how can you accept the forgiveness of God for all your sins and not forgive someone else when God who has forgiven you the most and God who was most offended and God who is of the highest and holiest standard has given you complete forgiveness, should you not forgive others? Matthew 18, very important text, I wish we had time to look at it.

But one final point, and it takes us into the place of preparation for the Lord's table. And it is this, the one who doesn't forgive won't be forgiven. You say, "What do you mean by that? Are you talking about the fact that we're going to die and go to hell?" No. In the big picture all your sins are forgiven if your faith is in Jesus Christ. We're not talking about that which has to do with your eternal destiny. We're talking about that which has to do with your joy, your peace, your usefulness, your fellowship. We're talking about what Jesus talked with Peter about when Peter said, "I want a bath," and the Lord said, "You already had a bath, you just need your feet washed." It's not a question of you being clean, you're clean, you just got some dirt on your feet that makes you a foul fellow for sitting at the table with us.

In Matthew 6, very important portion of Scripture. Jesus said this, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." And then down in verse 14, "For if you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive men then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." That makes the point about as clearly as it could ever be made. God will forgive you if you forgive others.

Eternal forgiveness...that's a settled issue. We have that in our justification and that settles the issue of future blessing. But temporal forgiveness rather than eternal forgiveness, temporal forgiveness we need in our sanctification and that settles the issue of present blessing. You understand the difference. Eternal forgiveness we as Christians have in our justification, settles the issue of future blessing. Temporal forgiveness we as Christians have and need in our sanctification, settles the issue of present blessing. The point is, if you're not forgiving others regularly and consistently and completely, then God is not forgiving you in a temporal sense and if you're not being forgiven in a temporal sense, several things will happen. You will forfeit blessing and you will come under chastening. Remember in the parable of Matthew 18 the man who wouldn't forgive, he had been forgiven, notably marking out that he was a believer, that's what it's saying in the parable, he was a believer who had been completely forgiven by God. He wouldn't forgive a man so the king brought him in and whipped him. God chastens those who do not forgive others. Sometimes he chastens them even perhaps to death.

Through the years as a pastor, I have been at it a long time now and I have found the emptiness, the dryness, the insipid dullness, the lack of joy, the lack of power, the lack of usefulness in the lives of people often related to an unforgiving heart. It's due to God's blessing being withheld because of an unwillingness to forgive. Sometimes a person will sit down with me and say, "They're saying this about me and they're saying this about me, and I've heard this about me, and I'm really angry with all of this and I'm upset about all of this." And my question is, what do you think the Lord's trying to do in your life? Do you think there might be some reason why you're experiencing all of this?

In other words, the implication is: could this be a chastening? Have you looked at your heart? What I hear coming out of your heart is anger and what I hear coming out of your heart is bitterness. And maybe it is the lack of forgiveness that is causing the escalation of all of these trials. We are to forgive because it is like God whose children we are.

We are to forgive because the most holy One forgives and shouldn't the least forgive? We are to forgive because we have been forgiven the greater sins against God and should be able to forgive lesser ones against us. We are to forgive because not to forgive is to forfeit fellowship and the love of the brethren and it is to be chastened. And furthermore, if we don't forgive we're really not fit to come to the Lord's table, we're not fit to worship.

In the same Sermon on the Mount where Jesus taught us how to pray and included the idea of forgiveness, back one chapter in Matthew 5 He said this in verses 23 and 24. *"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, then come and present your offering."*

Now this is very basic. If you have an unsettled grudge with somebody else, settle it. Reconciliation needs to precede worship. Where there is bitterness and anger and unforgiveness, you need to do everything you can to resolve it. Where there is the iniquity of unforgiveness, God will not receive your worship. Such is the centrality of forgiveness.

Summing up, a statement from an anonymous saint:

"Revenge indeed seems often sweet to men, but Oh, it is only sugared poison, only sweetened gaul and its aftertaste is bitter as hell. Forgiving enduring love alone is sweet and blissful, it enjoys peace and the consciousness of God's favor. By forgiving it gives away and annihilates the injury, it treats the injurer as if he had not injured and therefore feels no more the smart and sting that he had inflicted. Forgiveness is a shield from which all the fiery darts of the wicked one harmlessly rebound. Forgiveness brings heaven to earth and heaven's peace into the sinful heart. Forgiveness is the image of God, the forgiving Father, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world."

Never are you more like God than when you forgive.

2.3.10 Obedience

In 1 Peter 1:22, the apostle describes salvation as an act of obedience. It says, *"You have in obedience to the truth purified your souls."* He describes the same reality in verse 23 as having been born again through the Word of God. When you were born again through the Word of God that also could be described as obeying the truth that purified your souls. What truth was that? The gospel. What was the gospel? Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, right? And that's a command so you either obey it or you don't. God said, "This is My Son, hear Him." Jesus said, "Repent, repent, repent." The apostles remember on the day of Pentecost, Peter says, "Repent, be baptized for the remission of sins," and so forth. Always they preached the gospel...believe, believe, that's a command. It's always in a command mode and it calls for obedience. So Peter says you obeyed the truth and you were purified, you were saved, you were born again because you obeyed the truth...the truth contained in the Word of God. The Word of God was preached, you heard it, you believed it, you obeyed it. It said "believe," you believed. It said "repent," you repented. It said "cast yourself on Christ," you cast yourself on Christ.

So, the point is that at the moment of salvation you engaged in an act of obedience. But you did more than that. You pledged yourself that that obedience was only the beginning, not some isolated event. In other words, at the time when you committed yourself to obey the gospel you also affirmed Christ as Lord, right? You came and you recognized that He was your Savior and there was no other way to be saved from your sins and you were on your way to hell and the burden of your sin was overwhelming. And so you said I can't save myself, I can't deliver myself from sin, and only You can, You alone are the Savior and please forgive my sin, I cast myself on Your mercy, I cast myself on Your grace. Please forgive my sin based upon the fact that You died in my place. And you recognized Jesus as Savior. But at the same time you also acknowledged that He was lord and master and you said, "I'll follow You...I'll follow You." I don't...I'm confident that no Christian at the time of salvation has a grasp on the full implications of what that commitment meant. You don't know what that means at that point but the commitment is there. Why? Because the Holy Spirit has produced it. The Holy Spirit has produced the sense that you are now becoming a servant of God and you are now becoming a servant of Jesus Christ your master and acknowledging Him as your Lord. And you have stepped in to a place of obedience. That's part of the covenant of salvation. God's part--I save you, I forgive your sins, I give you eternal life through the work of Jesus Christ. Your part--you repent and you submit to follow Me. That's salvation. When you came to salvation that's what you did...that's what you did, you committed to obedience, though you didn't fully understand all the implications involved in that.

But go back to 1 Peter again, moving back from verses 22 to 23 to verse 1 and 2, this is a very, very important portion of Scripture. As Peter starts writing, the end of verse 1 he starts to talk about this matter of salvation. He starts with election. He talks to the aliens, the scattered believers who are chosen. So he's starting to talk about salvation here and he starts with election. Back in eternity past God chose who would be saved and He did it, verse 2 says, according to His foreknowledge. Foreknowledge doesn't mean that everybody acts independently and God way back looked ahead and saw what they were going to do and said, "Oh, so that's what they're going to do, if that's what they're going to do this is what I'll do." Foreknowledge is a predetermination...predetermined relationship. "Fore" means before we were ever born, before we ever had a choice, before we ever did or didn't do anything God predetermined to know us. In the same way that He says, "Israel only have I known." It doesn't mean that they're the only people on the planet that He knows, it means they're the only ones with whom He has personal relationship. It's the same knowing as Cain knew his wife, it's the same knowing as Mary's pregnant and Joseph has never known her. It's the same knowing as in John 10 where "My sheep hear My voice and I know them." It is the knowing of intimacy. And God in His plan chose based upon a predetermined relationship. He predetermined to have an intimate relationship with certain ones before the foundation of the world. That's the past part of salvation.

The present part moves in the phrase "by the sanctifying work of the Spirit." That which was in the decree of God in eternity past moved into time through the work of the Spirit. In what sense? We were sanctified by the work of the Spirit. To put it another way, we were begotten of the Spirit. To borrow John 3, "Born of the Spirit," that's our salvation there. That's the initiation of the sanctifying work. Sanctify means to separate, when the Spirit separated us from sin, separated us from death, separated us from hell, separated us from Satan in the sense that we were saved.

So first eternity past, we are chosen based upon God's predetermination to have a relationship with us. We are saved as the Spirit of God moved in and separated us unto God. That's the sanctifying work of the Spirit. It started at our salvation. And then notice this, next statement, "In order that..." we were chosen and saved, "In order that you may...do what?, what's the next word?...obey Jesus Christ."

We were saved unto good works, Ephesians 2:10. We were saved unto obedience. That's the point. So the past, chosen on the basis of the foreknowledge of God. The present, saved by the separating work of the Spirit of God. The future, a life of...what?...obedience. I mean, that's the redeeming purpose, a life of obedience.

And then this most interesting little statement there. "And be sprinkled with His blood." That's strange. What a strange thing to say. "And be sprinkled with His blood." What does it mean to be sprinkled with His blood? Isn't that more of a salvation issue? It's referred to in Hebrews 12:24, "the sprinkled blood." What is that?

There is an answer to that and it's in Exodus 24 and that's what Peter's alluding to. Go to Exodus 24, it is a very important text and a very interesting one. In Exodus 24, and we're going to find out what that sprinkling of the blood is, in Exodus 24 Moses has been up on the mountain and received the law of God. God has given man His law, it includes the ten commandments and all the rest of the law that God gave. And in that law God has revealed His will in very specific terms. Obviously prior to the Mosaic law God had revealed His ways and His will in many different manners, but now it's all going to be written down in absolute specifics in the law of Moses. So Moses went up the mountain, you remember Mount Sinai and was given the law of God. Then Moses came down.

Let's pick it up in chapter 24 verse 3. Moses came and all of this law, it's this massive law, all of the law that came through Moses, ceremonial law and moral law and all the laws of social life, the whole thing, Moses came, recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do." Now this is a very important moment. Moses comes down and I guess by the work of the Holy Spirit was able to remember everything and he recounts the whole thing...all the law of God to the people. And unilaterally with one voice they say, "We will do all of that." And they make a public vow. They make a pledge, they make a promise and it is a promise of obedience, it is a promise of obedience.

There's a covenant being made here, God's part of it is: I will send you My moral law, I will provide in that moral law My standards, I will provide in that moral law for when you violate those standards because in the moral law...I mean in the Mosaic law, and it certainly has moral implications, spiritual implications, but in the Mosaic law there was the sacrificial system and they were instructed as to how to deal with their sin as well. So God even revealed His grace and His mercy through that law. So God says My part of the covenant is I'll show you My will and I'll show you what I want you to do and I'll give you a path of righteousness and I'll give you a means of grace and mercy. And He gave all of that. And the people said, "And our part is we will obey."

You have a parallel right there to salvation. At the point of salvation God says to the sinner...Here is My law, here is My means of grace, I will bless you, I will care for you. And the believer says...And I will...what?...follow You, I'll obey You. So it's a very similar scene.

Follow along then in verse 4. Moses after having recited all this again, no doubt, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote down all the words of the Lord. And then he arose early in the morning. The implication is that it was a full night of writing. And he built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. Now he's going to get ready to publicly symbolize the covenant that has been made between God and the people. God revealed His part, the people declared their part...God spoke, they spoke and now he's going to demonstrate a sealing symbol. So he builds this altar out of stones, no doubt, and puts twelve stacks of stones representing the twelve tribes as a symbol of everybody's participation. He sent young men of the sons of Israel and they offered burnt offerings

and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. The sacrifices being an indication of the people's pledge in response to God's law.

And then he did a most interesting thing in verse 6, he took half the blood...and believe me, burnt offerings, sacrificing young bulls, there was blood everywhere...it was a real blood bath as they were bleeding all of these animals, cutting the jugular, in most cases, and capturing all the blood. Moses took half the blood, put it in basins, collecting it all in these big basins. And the other half of the blood he splattered across the altar...the altar represented God. And so the covenant was going to be ratified in this sort of demonstrable way and he splattered some of the blood across the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, that is what he had written down all night, and he read it in the hearing of the people. He read it all over again, this would be the fact that they had heard it once and now they hear it again. And all the people responded the same way, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be...what?...obedient." That's the covenant made between the people and God. So Moses, verse 8, took the blood and splattered it on the people.

Some of the blood on the altar, symbolizing God's part in the covenant. The rest of the blood on the people, symbolizing their part. "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." He said His part, you said your part, the blood is the physical demonstration that you both made that commitment.

Now with that in mind go back to 1 Peter. And in 1 Peter 1 you read this, "That you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood." Peter is borrowing from that graphic, graphic ceremony of Exodus 24. And Peter is saying when you came to Christ, when you put your trust in Jesus Christ, you accepted His part of the covenant, I will write My law in your heart, new covenant, I will write My statutes in your heart. I will forgive all your trespasses and all your iniquities, I will grant you mercy and I will grant you grace. And at that part, at that point when you were receiving all of that from Him, you were responding by saying, "Yes, Lord, and I will follow You." And that was the covenant of salvation. I confess you as Lord, and Lord means the one in charge, and that's what you confessed. And at that point in God's eyes the blood that had been splattered on Christ, the sacrifice, was then splattered on you because of your part in the covenant. It's a beautiful picture.

So when you came to salvation, my friend, you made a simple covenant of obedience. The sad story of Israel is that they did...what?...they violated it. And so do we...and so do we. If there's anything that has to be the companion of faith, it must be obedience because those two were the companions when we were saved, right? Faith in the Savior is the only one to save us, commitment to obey the Lord as our King. Obedience...that from the heart is what we desire in the church. Give me a church full of people whose hearts are devoted to obedience and I'll show you a church with power and joy.

Look at Romans 6:17, I'm going to give you a few more and we'll be done. Romans 6:17 on this issue of obedience...but look at verse 16, first of all, "*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience you are the slaves of the one whom you obey.*" That's pretty obvious. If you become somebody's slave, the main word is obedience. When you present yourselves as a slave to somebody, the issue is you do what they tell you. And then he makes that simple illustration, a spiritual doctrine in verse 17, "*Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin you became obedient from the heart,*" I love that phrase, you ought to underline it, "*obedient from the heart*" because it's your desire, because you love to be obedient, because it's from the inside. You became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed. In fact, verse 18, you became a slave of righteousness.

When you came to Christ you entered into a new obedience. You had been obedient before to the flesh, the world, the devil. You had been obedient to sin. And now you're obedient to Him. You're obedient to righteousness.

It's not just a question of hearing the Word, it's a question of obeying it. In Matthew 7 there were people who hear...who heard the Word and didn't obey it, and they were building their house on sand. And when the judgment came it would collapse. Obedience means hearing and putting it to practice.

One last scripture, very important, James 1. We'll close with this one, James 1:22, "*Prove yourselves doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*" You know what happens if you hear the Word and don't apply it? You're living in a delusion, you are deceived about your true spiritual condition. If you're not applying the Word of God in your life you are deceived about your spiritual condition. And then he gives an illustration of such deception...a very interesting one, verse 23, "If anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror," literally the word "looks" is glances. You go in there in the morning and you've decided you're going to shave off your mustache and you get half of it shaved off, you've got half your hair combed and half your teeth brushed and the phone rings and you go out of there and you've just barely gotten started maybe and you go out of there and you get on the phone and you forget what you look like and you go off to the office to the hilarity of everybody who greets you because you forgot what you look like. So it is with an individual who merely glances at the Word of God, who doesn't apply it. He really doesn't understand the condition he's in. He thinks everything is fine but everything is not fine, he is deceived about his true condition. And when he goes away he forgets because he doesn't apply.

This certainly applies to a non-believer, a non-Christian who hears the gospel, hears the gospel and never puts it into practice, never really looks very deeply at it, just water off a duck's back and is deceived about his true condition. This can be true about a person who comes to the church, makes a profession of Christ, might even in his own mind think he's a Christian, listens never applies anything, never applies anything...he's in a state of delusion about his spiritual condition.

It can also be true of a Christian who hears teaching about a certain area and he will not deal with that, he will not apply that in an area of his life. He becomes totally deceived about his true spiritual condition.

So the point is this, you better take more than a passing glance if you want to know your true condition. And James 1:25 says it, "The one who looks intently," that's a Greek verb that means you look very closely and for a prolonged period to rightly assess your condition. You look in that mirror which is the perfect law, the law of liberty. What's that? The Word of God, it's the perfect law, it's the law that sets you free from sin and delusion and you abide by it. You are not a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed. It's obedience that brings the blessing. And people who don't obey are self-deluded. Maybe they're not even Christians, maybe they're Christians who mistakenly think all is well when all is not well.

Father, we thank You for again the reminder of the foundation of our Christian life being obedience. There is a plan. There's a right way to do things in your church and that involves spiritual attitudes from the inside out. And, Lord, we ask that You would grant us great faith and the strength to be obedient and the longing to confess our disobedience and make it right. Work that work of conviction in our hearts that makes us hate our disobedience and long to submit. Produce in us those attitudes which will cause us to live in ways that bring You glory, for Christ's sake. Amen.

2.3.11 Prayer

The family that prays together stays together.

Prayer is the very important and only vehicle that we have to communicate with our Heavenly Father while we are on this earth. Prayer is also how we grow and maintain our personal relationship with Jesus Christ and learn about what He wants in our lives. It is how the Holy Spirit manifests its will in our lives. Regular prayer is also how we ensure spiritual stability in our lives. Spiritual stability calls for reacting to problems with thankful prayer. Phil 4:6, "*In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God*".

Prayer is the antidote to worry and it is relief from anxiety. By the way, this section does not emphasize the theology of prayer. It emphasizes the importance of prayer and the attitude of prayer. There are three different words for prayer used here. They're translated prayer, supplication and request. They all have to do with petitions and the assumption is that when you get into a problem you're going to cry out to God, right? I mean, that's natural. You're going to cry out to God. But what Paul is saying is instead of crying out to God in your difficulty with doubt, with questionings, with dissatisfaction, with discontent, blaming God, cry out to God with what attitude? Thanksgiving, thanksgiving. Well you say, "Why?" Well because you know that He's the God of promise who has promised that nothing's ever going to come into your life that's too much for you to bear, that He is the God of promise who is working all things for your good. He is the God of promise who is causing you to suffer a while in order that you might be made perfect, that you might be settled, that you might be established, 1 Peter 5:10.

In other words, you see in all the difficulty God's purpose and you thank Him for the available power you know is there. And you thank Him for the promises which He never will violate instead of questioning God, doubting God, sort of shaking your fist at God. He says in everything. That's like 1 Peter 5:7, casting all your care on Him, in everything. When you pray and supplicate and request to God in the process of doing that, do it with thanksgiving, thankful for His purposes, thankful for His providence, thankful for His power, thankful for His promise, thankful for His perfecting work, thankful for the hope of relief, thankful for the hope of glory, thankful that it is His will, thankful that He's doing exactly what He wants in your life to accomplish what He wants, thankful for past mercies that are the foundation of future blessings.

You see, prayer should always be about thankfulness. Thankfulness is a synonym for the word "JOY" in a Christian context, which is something we mentioned in section 2.3.7 that we are commanded to have, especially when we are having problems in our lives. That's why it's so important to pray when we have problems and why prayer can give us the peace and joy we need to deal effectively with our problems. Prayer will then immediately release me from fear and worry because I see God's purpose in a situation. I never question His purpose, but prayer helps us understand the purpose. I know my God is sovereign. I know He orchestrates all things for my good, Romans 8:28, and His glory. I know that whatever may come He can turn to His own praise and to my growth. And so I'm thankful. I'm thankful that He knows the problem. I'm thankful that He can deal with the problem. I'm thankful for His knowledge, His power, His promise, all of that. All three of those words, by the way, refer to specific direct requests...prayer, supplication, requests. They all assume that in difficulty you go to God. But the issue here is the thankful heart. And if you really know your God and you can thank Him in the midst of all of this, you have spiritual stability. This is so basic, folks. I watch people who are worried and fretting and anxious and troubled about everything and at the bottom line is they do not trust that everything is under the control of God for their good and His glory. They can't handle that. Either they don't understand their God, or the sin in their life has caused them to have a weak faith in the God they do know to be a

sovereign God. If you understand that my God shall supply all your needs, if you understand that God knows everything in your life and cares about it, if you understand that God has the power for every difficulty, if you understand that God is perfecting you to be like Christ, if you understand that nothing escapes God and nothing is outside of His tolerance and His purposes, then why would you fear and be anxious about anything? I mean, get in touch with the reality of it.

Now what is the result of a thankful heart? Philippians chapter 4 verse 7, "*And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" I would venture to say that everybody with a problem would like to find peace, right? We'd like to find tranquility, we'd like to find contentment, some kind of inner calm in the midst of the difficulty. Would you please note that that's precisely what Phil. 4:7 promises? Now I need to just give you a little bit of a thought here. In the middle of difficulty when you're pleading and supplicating and praying to God, and you have a thankful heart, the answer is not the issue. Did you hear that? The answer is not the issue. It doesn't say that if you will pray and you will supplicate and you will request to God with thanksgiving God will answer your prayer the way you want. It doesn't say that. It says nothing about the answer, it says whatever the answer may be and whenever the answer may come, God will give you...what?...peace. That's the issue....that's the issue.

What is the peace of God? Well it's the peace that God possesses and gives to us. It's inward peace, Godlike peace given to us. That's what provides the calm. Would you please note again it is a gift from God to one who prays thankfully? This is building to a spiritual crescendo. As you exist in an environment of love, and peace, be a peacemaker, as you focus on your relationship to the living Christ, as you have a humble heart, not demanding anything, as you begin to know your God, understand your God and trust your God so that in the middle of grave difficulties when you're pouring out your prayers before that God you can do so with thanksgiving, God in response to that kind of heart attitude dispenses His peace. That's the promise. He grants you His peace.

Listen to Isaiah 26:3. "*The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace because he trusts in Thee.*" That's it. You trust in God, you get a steadfast mind, God keeps you in peace. That's how to face life with stability.

So much wrong advice. So much trust in man's ability. So much distrust in God's sovereignty that we have sent people down the wrong path. Beloved, I don't care what the problem is in your life. I don't care what the difficulty that creates anxiety, psychosis, neurosis, whatever it is, if you understand who your God is, if you can take every issue of life with a thankful heart as you pray and ask him for deliverance, in the midst of it all the promise of the Word is that God will give you peace. Now what kind of peace is it? Please notice Phil. 4:7, it is peace which surpasses all comprehension. What does that mean? It's not human, it's not rational, it transcends intellectual powers, it transcends analysis, it transcends man's insights, it transcends man's understanding, man's definition, man's explanation. It is not human. You don't go to man to get it. Did you hear that? You go to God to get it. There's no counselor in the world that can give it to you. There's no therapy in the world that can give it to you. There's no technique in the world that can give it to you. It is a gift of God to a believer who so confidently understands and trusts his God that he is thankful in the trial and out of his thanksgiving, God responds by granting him peace, supernatural peace.

Boy, are there a lot of cheap substitutes being offered for that today. It is beyond any approach that attempts to reason your troubles away. It is superior to human scheming, superior to human devices, superior to human solutions, superior to any so-called human security. I can simply sum it up by saying the real challenge of Christian living...please note this because it runs cross-grain to our culture...the real

challenge of Christian living is not to see if you can eliminate every uncomfortable issue in your life. The real issue of Christian living is to see if you can trust your infinitely holy sovereign and powerful God in the midst of every situation and have His perfect peace.

People are running around trying to create a perfect world so they'll be happy. They don't like the way they look. They don't like the way they're shaped. They don't like the way their mother treated them. They don't like the way their father treated them. They were abused. They were misunderstood. They weren't treated properly. They don't like the way their husband treats them. They don't like the way their wife treats them. They don't like the way their kids are turning out. They don't like the place they live. They hate their job. And out of all of these things come all these petty anxieties. Sooner we should learn we are fallen people, we live in a fallen world, that's the way it's going to be. And the great reality is that our glorious sovereign God has overruled our fallenness, it says it, doesn't it, in John 16:33, "*In this world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer...what?...I have overcome the world.*" When are we going to start living on the supernatural plane and accepting that we live in a fallen world and wait for the overcoming God to do His perfect work in us here and some day in the glory to come? I must accept the fact that I'm a fallen person living with fallen people in a fallen world and there are manifestations of that fallenness all over the place. There will never be the tranquility I would like circumstantially in this world, but I will find my peace from God as I entrust everything confidently into His care.

Now notice what this peace does, Phil. 4:7. "*The peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" Guard you from what? From anxiety, from doubt, from fear, from distress. This is a great truth. That term "*shall guard*" is a military term, it literally means shall keep guard over, shall protect. The Philippians lived in a garrison town where Roman soldiers were stationed to watch out for the Roman interests in that part of their world. They knew what a sentry was, what a guard was, what a garrison was...a protector. And what Paul says...look, he says, if you know your God and you know your God is near and you confidently trust your God in the midst of any trial, knowing that it is effecting His purpose, and then being thankful in the midst of that for the purpose of God even in the difficulty, you are granted the peace of God, that peace will guard you and protect you from anxiety, difficulty, distress, dissatisfaction, discontent, doubt.

Bunyan had a beautiful picture of this. You remember in Holy War he has the picture of the city called Man's Soul and it's representative of the soul of man. And he has the Prince Emanuel who, of course, is Christ, and then he has this special character called Mr. God's Peace. And Mr. God's Peace is in the town of Man's Soul, he's on patrol and his job is to guard the town. Bunyan writes, "*Nothing was to be found but harmony, happiness, joy, and health so long as Mr. God's Peace maintained his office.*" And Bunyan talks about how the town Man's Soul grieved Prince Emanuel. Prince Emanuel left and Mr. God's Peace laid down his commission and chaos resulted. That's what happens in the Christian life. When Christ is out of our thoughts, when we no longer see things in the light of how He views them, when we no longer are under, as it were, the confidence in His sovereignty, then all of a sudden Mr. God's Peace doesn't function anymore and we're left with troubled minds and troubled hearts. But where we have that confident trust in the Lord, so much so that we can thank Him in the midst of our petitions, then we have Mr. God's Peace on duty and he is the protector of the peace of our souls. That couldn't be a clearer perspective for all of us to understand.

Now why does he mention hearts and minds? Some say, "Well, there's a distinction." I think not. I don't think he's trying to delineate between the heart and the mind, he's just trying to make a comprehensive statement. We could say the heart is the seat of personhood and the mind is the seed of thought, and

whatever. But I think he's just saying your hearts and minds in a general sense, saying he'll guard your whole inner person, this Mr. God's Peace. He'll guard them in Christ Jesus. Because you're in union with Christ you have this guardianship.

So, spiritual stability...how can you face the inevitable day of your death? What if you have a coronary? What if you're told that you have cancer? What if one of your children is tragically taken from you? What about the difficulties that you face right now in your life, how do you face them with spiritual stability? How do you stand your ground?

First of all, it requires the stability of the church. People in the church need to hold each other up. And where you have a strong unified peaceful loving church, you find great strength in the individual members. Secondly, you must maintain a spirit of joy and that means constantly cultivating your relationship to the living Christ so it's the source of joy for you all the time, no matter what may be going on around you. Thirdly, you have to learn to be humble and not expect anything because we don't deserve anything any way and not feel like you got cheated nor dealt a dirty deal or that God gave you the short end of the stick...we who are so utterly unworthy of anything. Then you must rest on a confident faith in the Lord. You must understand and trust Him to be consistent with Himself as revealed in Scripture and then react to your problems with thankful prayer and the promise of God is that peace will guard you...peace, tranquility, contentment.

2.3.12 Persistence and Endurance

As Christians, it is very important for us to be persistent and disciplined in honoring God during our brief time on earth, because like Jesus and the suffering he went through, we learn endurance and become more useful to God. Hebrews 12:1-4 describes the attitude we should take:

1 Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

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

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

4 You have not resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

2.3.13 Political Involvement

*"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."
[2 Corinthians 3:17.⁴]*

*"We must obey GOD rather than men."
[Acts 5:29]*

"Those people who are not governed by GOD will be ruled by tyrants."

[William Penn]

"Government is not reason; it is not eloquence; it is force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master."

[George Washington]

"The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

[Edmund Burke, 1729-1797]

"Woe to those who decree unjust statutes and to those who continually record unjust decisions, to deprive the needy of justice, and to rob the poor of My people of their rights..."

[Isaiah 10:1-2]

"If My people which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek y face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

[2 Chron. 7:14]

"The price of freedom is eternal vigilance."

[Unknown]

"There is nothing more terrifying than ignorance in action."

[Goethe]

"It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself."

[Thomas Jefferson]

"If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or your arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen."

[Samuel Adams]

"Why do we love this trial by jury? Because it prevents the hand of oppression from cutting you off . . . This gives me comfort--that, as long as I have existence, my neighbors will protect me. "

[Patrick Henry]

"To embarrass justice by a multiplicity of laws, or to hazard it by confidence in judges, are the opposite rocks on which all civil institutions have been wrecked."

[Johnson]

Responsible political involvement takes many forms:

1. Seeking wisdom and knowledge and understanding, is described in section 2.3.19.
2. Reading the newspaper and following current legislative events on the part of elected representatives to ensure that they vote in accordance with the will of the people.
3. Judging all situations righteously, in accordance with section 3.5.2 of this constitution: What is Righteous judgment.
4. Voting at every election.
5. Being a involved, responsible, and good juror.
6. Responding to the military draft.
7. Boycotting and protesting situations and behaviors that violate God's commandments.

Note that in this list, we deliberately put wisdom, being informed, and righteous judgment ahead of all the other responsibilities, because an unwise, misinformed or unrighteous vote or jury service is worse than not participating at all!

Political involvement, in addition to being a civic duty, is a duty and a stewardship we owe to God. This is especially true in democratic societies such as the United States, where the character and the nature of government is constrained by and conformed to the will of the people as determined by our constitution. With all the wickedness, communism, and political oppression found in the world today, it should be quite clear that freedom and liberty are not the natural state of man. Every people will eventually be oppressed by their own government if their rulers are left to their own selfish devices. That is the reason why even this blessed country at one time had to go through a Revolutionary War to free itself from the political oppression and tyranny of the British government. Therefore, we owe it to God, ourselves, our children, and the rest of the world to be vigilant in protecting and defending the blessings, liberty, and freedoms we enjoy. Doing so demands that we elect and encourage the involvement of men of character and of faith in the political process.

If our country is destroyed, this will most likely happen by a cancer from within: a callous, sinful, lazy, and indifferent citizenry who turn the other way and refuse to be politically involved while a wicked and corrupt government undertakes to destroy and eliminate, one by one, all their political and religious rights and liberties. **The only thing that stands between liberty and political oppression is your vote and your political involvement as a Christian.**

Nations and peoples go through a cycle as predictable as the seasons. Unfortunately, few of us live long enough to experience a whole cycle, and therefore we never learn from our collective mistakes as a nation unless we are avid students of the Bible and of history. The result is needless suffering caused by our own ignorance and shortsightedness. We could all learn something from this and prevent suffering on a large scale if we understood this process better and that is the goal of this section. Mormons teach about the cycle or process of civilizations in their seminary classes. Below is a detailed sequence of how this process happens (courtesy of the author and not the Mormon church):

1. Prosperity.

- 1.1. Low government debt.
- 1.2. Low taxes.
- 1.3. High wages.
- 1.4. Low inflation.
- 1.5. Low government spending.

2. Corruption. This includes, in order of occurrence:

- 2.1. A gradual and slow attack by Satan on personal morality and ethics. This begins with the wicked liberal media and is sanctioned by the government in the name of political and religious freedom, freedom of speech, and human rights.
 - 2.1.1. Political indifference. This facilitates items 2.1.2-2.1.5 below.
 - 2.1.2. Elimination of prayer in the schools in the name of "religious tolerance".
 - 2.1.3. Religious persecution in the workplace.
 - 2.1.4. Pornography and sex on TV and in the media in the name of "free speech".
 - 2.1.5. Greed for material gain perpetuated by the media and advertising.
 - 2.1.6. Idolatry: Worship money and power instead of God.

- 2.1.7. A government that gets so large that it becomes ineffective and unresponsive to the people because of its size, which cause inefficiencies that require taxes to be raised to exorbitant levels.
- 2.2. An attack by Satan on the family:
 - 2.2.1. Women's lib movement.
 - 2.2.2. Feminists maligning motherhood as the noble profession that it is.
 - 2.2.3. Reentry of women into the workforce and abandonment of their families.
 - 2.2.4. Kids staying at home and being raised by the media: "latch key kids".
 - 2.2.5. Decriminalization of abortion in the name of choice. This starts a wholesale slaughter of the most defenseless members of society whose only problem is that they aren't represented politically and so they are destroyed.
 - 2.2.6. Decriminalization of euthanasia in the name of "mercy". This starts a wholesale slaughter of the old people and the economically deprived.
 - 2.2.7. A new generation of wicked and corrupt children who were raised by the liberal media and the godless schools and who have no wisdom or discretion become adults and begin to vote.
 - 2.2.8. "No fault" divorce laws. These laws simply reward irresponsibility by spouses and encourage the breakup of families in the name of selfishness.
 - 2.2.9. An openly corrupt people who suppress and oppress their conscience and the Holy Spirit will then try to hide their sin or at least eliminate the public persecution of their sin. At this point, Satanism and hedonism becomes in effect a religion that they expect the same kind of protection for as religions enjoy. The result is the following on a large scale:
 - 2.2.9.1. Pride
 - 2.2.9.2. Lust
 - 2.2.9.3. Envy
 - 2.2.9.4. Greed
 - 2.2.9.5. Selfishness
 - 2.2.9.6. Lack of discernment.
- 2.3. High divorce rate (irresponsibility and selfishness). The consequence then becomes:
 - 2.3.1. Increase in single-parent families.
 - 2.3.2. Even less oversight and involvement by parents in the lives of their children, because now even more of them have to work.
 - 2.3.3. Even more influence by the liberal media and the amoral and areligious public school system on the lives of children.
 - 2.3.4. Further decay in religious values of succeeding generations.
 - 2.3.5. Worsening moral situation.
- 2.4. Legal assaults on religious groups by such organizations as the ACLU. This includes:
 - 2.4.1. Eliminating school prayer.
 - 2.4.2. Eliminating religion in the schools.
- 2.5. Political activism against religious groups.
 - 2.5.1. Preventing passage of laws that would enact school vouchers and parent choice in public education. This is financed by greedy teachers unions. It prevents parents who don't want liberal ideas taught to their children from being able to remove their children from public schools.
 - 2.5.2. Pushing for the passage of anti-hate crime bills, which are really just "hate against hate" bills. These laws criminalize certain thoughts and make the government into "thought police", who then have broad discretion to use the legal apparatus of the state to persecute any group based on their beliefs in the hypocritical name of human rights.

- 2.6. Criminalization of discrimination based on sexual preference using the lie that it is "genetic".
- 2.7. Revisionism of the school textbooks to glorify homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle.
- 2.8. Excessive over-reliance by private citizens on the government to do what the family should be doing. This includes:
 - 2.8.1. Social security
 - 2.8.2. Medicare.
 - 2.8.3. Welfare.
 - 2.8.4. Food stamps.
 - 2.8.5. AFDC.
- 2.9. Sexual promiscuity and pornography on public television and the media:
 - 2.9.1. Playboy channel.
 - 2.9.2. Howard Stern (what a vile, wicked person he is)
 - 2.9.3. Sex movies for rent in the privacy of your own home.
- 2.10. Development of a litigious society: Everything gets litigated because personal freedoms are so important that they are worth paying any price to get.
- 2.11. Increase in marital conflict over sex issues. Further increase in divorce rate, sex crimes.
- 2.12. Welfare becoming a lifestyle.
- 2.13. Assault by the government on businesses, which causes them to flee the country:
 - 2.13.1. Progressive taxes rates that punish success.
 - 2.13.2. Anti-trust lawsuits against successful companies.
 - 2.13.3. Over-regulation of the workplace by the government.
 - 2.13.4. Anti-discrimination laws that tie the hands of employers and prevent them from selecting the best qualified candidates.
3. Economic collapse. This occurs in the following sequence.
 - 3.1. Lack of will by the government to balance the budget. This equates with fiscal irresponsibility by elected officials. This lack of fiscal discipline results in chronic deficit spending.
 - 3.2. High or oppressive taxation or corruption of government officials with bribery.
 - 3.3. Government deficit spending which continues to increase taxes to pay off the debt.
 - 3.4. Consequent over-regulation by the government in order to pay the increasing taxes.
 - 3.5. High inflation caused by government deficit spending.
 - 3.6. Stock market crash. Reactive stock market.
 - 3.7. Cut in consumer spending.
 - 3.8. Layoffs and downsizing.
 - 3.9. High unemployment.
 - 3.10. Government declares bankruptcy and refuses to pay its debts. The people who then suffer are those who lent the government money, which undermines government credibility and makes debts for legitimate purposes later on more difficult to find lenders for.
4. Downfall and political instability.
 - 4.1. Riots, protests.
 - 4.2. Anger against God.
 - 4.3. Civil war.
 - 4.4. Heightened crime and unrest.
 - 4.5. Looting.
 - 4.6. Anarchy
 - 4.7. SUFFERING on a grand scale.
5. Conviction and God's judgment.
 - 5.1. People turn to history to try to explain what happened.

- 5.2. Suffering brings them into church for fellowship and help.
- 5.3. They become wise and are convicted of their sin.
- 5.4. The church tells them to repent.
- 5.5. People begin to realize the error of their ways and repent.
- 5.6. The political landscape changes to be more favorable to the truth being told, because people are dissatisfied with the status quo, which has demonstrated that it doesn't work. They want change and are willing to talk publicly about it.
- 5.7. The suffering people went through teaches them the value of political involvement.
- 5.8. People begin to vote and be politically active. They do this because they want a better life and the old ways don't work. Political indifference is gone.
6. Repentance and God's Forgiveness, Religious revival:
 - 6.1. People turn their problems over to God, and repent for their sin in their poverty.
 - 6.2. Political activism causes laws being to changed:
 - 6.2.1. Prayer in the schools.
 - 6.2.2. School vouchers.
 - 6.2.3. Strengthening of marriage.
 - 6.2.4. Criminalization of abortion.
 - 6.2.5. Criminalization of euthanasia.
 - 6.2.6. Criminalization of homosexuality.
 - 6.2.7. Criminalization of religious persecution.
 - 6.2.8. Criminalization of pornography.
 - 6.2.9. Simplification of the tax laws.
 - 6.2.10. Reduction in government taxes and spending.
 - 6.2.11. Elimination of deficit spending.
 - 6.3. Parents take their kids out of public schools and put them into private schools that have religious training and prayer.
 - 6.4. Divorce rate goes down.
 - 6.5. People are happier and suffer less.
 - 6.6. Companies who fled the country begin moving back because the laws and the workforce are more favorable to growth.
 - 6.7. Economic growth and prosperity.
 - 6.8. Stock market boom.
7. The cycle begins again!

2.3.14 Proper Attitude About Suffering and Problems in Our Lives

The Bible is filled with examples of people who suffered and how faith and endurance overcomes suffering. Christ, as we discussed above, suffered most for our sakes. Hebrews 12: 1-15 talks about how suffering is the primary tool which God uses to discipline and train his disciples. As we encounter vicissitudes in our lives, we need to continually remind ourselves what this scripture says because it is very easy to become discouraged:

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

*"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the Lord loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives."*

7 "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?"

8 But if you are without chastening of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.

13 and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

15 Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Another scripture that talks about suffering and trials and how we should handle them is James 1:2-4:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Solomon also had some inspirational things to say about how we as Christians should face suffering in Ecc. 7:2-5

2 Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is the house of mirth. 5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.

Solomon also said in Prov. 3:11-12:

My son, do not despise chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; 12 for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

To paraphrase what I think these scripture are saying, using more modern language, and applying the rest of what we read in this constitution to it:

1. Suffering is a gift from God that we ought to be happy we are receiving. It is a very important tool that God uses to help us mature as Christians, become wise, and develop a good heart and good character.
2. The fact that we are suffering should be interpreted as evidence that we aren't yet perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect and that He wants us to learn something from it, so like the loving Father that He is, he sends us to the "obedience school" called suffering so we can be "trained" about right

behavior by the pain we experience from wrong behavior. This training makes us patient and give us endurance, so that we can be a better blessing to Him.

3. We are the Lord's most precious resource and He loves us very much, but we aren't useful to Him unless we have been refined and molded into His image in the fire. Like gold and other precious metals, the Lord has to apply fire and heat to worthless dirt and rock to remove the sin and impurities from our foolish souls and to give us a new and golden purpose and direction in our lives that will better glorify Him. He needs to discipline us with the fire to purify and soften our heart so that the gold of righteousness is all that remains of the worthless dirt that was our original sinful human nature.
4. The heat, or suffering, we go through, like what Jesus experienced, is a natural part of the growth and refining process that all of God's children will inevitably encounter in their Christian walk. It is how He tests us and proves us and wins new souls to His kingdom. Many times, when the world sees how our faith leads us to handle problems, they are encouraged and they want the joy that we have, which draws them into pursuing the same kind of personal relationship that we enjoy with the Lord.
5. When we have problems and are experiencing heat in our lives, we should be on our knees asking the Lord: "Father, what is it that you want me to learn and to know from this situation, that I don't already know? What is the purpose for my life that I should glean from this situation, Lord, and how can I use it for Your glory and not my own selfish purposes?"
6. After we have prayed to the Lord and petitioned for His help, we should pursue the problem-solving techniques documented in section 3.1.4: Dealing with Personal Problems Effectively. This will ensure that we are doing everything we can to solve the problems, but we should do it prayerfully and frequently ask the Lord for His help and anointing in finding the right answers.

2.3.15 Repentance and Confession

Repentance was one of the first things that Jesus said in the first book of the new testament when he first appeared to the multitudes. It was the first and most important message and the main reason he appeared on the earth to be with mankind:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17)

Repentance is something that mainly sinners need to do, as Jesus pointed out in Luke 5:32:

"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

God is also happy when sinners repent, as described in Luke 15:10: *"Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

Proud people don't repent. Only humble people can truly repent of their sins. Therefore, we must work on being humble and eliminating pride before we can be effective and sincere and genuine in our repentance.

When we repent, we do more than sincerely say we are sorry to the person we hurt and to God. We also try to make things right for that person by trying hard to undo the damage we did to them if possible. This is how we demonstrate that we love them. When we are sincere in our repentance, then God commands Christians to forgive us (see Luke 17:3-4).

Paul gave us some idea in 2 Cor. 7:10-11 what the fruit of true repentance really is in the heart and behavior of the believer:

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

In Matthew chapter 3, we are introduced to the first New Testament evangel, none other than John the Baptist. In verse 1 of chapter 3 it says, "Now in those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying, Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Then in verse 8, further John said, "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance."

Let's look at Mark chapter 1 and verse 14. And again Mark introduces John, "After he had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God." And what was it? "Saying, The time is fulfilled and the gospel of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel."

Let's go to Luke chapter 15 verse 7, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who...what?...repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Verse 10, He tells a story about a woman who found a coin and rejoiced. "And in the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And then He tells a story of the prodigal son which is about a sinner who repented and a sinner who did not repent. The sinner who repented was the prodigal. And the sinner who would not repent was the brother who stayed in the house and wouldn't recognize his own sin.

The ministry of John the Baptist was repentance. The ministry of Jesus was repentance. The ministry of the disciples was repentance. And heaven recognizes it and rejoices when a sinner...what?...repents.

Chapter 16 of Luke, you know this record of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man died and went to Hades and was in torment. Lazarus, the beggar, died and went into the bosom of Abraham. And, of course, the rich man said, "Let me out of here so I can warn my brothers not to come here." But Abraham said in verse 29, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." But he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent."

Now what you're beginning to sense here is that this concept of repent is the very essence of the gospel invitation. It is a call to repent. When they say here, when Abraham says, "They will...rather when the rich man says to Abraham...they will repent," he is saying, "They will repent and believe the truth." That's all implied. But repentance is so obviously germane to the issue that the whole of gospel response could be summed up in the word "repent." John preached repentance. Jesus preached repentance. The disciples preached repentance. And the sinner here understood repentance.

Coming to the conclusion of Luke's gospel and bringing it very close to home, chapter 24 verse 46, Jesus sums up the gospel. "Thus it is written," Luke 24:46, "that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem."

In other words, we are called to preach what? Repentance. I hear a lot of people say they want to share their faith. I don't hear too many people say they want to go out and preach repentance. But that's really what we're called to do. We're called to preach repentance for forgiveness of sins, to proclaim it to all nations.

Now let's see what the early church did. Go to the book of Acts. Did they pick up on the ministry of John and Jesus and the disciples? Did they follow the instruction of the great commission that repentance for forgiveness was to be preached among all nations? Let's listen to Peter, Acts 2:38. Peter stands up on the day of Pentecost, this is the first sermon in the new era, the church is about to be founded and born after the resurrection. And what is the message that in fact is the invitation which gives birth to the church? Peter said in verse 38, "*Repent...repent.*" And he follows in the great train of John and Jesus and the disciples and follows obediently the commission of Luke 24:47, repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. And repentance, of course, provides for the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3 of Acts, we follow further into the ministry of the early church. And here again Peter is the preacher. This is his second sermon. He says to the Jews listening to him in verse 14, "You disowned the holy and righteous one, you asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead. A fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know. And the faith which comes through him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance just as your ruler did...your rulers did. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of the all the prophets that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled." Now verse 19, "Repent therefore and return in order that your sins may be wiped away." Again the gospel message is a call to repentance.

Chapter 11 takes us further in the expansion of the church. And we find again in chapter 11 the Apostle Peter is still the main figure. His duty here is to report to the Jews at Jerusalem what he has seen God do in saving Gentiles, namely Cornelius and his household. And in verse 18 it says, "When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God saying, Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

Now you're beginning to get the idea that repentance is a synonym for saving faith, that it's an essential ingredient and element.

Let's go further. Acts 17, now we go into the ministry of the Apostle Paul. And Paul finds himself in Acts 17 in the philosophical capital of the Hellenistic world and none other than the city of Athens. Finds himself on Mars Hill, on the *aereios pagos* there. And he is interacting with the philosophers, the erudite of that city. And he gives them this message in verse 30, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should...what?...repent, repent because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world." You better repent because He'll judge the world. He'll judge it in righteousness. He'll judge it through a man He appointed, a man who was proven to be worthy by being raised from the dead. So Paul preached repentance.

Let's go to chapter 20. Here Paul is instructing the Ephesian elders. The Ephesian elders were largely responsible for giving leadership to all the churches of Asia Minor. They were key leaders. And Paul reminds them in verse 21 that his ministry was to solemnly testify to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul preached to church leaders the matter of repentance, knowing full well that they in turn were to preach repentance to others.

And then turn to chapter 26 verse 20. Here is Paul before King Agrippa. And he says to him in verse 19 of chapter 26, "Consequently, King Agrippa, I didn't prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first and also at Jerusalem and through out all the region of Judea and even to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God performing deeds appropriate to repentance."

Now, folks, that was Paul's classic definition of gospel preaching. It is preaching repentance. And it was because he preached repentance that they seized him, verse 21 says, and tried to put me to death. So you can see that the early church picked up on the preaching of Jesus and picked up on the preaching of John and picked up on the preaching of the disciples and was faithful to proclaim repentance from sin...turning from sin to God.

Paul writes in Romans 2:4, "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Now mark that. Mark that. The preaching of John was geared to repentance. The preaching of Jesus was geared to repentance. The preaching of the disciples was geared to repentance. The preaching of the early church was geared to repentance. And even the work of God is geared to produce repentance. Why? Because it says in 2 Peter, again chapter 3 verse 9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to...what?...repentance."

Dear friend, may I say to you this? That in that verse repentance is a synonym for what? Salvation. There can be no believing without repentance. There can be no salvation without repentance. Repentance is a synonym. It is an element within the saving work of God that is so essential that the saving work of God can actually be called repentance, turning.

There are other invitations in the New Testament that call for this without using the word. For example, look at Mark 8:34 and here the Lord Jesus is giving an invitation. "He summoned the multitude to gather together with the already present disciples and He said to that great congregation, that multitude of people, If anyone wishes to come after Me," you want to be My disciples, you want to follow Me, "let him deny himself and take up his cross," that is willingness to die, giving his life, "and follow Me." Now that is a call for turning, turning away from self, turning away from sin, turning to Christ.

Look at Luke chapter 9 and again just two verses there, 23, same thought, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me, for whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." That's an invitation. That's an invitation to a sinner to turn from controlling his own life to follow Christ.

You say, "Are you sure that's spoken to sinners? You sure He's not telling an already saved person to deny himself, take up his cross and be a more devout follower? You sure He's not saying you might die in chastening if you don't give up your life? Are you sure He's talking to unbelievers?"

Well, from verse 25 we know because He says immediately, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" Or in the Authorized, "Loses his own...what?...soul." He's talking about whether you're going to lose your soul or not, not whether you're going to lose your reward or your blessing. So this is a call to turn from a self- directed life, a self-indulgent life, a sinful life to follow Christ.

Chapter 14 of Luke verse 26, "If anyone comes to Me and doesn't hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he can't be My disciples." What a

statement. And then He follows up, "Whoever doesn't carry his own cross and come after Me can't be My disciple." There's a price. It's a turning. It's a turning from your own will, your own way, the things that hold you, the relationships that confine you to follow Christ at all costs. And you better count the cost, verse 28, "Which one of you when he wants to build a tower doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise when he's laid a foundation not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, The man began to build and wasn't able to finish. Or what king when he sets out to meet another king in battle will not first sit down, take counsel whether he's strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace."

So follow this, "Therefore no one of you can be My disciple who doesn't give up...what?...all his possessions." My, it's a turning, it's a turning from your own life, your own will, your own way, your own sin to follow at all cost. It is a change of mind. It is a change of heart. It is a new life of denying self and sin and seeing the Savior as Lord and King in self's place.

How important is it to repent? Jesus said it, we just read it, Luke 13:3 and 5, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Beloved, from just that brief look at the gospels and the Acts, a verse out of Romans and 2 Peter, we can see that the early preachers preached repentance. And I just...I've asked the Lord to give me a new dose of repentance in my preaching because the subject has been so ignored, tragically ignored. Where is that kind of preaching today? Where do you hear that kind of evangelism today? It's not fashionable to preach a gospel that demands that people give up all their possessions. The gospel you hear today is come to Jesus and you'll be rich. The gospel today is believe in Jesus and He'll forgive all your sin and give you heaven and you don't have to worry about giving up anything. That's not what Jesus preached. Repent, turn from your sin and your selfishness.

Now how in the world did this essential element of gospel preaching become avoided? Where did we lose it? Because it isn't around. You rarely ever hear the word.

We can go back to 1937, Dr. Harry A. Ironside, great man of God, Bible teacher. Dr. Ironside in 1937 noted that the biblical doctrine of repentance was being systematically diluted by those who wished to exclude it from the gospel message, 1937...fifty years ago. Ironside said they're trying to exclude it from the gospel message.

Let me quote from the book he wrote entitled *Except Ye Repent*. He was a champion for repentance and rightly so. He wrote this, "*The doctrine of repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today.*" This is not a new battle. This is an old battle. People today are preaching a gospel that says, "*Well, look, just believe, don't worry about your sin, don't worry about your past, just believe and that will all come later.*" Ironside fought that battle in 1937.

Further he said this, he spoke of, quote: "*Professed preachers of grace who like the antinomians of old decry the necessity of repentance lest it seem to invalidate the freedom of grace and that was the core issue.*" There were some who said if you call for repentance you're invalidating the freedom of grace and grace is so gracious and so free you don't have to do anything but just believe. Ironside recognized in his day the dangers of an insipient easy believism.

Further he said, "*Shallow preaching that does not grapple with the terrible fact of man's sinfulness and guilt, calling on all men everywhere to repent results in shallow conversions. And so we have myriads*"

of glib-tongued professors today who give no evidence of regeneration whatever. Prating of salvation by grace, they manifest no grace in their lives. Loudly declaring they are justified by faith alone, they fail to remember that faith without works is dead and that justification by works before men is not to be ignored as though it were in contradiction to justification by faith before God."

Harry Ironside in 1937 was on target fighting the same battle. And if we go backwards from there, back into church history, we also note that the history of the church records the testimony of God's leaders regarding the essential nature of repentance. Let me take you all the way back. How about the early church fathers 150 A.D., okay? Fifty years after John the Apostle died, that's early. Let me read you from the Second Epistle of Clement in 150 A.D., this is what it says, "*Let us not merely call Him Lord for that will not save us, for He says, 'Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will be saved, but he who does what is right.' Thus, brothers, let us acknowledge Him by our actions, this would end the world to come...this world, rather, and the world to come are two enemies, this one means adultery, corruption, avarice and deceit while the other gives them up. We cannot then be friends of both. To get the one we must give up the other.*" That's repentance...that's repentance.

That's exactly what James said. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. You are either the friend of the world or the friend of God, not both...that's repentance.

How about Martin Luther? In 1517, Martin Luther fired the shot that's been heard around the world when he pinned to the church door at Wittenberg his Ninety-Five Thesis. He postulated 95 principles that he thought the Roman Catholic Church ought to acknowledge. I don't know if you're aware of what those 95 were but after tonight you're going to be aware of what the first three were because here they are.

Number one, this is what was on the door at Wittenberg. "*Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in saying 'Repent ye,' meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance.*"

Number two of his Ninety-Five Thesis, "*This saying cannot be understood of the sacrament of Penance, i.e., of confession and absolution which is administered by the priesthood.*"

Three, "*Yet He does not mean interior repentance only, nay, interior repentance is void if it does not produce different kinds of mortifications of the flesh.*" So said Martin Luther, three main points.

One, repentance is a way of life. Two, it has nothing to do with church sacraments, confession and absolution. Three, it's not just inward it produces mortification of the flesh. Martin Luther was right on target.

Let's move to the next century, 1674. In 1674 the theological masterpiece known as the "Westminster Shorter Catechism" was assembled. And in that catechism which some of you have perhaps read or even studied if you come from a reformed background, there's a series of questions and answers...that's what catechetical teaching was...question and answer, question and answer, question and answer, and you taught your children the catechism and eventually they memorized all the elements of theology.

One of the questions in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is this, what is repentance unto life? Answer, repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience. Great statement. It is a saving grace, that is it comes from God, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God

in Christ doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

Further the catechism says, "*Repentance unto life doth chiefly consist in two things. One, in turning from sin and forsaking it. Two, in turning to God.*"

Then comes the next question in the catechism. What is that turning from sin which is part of true repentance? Answer, the turning from sin which is a part of true repentance doth consist in two things. One, in turning from all gross sins in regard of our course and conversation. Two, in a turning from all other sins in regard of our hearts and affections. In other words, it's turning from sin in what you do and turning from sin in what you think.

The next question. Do such as truly repent of sin never return again unto the practice of the same sins which they have repented of? Answer, such as have truly repented of sin do never return unto the practice of it so as to live in a course of sin as they did before. And where any after repentance do return unto a course of sin, it is an evident sign that their repentance was not of the right kind. Some have truly repented of their sins although they may be overtaken and surprised by temptations so as to fall into the commission of the same sins which they have repented of yet they do not lie in them but get up again and with bitter grief bewail them and return again unto the Lord. So says the Westminster Catechism.

How about the Puritans? What did they believe about repentance? James Goodwin is representative of them, the British Puritan wrote this, "*Where mourning,*" that is weeping, "*for offending God is wanting,*" or lacking, "*there is no sign of any good well yet wrought in the heart to God nor of love to Him without which God will never accept a man.*" In other words, he's saying if there's no mourning over sin, it's evident God hasn't worked in the heart. "*Else there is no hope of amendment. God will not pardon till He sees hopes of amendment. Now until a man confesses his sin and that with bitterness, it is a sign that he loves it. Whilest he hides it, spares it and forsakes it not, it is sweet in his mouth and therefore till he confess it and mourn for it, it is a sign it is not bitter to him and so he will not forsake it. A man will never leave sin till he finds bitterness in it and if so, then he will be in bitterness for it. And godly sorrow works repentance.*"

Of all the statements that I have read on the subject, the strongest one comes from Charles Hadden Spurgeon. Listen to what Spurgeon said. "*There must be a true and actual abandonment of sin and a turning unto righteousness in real act and deed in every day life. Repentance, to be sure, must be entire. How many will say, Sir, I will renounce this sin and the other...but there are certain darling lusts which I must keep and hold? Oh, sirs, in God's name let me tell you, it is not the giving up of one sin, nor 50 sins which is true repentance. It is the solemn renunciation of every sin. If thou dost harbor one of those accursed vipers in thy heart and dost give up every other, that one lust like one leak in a ship will sink thy soul. Think it not sufficient to give up thy outward vices, fancy it not enough to cut off the more corrupt sins of thy life, it is all or none which God demands. Repent, says He, and when He bids you repent, He means repent of all thy sins otherwise He can never accept thy repentance as real and genuine. All sin must be given up or else you will never have Christ. All transgression must be renounced or else the gates of heaven must be barred against you. Let us remember then that for repentance to be sincere, it must be entire repentance. True repentance is a turning of the heart as well as of the life. It is the giving up of the whole soul to God to be His forever and ever. It is the renunciation of the sins of the heart as well as the crimes of the life,*" end quote.

Strong enough? What Spurgeon is saying is and what he's reflecting is the teaching of the church through all its centuries that the sinner beats on his breast and says, "*God, be merciful to me a sinner,*"

and is compelled to seek deliverance from all his sin, though it's not necessary that he recite every single sin. There's a desire in his heart to be freed from all of it. And Spurgeon is saying if you come to Christ and say I want You to be my Savior and I want You to give me forgiveness and I want You to promise me heaven, but there's some sins I want to keep holding onto, that's not sincere repentance.

So, we've looked at the Scripture, a message of repentance. We've looked at the history of the church, an affirmation of repentance. Beloved, in spite of all the scripture and all that the history of the church reflects, there are some people who continue to declare that preaching repentance to the unsaved violates the gospel. Did you get that? They teach that preaching repentance to the unsaved violates the gospel.

For example, no less an eminent theologian than Louis Barry Chaffer(?) writes in Volume 3, page 372 that repentance is one of the more common features of human responsibility which are too often erroneously added to the one requirement of faith or belief.

Absolutely incredible statement. Repentance is a human responsibility erroneously added to faith? It seems to me that it's interchangeable for saving faith in the biblical record.

You say, "Well, where does that come from? I mean, how can a person hold that view?" Well, Chaffer pointed out that in Acts 16:31, Paul did not tell the Philippian jailer to repent. He's right. You know what he said to the Philippian jailer as recorded in Scripture? "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved.*" Chaffer says this, "*Paul did not tell the Philippian jailer to repent,*" then he says this, "*that silence he called, an overwhelming mass of irrefutable evidence making it clear that the New Testament does not impose repentance on the unsaved as a condition of salvation.*"

I find it hard to understand that. What reasoning is that? You want to know something else Paul didn't say to the Philippian jailer? He didn't say Jesus was God, according to the record of Acts 16:31. He didn't say Jesus died on a cross. He didn't say Jesus rose from the dead. You want to know something? He probably said all of that including all there was to say about repentance but it was all summed up by Luke when he penned it under the inspiration of the Spirit just to give him that one statement. Because "*believing*" implied repentance, and the Lord Jesus Christ replied...implies all that He is and all that He did. But to argue from silence and cancel out every other element of repentance in the record of the New Testament and say that because it's not there that's an overwhelming mass of evidence is mind boggling. And one popular local pastor said, "*Repentance does not mean to turn from sin, nor change one's conduct.*"

Now, you see, the reason they have to say that is because they have to deal with the word "repentance." It's there. Another well-known teacher of the Bible says, "*Repentance means to change one's mind, not one's life.*" Aha, now we're getting close to the issue. Because you're asking yourself, "How in the world can people say repentance isn't an element if it just says repent, repent, repent all the time?"

And what you have to understand is they redefine repentance. And what they say is that repentance means to change your mind about who Jesus is, nothing more. Repentance is a change of mind about who Christ is, has nothing to do with turning from sin, has nothing to do with abandoning self-rule. It is utterly devoid of the recognition of personal guilt. It has no element of intention to obey God. It has no element of an intention or a desire for true righteousness. It's just to change your mind about who Jesus is.

You say, "Well, what in the world do they do with things like Jesus saying, 'If you want to come after Me, you have to deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Me?'" What do they do with the words of

Jesus, 'You have to hate your father, your mother, your sister, brother,' and so forth and so forth and so forth? What do they do? They say, "Oh all of that is directed to people that are already saved and that's calling them to the highest level of spiritual commitment."

That doesn't fly, folks. Because it's in that very passage that He said, "*What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?*" He's talking about your eternal soul. But they then have to take every one of Jesus' statements that call people to total commitment to abandon everything to follow Him and make them statements directed at already saved people calling them to the higher life. And so they conclude that when Jesus called someone to be a disciple, He was calling a believer to a second level. And a Christian is one thing and a disciple is another. But they say yes, you repent in the fact that you change your mind about who Jesus is. It has nothing to do with turning from sin. It has nothing to do with abandoning self rule. It has no recognition of personal guilt, no intent to obey God, and no desire for true righteousness. And I submit to you that that is not what Jesus intended by repentance. The gospel call of Jesus was a call to forsake sin as much as it was a summons to believe in Him. It was a call to turn from sin. From His first message to His last, the Savior's theme was calling sinners to turn from their sin, to embrace God, to pursue righteousness. It was not only that they had a new perspective on who He was, but that they turn from sin to follow Him.

And Luke, as we noted in chapter 24 and verse 47, said that when you go to preach, Jesus said, "*Preach repentance for forgiveness of sins.*" And if you're coming to Christ for forgiveness of sins, the thing that leads to it is repentance.

By the way, Luke is the only gospel writer who gives the content of the message that is inherent in the great commission. The other writers just give the commission, "Go and preach." Luke says, "*This is what you preach, repentance which leads to the forgiveness of sins.*"

And so, repentance is always linked to sin. It's not just changing your mind about who Jesus is. "Oh, I thought He was a man, now I know He's God." Not just that. It implies turning from sin.

Let me give you an illustration. Look at Luke 18...Luke 18 verse 9, it's a parable, a parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, viewed others with contempt, Pharisees namely. "*Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee the other a tax gatherer. The Pharisee stood, was praying, talks to himself, God, I thank Thee that I'm not like other people, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, even like this tax gatherer. I fast twice a week. I pay tithes of all I can get.*" He was there confessing to God his...what?...his righteousness. Yeah...let me ask you a question? Did he believe in God? Did the Pharisee believe in God? Yes. Did he have faith in God? Yes. Was he saved? No. Why? Because his faith was devoid of what? Of repentance.

You see, that's a classic illustration of the fact that here is a man who believed in God. Here is a man who is devoted to God. Here is a man who went into the temple to pray to the God he believed in. But where there was no repentance in the heart, there was no relationship. He was a fraud.

The tax gatherer standing over there pounding on his breast crying, "*God, be merciful to me the sinner.*" Jesus said, "*I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.*" That first guy never knew salvation. He was a believer who didn't repent. The second guy was an unbeliever who repented. He was a spiritual and religious outcast but he repented. And inherent in that, of course, was the expression of faith. You cannot take repentance and strip it of its moral implications.

Now let me give you a quick definition. Okay? All of that introduction comes down to what we're talking about. What is the biblical definition of repentance? Number one, it's an element within saving faith. In fact, it can be used as an expression interchangeably with saving faith. We are to preach repentance. We're to call men to repentance. That means to saving faith. It's so inherent it can be used as a synonym for saving faith. You can call on someone and say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Or you could call and say, "*Repent of your sin and embrace Christ.*" Same thing. It is simply all that salvation is.

But let me make this very clear. It is not a synonym in the purest sense for believe because it doesn't mean the same. It is inherent in believing and believing is inherent in repentance so that the terms can be used interchangeably but each of those terms expresses a unique element. Believing expresses just that--trust, confidence, faith. Repentance expresses turning from sin toward God. They are complementary parts of the same process, said Burkhoﬀ in his systematic theology.

Now the Greek word is *metanoeo* and, you know, it comes from two words, meta, after and noeo, to understand, and it means an afterthought. So if you just took those words and put them together it would mean an afterthought or a change of mind. And some of these people who want to say repentance is nothing more than changing your mind about who Jesus is say, you see, that's what meta noeo means. But listen, folks, that is something that you see often done with Greek words that's so unfair. Not every word is necessarily the sum of its separate parts. Because meta means this and noeo means this, when you put them together it doesn't necessarily mean what those two parts mean. Often it does, often it doesn't.

Let's illustrate in English? We have a word in English "independent." Right? Now if you push that too far you could say, "I know what that means, that means in de pen there is a dent." No, it doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean in de pen there is a dent because in English...in English every word is not necessarily the sum of all its parts. It's true in Greek. You've got to go deeper than that. And the biblical meaning is much deeper than that.

Metanoeo as used in the New Testament always embodies more than the literal meaning of its component terms. It always speaks of a change of purpose and it specifically always speaks of a turning from sin.

One of the helpful tools that we use in studying the Greek language is Colin Brown's work, massive tome, this big, three volumes. In the section on conversion by Gettsman(?) Volume 1 page 358, he's dealing with *metanoeo* and this, of course, from a very scholarly perspective. And this is a quote: "*The predominantly intellectual understanding of metanoeo as a change of mind plays very little part in the New Testament. Rather the decision by the whole man to turn around is stressed. It is clear that we are concerned neither with a purely outward turning, nor with a merely intellectual change of ideas.*" So says the best of scholarship. In the sense that Jesus used it, repentance incorporated or repudiation of the old life and a turning to God for salvation.

The other number one source for understanding all there is about Greek words was produced by Kittel. Colin Brown is this big, Kittel is even bigger. Every significant New Testament word is there in an exhaustive treatment. Let me read you what Beam says writing on *metanoeo* in Gerhard Kittel. Quote: "*The term demands radical conversion, demands a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience. This conversion is once for all. There can be no going back, only advance and responsible movement along the way now taken. It effects the whole man. First and basically the center of personal life, then logically his conduct at all times and in all situations,*

his thoughts, words and acts. The whole proclamation of Jesus is a proclamation of unconditional turning to God, of unconditional turning from all that is against God, not merely that which is downright evil but that which in a given case makes total turning to God impossible," end quote.

That's how they understand it from the technical side, the meaning of the word. This would be supported, wouldn't it, from 1 Thessalonians 1:9, do you remember that verse? Look at it. First Thessalonians 1:9, here is a chronicle of the elements of repentance. The second half of the verse, Paul reminds the Thessalonians how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God. Three elements of repentance, they're right there. One, turning to God. Two, turning from evil. Three, serving God. You turned to God from idols and all that's evil with them to serve God. Three elements of repentance: turning to God from evil to serve God. Beautiful summary. No...listen to me...no change of mind about who Jesus is can save until those three elements are present...turning from sin to God to serve Him. Repentance is an element within saving faith.

Second point, it involves a redirection of the will...it involves a redirection of the will. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *metanoeo* as quote: "*The change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds and have determined to enter upon a better course of life so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds," end quote.*

In other words, it's a redirection of the will that results in a changed behavior. It's not merely sorrow for sin, although genuine repentance always has sorrow. It is a redirection of the human will. It is a choice to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue holiness. And please, beloved, it is that redirection of the will that is the work of God. We're not talking about something you do, we're talking about God doing something in you when He saves you.

People say, "Well, you're teaching that this is some pre- salvation work and until you clean your life up and repent you can't get saved." No, repentance is not a pre-salvation attempt to get your life cleaned up. It is not a call to stop sinning so you can get saved. Not at all. It is not just an invitation to turn your back on all evil so Christ will accept you. It is the thing which God produces in you when He saves you. It's an element of saving faith that redirects the will.

J.I. Packer in his helpful little book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* writes, "*The repentance that Christ requires of His people consists in a settled refusal to set any limit to the claims which He may make on their lives.*" It's not just a mental activity.

There's an intellectual aspect as well. Repentance involves recognition of sin, recognition of the sinfulness of sin, recognition that sin affronts a holy God. It involves the intellectual recognition that I'm personally responsible for my sin and my guilt. It includes the recognition that Christ died for my sin and that He as God wants to rule my life, that's the intellectual part of repentance.

Secondly, it has an emotional part. That recognition produces sorrow, it produces new desires and new impulses, it produces shame. And 2 Corinthians 7:10 says there is a sorrow that leads to repentance. So it starts out, you see that sin is sinful, you see that you are guilty, you see that Christ has provided intellectually and then it touches your emotions and there's a brokenness and a sorrow and a shame and a guilt that pours out and out of that sorrow comes the third element, and that is the volitional. Finally, repentance enacts the will and brings a change of direction, a new determination to abandon stubborn disobedience and surrender your life to Christ. And then it produces a changed behavior. *Where there's*

no changed behavior, repentance may have been intellectual and it may have been emotional but it was never volitional. It redirects the will when it's genuine.

Thirdly, and as a result, it's life changing. It's an element of saving faith, it activates the will, redirects it, and it's life changing. That's why John said, "*Bring forth fruit, meat, for repentance.*" You say you repent, let's see your life. Demonstrate it. Real repentance alters the character of a person.

One of my heroes, the men that I esteem highly, is Martyn Lloyd-Jones. One of the books that's blessed me that he wrote has to do with the Sermon on the Mount. In it he writes this, he's now with the Lord, "*Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you and that you long to get rid of it and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practices, and you deny yourself and take up the cross and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest and the whole world may call you a fool or say you have religious mania, you may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference. That is repentance.*"

It becomes an ongoing way of life. The repentance that begins at salvation starts a progressive life-long process of confession of sin. First John 1:9, we go on confessing our sin. The active continuous attitude of repentance produces the poverty of spirit, the mourning, the meekness that characterizes true believers in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. Repentance produces a new way of life, not just a different opinion about Christ...a new way of life. Those who heard Jesus preach knew what He was calling for, believe me. The Jews knew exactly what He was calling for. He wasn't asking them just to change their opinion about Him. They knew what Isaiah said when Isaiah preached, what did he preach? Isaiah 1:16, this is what Isaiah preached, "*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from My sight, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice. And then though your sins be as scarlet they shall be...what?...white as snow. Though they're red like crimson, they'll be like wool if you wash yourselves, if you make yourselves clean.*"

The progression begins internally and then manifests itself in attitudes and actions. The end of Isaiah, or near the end, chapter 55, we find the same kind of call. Two verses, rich verses on this matter of repentance...I don't know how they overlook these. "*Seek the Lord while He may be found,*" Isaiah 55:6, "*Call upon Him while He is near.*" How do I do that? "*Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him and to our God for He will abundantly pardon.*" He'll pardon when the wicked forsakes his way and the unrighteous man forsakes his thoughts and turns to the Lord.

That familiar text often misused and perhaps too frequently avoided, 2 Chronicles 7:14, "*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 and will forgive their sin.*" When they turn, when they repent... And I'll tell you, when John the Baptist preached repentance, nobody missed it, they knew what he said and they knew exactly what he meant.

Where are the fruits? Prove your repentance by your life. And what are the fruits of repentance? Simply righteous deeds, holy deeds, godly deeds, transformed life. In Luke 3 we have the record of that very account of which I just quoted where the Pharisees came and approached again, as often they did, John the Baptist always wanting to parade their piosity and John says to them in verse 7 of Luke 3, "*You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*" What are you doing here, you snakes? "*Bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance,*" he says. Where are those fruits? What are they? Verse

10, *"The multitudes said, What do we do? What should we do? What are the fruits of repentance? Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none, let him who has food do likewise. Some tax gatherers came to be baptized, they said, Teacher, what do we do? What are the fruits of repentance? Collect no more than what you've been ordered to. Some of the soldiers came and said, Well, what do we do? And He said, Don't take money from anyone by force or accuse anyone falsely and be content with what your wages are."* Pretty practical stuff, right?

You want to know where true repentance shows up? In the character of your daily living. Do you give your cloak to one who doesn't have one? Do you make sure you don't take anything from anyone that you don't deserve? You don't force people. You don't accuse people falsely. Are you content with whatever your wages are? That's where the genuineness of your repentance shows up. That's pretty mundane stuff, folks. And, beloved, I submit to you that no message that doesn't press for repentance can properly be called the gospel. Conversion to Jesus is more than a break with an old thought pattern, it's a new life...it's a new life.

Beam says, writing again in Kittel's volumes, *"To be converted embraces all that the dawn of God's Kingdom demands of man,"* a changed life. And please understand, I don't think that anyone could miss my heart on this, this is not something you do so you can get yourself saved, this is something God's Spirit produces in you in saving you. That's why it says, and we've been reading it in 2 Timothy, and this is an essential passage for us to grasp, chapter 2 verse 25, that God may grant them repentance. It's a gift of God...it's a gift of God. Acts 11:31, that God has granted repentance to the Gentiles. It's a gift of God.

Let me close with this last passage, Matthew 21:28: *"What do you think?"* Jesus said. Think this one through with me, will you? *"A man had two sons. He came to the first, said, Son, go work today in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I will, sir. And he didn't go." You've got a son like that? "He came to the second, said the same thing. He said, I will not. Afterward, regretted what he said and went. Which of the two did the will of his father? The crowd said, The latter. Jesus said to him, Truly I say to you, tax gatherers and harlots will get into the Kingdom of God before you."*

Potent, my friend. Jesus describes two kinds of people, are you ready for this? People who pretend to be obedient but are actually rebels in their heart. They pretend to be obedient but they're rebels in their heart. And people who begin as rebels but do what? Repent. He told it for the benefit of the Pharisees who pretended to be obedient to God but were rebels in their hearts. And then there were the harlots and the tax gatherers who started out as rebels but repented.

There's no salvation apart from repentance. Let's bow together in prayer.

I'm reminded, Lord, of the words of James, *"Submit therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you, draw near to God and He will draw near to you, cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom, humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you."*

Father, give us an understanding of the call to repentance. My prayer is for anyone here who has pretended to be obedient but in the heart is a rebel, who says to God, *"I will go"* and does not. O God, transform that life, bring true repentance.

2.3.16 Responsibility

Responsibility is an important aspect of being a Christian. Responsibilities arise out of relationships and the role we play in those relationships. The most important relationship we can have, of course, is the personal relationship we have with Jesus Christ.

Responsibilities are defined either by promises exchanged between the parties to the relationship, by laws passed by the government, by contracts between parties, or by constitutions such as the Constitution of the United States or this Family Constitution. There are a lot of institutions and people that we as Christians are told by God in the Bible to demonstrate responsibility toward, and they are listed below in decreasing order of importance:

1. God:

- 1.1. You shall have no other Gods before me: Exodus 20:3.
- 1.2. Do not use the name of the Lord in vain: Exodus 20:7.
- 1.3. Keep the sabbath day holy: Exodus 20:8.
- 1.4. Fear God and keep his commandments: Ecc. 12:13-14.
- 1.5. Do not worship idols: Exodus 20:4-6.
- 1.6. Do not trust your emotions or your own heart: Prov. 28:26.
- 1.7. Confess your sins: Prov. 28:13.

2. Spouses

- 2.1. Must not divorce our spouse: Mark 10:2-9
- 2.2. Yield sexually to our spouse: 1 Cor. 7:3-5
- 2.3. Husbands honor their wives: Eph. 5:25-29; Col. 3:19
- 2.4. Wives respect and submit to their husbands: Eph. 5:22-25; Eph 5:33.
- 2.5. Don't commit adultery: Exodus 20:14.

3. Parents

- 3.1. Must Raise children to love God: Deut. 6:4-9.
- 3.2. Must discipline their children: Prov. 19:18; 22:6; 29:15.

4. Children

- 4.1. Must honor their father and mother: Eph. 6:1-3.

5. Managers/Employers:

- 5.1. Praise good works: Romans 13:13.
- 5.2. Be diligent: Prov. 12:24.
- 5.3. Be a good example: Matt. 5:16.

6. Employees:

- 6.1. Obey the law: 1 Peter 2:13-15.
- 6.2. Be subject to your boss: Romans 13:1.
- 6.3. Support your family through your work: 1 Tim. 5:8.
- 6.4. Value credibility: Prov. 22:1.
- 6.5. Do not isolate yourself, attend meetings: Prov. 18:1.
- 6.6. Do not lie: Prov. 19:9, Prov. 21:6.
- 6.7. Be diligent: Prov. 21:5.
- 6.8. Pay your taxes and show respect: Romans 13:7.
- 6.9. Work for the glory of the Lord: Eph. 6:5-8.
- 6.10. Don't curse the boss: Ecc. 10:20.
- 6.11. Be a good example: Matt. 5:16.

7. Neighbors and people in general:

- 7.1. Love your neighbor: Matt. 19:19.
- 7.2. Don't lie: Exodus 20:16.

7.3. Don't steal: Exodus 20:14.

7.4. Do not murder: Exodus 20:13.

7.5. Rebuke the wicked: Prov. 24:25.

7.6. Do not be greedy: Prov. 15:27.

7.7. Be humble and do not be proud: Phi. 2:2-4, Eph. 4:2; Prov. 16:18-19.

7.8. Don't fornicate as an unmarried person and deliver fornicators for discipline: 1 Cor. 5:18.

7.9. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (the Golden Rule): Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31.

8. Human government

8.1. We should be obedient and responsible to human government: Romans 13:1-7.

Responsibility means we live up to what people and God expect of us. It means we fully and faithfully honor our promises and the people we have relationships with, and by doing this, we demonstrate righteousness and glorify God. When we don't, we are guilty of sin, as described in chapter 7, and we disgrace God, because people around us know that we are Christians and will know us by our fruit (Matt. 7:15-20).

Oaths are one vehicle by which responsibilities are created. Jesus said we shouldn't take oaths in Matt 5:33-37:

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

34 "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

36 "Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

37 "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

What He was saying here is that we shouldn't make oaths to God or the temple or our religion. This would imply that it's OK to make promises and commitments, but we shouldn't do them as part of an oath to God or our religious faith or the temple. He was saying this, I believe, because he didn't want people who couldn't live up to their commitments making the church or their religion or God look bad as a result of their irresponsibility.

Another type of vehicle by which responsibilities are created is vows, which in contemporary terms are promises. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 indicates that we should be diligent to fulfill our vows and promises:

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed--

5 Better not to vow than to vow and not to pay.

Deuteronomy 23:21 adds to this that if we vow and do not pay, then we are guilty of sin against God.

2.3.17 Righteousness

Righteousness is characterized by the following:

1. God is righteous and loves righteousness and the righteous:

*For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright.
(Ps 11:7)*

2. Righteousness consists of obedience to God's laws and seeking His will rather than our own.

Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all those commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us. (Deut. 6:25.)

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. (Luke 1:6)

3. Jesus Christ loved righteousness and preached it:

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption--" 1 Cor 1:30

Note that we did not identify the righteous as one who obeys earthly laws or man's laws. It may be true that a person can be righteous by following the laws of a particular province or ruler, but only to the extent that the ruler or the laws are Godly. This derives from Acts 5:29: *"We must obey God rather than men."*

Righteousness is a vehicle by which God blesses us as Christians:

He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing the bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil: 16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure. Is. 33:15-16

The wicked man does deceptive work, But he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward. (Prov. 11:18).

Righteousness makes us bold and gives us courage:

The wicked flee when no one pursues, But he righteous are bold as a lion. (Prov. 28:1)

2.3.18 Tithing

We believe that God expects us to tithe our income to the Lord to further his causes, in accordance with Mal. 3:8-10.

According to Barna Research, a nondenominational polling organization, below are some startling statistics on tithing in the U.S.:⁶

Evangelicals Are the Most Generous Givers, but Fewer Than 10% of Born Again Christians Give 10% to Their Church

(Ventura, CA) As millions of Americans focus on submitting this year's tax forms before the mid-April deadline, a new survey conducted by the Barna Research Group shows that although most people can claim a deduction for charitable giving, relatively few people proved to be substantial givers. Among the most surprising findings is that born again Christians are much more generous than the norm, but very few give 10% or more of their income - a proportion described in the Bible as a "tithe" - to their church.

⁶ <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=52>; Apr. 5, 2000; Barna Research.

Most People Share Their Wealth

More than four out of every five adults donated some money to non-profit organizations last year. Eighty four percent made at least one donation during the year, which is a slight decrease from the 87% who did so in 1998. The people most likely to share their wealth with others were evangelicals (93%), Builders (ages 54-72, of whom 93% gave), people from households making over \$60,000 (93%), and political conservatives (91%). The people least likely to give contributions included adults who do not attend a church (27% of whom made no donations last year); Baby Busters (21%); Hispanics (24%); people with household incomes under \$30,000 (25%); political moderates (20%); individuals who are not registered to vote (24%); and adults who are not born again Christians (20%).

The median amount of money given to non-profits and churches by the typical adult last year was \$300. That is a 14% decline from 1998 levels (\$350 median per person). Even more telling was the decline in the mean total gift amount. The average for 1999 was \$1045 per adult. That represents a 24% decline from 1998, when the average cumulative giving was \$1377. The subgroups with the highest average giving were evangelical Christians (\$2476); households making \$60,000 or more (\$1687); born again Christians (\$1651); registered Republicans (\$1612); college graduates (\$1599); political conservatives (\$1533); people 54 or older (\$1341); and residents of the South (\$1281).

Among the largest declines in mean giving were the 36% drop in giving from non-born again adults. The decline among born again Christians was only 13% - substantial, but well below the 24% national decrease.

Overall, one out of every four adults (26%) donated more than \$1000 to charities, churches and other non-profits during the past year. That percentage remained unchanged from the year before.

Giving to Churches Increases

In opposition to the decreased overall giving of donors, churches actually received more money from adults in 1999 than they did in the previous year. Although there was no change in the proportion who failed to donate anything to churches (34%) compared to 1998, the average (mean) cumulative giving to churches rose from \$750 to \$806 per adult in 1999, a jump of 7%. The median donation level remained constant, at \$100. (The median is the level at which there are equal numbers of people who gave less than the median as gave more. The huge disparity between the mean and median figures underscores the fact that there are substantial numbers of people whose giving is extreme - i.e., either very low or very high.)

Church donations increased among born again Christians in 1999. The median rose by 25% (to \$500 per person) while the mean increased by 7% (to \$1439). The median among non-born again adults nudged forward from \$18 to \$20, while the mean also inched ahead (from \$378 to \$386, a gain of 2%). Oddly, giving by the most committed segment - evangelicals - actually dropped by 1%, from a mean of \$2380 in 1998 to \$2346 in 1999.

The size of the church a person attends is related to their giving habits. Churches that attract limited numbers of people also raise the least money per person. Among adults attending churches of less than 100 adults - which make up a majority of America's Protestant churches - the average (mean) donation was \$488 over the course of the year. Adults attending churches of 100 to 200 adults donated a cumulative mean of \$794 - 63% more than those in small churches donated. People attending churches of 201 to 999 adults contributed a mean of \$1561 in 1999 - more than three times the average in the smallest churches. Giving dropped off a bit in churches attracting 1000 or more

adults, to \$1462.

Churches Get the Lion's Share

According to survey respondents, about three-quarters of every donated dollar wound up going to churches or religious centers. For many people, all or most of their giving went to their church. For instance, among both evangelicals and African-American adults an average of 95% of their aggregate donations was given to churches. On average, 91 cents out of every dollar given by residents of the South went to their church, while 87 cents out of every dollar given by all born again Christians went to their church. Individuals who described themselves as politically conservative assigned 89% of their aggregate giving to churches.

The segments that devoted the smallest percentages of their giving to churches included the unchurched (whose median gift to churches was zero, but whose mean gift of \$156 represented 40% of their yearly giving), Hispanics (59% of their donations went to churches), Baby Busters (60%) and non-born again adults (60%).

Protestant adults proved to be more generous, in every measure, than were Catholics. Based on mean dollars donated in 1999, Protestant adults gave 57% more money away to all non-profits (\$1325 versus \$846, respectively); gave away 86% more money to churches (\$1084 versus \$584); and donated a larger share of their charitable gifts to churches (82% versus 69%).

Tithing Is Rare

One of the central teachings of many Protestant churches is that the Bible commands people to donate ten percent of the annual income to the church. The survey confirmed that the admonition is rarely followed. One out of every six born again Christians (16%) gave no money to his/her church during 1999. The proportion who tithed to their church was just 8%.

In general, the more money a person makes the less likely he/she is to tithe. While 8% of those making \$20,000 or less gave at least 10% of their income to churches, that proportion dropped to 5% among those in the \$20,000-\$29,999 and \$30,000-\$39,999 categories; to 4% among those in the \$40,000-\$59,999 range, down to 2% for those in the \$60,000-\$74,999 niche; and to 1% for those making \$75,000-\$99,999. The level jumped a bit for those making \$100,000 or more, as 5% of the most affluent group tithed in 1999.

Comments on the Research

The relative generosity of born again and evangelical Christians is paradoxical in the eyes of George Barna, president of the company that conducted the research. "On the one hand, evangelicals and born again Christians should be commended for modeling generosity within a culture that esteems giving a helping hand more than it actually gives such a hand. By giving more than double the national average of their income to non-profits and churches evangelicals have set a great example for others to follow. At the same time, however, the vast majority of those individuals attend churches that teach a biblical responsibility to tithe. The fact that fewer than one out of every ten born again believers does so suggests that financial stewardship is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges facing the Christian Church in America today."

The researcher also lamented the declining sum of money going to all charitable and religious causes. "Most analysts would agree that 1999 was one of the best financial years we have experienced in a long time. If we experience declining generosity by Americans during a period of unusual financial favor, what should we expect when the

economy hits a downturn? And as government leaders continue to push for more church-based and private initiatives to address America's growing list of social ills and cultural challenges, how can churches realistically take on such responsibilities? Churches cannot solve all of the nation's problems. But if they are to handle a significant share of the needs experienced in their communities, the typical Christian household will have to ante up more than 2% of their income to finance life-changing ministry activities - especially if they recognize tithing as one of God's requirements for their life."

Survey Methodology

The data described above are from telephone interviews with a nationwide random sample of 1002 adults. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the aggregate sample is ± 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The data for previous years' survey was conducted in the same manner, using the same sampling techniques and survey questions, and also based on a sample of 1002 randomly selected adults. All of the interviews were conducted from the Barna Research Group telephone interviewing facility in Ventura, CA. Adults in the 48 continental states were eligible to be interviewed and the distribution coincided with the geographic dispersion of the U.S. adult population. Multiple callbacks were used to increase the probability of including a reliable distribution of adults.

The figures regarding tithing were derived by dividing the total amount of money donated by the respondent to churches into the respondent's total household income for 1999. The information is not based on respondents reporting whether or not they tithed.

"Born again Christians" were defined in the survey as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who then indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as "born again."

Respondents were classified "evangelical" based upon their answers to nine questions regarding matters of faith. Those included the criteria for being born again, as described above; saying their faith is very important in their life today; believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; believing that Satan exists, that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works, and that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today. Thus, evangelicals are a subset of the born again population. Being classified as an evangelical was not based on self-identification, and the classification had no relationship to church attendance or the denominational affiliation of the church with which they associate.

The Barna Research Group, Ltd. is an independent marketing research company located in southern California. Since 1984 it has been studying cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. This research was funded solely by Barna Research as part of its regular tracking of attitudes, values and behavior.

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"Average Giving to Non-Profit Organizations and Churches
(mean giving; national random sample of 1002 adults)

Population segment	Total giving	Church giving	Total % of giving to churches
all adults	\$1045	\$806	77%

Baby Busters (ages 18-34)	\$589	\$353	60%
Baby Boomers (ages 35-53)	\$1248	\$984	79%
Builders (ages 54-72)	\$1326	\$1205	91%
Seniors (ages 73+)	\$1389	\$997	72%
Males	\$1036	\$770	74%
Females	\$1055	\$845	80%
Income Under \$30,000	\$453	\$338	75%
Income \$30,000-\$59,999	\$1076	\$841	78%
Income \$60,000 or more	\$1687	\$1343	80%
Politically conservative	\$1533	\$1365	89%
Politically moderate	\$845	\$582	69%
Politically liberal	\$932	\$618	66%
Evangelicals	\$2476	\$2346	95%
Born Again	\$1651	\$1439	87%
Non-born again	\$644	\$386	60%
Protestant	\$1325	\$1084	82%
Catholic	\$846	\$584	69%

This surprising research reveals that even among born again Christians in the United States, we collectively are not living up to what God expects us to do with our money, and the way we spend our money is not in accordance with our professed faith or priorities. Section 1.3 summarizes what those priorities need to be from a Biblical perspective.

A bumper sticker we read recently sums up our attitude about tithing:

Tithe if you love Jesus. Any idiot can honk!

2.3.19 Wisdom

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. (Prov. 4:7)

What is wisdom? Wisdom is all about living life with purpose and doing everything for the glory of God and out of fear of God. Wisdom is produced by diligently seeking knowledge and instruction throughout our lives so we can eliminate the fear that comes from foolish ignorance. This helps us develop a vocabulary and tools that make us very effective and successful in dealing with the everyday situations of life. Wisdom is about a proper attitude and approach toward suffering and prosperity that will develop character and skill in living life to its fullest and enjoying God's blessings. The singular goal of this entire Family Constitution is to reveal and promote wisdom and discernment as they relate to families and personal affairs.

Through wisdom come discernment, prudence, happiness, peace, prosperity, and God's blessings. That is why wisdom is perhaps one of the most important virtues and character attributes that a Christian can have. Of all the character attributes we can have as Christians, there is more said in the Bible about wisdom and its importance than any other subject other than possibly love. A search of the scriptures reveals that wisdom is used 222 times in the Bible. King Solomon devoted two complete books exclusively to the subject of wisdom: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The scriptures below give us a better idea what wisdom is, who has it, how it is produced, and why it should be so very important to us:

Table 2-3: Scriptures About Wisdom

Family Constitution, version 1.30

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#	Behavior	Description	Scripture(s)
1	Righteous people speak wisdom and talk about judgment	29 The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. 30 The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. 31 The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide	Psalms 37:29-31
2	Wisdom begins with fearing the Lord	10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: His praise endureth for ever. (Psalm 111:10)	Psalms 111:10
3	Seek understanding and wisdom. Doing so is how you understand the fear of the Lord	1 My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, 2 so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; 3 yes, if you cry out for discernment, understanding, 4 if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk uprightly; 8 he guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. 9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.	Prov. 2:1-9
4	Do not be wise in your own eyes and flee evil	Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones	Prov. 3:7-8
5	Wisdom produces happiness and peace	Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. And happy are all who retain her.	Prov. 3:13-18

2.4 Our Family Prayer

FAMILY PRAYER

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve,
 I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
 I asked for health, that I might do greater things,
 I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
 I asked for riches, that I might be happy,
 I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
 I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,
 I was given weakness, that I might feel the need for God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,
 I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
 I got nothing that I asked for--but everything I had hoped for.
 Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
 I am among all men, most richly blessed.

LORD, we pray that you give this family what it NEEDS, NOT what the people in it selfishly wants or thinks they need:
 Give it peace and tranquility.
 Give it unselfishness free of vanity.
 Give it honesty and personal responsibility.
 Give it humility.
 Give it patience and commitment.
 Give it the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
 ...and above all, give it **LOVE**.

2.5 Inspiration for the Christian

2.5.1 God's Promises Overcome our Negative Attitude

For all the negative things we have to say to ourselves, God has a positive answer for it.

Table 2-4: Scriptures to Contradict a Negative Attitude

You Say	God Says
"It's impossible"	All things are possible (Luke 18:27)
"I'm too tired"	I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28-30)
"Nobody really loves me"	I love you (John 3:16 & John 13:34)
"I can't go on"	My grace is sufficient (II Corinthians 12:9 & Psalm 91:15)
"I can't figure things out"	I will direct your steps (Proverbs 3:5-6)
"I can't do it"	You can do all things (Philippians 4:13)
"I'm not able"	I am able (II Corinthians 9:8)
"It's not worth it"	It will be worth it (Roman 8:28)
"I can't forgive myself"	I FORGIVE YOU (I John 1:9 & Romans 8:1)
"I can't manage"	I will supply all your needs (Philippians 4:19)
"I'm afraid"	I have not given you a spirit of fear (II Timothy 1:7)
"I'm always worried and frustrated"	Cast all your cares on ME (I Peter 5:7)
"I don't have enough faith"	I've given everyone a measure of faith (Romans 12:3)
"I'm not smart enough"	I give you wisdom (I Corinthians 1:30)
"I feel all alone"	I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)

It is the Word of God that satisfies.

2.5.2 Jesus Christ is the Source of Our Strength and Self-Esteem

Jesus Christ is sufficient to solve all our problems. Without him, we have little hope of success. It is not our own foolish human wisdom, but Jesus' wisdom and grace, which makes us sufficient in His eyes. *"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption--that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'"* (1 Cor. 1:30-31).

In Christ I Am Significant

I am the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13).
I am the light of the world (Matt. 5:14).
I am God's child (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-16; 1 John 3:3).
I am a branch of the true vine, a channel of His life (John 15:1,5).
I have been appointed to bear fruit (John 15:16).
I am Christ's personal witness (Acts 1:8).
I am God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16).
I am a member of Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:27).
I am a minister of reconciliation for God (2 Cor. 5:17,18).
I am God's co-worker (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1).
I am a saint (Eph. 1:1).
I have been raised up and seated with Christ (Eph. 2:6).
I am God's workmanship (Eph. 2:10).
I am a citizen of heaven (Eph. 2:6; Phil. 3:20).

In Christ I am Accepted

I am Christ's friend (John 15:15).
I have been justified (Romans 5:1).
I am joined to the Lord and am one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17).
I have been bought with a price; I belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:20).
I have been made righteous (2 Cor. 5:21).
I have been adopted as God's child (Eph. 1:5).
I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18).
I am of God's household (Eph. 2:19).
I am a fellow citizen with the rest of the saints (Eph. 2:19).
I may approach God with boldness and confidence (Eph. 3:12).
I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins (Col. 1:14).
I am complete in Christ (Col. 2:10)

In Christ I Am Secure

I am assured that all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28)
I cannot be separated from the love of God (Rom. 8:35).
I am free forever from condemnation (Rom. 8:1).
I am free from any condemning charges against me (Rom. 8:33).

I have been established, anointed, and sealed by God (2 Cor. 1:21-22).

I have been given the Holy Spirit as a pledge guaranteeing my inheritance to come (Eph. 1:13-14).

I have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13).

I am hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:3).

I am confident that the good work that God began in me will be perfected (Phil. 1:6).

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13).

I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7).

I can find grace and mercy in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

I am born of God, and the evil one cannot touch me (1 John 5:18).

2.5.3 God's Memorandum to Us⁷

Below is God's message to us. When we are discouraged or in conflict, we will read this message in its entirety together and heed what it says. We will then pray to God together for forgiveness and healing after we read it. In our prayer, we will ask Him to help us honor Him and each other by honoring our marriage commitment.

To: You

From: God

Take counsel.

I hear your cry.

It passes through the darkness, filters through the clouds, mingles with starlight, and finds its way to my heart on the path of a sunbeam.

I have anguished over the cry of a hare choked in the noose of a snare, a sparrow tumbled from the nest of its mother, a child thrashing helplessly in a pond, and my son shedding his blood on a cross.

Know that I hear you, also. Be at peace. Be calm.

I bring thee relief for your sorrow for I know its cause...and its cure.

You weep for all your childhood dreams that have vanished with the years.

You weep for all your self-esteem that has been corrupted by failure.

You weep for all your potential that has been bartered for security.

You weep for all your individuality that has been trampled by mobs.

You weep for all your talent that has been wasted through misuse.

You look upon yourself with disgrace and you turn in terror from the image you see in the pool.

Who is this mockery of humanity staring back at you with bloodless eyes of shame?

Where is the grace of your manner, the beauty of your figure, the quickness of your movement, the clarity of your mind, the brilliance of your tongue? Who stole your goods? Is the thief's identity known to you, as it is to me?

Once you placed your head in a pillow of grass in your father's field and looked up at a cathedral of clouds and knew that all the gold of Babylon would be yours in time.

Once you read from many books and wrote on many tablets convinced beyond any doubt that all the wisdom of Solomon would be equaled and surpassed by you.

And the seasons would flow into years until lo, you would reign supreme in your own garden of Eden.

Dost thou remember who implanted those plans and dreams and seeds of hope within you?

You cannot.

⁷ *The Greatest Miracle In The World*, Og Mandino, chapter 9.

You have no memory of that moment when first you emerged from your mother's womb and I placed my hand on your soft brow. And the secret I whispered in your small ear when I bestowed my blessings upon you?

Remember our secret?

You cannot.

The passing years have destroyed your recollection, for they have filled your mind with fear and doubt and anxiety and remorse and hate and there is no room for joyful memories where these beasts habitate.

Weep no more. I am with you...and this moment is the dividing line of your life. All that has gone before is like unto no more than that time you slept within your mother's womb. What is past is dead. Let the dead bury the dead.

This day you return from the living dead.

This day, like unto Elijah with the widow's son, I stretch myself upon thee three times and you live again.

This day, like unto Elisha with the Shunammite's son, I put my mouth upon your mouth and my eyes upon your eyes and my hands upon your hands and your flesh is warm again.

This day, like unto Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, I command you to come forth and you will walk from your cave of doom to begin a new life.

This is your birthday. This is your new date of birth. Your first life, like unto a play of the theatre, was only a rehearsal. This time the curtain is up. This time the world watches and waits to applaud. This time you will not fail.

Light your candles. Share your cake. Pour the wine. You have been reborn.

Like a butterfly from its chrysalis you will fly...fly as high as you wish, and neither the wasps nor dragonflies nor mantids of mankind shall obstruct your mission or your search for the true riches of life.

Feel my hand upon thy head.

Attend to my wisdom.

Let me share with you, again, the secret you heard at your birth and forgot.

You are my greatest miracle.

You are the greatest miracle in the world.

Those were the first words you ever heard. Then you cried. They all cry.

You did not believe me then...and nothing has happened in the intervening years to correct your disbelief. For how could you be a miracle when you consider yourself a failure at the most menial tasks? How can you be a miracle when you have little confidence in dealing with the most trivial of responsibilities? How can you be a miracle when you are shackled by debt and lie awake in torment over whence will come tomorrow's bread?

Enough. The milk that is spilled is sour. Yet, how many prophets, how many wise men, how many poets, how many artists, how many composers, how many scientists, how many philosophers and messengers have I sent with word of your divinity, your potential for godliness, and the secrets of achievement? How did you treat them?

Still I love you and I am with you now, through these words, to fulfill the prophet who announced that the Lord shall set his hand again, the second time, to recover the remnant of his people.

I have set my hand again.

This is the second time.

You are my remnant.

It is of no avail to ask, haven't you known, haven't you heard, hasn't it been told to you from the beginning; haven't you understood from the foundations of the earth?

You have not known; you have not heard; you have not understood.

You have been told that you are a divinity in disguise, a god playing a fool.

You have been told that you are a special piece of work, noble in reason, infinite in faculties, express and admirable in form and moving, like an angel in action, like a god in apprehension.

You have been told that you are the salt of the earth.

You were given the secret even of moving mountains, of performing the impossible.

You believed no one. You burned your map to happiness, you abandoned your claim to peace of mind, you snuffed out the candles that had been placed along your destined path of glory, and then you stumbled, lost and frightened, in the darkness of futility and self-pity, until you fell into a hell of your own creation.

Then you cried and beat your breast and cursed the luck that had befallen you. You refused to accept the consequences of your own petty thoughts and lazy deeds and you searched for a scapegoat on which to blame your failure. How quickly you found one.

You blamed me!

You cried that your handicaps, your mediocrity your lack of opportunity, your failures...were the will of God!

You were wrong!

Let us take inventory. Let us, first, call a roll of your handicaps. For how can I ask you to build a new life lest you have the tools?

Are you blind? Does the sun rise and fall without your witness?

No. You can see...and the hundred million receptors I have placed in your eyes enable you to enjoy the magic of a leaf, a snowflake, a pond, an eagle, a child, a cloud, a star, a rose, a rainbow...and the look of love. Count one blessing.

Are you deaf? Can a baby laugh or cry without your attention?

No. You can hear...and the twenty-four thousand fibers I have built in each of your ears vibrate to the wind in the trees, the tides on the rocks, the majesty of an opera, a robin's plea, children at play...and the words I love you. Count another blessing.

Are you mute? Do your lips move and bring forth only spittle?

No. You can speak...as can no other of my creatures, and your words can calm the angry, uplift the despondent, goad the quitter, cheer the unhappy, warm the lonely, praise the worthy, encourage the defeated, teach the ignorant...and say I love you. Count another blessing.

Are you paralyzed? Does your helpless from despoil the land?

No. You can move. You are not a tree condemned to a small plot while the wind and world abuses you. You can stretch and run the dance and work, for within you I have designed five hundred muscles, two hundred bones, and seven miles of nerve fiber all synchronized by me to do your bidding. Count another blessing. Are you unloved and unloving? Does loneliness engulf you, night and day?

No. No more. For now you know love's secret, that to receive love it must be given with no thought of its return. To love for fulfillment, satisfaction, or pride is no love. Love is a gift on which no return is demanded. Now you know that to love unselfishly is its own reward. And even should love not be returned it is not lost, for love not reciprocated will flow back to you and soften and purify your heart. Count another blessing. Count twice.

Is your heart stricken? Does it leak and strain to maintain your life?

No. Your heart is strong. Touch your chest and feel its rhythm, pulsating, hour after hour, day and night, thirty-six million beats each year, year after year, asleep or awake, pumping your blood through more than sixty thousand miles of veins, arteries, and tubing...pumping more than six hundred thousand gallons each year. Man has never created such a machine. Count another blessing.

Are you diseased of skin? Do people turn in horror when you approach?

No. Your skin is clear and a marvel of creation, needing only that you tend it with soap and oil and brush and care. In time all steels will tarnish and rust, but not your skin. Eventually the strongest of

metals will wear, with use, but not that layer that I have constructed around you. Constantly it renews itself, old cells replaced by new, just as the old you is now replaced by the new. Count another blessing.

Are your lungs befouled? Does the breath of life struggle to enter your body?

No. Your portholes to life support you even in the vilest of environments of your own making, and they labor always to filter life-giving oxygen through six hundred million pockets of folded flesh while they rid your body of gaseous wastes. Count another blessing.

Is your blood poisoned? Is it diluted with water and pus?

No. Within your five quarts of blood are twenty-two trillion blood cells and within each cell are millions of molecules and within each molecule is an atom oscillating at more than ten million times each second. Each second, two million of your blood cells die to be replaced by two million more in a resurrection that has continued since your first birth. As it has always been inside, so now it is on your outside. Count another blessing.

Are you feeble of mind? Can you no longer think for yourself?

No. Your brain is the most complex structure in the universe. I know. Within its three pounds are thirteen billion nerve cells, more than three times as many cells as there are people on your earth. To help you file away every perception, every sound, every taste, every smell, every action you have experienced since the day of your birth, I have implanted, within your cells, more than one thousand billion billion protein molecules. Every incident in your life is there waiting only your recall. And, to assist your brain in the control of your body I have dispersed, throughout your form, four million pain-sensitive structures, five hundred thousand touch detectors, and more than two hundred thousand temperature detectors. No nation's gold is better protected than you. None of your ancient wonders are greater than you.

You are my finest creation.

Within you is enough atomic energy to destroy any of the world's great cities...and rebuild it.

Are you poor? Is there no gold or silver in your purse?

No. You are rich! Together we have just counted your wealth. Study the list. Count them again. Tally your assets!

Why have you betrayed yourself? Why have you cried that all the blessings of humanity were removed from you? Why did you deceive yourself that you were powerless to change your life? Are you without talent, senses, abilities, pleasures, instincts, sensations, and pride? Are you without hope? Why do you cringe in the shadows, a giant defeated, awaiting only sympathetic transport into the welcome void and dampness of hell?

You have so much. Your blessings overflow your cup...and you have been unmindful of them, like a child spoiled in luxury, since I have bestowed them upon you with generosity and regularity.

Answer me.

Answer yourself.

What rich man, old and sick, feeble and helpless, would not exchange all the gold in his vault for the blessings you have treated so lightly?

Know then the first secret to happiness and success—that you possess, even now, every blessing necessary to achieve great glory (see Phil. 4:13, 2 Cor. 1:21-22). They are your treasure, your tools with which to build, starting today, the foundation for a new and better life.

Therefore, I say unto you, count your blessings and know that you already are my greatest creation. This is the first law you must obey in order to perform the greatest miracle in the world, the return of your humanity from living death.

And be grateful for your lessons learned in poverty. For he is not poor who has little; only he that desires much...and true security lies not in the things one has but in the things one can do without.

Where are the handicaps that produced your failure? They existed only in your mind.

Count your blessings.

And the second law is like unto the first. Proclaim your rarity (see section 2.5.2 above and Matt. 5:13-14).

You had condemned yourself to a potter's field, and there you lay, unable to forgive your own failure, destroying yourself with self-hate, self-incrimination, and revulsion at your crimes against yourself and others.

Are you not perplexed?

Do you not wonder why I am able to forgive your failures, your transgressions, your pitiful demeanor...when you cannot forgive yourself?

I address you now, for three reasons. You need me. You are not one of a herd heading for destruction in a gray mass of mediocrity. And ...you are a great rarity.

Consider a painting by Rembrandt or a bronze by Degas or a violin by Stradivarius or a play by Shakespeare. They have great value for two reasons: their creators were masters and they are few in number. Yet there are more than one of each of these.

On that reasoning you are the most valuable treasure on the face of the earth, for you know who created you and there is only one of you.

Never, in all the seventy billion humans who have walked this planet since the beginning of time has there been anyone exactly like you.

Never, until the end of time, will there be another such as you.

You have shown no knowledge or appreciation of your uniqueness.

Yet, you are the rarest thing in the world.

From your father, in his moment of supreme love, flowed countless seeds of love, more than four hundred million in number. All of them, as they swam within your mother, gave up the ghost and died. All except one! You.

You alone persevered within the loving warmth of your mother's body, searching for your other half, a single cell from your mother so small that more than two million would be necessary to fill an acorn shell. Yet, despite impossible odds, in that vast ocean of darkness and disaster, you persevered, found that infinitesimal cell, joined with it, and began a new life. Your life.

You arrived, bringing with you, as does every child, the message that I was not yet discouraged of man. Two cells now united in a miracle. Two cells, each containing twenty-three chromosomes and within each chromosome hundreds of genes, which would govern every characteristic about you, from the color of your eyes to the charm of your manner, to the size of your brain.

With all the combinations at my command, beginning with the single sperm from your father's four hundred million, through the hundreds of genes in each of the chromosomes of your mother and father, I could have created three hundred thousand billion humans, each different from the other.

But who did I bring forth?

You! One of a kind. Rarest of the rare. A priceless treasure, possessed of qualities in mind and speech and movement and appearance and actions as no other who has ever lived, lives, or shall live.

Why have you valued yourself in pennies when you are worth a king's ransom?

Why did you listen to those who demeaned you...and far worse, why did you believe them?

Take counsel. No longer hide your rarity in the dark. Bring it forth. Show the world. Strive not to walk as your brother walks, nor talk as your leader talks, nor labor as do the mediocre. Never do as another. Never imitate. For how do you know that you may not imitate evil; and he who imitates evil always goes beyond the example set, while he who imitates what is good always falls short. Imitate no one. Be yourself. Show your rarity to the world and they will shower you with gold. This then is the second law.

Proclaim your rarity.

And now you have received two laws.

Count your blessings! Proclaim your rarity!

You have no handicaps. You are not mediocre.

You nod. You force a smile. You admit your self-deception.

What of your next complaint? Opportunity never seeks thee?

Take counsel and it shall come to pass, for now I give you the law of success in every venture.

Many centuries ago this law was given to your forefathers from a mountain top. Some heeded the law and lo, their life was filled with the fruit of happiness, accomplishment, gold, and peace of mind. Most listened not, for they sought magic means, devious routes, or waited for the devil called luck to deliver to them the riches of life. They waited in vain...just as you waited, and then they wept, as you wept, blaming their lack of fortune on my will.

The law is simple. Young or old, pauper or king, white or black, male or female...all can use the secret to their advantage; for of all the rules and speeches and scriptures of success and how to attain it, only one method has never failed...whomsoever shall compel ye to go with him one mile...go with him two (see the Bible, Matt. 5:41, spoken by Jesus Himself).

This then is the third law...the secret that will produce riches and acclaim beyond your dreams. Go another mile (see the Bible, Matt. 5:41)!

The only certain means of success is to render more and better service than is expected to you, no matter what your task may be. This is a habit followed by all successful people since the beginning of time. Therefore I saith the surest way to doom yourself to mediocrity is to perform only the work for which you are paid.

Think not ye are being cheated if you deliver more than the silver you receive. For there is a pendulum to all life and the sweat you deliver, if not rewarded today, will swing back tomorrow, tenfold. The mediocre never goes another mile, for why should he cheat himself, he thinks. But you are not mediocre. To go another mile is a privilege you must appropriate by your own initiative. You cannot, you must not avoid it. Neglect it, do only as little as the others, and the responsibility for your failure is yours alone.

You can no more render service without receiving just compensation than you can withhold the rendering of it without suffering the loss of reward. Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, these cannot be separated. The effect already blooms in the cause, and the end pre-exists in the means, and the fruit is always in the seed.

Go another mile.

Concern yourself not, should you serve an ungrateful master. Serve him more.

And instead of him, let it be me who is in your debt, for then you will know that every minute, every stroke of extra service will be repaid. And worry not, should your reward not come soon. For the longer payment is withheld, the better for you...and compound interest on compound interest is this law's greatest benefit.

You cannot command success, you can only deserve it...and now you know the great secret necessary in order to merit its rare reward.

Go another mile!

Where is this field whence you cried there was no opportunity? Look! Look around thee. See, where only yesterday you wallowed on the refuse of self-pity, you now walk tall on a carpet of gold. Nothing has changed...except you, but you are everything.

You are my greatest miracle.

You are the greatest miracle in the world.

And now the laws of happiness and success are three.

Count your blessings (see Phil. 4:13, 2 Cor. 1:21-22)! Proclaim your rarity (see section 2.5.2 above and Matt. 5:13-14)! Go another mile (Matt. 5:41)!

Be patient with your progress. To count your blessings with gratitude, to proclaim your rarity with pride, to go an extra mile and then another, these acts are not accomplished in the blinking of an eye.

Yet, that which you acquire with most difficulty you retain the longest; as those who have earned a fortune are more careful of it than those by whom it was inherited.

And fear not as you enter your new life. Every noble acquisition is attend with its risks. He who fears to encounter the one must not expect to obtain the other. Now you know you are a miracle. And there is no fear in a miracle.

Be proud. You are not the momentary whim of a careless creator experimenting in the laboratory of life. You are not a slave of forces that you cannot comprehend. You are a free manifestation of no force but mine, of no love but mine. You were made with a purpose.

Feel my hand. Hear my words.

You need me...and I need you.

We have a world to rebuild...and if it requireth a miracle what is that to us? We are both miracles and now we have each other.

Never have I lost faith in you since that day when I first spun you from a giant wave and tossed you helplessly on the sands. As you measure time that was more than five hundred million years ago. There were many models, many shapes, many sizes, before I reached perfection in you more than thirty thousand years ago. I have made no further effort to improve on you in all these years.

For how could one improve on a miracle? You were a marvel to behold and I was pleased. I gave you this world and dominion over it. Then, to enable you to reach your full potential I placed my hand upon you, once more, and endowed you with powers unknown to any other creature in the universe, even unto this day.

I gave you the power to think.

I gave you the power to love.

I gave you the power to will.

I gave you the power to laugh.

I gave you the power to imagine.

I gave you the power to create.

I gave you the power to plan.

I gave you the power to speak.

I gave you the power to pray.

My pride in you knew no bounds. You were my ultimate creation, my greatest miracle. A complete living being. One who can adjust to any climate, any hardship, any challenge. One who can manage his own destiny without any interference from me. One who can translate a sensation or perception, not by instinct, but by thought and deliberation into whatever action is best for himself and all humanity.

Thus we come to the fourth law of success and happiness...for I gave you one more power, a power so great that not even my angels possess it.

I gave you the power to choose.

With this gift I place you even above my angels...for angels are not free to choose sin. I gave you complete control over your destiny. I told you to determine, for yourself, your own nature in accordance with your own free will. Neither heavenly nor earthly in nature, you were free to fashion yourself in whatever form you preferred. You had the power to choose to degenerate into the lowest forms of life, but you also had the power, out of your soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.

I have never withdrawn your great power, the power to choose.

What have you done with this tremendous force? Look at yourself. Think of the choices you have made in your life and recall, now, those bitter moments when you would fall to your knees if only you had the opportunity to choose again.

What is past is past...and now you know the fourth great law of happiness and success...Use wisely, your power of choice.

Choose to love...rather than hate.
 Choose to laugh...rather than cry.
 Choose to create...rather than destroy.
 Choose to persevere...rather than quit.
 Choose to praise...rather than gossip.
 Choose to heal...rather than wound.
 Choose to give...rather than steal.
 Choose to act...rather than procrastinate.
 Choose to grow...rather than rot.
 Choose to pray...rather than curse.
 Choose to live...rather than die.

Now you know that your misfortunes were not my will, for all power was vested in you, and the accumulation of deeds and thoughts which placed you on the refuse of humanity were your doing, not mine. My gifts of power were too large for your small nature. Now you have grown tall and wise and the fruits of the land will be yours.

You are more than a human being, you are a human becoming.

You are capable of great wonders. Your potential is unlimited. Who else, among my creatures, has mastered fire? Who else, among my creatures, has conquered gravity, has pierced the heavens, has conquered disease and pestilence and drought?

Never demean yourself again!

Never settle for the crumbs of life!

Never hide your talents, from this day hence!

Remember the child who says, "when I am a big boy." But what is that? For the big boy says, "when I grow up." And then grown up, he says, "when I am wed." But to be wed, what is that, after all? The thought then changes to "when I retire." And then, retirement comes, and he looks back over the landscape traversed; a cold wind sweeps over it and somehow he has missed it all and it is gone.

Enjoy this day, today...and tomorrow, tomorrow.

You have performed the greatest miracle in the world.

You have returned from a living death.

You will feel self-pity no more and each new day will be a challenge and a joy.

You have been born again...but just as before, you can choose failure and despair or success and happiness. The choice is yours. The choice is exclusively yours. I can only watch, as before...in pride...or sorrow.

Remember, then, the four laws of happiness and success.

Count your blessings.

Proclaim your rarity.

Go another mile.

Use wisely your power of choice.

And one more, to fulfill the other four. Do all things with love...love for yourself, love for all others, and love for me.

Wipe away your tears. Reach out, grasp my hand, and stand straight.

Let me cut the grave cloths that have bound you.

This day you have been notified.

YOU ARE THE GREATEST MIRACLE IN THE WORLD!

2.6 Are You Good Enough To Go To Heaven?

Of all the questions you will ask yourself in life, probably the most important is, Am I good enough to go to Heaven? The way to find this out is to ask yourself if you have obeyed the Ten Commandments. Most would answer the question, 'Well, I've broken one or two, but nothing too serious, like murder, etc.' So let's go through them and see how you do:

1. 'You shall have no other gods before Me.'

Is God first in your life? Do you love God above all else? Many years ago, I purchased a TV for our children, but the first evening we had it, I arrived home from work and found that they didn't even bother to greet me. They were too busy watching television. I turned it off and explained to them that if they ignored me because they preferred to watch TV. They were setting their love on the gift rather than the giver, a wrong order of affections. In the same way, if we love anything -- husband, wife, children or even our own lives -- more than we love God, we are setting our affection on the gift rather than the Giver, which is a transgression of the First Commandment. In fact, the Bible says that we should so love God that our love for Mom and Dad and brother and sister should seem like hatred compared to the love we have for the God who gave those loved ones to us. We are also commanded to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. Jesus spoke of a Samaritan who found an injured stranger, bathed his wounds, carried him to an inn, gave money for his care and told the inn-keeper that he would pay for his expenses. We call him the good Samaritan, but in reality he wasn't 'good' at all, he merely obeyed the basic command to love his neighbor as himself. That is a picture of how God expects us to love our fellow human beings. We should love them as much as we love ourselves...whether they be friend or foe. Have you loved God with all your heart? Have you loved humanity as much as you love yourself? You be the judge. Will you be innocent or guilty on Judgment Day of breaking that Commandment? I'm not judging you -- I'm asking you to judge yourself before the Day of Judgment. The sentence for breaking this Commandment is death.

2. 'You shall not make for yourself any graven image.'

This means that we shouldn't make a god to suit ourselves, either with our hands or our mind. I was guilty of this. I made a god to suit myself. My god didn't mind a 'white' lie or a fib here and there -- in fact, he didn't have any moral dictates. But in truth my god didn't exist. He was a figment of my imagination, an 'image' which I shaped to suit myself. Is your god the One revealed in Holy Scripture? If not, then you have made your own god to suit yourself - you have committed the oldest sin in the Book. Scripture warns that no idolater will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

3. 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.'

Have you ever taken God's name in vain -- instead of using a four-letter word to express disgust, you've used His name? Hitler's name wasn't despised enough to use as a curse word. If you have used His holy name in that manner, you are a blasphemer and will not enter the Kingdom of God.

4. 'Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.'

I ignored this command for 22 years. Even though God gave me the gift of life, never once did I ask what he required of me. I was guilty of breaking the Commandment.

5. 'Honor your father and your mother.'

Have you always honored your parents in a way that's pleasing in the sight of God? Ask Him to remind you of the sins of your youth. You may have forgotten them, but God hasn't.

6. 'You shall not murder.'

Jesus warned that if we get angry without cause we are in danger of judgment. If we hate our brother, God calls us a murderer. We can violate God's Law by attitude and intent.

7. 'You shall not commit adultery.'

Who of us can say that we are pure of heart? Jesus warned, 'You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery already with her in his heart.' Remember that God has seen every thought you have had and every sin you have ever committed. The day will come when you have to face His Law, and we are told that the impure, fornicators (those who have sex before marriage) and adulterers will not enter the Kingdom of God. Punishment for transgression of this Commandment is the death penalty.

8. 'You shall not steal.'

Have you ever taken something that belonged to someone else (irrespective of its value)? Then you are a thief -- you cannot enter God's Kingdom.

9. 'You shall not bear false witness.'

Have you ever told a lie? Then you are a liar. How many lies do you have to tell to be a liar? Just one. The Bible warns that all liars will have their part in the Lake of Fire. You may not think deceitfulness is a serious sin. God does!

10. 'You shall not covet.'

That means we shouldn't desire anything that belongs to another person. The covetous will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Who of us can say we are not guilty of breaking these Commandments? All of us have sinned, and just as with civil law, you don't have to break ten laws to be a law-breaker, so the Bible warns, 'For whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.'

A little girl was once watching a sheep eat grass and thought how white it looked against the green background. But when it began to snow she thought, 'that sheep now looks dirty against the white snow!' It was the same sheep, but with a different background. When we compare ourselves to the background of man's standard we look pretty clean, but when we compare ourselves to the pure snow-white righteousness of God's standard -- His Law, we can see ourselves in truth, that we are unclean in His sight. That Law is the holy standard by which humanity will be judged on Judgment Day.

This may sound strange, but the worst thing you could at this point of time is to try and clean up your lifestyle -- you realize that you have sinned, so from now on you will keep the Ten Commandments, do good deeds, say the right things and think only pure thoughts. But should a judge let a murderer go because he says he will now live a good life? No, he's in debt to justice and therefore must be punished.

The Law of God is merely like a mirror -- all a mirror does is show you the truth. If you see egg on your face, you don't try and wash yourself with the mirror, its purpose should be to send you to water for cleansing. Neither should you try and wash yourself with the mirror of God's Law . . . that's not its purpose.

The sight in the mirror is not a pretty one, but if you can't face it and acknowledge that you are unclean, then all that 'dirt' will be presented on Judgment Day as evidence of your guilt, and then it will be too late to be cleansed.

Perhaps you think that God is good and will therefore overlook your sins. But if you were guilty of terrible crimes in a civil court and said to the judge, 'Judge, I am guilty but I believe that you are a good man and will therefore overlook my crimes,' the judge would probably respond by saying, 'You are right about one thing; I am a good man, and it's because of my goodness that I am going to see that justice is done, that you are punished for your crimes.' The very thing that many people are hoping will save them on Judgment Day, God's 'goodness,' will be the very thing that will condemn them. If God is good, He should punish murderers, liars, thieves, etc., and Hell will be their dreadful fate.

What a terrible place Hell must be. If you read in the newspaper that a man received a \$5 fine for a crime, you could conclude that his crime was insignificant. But if a man received multiple life sentences, you could conclude that his crime was heinous. In the same way, we can catch a glimpse of how terrible sin must be in the sight of God by looking to the punishment given for it -- eternal punishment. Ungrateful humanity never bothers to thank God for His wonderful blessings of color, light, food, joy, beauty, love and laughter, so He will take those blessings away from them. Instead of proving their gratitude by obedience to His will, they use His name to curse. Their punishment will be just but severe to the uttermost. Take the time to read what Jesus said Hell was like in Mark 9:43-48. I am afraid for you . . . please, look honestly into the mirror of the Law, then seek the 'water' that cleanses every sin. If you don't believe what I am saying about the reality of Hell, it means you think God is corrupt (that He hasn't the moral backbone to seek justice), that Jesus was a liar, that the Apostles were false witnesses, that God's promises are nothing but prefabricated lies, and there is no greater insult to God than to call Him a liar. By doing so, you are adding to your transgressions. Imagine if you reject the Savior, die in your sins and find that what I have told you is the Gospel truth? Then it will be too late, you will be judged for your sins. If that happens, and your eyes meet my eyes on the Day of Judgment, I'm free from your blood. I have told you the truth, but if you choose to ignore it your blood will be upon your own head . . . you will have no one to blame but yourself.

Can you see your predicament? You are guilty of sinning against God Himself, and because you have a conscience you have sinned 'with knowledge.' Isn't it true that every time you lied, stole, lusted, etc., you did it with knowledge that it was wrong?

Does the fact that you have sinned against God scare you? It should. You have actually angered Him by your sin. The Bible says His wrath abides on you, that you are an 'enemy of God in your mind through wicked works.' But let fear work for your good in the same way that a fear of jumping out of a plane at a great height would make you put on a parachute. Let your will to live open your heart to the Gospel of salvation.

I am not the only one who doesn't want you to end up in Hell. The person who gave you this document cared enough to give it to you and risk your rejection, and God Himself is not willing that you perish. To make clear what an incredible thing He has done for you in the Gospel, let's look again to civil law: You are standing in front of a judge, guilty of very serious crimes. All the evidence has been presented and

there is no doubt about your guilt. The fine for your crime is \$250,000 or imprisonment, but you haven't two pennies to rub together. The judge is about to pass sentence . . . he lifts his gavel, when someone you don't even know steps in and pays the fine for you. The moment you accept that payment, you are free to go. Justice has been served, the law has been satisfied, and what's more, the stranger who paid your fine showed how much he cares for you. His payment was evidence of his love.

That's what God did for you, in the person of Jesus Christ. You are guilty. He paid the fine 2,000 years ago. It is that simple. The Bible puts it this way: 'He was bruised for our iniquities . . . Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law being made a curse for us . . . God commended His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

It was no small thing for Jesus to die for us. The only thing that would satisfy the demands of Eternal Law was the suffering death of the sinless son of God. What love God must have for you! He suffered unspeakable agony, so that you wouldn't have to be punished for your sins. His sacrificial death and resurrection mean that you need no longer be in debt to the Law, and God can now grant you everlasting life if you obey Him -- death no longer has a legal hold upon those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Two men were offered a parachute while seated in a plane. The first man was told it would improve his flight, but the second man was informed that he had to make a 25,000 foot jump. When the flight struck severe turbulence the first man took his parachute off because, as far as he was concerned it didn't improve the flight. But during the same violent turbulence, this second man clung tighter to his parachute. Each man's motive for putting the parachute on determined whether or not he would keep it on*. In the same way, the reason you should 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' shouldn't be to find peace, joy, true happiness, to have your marriage healed or your problems fixed, etc. (to have your flight improved), but it should be to escape the jump to come -- because of the fact that you have to pass through the door of death. Then, when the flight gets bumpy (when problems come) you won't fall away from the faith.

What should you then do? Simply repent and put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Don't put it off until tomorrow. Would you sell an eye for a million dollars? How about both for \$20 million? No one in his right mind would. Your eyes are priceless to you, yet they are merely the windows of your soul. Your life (your soul) is of such value, Jesus said that you should despise the value of your eye compared to it. He said that if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you, for it is better to enter Heaven blind, than to go to Hell seeing. In other words, of all the things that you should prioritize in you life, it's not your health, your vocation, etc., it's your eternal salvation.

Think of a man who has committed adultery. His faithful wife is more than willing to take him back, so what is the attitude in which he should approach her? It should be one of tremendous humility, asking for forgiveness, and determining in his heart never to even think of committing adultery again. That's how you should approach God. If you are not sure how to pray, read Psalm 51 and make it your prayer. Then put your faith in Jesus Christ in the same way you would put your faith in a parachute. You don't just 'believe' it will benefit you, you actually trust yourself to it by putting it on. Then, once you have made peace with God read the Bible daily and obey what you read.

2.7 The Problem Science Has with Jesus Christ

"Let me explain the problem science has with Jesus Christ" The atheist professor of philosophy pauses before his class and then asks one of his new students to stand. "You're a Christian, aren't you, son?"

"Yes, sir."

"So you believe in God?"

"Absolutely."

"Is God good?"

"Sure! God is good."

"Is God all powerful? Can God do anything?"

"Yes."

"Are you good or evil?"

"The Bible says I'm evil."

The professor grins knowingly. "Ahh? THE BIBLE!" He considers for a moment. "Here's one for you. Let's say there's a sick person over here and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help them? Would you try?"

"Yes sir, I would."

"So you're good...!"

"I wouldn't say that."

"Why not say that? You would help a sick and maimed person if you could...in fact most of us would if we could...God doesn't."

No answer.

"He doesn't, does he? My brother was a Christian who died of cancer, even though he prayed to Jesus to heal him. How is this Jesus good? Hmmm? Can you answer that one?"

No answer.

The elderly man is sympathetic. "No, you can't, can you?" He takes a sip of water from a glass on his desk to give the student time to relax. In philosophy, you have to go easy with the new ones. "Let's start again, young man. Is God good?"

"Err... Yes."

"Is Satan good?"

"No."

"Where does Satan come from?"

The student falters. "From ...God..."

"That's right. God made Satan, didn't he?" The elderly man runs his bony fingers through his thinning hair and turns to the smirking student audience. "I think we're going to have a good semester, ladies and gentlemen." He turns back to the Christian. "Tell me, son. Is there any evil in this world?"

"Yes, sir."

"Evil's everywhere, isn't it? Did God make everything?"

"Yes."

"Who created evil?"

No answer.

"Is there sickness in this world? Ugliness, immorality, hatred? All the terrible things--do they exist in this world?"

The student squirms on his feet. "Yes."

"Who created them?"

No answer.

The professor suddenly shouts at his student. "WHO CREATED THEM? TELL ME, PLEASE!" The professor closes in for the kill and climbs into the Christian's face. In a still small voice: "God created them, didn't he?"

No answer.

The student tries to hold the steady, experienced gaze and fails. Suddenly the lecturer breaks away to pace the front of the classroom like an aging panther. The class is mesmerized. "Tell me," he continues, "how is it that this God is good if He created all evil throughout all time?" The professor switches his arms around to encompass the wickedness of the world. "All the hatred, the brutality, all the pain, All the torture, all the death and the ugliness and suffering created by this good God is all over the world, isn't it, young man?"

No answer.

"Don't you see it all over the place? Huh?" Pause. "Don't you?" The professor leans into the student's face again and whispers, "Is God good?"

No answer.

"Do you believe in Jesus Christ, son?"

The student's voice betrays him and cracks. "Yes, Professor, I do."

The old man shakes his head sadly. "Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you seen Jesus?"

"No sir, I've never seen Him."

"Then tell us, have you ever heard your Jesus?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"Have you ever felt your Jesus, tasted your Jesus or smelt your Jesus...in fact, do you have any sensory perception of your God whatsoever?"

NO answer.

"Answer me, please."

"No, sir, I'm afraid I haven't."

"You're AFRAID you haven't?"

"No, sir."

"Yet you still believe in Him?"

"...yes..."

"That takes FAITH!" The professor smiles sagely at the underling. "According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God does not exist. What do you say to that, son? Where is your God now?"

The student does not answer.

"Sit down, please." The Christian sits...defeated.

Another student raises his hand. "Professor, may I address the class?" The professor turns and smiles. "Ah, another Christian in the vanguard! Come, come, young man. Speak some proper wisdom to the gathering."

The Christian looks around the room. "Some interesting points you are making, sir. Now I've got a question for you. Is there such a thing as heat?"

"Yes," the professor replies, "there's heat."

"Is there such a thing as cold?"

"Yes, son, there's cold too."

"No, sir, there isn't."

The professor's grin freezes. The room suddenly goes very quiet. The second Christian continues. "You can have lots of heat, even more heat, super-heat, meta-heat, white heat, a little heat, or no heat, but we don't have anything called 'cold'. We can hit 458 degrees below zero, which is no heat, but we can't go any further than that. There is no such thing as cold, otherwise we would be able to go colder than negative 458--you see, sir, cold is only a word we use to describe the absence of heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat we can measure in thermal units because heat is energy. Cold is not the opposite of heat, sir, it's just the absence of it." Silence. A pin drops somewhere in the classroom.

"Is there such a thing as darkness, professor?"

"That's a dumb question, son. What is night if it isn't darkness? What are you getting at?"

"So you 'believe' in darkness?":

"Yes."

"I'm very sorry, but science says you're wrong again, sir. Darkness is not something, it is the absence of something. You can have low light, normal light, bright light, flashing light, but if you have no light constantly, you have nothing, and its called darkness, isn't it? That's the meaning we use to define the word. In reality, darkness isn't. If it were, you would be able to make darkness darker and give it to me in a jar. But you can't give me a jar of darker darkness, can you Professor?"

Despite himself, the professor smiles at the young effrontery before him. This would indeed be a good semester. "Would you mind telling us what your point is, young man?"

"Yes, professor. My point is, your philosophical premise is flawed to start with, and so your conclusion must be in error..."

The professor goes toxic. "Flawed...? How dare you...!"

"Sir, may I explain what I mean?" The class is all ears.

"Explain...oh, explain." The professor makes an admirable effort to regain control. Suddenly he is affability itself. He waves his hand to silence the class, for the student to continue.

"You are working on the premise of duality," the Christian explains, "that, for example, there is life and then there's death; a good God and a bad God. You are viewing God as a concept, as something finite, something we can measure. Sir, science cannot even explain a thought. It uses electricity and magnetism, but has never seen, much less fully understood them. To view death as the opposite of life is to be ignorant of the fact that death cannot exist as a substantive thing. Death is not the opposite of life, merely the absence of it."

The young man holds up a newspaper he takes from the desk of a neighbor, who has been reading it. "Here is one of the most disgusting tabloids this country hosts, Professor. Is there such a thing as immorality?"

"Of course, there is, now look..."

"Again, I'm sorry sir, but you are wrong. You see, immorality is merely the absence of morality. Is there such a thing as injustice? No, injustice is the absence of justice. Is there such a thing as evil?" The Christian pauses. "Isn't evil the absence of good?" The professor's face has turned an alarming shade of red. He is so angry, he is temporarily speechless.

The Christian continues. "If there is evil in the world, Professor, and we all agree there is, then God, if He exists, must be accomplishing a work through the agency of evil. What is that work God is accomplishing? The Bible tells us that it is to see if each one of us will, of our own free will, choose good (the result of the love of God) over evil (the result of the independence or the absence of the love of God).

"There is nothing greater than love. God is love and God is good. If He is good, then the ultimate act of his goodness would be to give man the opportunity to experience the greatest thing that exists--love. But love cannot be forced on someone or else it is not love. There must be a choice involved. God loved us enough to allow us to make the choice. Evil is the result of the choice of independence from God."

The professor bristles. "As a philosophical scientist, I don't view this matter as having anything to do with choice; as a realist, I absolutely do not recognize the concept of God or any other theological factor as being part of the world equation because God is not observable."

"I would have thought that the absence of God's moral code in this world is probably one of the most observable phenomena going," the Christian replies. "Newspapers make billions of dollars reporting it every week! Tell me, professor, do you teach your students that they evolved from a monkey?"

"If you are referring to the natural evolutionary process, young man, yes, of course I do."

"Have you ever observed evolution with your own eyes, sir, or are you placing your 'faith' in the unobservable?" The professor makes a sucking noise with his teeth and gives the student a silent, stony stare.

The student replies: "May I follow up on the point you were making earlier to the other student?"

The professor wisely keeps silent.

"I believe you have a great mind Professor, but with all respect let me ask the class a question: "Is there anyone here who has ever heard the professor's mind...felt the professor's mind, touched or smelt the professor's mind?"

The class remains silent.

"No one appears to have done so. No one here has had any sensory perception of the professor's mind whatsoever. While I would not dare to imply it myself, but wouldn't the limitations of what you 'believe

in' (the rules of empirical testable, demonstrable, protocol, science) say that you have no mind? Wouldn't the same apply to your emotions and your will? I believe your great mind is hidden within your brain although I cannot observe it within the small box, or within the limited parameters which you want to place God within. If I want to know your mind or better yet the real you (your mind, emotions, will and even your spirit), all I have to do, if you are willing to be known, is be willing to seek to know you and to spend time with you."

"You can know that God exists--if you are willing. Are you willing Professor?"

Silence.

The bell rings.

"Class dismissed," replies the professor. "Time is up!"

2.8 Foundational Readings

The documents listed below will form the foundation for resolving all issues and disputes of doctrine, principle, and fact within the _____ Family. Any family court or family meeting held to discuss or resolve problems within the family will rely exclusively and only on the below-listed documents as evidence or grounds for resolving disputes. The documents are listed in order of priority or precedence, where lower numbered documents take precedence over higher numbered documents. Where documents are found to conflict then the lower numbered documents shall take precedence over the higher numbered documents.

Table 2-5: Foundational Readings

#	Title	Author	Details	Summary
1	Family Constitution	This family	Our plan for a happy family, subject to change upon mutual consent of mom and dad.	Rule book for this family.
2	The Open Bible	God	New King James Version; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1997	God's operator manual for our lives. Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth
3	Seven Deadly Sins	Anthony Campolo	Victor Books, 1987, ISBN 0-89693-533-7	Describes the seven most deadly sins including: 1. Sloth. 2. Lust. 3. Anger. 4. Pride. 5. Envy. 6. Gluttony. 7. Greed.
4	Love for a Lifetime	James Dobson	Tyndale House Publishing	Describes the foundations for a lifelong marriage

#	Title	Author	Details	Summary
5	The Parents Handbook	Don Dinkmeyer, Sr. Gary D. McKay Don Dinkmeyer, Jr.	American Guidance Service, 1997, ISBN 0-7854-1188-7	The most excellent and concise parenting book available and the most popular book of its kind. Deals mainly with emotional well-being of the child. Based on the Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) curriculum.
6	Before You Say I Do	H. Norman Wright Wes Roberts	Harvest House Publishers, 1997, ISBN 1-56507-637-0	Pre-marital counseling book
7	The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People	Stephen R. Covey	Fireside Publishers, 1989, ISBN 0-671-66398-4	An inspirational and very concise book on self-improvement
8	Baby and Childcare	Paul Reisser, M.D.	Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.; 1997, ISBN 0-8423-0889-X	Addresses practical medical and emotional aspects of parenting in great detail
9	Love Must Be Tough	James Dobson	Word Publishing, 1983, ISBN 0-8499-0348-3	Addresses how to deal with serious sin in a marriage context

2.9 Proverbs to Live By

1. Character:

- 1.1. "He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help." Abraham Lincoln (*A Husband's Little Black Book*, Robert Ackerman, p 112)
- 1.2. "Rudeness is the weak man's imitation of strength." Eric Hoffer (*A Husband's Little Black Book*, Robert Ackerman)
- 1.3. "Character is what you do when no one is watching." J.C. Watts, *Republican*.
- 1.4. "Behold the turtle: He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out." James Conant.
- 1.5. "Pride makes us do things well, but it is love that makes us do them to perfection." H. Jackson Brown.
- 1.6. "Luck is when preparedness and opportunity coincide. People who spend all of their time preparing and looking for opportunities tend to be very lucky indeed." (Me)
- 1.7. "When an old person dies, a library is lost." Tommy Swan
- 1.8. "Your ATTITUDE determines your ALTITUDE!" Unknown
- 1.9. "Do a good job because you WANT to, not because you HAVE to. That puts YOU in charge instead of your boss." H. Jackson Brown.
- 1.10. "Problems are just opportunities in work clothes!" H. Jackson Brown.
- 1.11. "What you are shouts so loudly in my ears that I cannot hear what you say." Ralph Waldo Emerson.
- 1.12. "Ask not and ye shall definitely receive not." Unknown
- 1.13. "One man with courage is a majority." Andrew Jackson
- 1.14. "Let the refining and improving of your own life keep you so busy that you have little time to criticize others." H. Jackson Brown
- 1.15. "Praise in public. Criticize in private." H. Jackson Brown
- 1.16. "You can fool some of the people some of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool ALL of the people ALL of the time." Abraham Lincoln
- 1.17. "Wear out, don't rust out." H. Jackson Brown
- 1.18. "Some goals are so worthy, it's glorious even to fail." Unknown

1.19. "There can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity." Samuel Johnson.

1.20. "Evil triumphs because good men passively sit and do nothing." Unknown.

2. Relationships:

2.1. "Be faithful, and remember: it doesn't matter where you get your appetite as long as you eat at home." (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman)

2.2. "If the phone rings when you are making love, don't answer it. Who could be more important?" (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p 133)

2.3. "If you forget her birthday, have a good excuse. If you forget her anniversary, move out of town!" (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p. 118)

2.4. "Fill the tub with hot water and bubble bath for her, light a candle, fill a glass of white wine--- then leave her alone!" (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p. 148)

2.5. "Write her a love letter, but be careful about what you promise. You don't want to be guilty of MALE fraud!" (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p. 155)

2.6. "Love her for who she is, not for what you would like her to be." (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p. 143)

2.7. "Remember that arguments have three sides: his, hers, and the facts." (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p. 75)

2.8. "It is more important to go together than it is to know where you are going." (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p 125)

2.9. "Order something for her from Victoria's Secrets catalog." (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p. 127)

2.10. "The opposite of love is NOT hate, it is indifference!" (Me)

2.11. "Would you rather be happy, or would you rather be right?" Unknown (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman)

2.12. "It is more noble to give yourself completely to one individual than to labor diligently for the salvation of the masses." Hammerskjold, Dag; past Secretary-General of the United Nations

2.13. "The test of a man or woman's breeding is how they behave in a quarrel." George Bernard Shaw (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman)

3. Parenting:

3.1. "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." Theodore Hesburgh (A Husband's Little Black Book, Robert Ackerman, p 116)

4. Work/business/government:

4.1. "Read carefully anything that requires your signature. Remember that the big print giveth and the small print taketh away." Chris Hansen

4.2. "Do you know the difference between education and experience? Education is what you get when you read the fine print. Experience is what you get if you don't." Peter Seeger

4.3. "People who think logically are a nice contrast to the real world." Unknown

4.4. "Remember that the more you know, the less you fear!" H. Jackson Brown

4.5. "A conference is a gathering of people who single can do nothing, but together can decide that nothing can be done." Fred Allen

4.6. "Even when you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." Unknown

4.7. "Remember that only dead fish swim with the stream." Unknown.

4.8. "Friends may come and go but enemies accumulate." Unknown

4.9. "Computers let you make more mistakes faster than any other invention in human history, with the possible exception of handguns and tequila." Mitch Radcliffe

TO BE A LIBERAL:

1. *You have to believe the AIDS virus is spread by a lack of funding.*
2. *You have to believe that the same overpaid public school idiot who can't teach 4th graders how to read is qualified to teach those same kids about sex.*
3. *You have to believe that trial lawyers are selfless heroes and doctors are overpaid.*
4. *You have to believe that guns in the hands of law-abiding Americans are more of a threat than nuclear weapons in the hands of the Red Chinese.*
5. *You have to believe that global temperatures are less affected by cyclical, documented changes in the brilliance of the Sun, and more affected by yuppies driving SUVs.*
6. *You have to believe that gender roles are artificial but being gay is natural.*
7. *You have to believe that businesses create oppression and governments create prosperity.*
8. *You have to believe that hunters don't care about nature but pasty, euphorians who've never been outside Seattle do.*
9. *You have to believe that self-esteem is more important than actually doing something to earn it.*
10. *You have to believe there was no art before federal funding.*
11. *You have to believe the military, not corrupt politicians, start wars.*
12. *You have to believe the free market that gives us 500+ channels, can't deliver the quality that PBS does.*
13. *You have to believe the NRA is bad, because they stand up for certain parts of the Constitution, while the ACLU is good, because they stand up for certain parts of the Constitution.*
14. *You have to believe that taxes are too low but ATM fees are too high.*
15. *You have to believe that Harriet Tubman, Caesar Chavez and Gloria Steinhem are more important to American history than Thomas Jefferson, General Robert E. Lee or Thomas Edison.*
16. *You have to believe that standardized tests are racist, but racial quotas and set-asides aren't.*
17. *You have to believe second-hand smoke is more dangerous than HIV.*
18. *You have to believe that the only reason socialism hasn't worked anywhere it's been tried, is because the right people haven't been in charge.*