

NATHAN E. BROWN

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Following Christ

“If anyone would come after me...”



Following Christ

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First Things First

Introduction to Discipleship

1) What is a disciple?

- A) A disciple is a person who desires to learn from and follow after someone else. For Christians, that “someone else” is Jesus. Your goal as a disciple of Jesus is to learn His teachings, model His way of living and become like Him in your thoughts, attitudes, actions and words.
- B) The master-disciple relationship is something that sounds a little strange to us today. Perhaps the best modern equivalent we can understand and relate to is the coach-player relationship. When you are accepted onto a sports team, you are effectively a disciple of your coach. You place yourself under his authority and agree to do whatever he tells you. Your goal is to learn to think about the game like your coach: to model his attitudes and actions and follow his direction. You are subject to his correction and discipline, and you work hard to earn his praise and respect.
- C) Being a member of a professional sports team is not a part-time endeavor. It affects every area of your life. It’s the same way with being a disciple of Jesus. It is a life-long commitment that will require you to give 100% in order to be successful.

2) How do I learn how to disciple others?

- A) The best way to learn how to disciple others is through the experience of being disciplined yourself. That is the example Jesus gave us.
 - (1) During His earthly ministry, Jesus chose twelve men to whom He gave special attention and instruction (Luke 6:12-13). He spent around three years living with them, teaching them and developing personal relationships with them. After His resurrection, Jesus commissioned them to go and make disciples just as He had done with them (Matthew 28:18-20). Their years as disciples of Jesus directly affected their ability to carry out His command (2 Peter 1:16-18; 1 John 1:1-3).
- B) These lessons are designed to be a discipleship experience for you. The goal is for you to be able to take this material and go out and disciple others.

3) Can you give me some practical suggestions for discipling new believers?

- A) Begin immediately. The devil isn’t going to wait a few weeks before attacking your new converts. You need to be there as soon as possible after conversion.
- B) Friendship discipling. Most new believers are converted through the witness of a family member or friend. Because of that relationship, you will be the one they turn to for guidance. It will be much easier for them to share and be open with you than with a stranger. That’s why it’s important for you to be able to disciple them.
 - (1) I understand that not everyone has the gift of teaching or is comfortable with the role of discipling someone else. In such cases, the best solution may be for you to act as host for a discipleship class between your new convert and a teacher from your local church. In this way, you will gain the skills and confidence needed to one day do it on your own.

- C) **Setting.** If possible, conduct the training in the homes of your new converts. This will make sharing and accountability much easier, since people are most comfortable in their own environment. You can also invite them to your home and take turns with hosting the lessons.
- D) **Size.** If you have several new converts being disciplined together, try to keep the group size small. If the group is too large, some of the more shy and quiet personalities may be smothered.
- E) **Format.** Most discipleship training takes place on a weekly basis (my experience is that monthly meetings are simply not often enough). Try to set aside a specific time each week that you meet.
- (1) Start by having a snack and sharing your week. Be prepared to address issues that come up during this time. Sometimes a problem will be brought up that should take precedence over the intended lesson. Be sensitive to what your new converts want to talk about. Also, be transparent. Let them know that you struggle with things just like they do.
 - (2) Always begin with prayer. Ask God to open your hearts and minds to His truth. You cannot disciple others without the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 - (3) Cover the material for that week's lesson. If questions come up during the lesson that you can't answer, be honest and tell your new converts that you don't know. Write them down and take them to your pastor. Then share the answers with the group the next week.
 - (4) Conclude with prayer asking God for help throughout the upcoming week.
- F) **Material.** This is one of the hardest parts of discipling new converts: What do you teach them? My hope and prayer is that these lessons will be the answer. The material at <http://comeafterme.com> is designed to take a new convert from baptism to the first stages of growth and maturity in Christ.
- (1) Not everyone grows at the same rate. Take your time and work on any areas that they may struggle with.
 - (2) Never teach new converts your own personal convictions. Keep the focus on God's Word and let Him worry about other issues.
- G) **Outside the classroom.** Teaching the material in these lessons is only a small part of what it means to disciple someone. You need to be as involved as possible in the life of your new converts. Be available when they need help. Make sure they know you can be called anytime for support and encouragement. Whenever you can, integrate them into your own life and activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, recreation, etc.).
- H) **Take the responsibility seriously.** Your attitudes and actions are now an example for your new converts. They will look up to you and imitate your approach to living the Christian life.

Salvation

1) Why do I need to be saved?

- A) You were created by God to love and serve Him (Matthew 22:37–40). His will for your life is clearly revealed in His Word the Bible. Within the Bible are written all of the commands that God expects you to obey—it is His law (John 14:15).
- B) Everyone has broken God's law (Romans 3:10, 23). Consider only a few of God's commands (Exodus 20): Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever taken something that wasn't yours? Have you ever lusted after someone? Have you ever coveted what belonged to another? You don't have to go very far into God's law before you realize that you have broken not just one but many of His commands.
- C) When you break a man-made law there is a punishment (e.g., the penalty for speeding is a fine, while the penalty for murder is imprisonment). Breaking God's law also brings punishment—the punishment of eternal death (Romans 6:23; Matthew 25:46). Breaking God's law is sin, and sin is rebellion against God. Because God is infinite, the consequences of rebelling against Him are also infinite. As a sinner, you are guilty of sinning against God and stand condemned to eternal death in hell.
- D) There is nothing you can do to merit God's forgiveness. No amount of money can repay the debt you owe Him. No amount of time spent in His service can make up for breaking His law. No amount of good works is ever enough to outweigh your sin. The Bible is clear that there is nothing you can do in and of yourself to escape the sentence of eternal death (Psalms 49:7–9; Ephesians 2:8–9; Isaiah 64:6; Galatians 2:16).

2) How can I be saved?

- A) There is good news (gospel)! Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NASB). Jesus Christ died on the cross in your place and took the punishment of death that you deserved upon Himself (Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). He offers you eternal life (John 17:3; Revelation 3:20).

3) Is there a cost involved in God's offer of salvation?

- A) God's gift of salvation is freely offered to everyone, but there is a cost involved in being Jesus' disciple. In fact, Jesus made a point of urging those who sought to follow after Him to count the cost of such a decision (read Luke 14:25–33):
 - (1) The commitment. When Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple,” He meant that you must love God more than you love anyone else (not that you must literally “hate” your family). Your loyalty to Jesus must come before your loyalty to your family, your spouse and even your life itself. Are you willing to love God more than anyone, including yourself?

- (2) The cross. The cross was an instrument of humiliation and death. If you want to follow Christ, you will have to die to yourself. This means that you must renounce your right to control your own fate and choose your own way. Are you willing to give up your self-sovereignty and obey the will of Christ?
- (3) The cost. Jesus warned that those who didn't consider the true cost of their endeavors would find themselves unable to complete them (Luke 14:28-33). Are you willing to count the cost and take Jesus' words to heart: "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple"?

4) How do I respond to God's offer of salvation?

- A) Confess your sins. Confession is not mere speculation ("If I have sinned...") or catharsis ("Just wanted to get that off my chest..."). It is agreeing with what God says about your sinful condition. It is recognizing and acknowledging that you are guilty of breaking His law. When you confess, you must put aside your natural desire to justify yourself. Instead, you must agree with God that you stand justly condemned as a sinner (Psalm 32:5; 1 John 1:9-10).
- B) Repent of your sins. Repentance is not simply feeling bad that you have done wrong. It is a complete change of mind toward sin and a desire for forgiveness (Mark 1:15; 1 Thess 1:9; Ezekiel 33:11). When you repent, you turn from your old way of living for sin and self and begin living for Christ. True repentance always shows itself in a change of behavior (Acts 3:19; 8:22; 17:30).
- C) Believe in Christ. You must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died on the cross in your place, and that He was resurrected to bring life to the world. You must place your trust in Christ's sacrifice as the atonement for your sins (Romans 10:9-10, 13; Acts 16:31). When you believe in Christ, you are staking your whole life on Jesus' claim that He is the only way to God.
 - (1) Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6; cf. Acts 4:12). There is only one way to be forgiven of your sins and be reconciled to God—through His Son, Jesus Christ.
 - (2) Your faith in Christ is not a work of which you can boast. Faith is only possible by and through God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). God's Word is clear that no work can save you.
- D) Pray to God. Many people find it helpful to be guided in how to express their decision to trust Christ for salvation. Here is an example of a prayer for salvation that carefully accounts for the essential requirements of turning to God:
 - (1) [For adults] God, I confess that I have broken your law. I stand justly condemned as a sinner. Today, I declare that I choose to repent of my sin and turn from my old way of living for sin and self. I also declare that I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died in my place and that He was resurrected to bring me life. I place my faith and trust in His sacrifice, and I humbly ask you to forgive me and give me new life. Thank you for saving me. In Jesus name, Amen.

(2) [*For children*] God, I know that I have done bad things. I'm sorry for doing wrong. I believe that Jesus is Your Son. I believe that He died for me and that He came back to life so that I could live in Him. I ask you to forgive me and come into my heart. Thank you for saving me. In Jesus name, Amen.

E) Be Baptized. Baptism is the first step of obedience for those who have been saved. (Acts 16:31-34). It is also one of the ways that you “confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9). If your baptism takes time to arrange, don't wait—tell someone (a parent, a sibling, a friend) about your conversion. Confessing Christ is not a single, isolated event. It's something you'll be doing for the rest of your life!

5) What happens when I'm saved?

- A) When you are saved, you are spiritually united with Christ and become part of His body. As a result of this union, you are:
- (1) Justified. God forgives your sins and declares you righteous in His sight (Romans 3:24-26; 5:9).
 - (2) Regenerated. God makes you spiritually alive (Ephesians 2:1-5). This is what the Bible means when it speaks of being “born again” (John 3:1-8).
 - (3) Sanctified. God makes you holy. This means you are set apart from sin and dedicated to God as His possession (1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11).
 - (4) Cleansed. God washes away your guilt and sin and makes you clean (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
 - (5) Reconciled. God reconciles you to Himself through Christ. You are no longer an enemy of God but a friend (Colossians 1:21-22; Romans 5:10).
 - (6) Adopted. God adopts you as His child with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities associated with such a relationship (John 1:12-13; Galatians 3:26; 4:4-6; 1 John 3:1). This relationship is the essence of what it means to be saved (John 17:3).
 - (7) Naturalized. God makes you a citizen of Christ's kingdom (Colossians 1:13). The kingdom has a King, laws, a culture and a mission.

Baptism

1) What is baptism?

- A) Baptism is the act of immersing a person in water and raising them back up again. It is typically done in church baptisteries, but can be done anywhere where there is enough water (pools, rivers, lakes, etc.). The biblical method is immersion, but pouring or sprinkling can be used if immersion is not possible (e.g. when a person is ill, disabled, elderly, confined, etc.).

2) What does baptism signify?

- A) Your union with Christ. Baptism is symbolic of being saved. It is an outward physical sign of your inward spiritual union with Jesus Christ.
- (1) Being immersed in water is symbolic of your death and burial with Christ (Romans 6:3-4). When you were saved, you died with Christ, that is, you died, spiritually speaking, to sin and your old way of life. “Dying to sin” means that your relationship with sin is ended. Its power over you is broken, and you are no longer its slave (Romans 6:7).
- (2) Being raised up from the water is symbolic of your resurrection with Christ (Romans 6:5). When you were saved, you were made alive with Christ, that is, you became alive, spiritually speaking, to God. Becoming “alive” to God means that you have begun a relationship with Him (John 17:3). God has regenerated you (Ephesians 2:4-5), and you have been born again (John 3:1-8).
- B) Your commitment to discipleship. When you are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, you are publicly declaring your faith in Him and your intention to become His disciple (Matthew 5:14-16). As we learned in a previous lesson, a disciple is a person who desires to learn from and follow after someone else. Your goal as a disciple of Jesus is to learn His teachings, model His way of living and become like Him in your thoughts, attitudes, actions and words.

3) What are the prerequisites for baptism?

- A) You must be born again before being baptized (see the lesson on salvation).
- B) You should be aware of and understand the spiritual significance of the act of baptism.

4) Why must I be baptized?

- A) Water baptism is commanded by Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).
- B) Jesus, our example, was Himself baptized (Matthew 3:13-17).
- C) Jesus and His disciples baptized those who believed and repented (John 3:22-26).

D) New converts in the early Church were always baptized (Acts 2:38–41; 8:26–38; 16:31–34).

5) Does getting baptized save me?

A) The act of baptism does not save you (cf. Luke 23:39–43). You are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9). Baptism is simply the first and necessary step of obedience as you begin your relationship with God.

(1) Doctrinal Error Alert: the Catholic church believes that “baptism confers the grace of justification.”¹ Catholics also practice infant baptism in which water from a baptismal font is poured over the baby’s head. The godparents then profess faith for the child by responding to a litany of beliefs and reciting the prayer of Jesus, the Our Father.

(2) If you were baptized as an infant, I recommend that you get baptized again. You will fulfill the hope your parents had for you when they baptized you as an infant, and you will declare your own faith in Christ at the same time.

6) When should I be baptized?

A) In the early Church, baptism took place very soon after conversion (Acts 22:16). Because of this, I recommend that you request baptism as soon as possible after being saved. The pastor of your church will work with you to arrange this, and he can answer any questions you have about the process.

7) Who can baptize me?

A) Anyone who is a Christian and who understands the nature and significance of baptism can baptize another believer. Scripture gives no other requirements. The reason baptisms are typically done by pastors is because of denominational restrictions and the desire to ensure that people are truly saved before they are baptized.

¹ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, (TAN Books and Publishers; 4th Edition), p. 354.

Consecration

1) I'm so grateful to God for saving me. How can I show my gratitude to Him?

- A) The Bible says that the proper way to show your gratitude to God is to consecrate yourself to Him: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—living, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).¹

2) What does it mean to present my body as a sacrifice?

- A) Around four thousand years ago, God chose a man named Abraham to be the father of a group of people that would belong uniquely to Him. These people are known as the Jews. God made a covenant with them and gave them a system of worship. Part of that worship system was the practice of sacrifices.²
- B) A sacrifice was made when an individual offered up something on an altar to God. Most sacrifices involved offering an animal (usually a sheep or bull), but others involved offering grain or barley. God intended the sacrifices to be object lessons that would help His people understand spiritual realities. One of the lessons they communicated was that God wants us to consecrate our lives to Him.
- C) The sacrificial system is the context for the command in Romans 12:1. When you present your body to God as a sacrifice, you are yielding every part of yourself to God. This sacrifice is described as "living, holy and acceptable to God." It is "living" because you are spiritually alive in Christ; it is "holy" because you are separated from sin unto God; it is "acceptable" because God is pleased with the offering of what He has cleansed.
- D) Presenting your body to God as a sacrifice is an act of submission and consecration. The motivation for this offering is the mercy of God, for He graciously gave His only Son to die in your place. The proper response ("reasonable service") for you as a new convert is to willingly yield yourself to Him. You must give up the right to have your own way, and you must surrender unconditionally to God's will and purpose for your life.

3) What does a consecrated life look like? How do I put this into practice?

- A) When you consecrate something, you set it apart from everything else to a special, specific purpose. For example, an athlete who competes in the Olympics dedicates (consecrates) himself to the training required to achieve that goal. It affects what he eats, how much he sleeps, where he goes, who he associates with and how he spends his time. In the same way, when you consecrate yourself to God, it will affect everything you do.

¹ This translation is a combination of the ESV, NIV and YLT.

² This worship system is described in detail in the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

- B) The Bible gives us two practical directives for how to live a consecrated life. The first is to “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11) and the second is to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

4) What does it mean to consider myself dead to sin and alive to God?

- A) Romans 6 begins with a question: Should a Christian continue sinning after they are saved? The answer is emphatic: “By no means!” (Romans 6:1–2). Paul then goes on to explain why. As a Christian, you died to sin and are now alive to God in Jesus (Romans 6:3–10).
- B) When Paul says that you are “dead to sin,” he means that your relationship to sin has been severed—sin no longer has control over you. When you were a sinner, sin reigned over you, and you were under its control. As a Christian, the only control sin has in your life is the control that you allow it to have (see the lessons “Spiritual Warfare” and “Conquering Sinful Habits”).
- C) When Paul says that you are alive to God in Christ he means that you now have a relationship with God through your union with Christ. When you were a sinner, you were dead to God, that is, you had no relationship with God and were spiritually dead. As a Christian, you are now united with Christ in His resurrection. Through Christ you are spiritually alive and have been adopted by God as His child (see the lesson “Salvation”).
- D) If you, as a Christian, are dead to sin and alive to God, then why are you told to “consider [NIV “count”] yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”? The answer is that God wants you to live out in practice what is true of you in spirit. You are to demonstrate this truth (your new state) by how you live.
- E) There are two parts to obeying this command. First, you are not to allow sin to have control over your thoughts, attitudes or actions (Romans 6:12). This means resisting temptation and rejecting the influence of the world (Romans 12:2). Second, you must yield to the control of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:13). This means obeying God’s word and following the leadership of the Spirit.

5) What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?

- A) The key to understanding what Paul means when he says to be “filled with the Spirit” is found in the contrast between the two parts of Ephesians 5:18. The full verse reads, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”
- B) Notice the contrast between being “drunk with wine” and being “filled with the Spirit.” When a person is drunk, we say that they are “under the influence.” This means that their attitudes, actions and words are being influenced by the alcohol in their bloodstream. They will say and do things while drunk that they would never do if they were sober. God does not want you to be under the influence of alcohol—instead, He wants you to be “filled with the Spirit.”

- C) Being “filled with the Spirit” means that you are to be “under the influence” of the Holy Spirit. You are to be yielding to the Spirit and allowing Him to control your attitudes, actions and words. Just as a person is transformed by the influence of alcohol, you are to be transformed by the influence of the Holy Spirit. He will guide you to say and do things that are pleasing to God.

6) Is consecration something that I do just once?

- A) No, consecration should be a part of your daily walk with God. However, just as a long journey begins with the first step, so the consecrated life begins with the first dedication of yourself to God.
- B) Here is a suggested prayer for the first step of your journey in the consecrated life: “Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for saving me and giving me new life. I now give my life back to You and consecrate myself to You as a living, holy and acceptable sacrifice. I resolve to resist temptation and say ‘Yes’ to the Holy Spirit. I also purpose to yield every area of my life to the control of the Spirit, and I will endeavor, through Your grace, to walk each day according to His guidance. In Jesus name, Amen.”
- C) Here is a suggested daily prayer as you continue to resist temptation and yield yourself to the Holy Spirit: “Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your grace which gives me the desire and power to do your will. Today I choose to consecrate myself to you. Help me to resist temptation and say ‘Yes’ to the Holy Spirit. Help me to live each moment under His influence. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Loving God

1) What is the greatest commandment in the Bible?

- A) The Pharisees once asked Jesus this same question. Jesus answered with a verse from the Old Testament (OT) book of Deuteronomy: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” (Matthew 22:37–38; Deuteronomy 6:5). This means you should love God with every part of your being and to the utmost of your ability.
- B) The Pharisees asked about the greatest commandment, but Jesus continued by giving them another from the OT book of Leviticus: “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39; Leviticus 19:18b). Loving others is closely related to loving God. John said, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20–21).
- C) Jesus concluded his answer with this statement: “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40). The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” refers to the OT, which was the Bible of Jesus’ day. Jesus’ point is that everything God requires can be summarized by these two commands.

2) What does it mean to love God?

- A) When you are saved, God sends the Holy Spirit to live in your heart (Romans 5:5). The Spirit enables you to love God and have a relationship with Him (Galatians 4:6). You are then responsible, by God’s grace, for nurturing that love and keeping it strong and vibrant (Revelation 2:4–5). The Bible tells us that those who love God:
 - (1) are faithful to Him alone.
 - (2) obey Him with gladness.
 - (3) desire to please Him.
 - (4) seek their happiness in Him.
 - (5) work to build a closer relationship with Him.
- B) Everything listed above is a function of your will. That is because love, although truly a feeling, is also a commitment. Strong, enduring relationships require lots of hard work!

3) Loving God means being faithful to Him alone.

- A) When God spoke audibly to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, the first thing He said was, “I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but me” (Exodus 20:2–3 NLT).
- B) When we think of other “gods,” we typically think of idols made of wood, stone and precious metals. But gods can also have a more subtle form—money, material possessions, power, relationships, etc. Having another god (idolatry) means allowing anything to take God’s rightful place of supremacy in your life.

- C) How does this relate to loving God? Moses told the people of Israel: “Suppose there are prophets among you or those who dream dreams about the future, and they promise you signs or miracles, and the predicted signs or miracles occur. If they then say, ‘Come, let us worship other gods’—gods you have not known before—do not listen to them. The LORD your God is testing you to see if you truly love him with all your heart and soul. Serve only the LORD your God and fear him alone. Obey his commands, listen to his voice, and cling to him” (Deuteronomy 13:1–4 NLT). Loving God means being faithful to Him alone.
- D) Being faithful to God involves sacrifice. Moses went on to say, “Suppose someone secretly entices you—even your brother, your son or daughter, your beloved wife, or your closest friend—and says, ‘Let us go worship other gods’...Do not give in or listen. Have no pity, and do not spare or protect them. You must put them to death! Strike the first blow yourself, and then all the people must join in” (Deuteronomy 13:6a, 8–9 NLT). This teaches us how seriously God takes our faithfulness to Him. You must do whatever it takes to maintain your commitment to Him alone.
- E) The sacrifices you make to be faithful to God will not go unrewarded. When the apostle Peter told Jesus how much he and the other disciples had given up to follow Him, Jesus said, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). This wonderful truth will help you remain faithful to God alone.

4) Loving God means obeying Him with gladness.

- A) Think back for a moment to your life as a sinner. You probably believed that you were “doing your own thing” and “living your own life.” But nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, you were a slave of sin (Romans 6:6). Paul said, “Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.” (Romans 6:16 NLT).
- B) What is the connection between obedience and loving God? Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The apostle John said, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). These passages teach us that love for God expresses itself in obedience to His commands.
- C) What is it that God commands? That you should love God and love others. That is all God requires of you—nothing more or less. Now inevitably the question is asked, “How do I love God and love others?” The answer is found by reading God's word. As you study it, you will learn how to live out these two commands. For example, if you love others you will forgive them, be kind to them, pray for them, etc. (Ephesians 4:32; 6:18–19). If you love God you will read His word, spend time in prayer, participate in a local church, etc. (Psalm 119:11; Mark 1:35; Hebrews 10:25).
- D) Is it enough to simply obey God? No—your attitude is also very important. Psalm 100:2 says, “Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!” This means you should obey God without grumbling or complaining (Philippians 2:14). Instead, you should serve Him with a cheerful spirit, grateful for His love and

mercy. God told the people of Israel: “If you do not serve the LORD your God with joy and enthusiasm for the abundant benefits you have received, you will serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you. You will be left hungry, thirsty, naked, and lacking in everything” (Deuteronomy 28:47–48 NLT). God’s blessings should motivate you to obey Him with gladness!

5) Loving God means desiring to please Him.

- A) We all know from personal experience that when you love someone, you want to please them. It’s the same in your relationship with God. Your love for Him causes you to desire to please Him in everything you do. Paul’s testimony was, “We make it our goal to please him” (2 Corinthians 5:9 NIV). This is the motto of those who truly love God.
- B) How can we please God? Paul told the Colossians, “We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:9–10). This passage contains two important truths:
- (1) First, you must be “filled with the knowledge of his will” in order to be “fully pleasing to him.” You gain this knowledge by reading God’s Word and following the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Romans 10:17; James 1:21–22; Galatians 5:25).
 - (a) The Bible is the revelation of God’s will. If you want to know what pleases Him, read and study His Word. Do this with humility, asking God to open your heart and mind so you can understand His truth (1 Corinthians 2:11–13).
 - (b) God’s will is also revealed through the leadership of the Spirit. For example, God may lead you into a certain career, relationship, job, church or place. You should regularly seek His will for the decisions you face. Remember—the Spirit will never lead you contrary to Scripture. His guidance is always in harmony with God’s Word.
 - (2) Second, God cares about every aspect of your life. The phrase “fully pleasing to Him” means pleasing Him in all things. In other words, Paul is praying that the Colossians would know how to please God in every area of their lives—work, home, marriage, family, entertainment, ministry—everything.
- C) Love for God is demonstrated by a desire to please Him in every area of your life. This is more than just following a list of rules. You can obey a list of rules without loving the rule-maker. However, if you love the one who made the rules, you will not only obey him gladly, you will also desire to please him in everything you do.

6) Loving God means seeking our happiness in Him.

- A) Everyone wants to be happy; it’s the basic motivating force behind all our decisions. Is there anything wrong with this desire? Not at all! In fact, our problem is that our desire for happiness is not strong enough!

- (1) C. S. Lewis once commented that God “finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”¹
- B) Did you know that God wants you to be happy? Consider the following verses from the OT:
- (1) “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 5:16)
- (2) “Keep the LORD's commands and statutes I am giving you today, for your own good” (Deuteronomy 10:13 HCSB).
- (3) “How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you” (Psalm 128:1-2 NASB).
- C) God calls you to obey Him by appealing to your desire for things be well, that is, your desire for happiness. This implies two things: first, God designed you to seek happiness, and second, true happiness is found only in a life of obedience to Him.
- D) You seek your happiness in God by:
- (1) Recognizing that “the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17). If you remind yourself of this truth on a daily basis, it will be easier to resist the passing pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:24-26).
- (2) Being willing to deny yourself in the present so you may gain everything in the future (Philippians 2:5-11). This is the way Christ lived—He left us an example that we should “follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).
- (3) Saying with Paul, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Philippians 4:11). It’s biblical to do what you can to improve your life (1 Corinthians 7:21), but when you encounter circumstances that you cannot change, contentment is the God-given ability to say to yourself, “It is enough” (Hebrews 13:5).
- (4) Rejoicing in Him—His attributes (love, mercy, justice, etc.), His saving grace, His many blessings in your life (Psalm 32:10-11; Philippians 4:4). You should “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- E) If you do these things, you will find happiness and joy in this present life, and eternal happiness in the life to come. God made you to be happy in Him—you cannot find lasting happiness anywhere else.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1-2.

7) Loving God means working to build a closer relationship with Him.

- A) A strong, loving relationship is like a good garden. It's a beautiful thing, but it doesn't happen by accident—it takes dedication and hard work. You need to be working each day to cultivate a closer relationship with God. You do this by:
- (1) Reading, studying and meditating on His Word. You need to be reading *all* of God's Word on a regular basis. This will help you keep a balanced perspective of God. You also need to be studying the Bible, that is, working to truly understand what it means and how it applies to your life (2 Timothy 2:7). Lastly, you need to be memorizing and meditating on God's Word (Psalm 119:15). This is how you transform your mind so you can learn to think like Christ (Romans 12:2).
 - (2) Talking to Him. You need to be spending time each day in prayer. Remember that talking to God is more than just giving Him a list of requests. Take time to praise Him for who He is and what He's doing in your life. Share the ordinary things with Him—the events of the day, your thoughts and feelings, any irritations and difficulties you've had, etc. God is interested in every part of your life!
 - (3) Spending time with His people. You are part of the body of Christ—the Church. God wants you to support, encourage and build up other believers in the faith (Hebrews 3:13; 10:25). The Church deepens your relationship with God by showing you what He's doing in other people's lives and by giving you the accountability it takes to stay faithful to Him.
 - (4) Resisting temptation. Nothing will hinder your relationship with God like sin. You need to be asking God each day for the grace to say 'No!' to the temptations of the world, the flesh and the Devil (1 John 2:16; 1 Peter 2:11; 2 Corinthians 2:11). And "if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1b). You should confess your sins, and "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9; James 5:16).

Essentials for Success

Four Essentials to Being a Successful Christian

1) What are the four essentials to being a successful Christian?

- A) Read your Bible each day.
- B) Pray each day.
- C) Participate in a local church.
- D) Witness to your family, friends, co-workers and others.

2) Why is it important to read my Bible and pray every day?

- A) The fundamental building block of life and living is the day. Bible reading and prayer need to become part of that normal cycle.
- B) Bible reading and prayer are to you spiritually what food is to you physically. You need it every day in order to live and grow.
- C) Each day you face many decisions. You also face the attacks and temptations of the enemy. Bible reading and prayer prepare you for the choices and challenges that come your way each day.

3) How can I make Bible reading and prayer a daily habit?

- A) It's important to form good habits early in your Christian walk. Here are some steps you can take to make Bible reading and prayer a daily habit:
 - (1) Motivation. You can't form a new habit without proper motivation. Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of your new habit (see handout). Keep it near your Bible to remind you of the importance of what you're doing.
 - (2) Commitment. Each day, renew your commitment to read the Bible and pray. Ask God to help you persevere. You may also want to make yourself accountable to someone who can help you keep your commitment.
 - (3) Planning. The devil will resist what you're doing! That's why it's important to prepare:
 - (a) Associate it with something you already do consistently each day.
 - (b) Try to do it at the same time each day if possible. Beware procrastination!
 - (c) Watch your environment. Do it in an area where you are free from distractions and interruptions.
 - (4) Keep a record. Record keeping is important to creating new habits. Studies show that it takes around 30–60 consecutive days to form a new habit. Take a sheet of paper and make a row for each day (see handout). Make a check mark each day

to show your progress. Keep marks for the entire period and even longer if helpful.

- (5) Reward yourself. For example, every 7 days of consistent progress might mean a special treat.
- (6) Sacrifice. It may (and probably will) take extra effort to make Bible reading and prayer happen on a daily basis (Mark 1:35). Remember your motivation!

4) What should I do if I miss a day?

- A) Don't be discouraged! The enemy will tell you to give up and that you'll never be able to do it consistently. He's lying! With God's help, all things are possible (Philippians 4:13). Resist his attempts to talk you into giving up.
- B) Analyze. Ask yourself the question, "Why did I not follow through today?" Many times the answer is something you can avoid in the future. Take that into account and plan accordingly.
- C) Ask God for help. It's important to remember that you can't live the Christian life in your own strength. You need God's help each day. These lessons will give you many ideas and strategies for success, but ultimately, it's God's grace that will give you the victory.
- D) Remember. Remind yourself of your motivation and commitment. Purpose to do better tomorrow and in the future.

5) Why is participating in a local church important to being a successful Christian?

- A) Growth. When you became a Christian, you became part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The body of Christ is made up of everyone who is born again. Just as a part of your physical body can't live and grow when separated from the whole, so you can't live and grow without the fellowship of other believers.
- B) Encouragement and support. The Bible says, "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT).
- C) Accountability. This is one of the most important factors in being a successful Christian. Becoming part of a local church makes you accountable. People will check on you and ask how things are going. That's why you should make a point of being around fellow Christians as much as possible.
 - (1) If you find that you're struggling in a certain area, seek out an older, mature believer and make yourself accountable to them. Many times this will help you overcome something that you can't conquer by yourself.

6) What is witnessing and why is it important?

- A) Witnessing is telling others the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ and sharing your conversion story with them.
- B) Witnessing will help you in several areas:
 - (1) It will reaffirm your life in Christ. You will find that the devil likes to put doubts in your mind about your salvation. Telling others about your new birth will help to overcome those doubts.
 - (2) It will remind you that people are watching you. You witness by both word and deed, and many times your actions are more important than your words. People will notice the change in your life, and they'll be watching closely to see if it's genuine. They may even test you to see how you react.
 - (3) It will encourage you to study the Bible. When you witness, people will ask you questions about God and the Bible. Those questions will motivate you to learn.
 - (4) It will build you up spiritually. There is nothing like the experience of helping someone repent of their sins and commit their life to God. It builds your faith and strengthens your commitment to Christ.

Reading the Bible and Praying Each Day

Advantages	Disadvantages
Results of Developing the Habit	Results of Not Developing the Habit

30 Day Bible Reading and Prayer Record Sheet

Day	Read Bible	Prayed	Comments
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
14	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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25	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
26	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
27	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
28	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
29	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
30	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Reading God's Word

1) What is the Bible?

- A) The Bible is a collection of 66 separate writings which are called books.
- (1) The Bible was written by more than forty authors from every walk of life, including kings, military leaders, peasants, philosophers, fisherman, tax collectors, poets, musicians, statesmen, scholars and shepherds.
 - (2) The Bible was written to kings, nations, slave-owners, churches, Jews, Gentiles, and individuals of all backgrounds.
 - (3) The Bible contains poetry, songs, personal letters, historical narratives, biographies, romance, rhetoric, satire, law, prophecy, and parables.
 - (4) The Bible was written over a period of 1,500 years. It was written in times of war and peace. It was written on three continents—Asia, Africa and Europe—and in places as varied as a desert, a dungeon, an island and a palace.
- B) The Bible is divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament records the history of Israel prior to the coming of Christ. The New Testament records the life of Jesus and the history of the early church.

2) What makes the Bible different from other books?

- A) The Bible makes a radical claim—it claims to be the “Word of God.”
- (1) The claim. Paul said, “All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). This passage is the key text for the doctrine of inspiration. The Bible has literally been breathed out from God.
 - (2) The method. Peter said, “Above all, you do well if you recognize this: no prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20–21 NET). God, acting through the Holy Spirit, caused various men to record the exact words He desired. This means the Bible is not the product of men's minds, but rather of God Himself.
- B) In summary, inspiration is the process by which Spirit-moved writers produced God-breathed words. This makes the Bible unique from other books, for it is the authoritative Word of God.

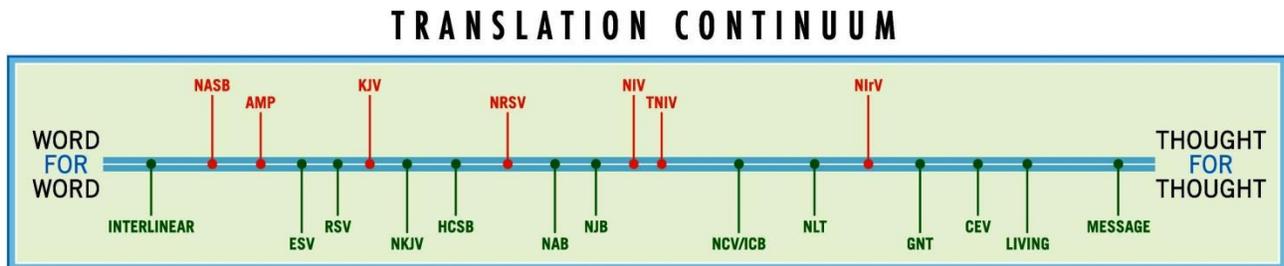
3) There are so many different translations. Which one should I read?

- A) The Bible was originally written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The Bibles we have today are translations into English from the original languages.¹

¹ See this link for a list of Bible versions: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-versions/>.

B) There are two general methods of Bible translation:

- (1) Word-for-Word (Formal Equivalence) – this method attempts to translate each word of the original language into English and tries to preserve the original word order and sentence structure as much as possible. Word-for-word translations are excellent for study.
- (2) Thought-for-Thought (Dynamic Equivalence) – this method seeks to understand what the original text is saying and then translate that thought into English at the expense of literalness and original word order. Thought-for-thought translations are helpful for ease of reading.

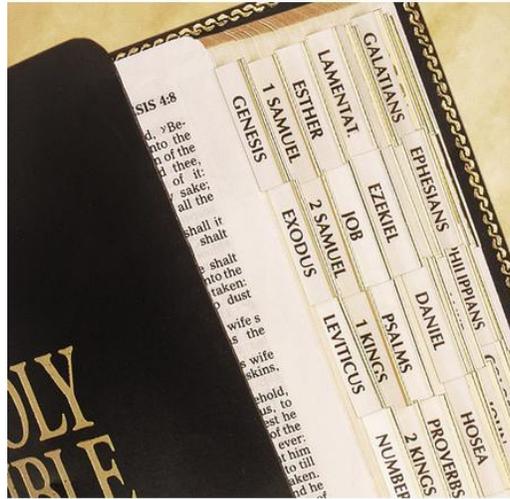


This continuum shows how different Bible translations fit into the word-for-word and thought-for-thought translation philosophies.

- C) For your main Bible, I recommend the English Standard Version (ESV) or New American Standard Bible (NASB). The ones from Cambridge University Press are beautiful. The craftsmanship is excellent and the text is clear and easy to read with plenty of space for note taking. If you can afford it (they are expensive), get real leather—it will last a lifetime.
- D) For your reference Bible, I recommend *Today's Parallel Bible* from Zondervan. It has the KJV, NASB, NIV and NLT versions side-by-side for you to compare and contrast. This is very useful and will get you in the habit of checking other translations.
- E) If you would like to purchase a Bible for your children, I recommend *The Picture Bible* by Iva Hoth and the *Illustrated Bible: Complete New Testament* by Keith Neely.
- F) If you enjoy reading the Bible online, I recommend <http://biblegateway.com> and <http://bible.is>. You can also use an app like YouVersion (<http://youversion.com>).

4) How do I find things in the Bible?

- A) If you're new to the Bible, I recommend using book tabs (see picture below). You can buy the tabs at any Christian bookstore. Some will even put them on for you.



- B) Books of the Bible are often referred to by their abbreviations (e.g., Gen for Genesis). This can be tough for new converts who are not familiar with all the books. Be sure to look at the “Bible Book Abbreviations” handout on the website which gives the common abbreviations for each book.
- C) As you work your way through the lessons on the website, be sure to look up each Scripture reference. This will give you practice with locating verses in the Bible.

5) Where should I start reading?

- A) The “30 Days With Jesus” handout on the website is an excellent way to begin reading the Bible. You can do this in conjunction with the “30 Day Bible Reading and Prayer Record Sheet” handout.
- B) Once you finish the “30 Days With Jesus” handout, you will be ready to read larger sections of Scripture. However, because many books in the Bible are difficult to read and understand, I recommend that you start with the easier books. The “Bible Books in Reading Order” handout on the website will help you with this (the easiest books are listed first with the difficulty level increasing as you go).
- C) For those who are ready to read the entire Bible, I created a plan that will help you read through the Bible in a year:
- (1) The Chronological Synopsis of the Bible. This plan has you reading through the Bible chronologically—that is, in the order in which the events occurred. Events that are recorded more than once (e.g., the history of Israel's kings, the Gospels, etc.) are harmonized and presented in synopsis form (parallel columns of text). I created this plan myself, and I use it for my own daily Bible reading.
- D) Topical Reading. Sometimes you will want to read what the Bible has to say about a certain topic (e.g. divorce, homosexuality, baptism, angels). The best resources for this type of reading are the *Baker Topical Guide to the Bible* by Walter A. Elwell and the *New Nave's Topical Bible*.

6) How much should I read each day?

- A) If you're not working through a particular reading plan, I recommend that you read at least one chapter each day. Sometimes you may read more and occasionally less, but a chapter a day is a good rule of thumb.

7) I'm not a good reader. How do I get something out of what I read?

- A) Ask questions. Questions are the key to understanding. You should always have a pen and paper when you read the Bible. As you read, write down any questions you have about the meaning of the text. If you can, answer the questions yourself by thinking about the verses and studying the context. Save questions you can't answer for church or Bible study (2 Timothy 2:7). Consider the following example:

- (1) "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7 NET).
- (2) Here are some questions you could ask:
 - What does it mean that "God is Light"?
 - What does it mean to "walk in darkness"?
 - What does it mean to "walk in the light"?
- (3) You could answer these questions as follows:
 - (a) "God is light" means that God is truth. If I "walk in darkness" then I'm living in lies and wickedness, but if I "walk in the light" then I'm living in truth and obedience to God.
- (4) An important takeaway from this passage is that you cannot be a Christian and continue to practice willful sin. If you claim otherwise, you are a liar (see 1 John 2:4).
- (5) Consider this quote: "People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem. Without some kind of dilemma to stimulate thought, behavior becomes habitual rather than thoughtful" (John Dewey). I encourage you to form the habit of asking questions of the text.

- B) Apply what you read by asking yourself these two questions:

- (1) Does this passage challenge any of my values, beliefs, or attitudes? The focus here is on your internal thinking. For practice, try applying Philippians 3:8.
- (2) Does this passage challenge the way I act or speak? The focus here is on your outward behavior. For practice, try applying Philippians 2:14-15.

Bible Book Abbreviations

Old Testament		Common Abbreviations		New Testament		Common Abbreviations	
Genesis	Gen Gn			Matthew	Mat	Matt	Mt
Exodus	Exo Ex	Exod		Mark	Mar	Mark	Mk
Leviticus	Lev Lv			Luke	Luk	Luke	Lk
Numbers	Num Nm			John	Joh	John	Jn
Deuteronomy	Deu Deut	Dt		Acts	Act	Acts	
Joshua	Jos Josh	Jo		Romans	Rom		
Judges	Jdg Judg	Jud		1 Corinthians	1Co	1Cor	1 Cor
Ruth	Rut Ruth	Ru		2 Corinthians	2Co	2Cor	2 Cor
1 Samuel	1Sa 1Sam	1 Sam	1 Sm	Galatians	Gal		
2 Samuel	2Sa 2Sam	2 Sam	2 Sm	Ephesians	Eph		
1 Kings	1Ki 1Kgs	1 Kgs	1 Kgs	Philippians	Phi	Phil	
2 Kings	2Ki 2Kgs	2 Kgs	II Kgs	Colossians	Col		
1 Chronicles	1Ch 1Chro	1 Chron	I Chr	1 Thessalonians	1Th	1Thes	1 Thes
2 Chronicles	2Ch 2Chro	2 Chron	II Chr	2 Thessalonians	2Th	2Thes	2 Thes
Ezra	Ezr Ezra			1 Timothy	1Ti	1Tim	1 Tim
Nehemiah	Neh Ne			2 Timothy	2Ti	2Tim	2 Tim
Esther	Est Es	Esther		Titus	Tit		
Job	Job Jb			Philemon	Phm	Phile	Philem
Psalms	Psa Ps			Hebrews	Heb		
Proverbs	Pro Prov	Prv		James	Jam	Jas	
Ecclesiastes	Ecc Eccles	Ecc		1 Peter	1Pe	1Pet	1 Pt
Song of Solomon	Sol Song	Sg	Song of Sol	2 Peter	2Pe	2Pet	2 Pt
Isaiah	Isa Is			1 John	1Jo	1John	1 Jn
Jeremiah	Jer			2 John	2Jo	2John	2 Jn
Lamentations	Lam			3 John	3Jo	3John	3 Jn
Ezekiel	Eze Ezek			Jude	Jud	Jude	
Daniel	Dan Dn			Revelation	Rev	Apoc	Rv
Hosea	Hos Hosea						
Joel	Joe Joel	Jl					
Amos	Amo Amos	Am					
Obadiah	Oba Obad	Ob					
Jonah	Jon Jonah						
Micah	Mic Micah	Mi					
Nahum	Nah Nahum	Na					
Habakkuk	Hab Hb						
Zephaniah	Zep Zeph						
Haggai	Hag Hg						
Zechariah	Zec Zech						
Malachi	Mal						

30 Days With Jesus

Day	Theme	Passage
1	Jesus' Birth and Ministry Foretold	Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; 53
2	The Birth of Jesus	Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20
3	John the Baptist / Jesus' Baptism and Temptation	Matthew 3:1-4:11
4	Water to Wine and the Samaritan Woman	John 2:1-11; 4:1-42
5	Jesus Rejected in His Hometown	Luke 4:14-30
6	Jesus Calls His Disciples	John 1:35-51; Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 3:13-19
7	Sermon on the Mount	Luke 6:17-49
8	Jesus' Healing Ministry	Matthew 8:1-13; Luke 7:11-17; 7:36-50
9	Encounters With the Pharisees	Matthew 12:1-13; 22-45
10	Parable of the Sower	Matthew 13:1-43
11	Jesus Calms the Storm and Later Walks on Water	Luke 8:22-25; Mark 6:45-56
12	Casting Out Demons	Mark 5:1-43
13	Feeding of the 5000	John 6:1-14
14	Peter's Great Confession / The Transfiguration	Matthew 16:13-20; Luke 9:28-36
15	Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection	Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; Isaiah 50:6-7; 53:4-12
16	Teachings and Parables	Matthew 17:24-18:20
17	Teachings and Parables	Matthew 18:21-19:15
18	The Rich Young Ruler	Mark 10:17-31
19	Disciples Sent Out	Luke 10:1-24
20	The Good Samaritan	Luke 10:25-37
21	Jesus Teaches on Prayer	Luke 11:1-13
22	Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead	John 11:1-44
23	Jesus Comes to Jerusalem	Matthew 21:1-27
24	The Last Supper	John 13:1-17; Matthew 26:17-35
25	Comfort for the Disciples	John 14-15
26	Jesus Arrested / Peter Denies Jesus	Matthew 26:36-75
27	Jesus' Trial	John 18:28-19:16
28	Jesus' Crucifixion and Death	John 19:17-42
29	Jesus' Resurrection and Appearances	John 20-21
30	The Great Commission and the Ascension of Jesus	Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-14

Bible Books in Reading Order

1. 1 John
2. John
3. 1 Peter
4. 2 Peter
5. Genesis
6. James
7. Mark
8. Acts
9. Ephesians
10. Proverbs
11. Philippians
12. Colossians
13. Luke
14. Psalms
15. 2 John
16. 3 John
17. Ruth
18. 1 Timothy
19. 2 Timothy
20. Jude
21. Titus
22. Jonah
23. Philemon
24. Matthew
25. Esther
26. Joshua
27. Judges
28. 1 Samuel
29. 2 Samuel
30. 1 Kings
31. 2 Kings
32. 1 Chronicles
33. 2 Chronicles
34. Ezra
35. Nehemiah
36. Romans
37. 1 Corinthians
38. 2 Corinthians
39. Galatians
40. 1 Thessalonians
41. 2 Thessalonians
42. Exodus
43. Leviticus
44. Numbers
45. Deuteronomy
46. Hebrews
47. Job
48. Ecclesiastes
49. Song of Solomon
50. Daniel
51. Revelation
52. Isaiah
53. Jeremiah
54. Lamentations
55. Ezekiel
56. Hosea
57. Joel
58. Amos
59. Obadiah
60. Micah
61. Nahum
62. Habakkuk
63. Zephaniah
64. Haggai
65. Zechariah
66. Malachi

Prayer

1) What is prayer?

- A) Prayer is simply talking to God. The essence of being a Christian is having a relationship with God (John 17:3). God is personal, and you communicate with Him in much the same way that you communicate with others. As you know, communication is essential for any healthy relationship.

2) What should I say to God when I pray?

- A) Jesus is your primary example of what to do and how to live as a Christian. Here is what Jesus taught about prayer:

- (1) “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil’” (Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4).
 - (a) Jesus’ prayer serves as a model for your prayers. Note that He said, “Pray then *like* this.” He did not mean for you to repeat this prayer word-for-word over and over again. He intended this prayer to give you an idea of what to say when you talk to God.
 - (b) The word “Father” reminds you of the nature of your relationship to God: He is your Father. God graciously adopted you as His child, and He loves you very much. (People sometimes wonder whether they should pray to Jesus or to the Father. The example which Jesus left, as well as the general pattern in the Bible, is to pray to the Father. This should be done in the name of Jesus by the power of the Spirit.)
 - (c) When you talk to God, you should begin by honoring His name. Tell Him how much you love who He is and what He’s done for you. The Psalms are full of ideas on how to express yourself in this way (read Psalm 97, 103, 111).
 - (d) The kingdom of God is both spiritual (He is Lord of your life) and physical (He will someday rule the earth). You should tell God that you desire His kingdom to come, both in the hearts of others as well as here on earth. Tell God that you want His will to be done in your life just like it is in heaven.
 - (e) Talk to God about your daily needs. He wants you to recognize your dependency on Him for even the basic necessities of life. He doesn’t want you to worry about these things. He wants you to trust Him to provide.
 - (f) If there is any attitude or action that God is convicting you about, prayer is the time to confess it and ask His forgiveness. Note that forgiveness from God is conditional upon you being willing to forgive others.
 - (g) Ask God to help you resist the temptations of the enemy and deliver you from evil. Doing this will remind you that you cannot make it on your own. You need God’s help every day to resist Satan’s attacks.

(2) The Bible records an intimate conversation between Jesus and the Father that took place in the Garden of Gethsemane: “And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’” (Matthew 26:39).

- (a) Jesus talked openly with the Father about the inner struggle that was going on inside Him. This means that you should share even your most private thoughts and feelings with God. Note that Jesus’ attitude was one of submission to God’s will, even when His own desires were pulling Him in a different direction.
- B) Think about it this way: what do you say when you’re talking to your family or your friends? You talk about the events of the day, how you’re feeling, what you’ve been thinking about and any irritations or difficulties that you’ve had. You should talk to God about all these things. He’s interested in every aspect of your life!

3) Prayer seems so one-sided. How does God talk to me?

- A) The primary way God talks to you is through the Bible. That’s why it’s important for you to be reading the Word each day. For example, you may have told God that you’re concerned about your job. Listen to His response: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7 NIV).
- B) God also speaks to you through His Holy Spirit. The Spirit lives inside you and serves as your counselor, helper and guide (1 John 3:24; 4:13; John 14:26). He will often speak to you through impressions and thoughts. For example, if you yell at someone in anger, you will notice a feeling of conviction. This is the Spirit prompting you to apologize and ask forgiveness. You will also experience impressions to witness to others and thoughts urging you to act and speak in a Christ-like manner. Learn to recognize the Spirit’s voice and always respond in obedience!
- C) God will talk to you through other Christians. One of the primary ways this happens is through pastors and teachers (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13; Hebrews 13:7, 17).
- D) God may also speak to you through events and circumstances. It has been said that God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain.¹ The trials and sufferings we endure are often used by God to speak to us about areas of need in our lives.

4) How long should I pray?

- A) There is no time limit on prayer. The Holy Spirit lives inside you and is with you all the time. Thus you can talk to God all day long (1 Thessalonians 5:17). However, even with our family and friends there are specific times when our focus is on talking to them directly. It is the same with God. These times will be short to begin with and will lengthen over time as your relationship with God grows.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*.

5) Why is it so hard to pray?

- A) The Devil hates prayer. You can expect him to do everything he can to stop you from praying. His usual method is to interrupt or distract you. That's why it's important to make sure you're alone and free from distractions (cell-phones, etc.) when you are praying (Matthew 6:6).
- B) Much of our communication with others is non-verbal. This makes talking to God difficult since we cannot see Him. Because of this, you may find your mind wandering while you're trying to pray. Here are some suggestions that may be useful to you:
 - (1) Pray out loud. Praying out loud helps focus your mind on what you're saying. I personally have found this very helpful.
 - (2) Change your position. Many people find themselves dozing off if they pray while sitting or kneeling. Sometimes walking or standing can help keep you awake.
 - (3) Consider writing instead of speaking. Some people find it easier to write their prayers down on paper rather than speaking. Think of it as e-mailing God. This has the added benefit of functioning as a prayer journal. You can save each prayer and review them in the future to see how God has been working in your life.
 - (4) Some people find that using a prayer template is helpful. The prayers that are part of the Bible reading plan follow this format: praise, lessons from God's Word, reflection, request, and thanksgiving.
- C) For many people, finding time to pray in their busy schedules is the hardest part of praying. The solution is simple but requires sacrifice. Prayer does not just happen. You must plan ahead and purposely take time to pray. Set aside a certain time each day that you go off alone and pray.

6) Will God always answer my prayers?

- A) God will *always* answer your prayers, but His answer may be 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'Not yet.' The 'Yes' is easy to recognize, but it's often difficult to tell the difference between 'No' and 'Not yet.' Over time, you will learn the discipline of waiting on God and letting Him work out His will in various situations.
- B) There is one way of praying that is sure to get a 'No' response. James said, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3 NASB). Watch your motives when you pray. God is not a Santa Claus with a bag of goodies reserved for your personal pleasure.

7) What are some things to avoid when praying?

- A) Praying to be seen. Jesus specifically mentioned this when talking to His disciples about prayer (Matthew 6:1, 5-6). The religious leaders of His day craved the attention and respect of the people. In order to appear as righteous as possible, they would pray in places where the public would be sure to notice them. Jesus rejected

this kind of behavior and told His disciples to pray alone where only God could see them. As a new convert, this probably won't be a temptation for you. However, it's good to be aware that this is a potential area the enemy can exploit.

- B) Meaningless repetition. Jesus' prayer was given as a contrast to His comment about the Gentiles (non-Jews): "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:7-8 NASB). You certainly wouldn't say the same thing over and over to your family or your friends. Don't do it to God either! (that includes Jesus' prayer itself).

Participating in Church

1) What is church?

- A) When you hear the word “church,” you probably think of a building or a denomination. Actually, the church is something very different. The church is the body of Christ. Paul said, “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:22–23).
- B) When you were born again, you were united spiritually with Christ. You are now “in Christ” and are part of His spiritual “body.” An analogy that Jesus used is that of a vine and its branches (John 15:5). Christ is the vine, and you are a branch. You have life because you are in the vine and receive nourishment from its roots.
- C) The body of Christ, the church, is made up of everyone who is born again. We refer to this vast group of people as the “universal”¹ church. Paul said, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Corinthians 12:13–14 NASB).
- D) For obvious reasons, it’s not possible for everyone who is in the body of Christ to gather together in one place to worship. Instead, we meet together locally in smaller groups. We refer to these groups as “churches” even though there is really only one “church” (we do this following Paul’s example: “Paul, an apostle...and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:” (Galatians 1:1–2)).
- E) In summary, the church is that vast group of people who throughout history have been united spiritually with Christ and are part of His body. It includes not only those alive on the earth presently, but all those who have died and gone to heaven in the past and all those who will in the future put their faith in Jesus Christ.

2) Why do believers meet together on a regular basis?

- A) Obedience. God commands every believer to meet regularly with a local body of Christians: “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24–25 NLT).
- B) Worship. Meeting together is a visible, tangible expression of your love and worship of God. It is where you can publicly testify to your faith and bring offerings of praise, thanks and honor, which are pleasing to Him. The psalmist David said, “Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!” (Psalm 95:1–2).

¹ While the term “Catholic” is generally used to refer to the Roman Catholic Church, the word “Catholic” is derived from the Latin *catholicus* which in turn is derived from the Greek *katholikos* meaning “general” or “universal.”

- C) Fellowship. One of the most important reasons for participating in a local church is to practice love toward other believers in the form of fellowship. We are to encourage and build each other up in the faith (1 Thessalonians 5:11). We are to urge one another to good works and motivate each other to live holy lives.
- D) Prayer. The early church met regularly to learn from the apostles, break bread and pray together (Acts 2:42). When we pray with other believers, we edify each other and help bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2). It's very encouraging to hear a fellow believer pray on your behalf.²
- E) Instruction. Paul told Timothy, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13). This means that corporate worship is about hearing the Word, being taught what it means, and being called to obey. These activities take place most effectively in the context of a local assembly of believers.
- F) Evangelism. The church is a place where sinners can be convicted of sin and called to repentance. Paul said, "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

3) Why should I participate in a local church?

- A) Accountability. In addition to the reasons given above, the Bible teaches that you must be under the protection and guidance of the leaders of a local church. These godly men are charged to care for you through teaching, encouragement and reproof, and you are accountable to them. The Spirit said, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:7, 17).
- B) Ministry. Everyone who is born again is given a spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:7). You are commanded to use your gift to help the body of Christ grow and flourish (1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:15-16). It's important for you to understand that you go to church to *give* as well as receive. That's why this lesson is called "Participating in Church" rather than "Attending Church."

² The idea that corporate prayer is more likely to be answered than individual prayer comes largely from a misunderstanding of Matthew 18:19-20. These verses are located within the context of the procedures to be followed when the church needs to discipline a sinning member. To interpret them as promising believers a blank check for anything they may agree to ask God for is to take these verses out of context (cf. John 14:13-15 where Jesus emphasizes that we must pray in His name, that is, in harmony with His will). In addition, it is unbiblical to say that when "two or three are gathered" to pray, some kind of magical power boost is applied to our prayers. Jesus is present when two or three pray, but He is equally present when one believer prays alone. See <http://www.gotquestions.org/corporate-prayer.html> for further details.

4) What about those who are unable to go to church?

- A) For shut-ins or invalids who aren't able to go to church, there are a variety of ministries available on the internet, radio or television. God understands the circumstances of these people and recognizes the sincerity of their hearts.
- B) It's your responsibility to visit such people as often as possible so they can be encouraged and not feel like they have been forgotten (James 1:27).

5) How often should I go to church?

- A) I encourage you to go to church as much as possible. The support and fellowship you receive from the church is vital to your spiritual growth. Avoid the temptation to skip church services. Satan wants to separate you from those who love and support you. Don't give him that chance!

6) My job keeps me from participating in church. What should I do?

- A) If your job prevents you from going to church at all, I recommend that you talk with your manager and explain your need. Approach them in a spirit of humility and cooperation. Don't be demanding or superior in your attitude. See if you can work something out that is satisfactory to both sides (follow the example given in Daniel 1). Pray and ask God to help resolve the situation. If nothing can be done, I recommend that you begin looking for another job.
- B) If your job only occasionally prevents you from attending church, I recommend you keep your job and work with your manager to maximize your chances to attend church. If you notice that you are starting to miss more and more services, ask God to help you resolve the issue. If your attempts are not successful, be prepared to look for another job.
- C) Remember this—God honors those who honor Him (1 Samuel 2:30). He knows your needs and will provide for you. Your job situation may be a test of faith to see if you will put Him first in your life. Seek godly counsel and be willing to do whatever is necessary to attend church regularly.

7) There are so many different churches. Which one should I attend?

- A) I generally recommend that you attend the church in which you were saved. If you were born again through the witness of a friend, I recommend that you attend your friend's church. This will help make the transition easier and give you connections to people who can immediately support you.
- B) If you are unable to follow the recommendation above (you may have been converted through a friend who does not live near you), or if you are forced to seek another church for other reasons, here are some things to consider as you make your decision:

- (1) Doctrine. Be sure the church believes that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant³ Word of God and that you should obey what it teaches (John 14:15).
- (2) Theology. Be sure the church believes in the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation and the physical suffering, death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- (3) Salvation. Be sure the church believes that you are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and that your works cannot merit your salvation.
- (4) Holiness. Be sure the church believes that you are called to live a holy life, separated from sin and the world unto God.
- (5) Preaching. Be sure the pastor preaches the Word of God and clearly explains its meaning and relevance to daily living.

³ Broadly speaking, the doctrine of inerrancy identifies Scripture as true and without error in all that it affirms, including its affirmations regarding history and the physical universe. For further detail on this issue, see the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. It is online at http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf.

Witnessing

1) What is witnessing?

- A) A witness is someone who sees or has personal knowledge of something. Consider our legal system: during a trial it is customary to call a witness to the stand to testify. The testimony of an eyewitness carries great weight in court because that person actually saw (witnessed) what happened.
- B) Jesus' disciples were eyewitnesses of His life and ministry (2 Pet 1:16–18). After His ascension, they told others what Jesus taught and how Jesus lived (1 John 1:1–5). Two of His disciples, Matthew and John, wrote down personal accounts of the time they spent with Jesus. What they recorded has been carefully preserved and comes to us in the form of the Bible—God's word.
- C) You did not have the privilege of seeing Jesus and being around Him, but you do have the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses of His ministry. You believed what they wrote about Jesus, and you personally experienced His saving grace. You are now a witness to the truth of God's word (John 17:18–21; Acts 1:6–9).

2) Why should I witness?

- A) Love for God. Part of loving God is loving what He loves, and God loves to save the lost (Luke 15:1–6). Redeeming sinners is the reason God sent His Son to earth (John 3:16; Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10). You should witness to others about the saving power of the gospel because you love God.
- B) Love for others. Part of loving others is desiring their salvation. The apostle Paul had this kind of love for his fellow Jews (Romans 9:1–3; 10:1). Loving others means seeking their greatest good: salvation from God's eternal wrath. Paul modeled this kind of love in his missionary journeys through Turkey and Greece. He endured beatings, prison, cold, hunger and rejection to bring the gospel to thousands of people. You are called to show this same kind of love to others.
- C) Kingdom mission. Part of being a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven is the responsibility to fulfill its primary mission—seeking and saving the lost (Matthew 28:18–20). Jesus wants you to be reaching out to your family, friends, co-workers and others.

3) To what do I bear witness?

- A) As a Christian, you bear witness to the truth of God's word and the need for all men to be saved:
 - (1) Everyone has broken God's law and must suffer the punishment of eternal death in Hell. There is nothing you can do to save yourself.
 - (2) There is good news (gospel)! Jesus Christ, God's only Son, died in your place to pay the penalty for your sin. If you confess your sin, repent of your rebellion against God and believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you will be saved!

4) How do I witness?

A) There are two ways you can witness to others: verbally and non-verbally. Let's consider the non-verbal method first:

(1) Non-verbal. This method of witnessing is often the more difficult of the two. It's easy to say you are a Christian, but it's hard to actually live a consistent, holy life. The greatest witness you can have to the truth of God's transforming power is to live a transformed life in front of others. Consider what Peter said about a wife who is seeking to bring her husband to Christ (1 Peter 3:1-2). Consider also Paul's change in behavior after his conversion (Acts 9:20-21; Galatians 1:23-24).

(2) Verbal. This, of course, is the standard method of witnessing to others about the good news of Jesus Christ (John 1:35-51). It's very important to communicate the truth concerning salvation clearly to those you wish to lead to Christ (see the lesson called "Salvation"). With those core elements in mind, let's go over an example of how you might witness to someone:

(a) Recognition of need. Begin by relating your own personal recognition of spiritual need. You could say something like, "I never realized it before, but a friend showed me that I'd broken God's law. I lied, coveted what belonged to others and even lusted after others (Exodus 20; Romans 3:23). When you break a man-made law there's a penalty that must be paid. When you disobey God's law there's a penalty too—the penalty of eternal death (Romans 6:23). At first I thought that I could make up for breaking God's law by doing good things, but my friend explained that nothing I did would pay for my sin (Ephesians 2:8-9). On my own, I had no hope."

(i) Notice that you didn't accuse *them* of being a sinner; instead, you confessed your own past sinfulness. This has the effect of causing them to realize that they have also broken God's law. You also placed the correct emphasis on why salvation is necessary.

(b) Proclaim the gospel. You could continue like this, "My friend then told me the good news! God loved me so much that He sent His only Son to suffer the penalty I deserved (Romans 5:8). Jesus Christ died in my place, and then He rose from the dead and is alive today. He wants everyone to accept His offer of salvation from sin!" (Revelation 3:20).

(i) You proclaimed the gospel message and made it clear that God wants them to accept salvation just as you did.

(c) Present the choice. You could finish by saying, "My friend then explained that if I confessed and repented of my sin and put my faith in Jesus Christ, He would forgive me and give me eternal life (Acts 3:19; Romans 10:9-10, 13). And that's what I did! I gave my life to God and now I'm so excited. I want everyone to know what God did for me! (Romans 5:1; 8:1)."

(i) You have witnessed in a non-confrontational way, and depending on their reaction, you can ask them if they want to accept Christ.

5) I'm terrified of witnessing to others! What should I do?

- A) Pray. Each day, ask God to give you the courage to witness for Christ. He will give you the ability to proclaim the gospel when the right time comes.
- B) Practice. Find another believer and ask them if you can practice leading them to Christ (I know this sounds strange, but it really works!). Witnessing to them will get you comfortable with presenting your own salvation experience. Have them ask questions and even reject you in order to give you a taste of what might really happen. As they say—practice makes perfect.

6) How will people respond to my witnessing?

- A) Rejection. Witnessing is often met with rejection. Don't be discouraged—it often takes time to break through people's natural resistance to the truth.
- B) Skepticism. Friends and family members are typically skeptical of claims about religious experiences. Several questions will probably come to their minds:
 - (1) Is it genuine? Your attitudes and actions over the next few days/weeks will be extremely important in answering this question. They will be watching you closely. You will need God's grace to help you live a consistent life of obedience in front of them.
 - (2) If it's genuine, how long will it last? Sometimes the only witness that will truly impress a friend or family member is the witness that holds steady over time. Again, this is impossible without God's help.
- C) Concern. Friends and family members are often concerned about the changes that come from a conversion. Things they might wonder include:
 - (1) What will you be like now? In many cases they will be pleasantly surprised by the changes in your attitudes and actions. Be careful not to let your enthusiasm get the best of you. People cannot be pressured into repentance. They often need time and space to think about what you have told them.
 - (2) How will this affect our relationship? Your change of lifestyle will often make this an issue with your family and friends. Indeed, you may find that there are some friends you cannot keep (1 Corinthians 15:33). For those who are satisfied to let you be yourself, you can be firm about not participating in activities that are ungodly, even if you once did them together. Do this with a right attitude; don't be condescending.
- D) Interest. Although they may not be ready or willing to actually repent and believe in Christ, many of your friends may be interested in learning more. Invite them to church and do your best to answer any questions they have. Often, with patience and prayer, it won't be long before they too are saved.
- E) Acceptance. This is what every Christian hopes will happen when they share the good news of Christ with others. In this case it will be your privilege to help your friend repent and turn to Christ. If they express a desire to pray, you can lead them in the prayer provided in the lesson on salvation.

The Fifth Essential

Memorizing and Meditating on Scripture

1) Why should I memorize Scripture?

A) You are commanded to memorize and meditate on God's Word:

- (1) "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).
- (2) "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).
- (3) "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word" (Psalm 119:11, 15-16).
- (4) "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

B) Jesus memorized and meditated on Scripture. This enabled Him to resist the temptations of the Devil (see Matthew 4:1-11). As His disciple, you should follow His example. Memorizing Scripture will help you think and act like Jesus.

C) When you memorize and meditate on Scripture, the truth will begin to transform your mind (Romans 12:2). Old patterns of thought will be replaced with God's thoughts, false beliefs will give way to the truth, and old values will be exchanged for God's principles.

D) There are many other reasons to memorize and meditate on God's Word: it will strengthen your faith, it will help you see life from God's perspective, it will give you the words to say when you minister to others, and it will guard you against the lies of the enemy. It's so important that you can think of it as the "fifth essential" to being a successful Christian.

2) I have a terrible memory! How will I ever memorize Scripture?

A) Many people believe they have a bad memory, but usually the problem is that their memory hasn't been properly trained. The system presented below will help you to memorize and retain even large portions of God's word.

B) The Memory Card System:

- (1) This training regimen is based on 3x5 index cards. Buy 52 cards, one for each week of the year (plain white cards will do; use colored cards if white is too boring for you). Also purchase a card holder so that you can keep your cards organized and in a safe place (or you can buy a set of cards that are spiral-bound).
- (2) Each card will contain one verse of Scripture. The front side will be the verse and the back side will be the reference. Be sure to put a number in the top right corner of the front side so you can keep them in order as you memorize.
- (3) The first step in memorizing a verse is to write it down on the card. Do this yourself with a pen or pencil (don't print it out from your computer). The act of writing the verse by hand will begin the memory process.
- (4) The next step is to read the verse and reference out loud to yourself. Do this at least four or five times. Hearing yourself speak the words is a large part of making sure the verse sticks in your memory.
- (5) Now turn the card to the back side and try saying the verse out loud without looking at the front. Do this until you are sure that you can remember the words. Then flip the card over to the front and try saying the reference. Many people struggle to remember the numbers in a Scripture reference, so be sure to spend extra time on this. This is important—there is clarity and power in being able to say “God said in 1 John 2:2...”
- (6) Once you have the verse and reference memorized, find a friend and ask them to test you. Give them the card and practice until you can say the verse and reference perfectly.
- (7) Strive for perfection in your memory work. You will be tempted to settle for less, especially if you're having trouble with a particular verse, but when you don't know a verse word-for-word, you lose confidence in saying it to others when witnessing or ministering.

C) Memorizing Scripture doesn't require large amounts of time. Each day, spend a few moments writing out the verse for the week on your 3x5 card. Then review the verse four times each day: at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and just before going to sleep at night.

D) Different people learn in different ways. Pay attention to whether you tend to see the words in your mind (a visual learner), hear the words in your mind (an auditory learner), or associate the words with actions (a kinetic learner). Most of us learn best if all three elements are present when we memorize. When you write down the verse on your card, you involve the visual and kinetic centers of learning. Reading the verse and quoting it aloud involves the auditory center of learning.

- (1) If you are visually oriented, you may want to draw pictures or symbols on your card to reinforce the main idea of the verse.

(2) If you are audibly oriented, say the verse out loud repeatedly. You may want to record the verse you are working on and listen to it throughout the day.

(3) If you are kinetically oriented, try adding motions to express the various words in the verse. These motions will help you retain the words in the verse.

3) What should I memorize?

A) As a new convert, I encourage you to start small and build your memory muscles slowly until you're ready for larger portions of Scripture. I created a handout that will guide you in this process (see the "Memorizing Scripture Guide"). The handout is based on memorizing one verse each week. If you discover that you're doing well, challenge yourself and try memorizing two verses each week.

4) How can I retain what I memorize long-term?

A) The key to memory retention is review. Reviewing the verses you already know is a key part of your daily memory work.

B) I recommend the following approach:

(1) Sunday – begin memorizing the verse for the week.

(2) Monday – continue working on the verse for the week.

(3) Tuesday – review the verse for the week.

(4) Wednesday – review the first five weeks (5 verses). If you are still in the first four weeks of the program, simply review the verses you already know.

(5) Thursday – review the verse for the week.

(6) Friday – review the second five weeks (5 verses). If you haven't reached the second five weeks, just review the previous weeks.

(7) Saturday – review the verse for the week.

C) Wednesday and Friday will be your days to review past memory verses. Use these days to cycle through all the verses you have memorized. Once you have reviewed all your verses, *start back at the beginning* and start through again. This way, you will be working on one new verse and reviewing ten old verses each week.

5) What translation should I use to memorize?

A) Since you are committing God's Word to memory, I recommend using a Formal Equivalence (word-for-word) translation. The "Memorizing Scripture Guide" uses the English Standard Version (ESV).

6) What does it mean to meditate on Scripture?

A) When people hear the word "meditation" they often think of a Buddhist monk sitting in a yoga position chanting "Ohhhmm" over and over. Biblical meditation is nothing like that. Most worldly meditation systems encourage you to empty your mind of all thoughts. Meditating on Scripture is exactly the opposite—you fill your mind with God's Word and spend time thinking about its meaning and application to your life.

- B) Memorizing Scripture is the first step of a two-step process in beginning to think like Jesus. The second step is meditation. We don't memorize to impress others with all the verses we can quote. We memorize so God's thoughts will sink into our minds and begin transforming us from the inside out. Memorizing without meditating is like eating without chewing.
- C) As an exercise, let's walk through what it means to meditate by using the first memory verse in the guide: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32).
- (1) The first step in meditation is to understand the meaning of the text. Luke 17:32 mentions a person, Lot's wife. Clearly you cannot understand Jesus' warning unless you know more about Lot's wife and what happened to her.
 - (a) Verse Background. If you have cross-references in your Bible, you will see that the background story to Luke 17:32 can be found in Genesis 19. In this chapter you learn that Lot's wife disobeyed the command of the angel and looked back toward the destruction of Sodom. When she did, she became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).
 - (b) Verse Context. The context of Luke 17:32 sheds even more light on the meaning of Jesus' warning. In the preceding verses, Jesus talked about the destruction that will come as part of His Second Coming to earth. He told His disciples that if they tried to hold onto their worldly possessions, they would be swept up in the destruction.
 - (c) Verse Meaning. When you think about what happened to Lot's wife, you can see that she had become very attached to the worldly possessions and relationships she had developed over her many years in Sodom. When the time came to leave it all behind, including some of her own children, she was not able to resist the urge to turn back.
 - (2) The second step in meditation is to ask, *What does this verse teach me about the way Jesus thinks?* This verse teaches you at least two things about the way Jesus thinks: a) Jesus thinks that obeying God is more important than possessions or relationships, and b) Jesus thinks that God is just to punish disobedience with death. These two principles are examples of how Scripture teaches us to think like Jesus.
 - (3) The third step in meditation is to apply the verse to your own life. This can be done by asking yourself questions like:
 - Are my values and beliefs in harmony with what this verse teaches?
 - Do I need to adjust any of my attitudes or perspectives?
 - Is there anything I need to stop doing based on the truth of this verse?
 - Is there anything I need to start doing based on the truth of this verse?
 - (a) The warning about what happened to Lot's wife is especially relevant to you as a new convert. In many ways the life you left behind when you became a Christian is like Sodom, a city that was given over to self and sin. God's destruction is coming upon all who live such lives. What will happen to you if you turn back and once again become entangled in the snares of Satan? (2 Peter 2:18-20; Hebrews 6:1-12).

- (4) The fourth step in meditation is to ask God to impress the truth of the verse on your mind. Open your heart and allow the Holy Spirit to search your life and bring things to your attention that need to be corrected. Some of the verses you memorize can actually be prayed back to God as part of your normal fellowship with Him (Ephesians 1:17–19; Philippians 1:9–11).

Memorizing Scripture Guide

Starting Small (Weeks 1-8)¹

Each verse has no more than 7 words

- Week 1 – “Remember Lot's wife” (Luke 17:32).
- Week 2 – “Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16).
- Week 3 – “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- Week 4 – “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).
- Week 5 – “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
- Week 6 – “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (Philippians 2:14).
- Week 7 – “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).
- Week 8 – “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11).

A Step Forward (Weeks 9-18)

Each verse has between 7 and 10 words

- Week 9 – “Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Corinthians 15:33).
- Week 10 – “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).
- Week 11 – “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).
- Week 12 – “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Ephesians 5:1).
- Week 13 – “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).
- Week 14 – “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent” (Proverbs 1:10).
- Week 15 – “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).
- Week 16 – “This I command you, that you love one another” (John 15:17).
- Week 17 – “Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14).
- Week 18 – “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13).

¹ All Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Medium-sized Verses (Weeks 19-34)

Each verse has between 10 and 15 words

- Week 19 – “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (James 1:2).
- Week 20 – “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3).
- Week 21 – “But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
- Week 22 – “Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them” (Colossians 3:19).
- Week 23 – “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22).
- Week 24 – “Making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16).
- Week 25 – “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).
- Week 26 – “Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:28).
- Week 27 – “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).
- Week 28 – “The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps” (Proverbs 14:15).
- Week 29 – “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 150:6)
- Week 30 – “My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2).
- Week 31 – “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You” (Psalm 56:3).
- Week 32 – “Make me know Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths” (Psalm 25:4).
- Week 33 – “Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit” (Psalm 34:13).
- Week 34 – “Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14).

Larger Verses (Weeks 35–52)

Each verse has between 16 and 25 words

- Week 35 – “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Week 36 – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
- Week 37 – “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).
- Week 38 – “Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).
- Week 39 – “For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3).
- Week 40 – “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).
- Week 41 – “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal” (John 12:25).
- Week 42 – “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate” (Proverbs 8:13).
- Week 43 – “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).
- Week 44 – “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Colossians 3:17).
- Week 45 – “Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person” (Colossians 4:6).
- Week 46 – “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).
- Week 47 – “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1).
- Week 48 – “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).
- Week 49 – “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).
- Week 50 – “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

- Week 51 – “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).
- Week 52 – “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

Ideas for the Future

You began your memory work by memorizing individual verses. You are now ready to memorize small sections of Scripture and eventually whole chapters and books (yes, it can be done!). Here are some ideas for more advanced memory work:

- 1 John 2:15–17 (3 verses).
- Matthew 5:44–47 (4 verses).
- Psalm 1 (6 verses).
- Psalm 8 (9 verses).
- 1 Corinthians 13 (13 verses).
- Psalm 145 (21 verses).
- Proverbs 31 (31 verses).
- Titus (46 verses).
- 2 Peter (61 verses).
- 2 Timothy (83 verses).
- Colossians (95 verses).
- 1 John (105 verses).
- Matthew 5–7 (111 verses).

Early Struggles

Coping With Rejection

1) Will I experience rejection after I become a Christian?

- A) Yes, the Bible teaches that Christians will be rejected and persecuted by the world. Our example, Jesus Christ, was rejected during His earthly ministry. He was rejected by:
- (1) His family (John 7:3-5; 1 Corinthians 15:7).
 - (2) His friends and neighbors (Mark 6:1-6).
 - (3) The religious leaders (Matthew 12:14; Matthew 26:3-4).
 - (4) His own people, the Jews (John 8:48-59).
 - (5) His disciples (John 6:53-66; Matthew 26:56).
- B) Jesus told His disciples they would be rejected just as He was rejected (Matthew 10:24-25; John 15:18-21).

2) What are some general principles for coping with rejection?

- A) Understand the truth of rejection. The rejection that comes from believing in Christ is very personal in nature. It feels as though you are being rejected for who you are, and it can be very painful. However, it's important to remember that ultimately it is Christ who is being rejected (Matthew 25:41-45). You are being despised because you have chosen to follow Him (John 15:19; Acts 7:51-60).
- B) Know that God empathizes with your pain. Jesus knows exactly how it feels to be rejected. After all, He was rejected by His own family. That's why He promised to encourage us. Paul said, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5 NIV).
- C) Remember that you are not alone. Rejection can leave you feeling lonely and isolated. God knows this, and He has promised to be with you. There is great comfort in knowing that no matter how many people reject you, God will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).
- D) Keep the goal in sight. Remember what Jesus said when you are rejected (Matthew 5:12). God has promised to reward those who are faithful in spite of rejection and persecution (Hebrews 11:24-26). Also, remember the sin and darkness from which you were saved (Ephesians 2:1-3). The road to eternal life may be difficult, but the alternative is eternal death.
- E) Pray for those who reject you (Matthew 5:44). Jesus wants you to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. He left an example of this when He prayed for those who were killing him (cf. Luke 23:34). How can you do any less?
- F) Find love and friendship in your spiritual family. As a Christian, you have a new family—the Church (Matthew 12:46-50; 19:29). Your church will be reaching out to

you and welcoming you into their family. As a new convert, you should show yourself friendly and respond when people extend friendship in your direction.

3) What should I do if my spouse rejects me?

- A) 1 Corinthians 7:10–16 and 1 Peter 3:1–2 give advice on how you should handle being rejected by a spouse:
- (1) If your unbelieving spouse rejects you completely and wants to leave the marriage, let them leave. If they remain unmarried, your desire should be for their salvation and the restoration of your marriage. If they marry someone else, you are no longer bound to them.
 - (2) If your unbelieving spouse is willing to live with you, remain with them. God doesn't want you to divorce your spouse simply because you are now a Christian. Be willing to endure persecution from them with a Christ-like attitude.
 - (3) As you remain in the relationship, live in such a way that your conduct will witness to them and they may be won without a word being spoken.
 - (4) In extreme cases where your physical safety is at risk, separate from your spouse, but do not pursue other relationships. Your prayer should be for their salvation and the restoration of your marriage.

4) What should I do if my family/parents reject me?

- A) If you're still living under your parent's care, you should remain submissive to them and show them respect in spite of their rejection. Be mighty through God in prayer. Many of the principles we looked at in the case of a rejecting spouse can also be applied to parents (e.g., live in such a way that your good behavior is a witness to them).
- B) If you're married and have a family of your own, you will often find it necessary to create boundaries to protect yourself and your children. Unsaved family members can be a very negative influence, and you will have to make some hard decisions. Be as kind and respectful as you can, but don't allow them to be an ungodly influence.

5) What should I do if my friends reject me?

- A) Let them go. In some cases rejection can be a good thing (see 1 Corinthians 15:33). Indeed, some friends may need to be rejected by you as their friendship can only lead to trouble (1 Peter 4:3–5). If some of your friends respect your faith in Christ, you should remain friends with them and seek to win them to Christ (1 Corinthians 5:9–10). Prayer is your best weapon here. Be firm but sensitive to when they need space/time to think about what you have said.
- B) Turn to the church. As a Christian, you have a new family in the church. It's your responsibility to involve yourself as much as possible in whatever activities are available. Show yourself friendly.

C) Boyfriend/girlfriend (2 Corinthians 6:14). You may find yourself in a position where you have been saved, but the person you are dating is still a sinner. In such a case, I advise you to be truthful and straightforward about the change in your life. It may be that you will win them to Christ. If they reject Christ and tell you that they will not continue the relationship unless you give up your faith, you must be ready to break off the relationship. This can be a very difficult and painful experience. But remember, God will reward you for putting Him above all others!

6) What is going on in the minds of those who reject me?

A) It is helpful to understand what is going on in the minds of those who reject you. Often we are so focused on how we are being treated that we are unaware of how our faith affects others. Consider this:

- (1) Conviction. The change in your heart and life is a tremendous source of conviction to your friends and family. Most sinners have some awareness that what they are doing is wrong, and your life serves to amplify this awareness and intensify their feelings of guilt. In a sense, you are making them miserable (actually it is their own resistance to God's grace, but they will see you as the root cause; see 2 Corinthians 2:15-16).
- (2) Light provokes sin. The Bible teaches that when light and truth are focused on a sinful heart, it provokes more sin (Romans 7:8). Your good example will serve to inspire sin in those rejecting you, so don't be surprised if they become worse than they were before.
- (3) Justification. Sinners are constantly trying to justify their attitudes and actions to themselves and others in an attempt to ward off the feelings of guilt they have for their sin. You may find them trying to justify themselves to you.
- (4) Persecution. Many times the one rejecting you may persecute you hoping you will respond in kind. If you do, it will make them feel better to know you are really no different than they are. If you don't, you will convict them all the more.

Spiritual Warfare

1) What is spiritual warfare?

- A) The Bible reveals that Satan and the other fallen angels are active throughout the world blinding sinners to the truth and tempting Christians to sin. As Christians, we resist Satan and seek to free people from the bondage of sin. This great struggle is called “spiritual warfare.” Consider the following verses:
- (1) “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).
 - (2) “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12 NIV).
- B) As a Christian, you are engaged in a spiritual struggle against the forces of evil. *The Message* paraphrases Ephesians 6:12 like this: “This is for keeps. It’s a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.”

2) Why does God allow Satan to attack me?

- A) The attacks of Satan that God permits in your life are not intended to weaken or destroy you. They are designed to build your faith and strengthen your endurance (Romans 5:3-4). If you respond properly, Satan’s attacks will help you become a skilled and effective soldier in Christ’s Kingdom (Hebrews 5:8).
- B) Faith comes by hearing and believing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), but faith does not grow without exercise. Reading the Bible without practicing its principles is like reading a golf magazine without ever playing golf. All the golf magazines in the world will never make you into a golf player. Reading about war does not make you a soldier, but basic training and combat will.
- C) Building muscle is based on the principle of resistance: the more resistance, the more your muscles develop. Satan’s attacks are spiritual resistance. Accept them as a challenge to practice your faith and build spiritual muscle (James 1:2-3).

3) How do I prepare for the battle?

- A) Prayer. You cannot be victorious in spiritual warfare without prayer. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13 NLT). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told Peter, James and John, “Pray that you will not give in to temptation” (Luke 22:40 NLT). Unfortunately, prayer is often the last thing we think of when we encounter temptation. Prayer should be a constant part of our day, from the moment we wake up to the moment we go to sleep (Ephesians 6:18).
- B) The armor of God (2 Corinthians 6:7; Romans 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:10-20). When you read these passages, it’s easy to get caught up in the details of

the armor metaphor, and you may start wondering, *Now is it the breastplate of righteousness or the breastplate of faith and love?* But what I want you to focus on are the qualities and attributes that Paul mentions in these passages: faith, love, light, truth, righteousness, salvation, the gospel of peace. All these things are produced in your life when you obey the Holy Spirit and read and meditate on God's Word (Galatians 5:22–23). Paul's point is that these spiritual qualities and attributes function as armor and weaponry in our battle against Satan.

- (1) How do these things act as your armor? As an example, let's consider 'truth.' In what way does truth act as protection against Satan's attacks? Consider the following attack: you're at the mall, and you notice someone who is very physically attractive. The thought comes to your mind, "How you look is what it's all about." Then the truth of God's word comes to your mind, and you reject this thought, for you know that true beauty is internal, not external (1 Peter 3:3–4). The truth just acted like armor—it protected you from believing a lie.
 - (2) How do you put this armor on? As an example, let's consider righteousness. How do you put on righteousness? You put on righteousness by living your life in obedience to the standard of God's Word. You put on righteousness by keeping your conscience clear. You put on righteousness by submitting yourself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Doing these things produces righteousness within you, and it will protect you from Satan's attacks.
- C) Accountability. Whoever heard of fighting a war by yourself? We need each other to be victorious. Seek out another brother or sister who is mature in the faith, and make yourself accountable to them. Pray for each other and commit to be honest with each other. There's nothing like the thought of having to confess to someone else to keep you from sinning.

4) What are the primary ways that Satan attacks us?

- A) He tempts us to sin.
- B) He lies to us about God, ourselves and others.
- C) He lays traps and snares for us.

5) How does temptation work?

- A) James 1:14–15 is the classic passage on the nature of temptation. Here are the principles we learn from these verses:
 - (1) Satan appeals to your desires. We all have normal, natural, God-given desires for many things: food, sleep, companionship, love, sex, fun, etc. If you lived a life of sin, you may also have acquired unnatural desires: drugs, drinking, smoking, aberrant sexual behaviors, etc. (James 1:14).
 - (2) Satan then urges you to satisfy a good desire in an ungodly way or to satisfy a bad desire that we acquired when we were sinners (James 1:14).

- (3) Your mind now considers the choice: to act or not to act? So far, no sin has been committed. Being tempted is not the same as sinning.
- (4) You then exercise your will and make a decision to either act on that desire or resist. The moment you choose to give in to that desire, you sin (James 1:15).
- (5) The battleground of temptation is the mind. That's where the battle is either won or lost.

6) How do I resist temptation?

- A) The gospel of Matthew tells us about a time when Jesus was tempted by Satan. Jesus' response is a model of how to resist temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). Let consider some of the lessons we learn from this account:
- (1) Temptation can come immediately after a time of spiritual joy or happiness (Matt 3:16-17).
 - (2) Temptation is part of God's will for your life (Matt 4:1).
 - (3) Temptation strikes when you are weak and is aimed at your weaknesses (Matt 4:2-3).
 - (4) Temptation should be resisted with the truth of God's Word (Matt 4:4, 7, 10).
 - (a) The importance of reading and meditating on Scripture cannot be overstated. Consider what the Psalmist said: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11 NIV). Jesus' ability to respond with Scripture came from the time He had spent "putting on the truth."
 - (b) I often refer to this type of resistance as "replacement strategy." Consider being tempted to think lustful thoughts. It's not enough to say to yourself, *I won't think that, I won't think that*. You must replace the ungodly thought with something else (Philippians 4:8). Turn your mind to the truth, sing a song of praise, read the Bible, or call another believer. Take action to occupy your mind with something edifying.
 - (5) Temptation can contain a grain of truth that has been twisted in order to deceive you (Matt 4:6).
 - (6) Temptation can be resisted. You can be victorious! (Matt 4:11; cf. 1 Cor 10:13).
- B) There are times when the best way to resist temptation is to run away as fast as you can. Consider the case of Joseph in Genesis 39:6-10. Also consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:14 and 2 Timothy 2:22.

7) How do I detect Satan's lies?

- A) Paul said, "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). This verse highlights the importance of paying attention to

the thoughts that come into your mind. You are commanded to recognize, reject and replace. For example, imagine a time when you put a lot of work into something and then someone criticized your effort. Immediately you find yourself thinking, *I'm such a failure, I can't do anything right. Every time I try I just mess things up. Fine, I won't ever try again.* Do you hear what you're thinking? Take these thoughts captive and reject them for the lies they are. Turn your mind to God's Word and replace Satan's lies with Scriptural truth.

- B) 1 Corinthians 13 is the filter through which you should be examining thoughts about other people. For example, suppose there is a birthday party, and you discover that your friends were invited, but you were not. Thoughts begin to rush into your mind, *Why wasn't I invited? I thought they liked me. I guess maybe they don't. How could they treat me like that when I invited them to my party two months ago?* Satan is a mastermind when it comes to questioning people's motives and intentions. He delights in planting accusations and criticisms of others in your mind. Remember, love does not think evil of others; love always gives people the benefit of the doubt.

8) How do I avoid Satan's traps?

- A) Be alert. Peter said, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed," and "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 1:13; 5:8 NIV). It is imperative that you be on the alert for Satan's traps.
- B) Be sensitive. The Holy Spirit will warn you and raise red flags in your mind when Satan tries to trap you. Listen to Him and do what He says. The more you obey, the more you will be able to hear His voice.
- C) Be wise. Solomon said, "Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:5-7 NIV). Wisdom comes from studying God's Word, living a life of obedience and seeking out godly counsel. It will save you from the snares of the enemy. For example, consider 1 Timothy 6:9-10.
- D) Be informed. Paul once said that he was not ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). You should be able to say the same thing. Consider the following:
- (1) Relationships. Satan can use relationships to ensnare even the most mature Christians. Examples: A young girl meets an attractive young man who is not a Christian (or vice versa). A recently married couple who is struggling with issues in their marriage meets another couple who begins to draw them away from church. A person who is lonely is befriended by someone who claims to be a Christian but is very shallow and unreliable.
 - (2) Situations. Satan loves to create situations in which he can trap you. Examples: A teenager at school is surrounded by classmates who are involved in a sinful activity. A husband struggling to make ends meet is offered the position of Treasurer on a local committee. A young girl's roommate starts inviting her friends over for parties.

- (3) Places. Satan can use places as traps for the unwary, and not just the obvious places like casinos, bars and nightclubs. The Devil can use other places as well. Examples: A bookstore (whose magazine racks are filled with sinful images). A restaurant (which often has a bar section). A mall (which has whole stores dedicated to worldly pleasures). A grocery store (which is filled with every possible tasty food you could want).

Conquering Sinful Habits

1) I'm struggling with a sinful habit that I haven't been able to conquer. Is there hope for me?

A) The Bible is clear that you can have victory over sinful habits! Consider what Paul told the Corinthians:

(1) "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13B).

B) This verse contains several encouraging truths:

(1) You are not alone. Satan will tell you that you're the only person who struggles with temptation. Nothing could be further from the truth. All believers deal with the same kinds of temptations, and even Jesus was tempted. The Bible says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

(2) You are able to resist. God is faithful. He will not allow you to face a temptation that is beyond your ability to resist. Satan will tell you that the habit you're struggling with can't be overcome. He will tell you that past defeat equals future failure. Don't believe him! He's lying to you. Instead, believe what Paul said: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

(3) You are able to endure. Trials and temptations can't be brushed aside. Their purpose is to build character and spiritual muscle. You may want God to simply take your temptations away, but that won't help you in the long run. God's "way of escape" is found through the effort of endurance.

2) What is the biblical method for conquering sinful habits?

A) The first step to victory over a sinful habit is to examine your thinking and ask God to reveal any lies that Satan may have planted in your mind. Consider the following lies that people believe about conquering sinful habits:

(1) *I can conquer this habit on my own*. There's nothing Satan likes better than for you to try to live a godly life in your own strength. Jesus told his disciples, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

(2) *I've failed so many times. I'll never be free from this sinful habit*. If Satan can convince you of this, he's got you beat. James said, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Remember this: life is a series of choices. At each decision point, you have the ability, through God's grace, to choose to do what is right. A life of victory is lived one decision at a time (Romans 6:7, 11, 14, 17-18; 8:37; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

(3) It's OK if I have one bad habit—after all, nobody's perfect. This is one of Satan's favorite lies. If you allow Satan to have one stronghold in your life, sin will inevitably spread to other areas (1 Corinthians 5:6). Peter said, "As the one who called you is holy, you yourselves be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15).

B) The next step to victory is to recognize the magnitude of what is at stake—this is a battle for your soul. Remember Charles Dickens' story called *A Christmas Carol*? The main character, Scrooge, was consumed by selfishness and greed, yet all that changed in a single night. How? Three spirits visited Scrooge and made him think about three important questions:

- What have I lost in the past because of this sinful habit?
- What am I losing right now because of this sinful habit?
- What will I lose in the future because of this sinful habit?

Use the "Scrooge Principle for Conquering Sinful Habits" handout and answer these three questions for yourself. Review your answers on a regular basis so you can be reminded of the importance of obedience. Jesus once asked, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

C) The next step to victory is to examine your life and remove anything that triggers your area of weakness. Break off contact with anyone who would draw you back into sinful behavior. Paul said, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:14).

- (1) If you struggle with pornography, get an internet filter and give the password to your spouse. If this is not enough, get rid of your internet connection completely (iPhones, iPads, etc.).
- (2) If you struggle with gluttony, stop buying junk food. Go through the kitchen/refrigerator and remove anything that you shouldn't be eating.
- (3) If you struggle with smoking, get rid of your cigarettes and avoid any store where you regularly purchased them.
- (4) If you struggle with anger or worry, give your time, money and possessions to God. Release your right of ownership and commit to trusting Him for your needs. Identify your emotional triggers and preempt them where possible.
- (5) If you struggle with lust, get rid of anything that stimulates lustful thinking—TV, DVDs, magazines, etc.

D) The next step to victory is to renew your mind by memorizing and meditating on Scripture. The power of God's Word to conquer sinful habits is emphasized in Psalm 119: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:9–11). You can learn more about how to do this in the lesson called "The Fifth Essential—Memorizing and Meditating on Scripture." Consider the following plan a "prescription" for curing sinful habits:

- (1) Find Bible verses that relate to your area of temptation. Write these down on 3x5 cards and use them each day. Along with the verse, write down a prayer that reflects the truth of the verse. For example, suppose you are struggling with worry:
 - (a) Write down what Jesus said: “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” (Matthew 6:30–31).
 - (b) A prayer that reflects this truth is: “Father, you told me that you care for something as temporary and trivial as the grass of the field. How much more do you care for me! I believe what you said, and I purpose, through your grace, to stop worrying and trust you for the future.”
 - (2) In the morning, read your memory card(s) and pray before you begin your day. Ask God to give you His grace (the desire and power to do His will) and help you resist temptation until lunch time. Throughout the morning, meditate on the truth of the Scriptures you memorized.
 - (a) It is important to understand that you “grow” in grace. This means that every time you resist temptation and choose to obey, your desire and will to do right grows. When you yield to temptation, you resist God’s grace and your desire and will to do right shrinks (Hebrews 12:15).
 - (3) At lunch time, repeat the process. Ask God to give you His grace and help you resist temptation until dinner time.
 - (4) At dinner time, repeat the process. Ask God to give you His grace and help you resist temptation until bed time.
 - (5) At bed time, review your day: Did you say ‘No!’ to the devil and resist temptation? If you failed, ask God to forgive you and determine to obey tomorrow. Read over your verse(s) and ask God to guard your mind while you sleep. The best thing to have on your mind as you go to sleep is God’s Word.
 - (6) Commit to following this “prescription” for at least 30 days (60 days is even better).
- E) The last step to victory is to find a fellow Christian to whom you can be accountable. Humble yourself and confess your sin to them (Proverbs 28:13; James 5:16). Ask them to enter into a commitment of accountability with you. This means that they will ask you each week (or each day) whether or not you have resisted temptation in a specific area. This commitment will give you added motivation to resist the Devil. You are not meant to live the Christian life apart from the help and encouragement of the church. That’s why accountability to other believers is so important (cf. Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:23–25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Galatians 6:1–2).
- (1) Select this person with care. They should be mature in the faith and respected as a person of integrity by other Christians. They should be someone you would

never think of deceiving, and the thought of telling them that you have sinned should be embarrassing enough to help motivate you to resist temptation. They should also be someone that you can call during the week if you're really struggling with temptation.

3) Some people are freed from their sinful habits when they are saved, while others are not. Why?

- A) We began this lesson by looking at 1 Corinthians 10:13 in which God promises that He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to resist. When certain people are saved, God supernaturally removes all desire for the sinful habit(s) they had as a sinner. He does this because He knows it is necessary for them. They have so damaged their will that they are not able to handle temptation in that area.
- B) When you hear about someone who has experienced miraculous deliverance from a sinful habit, it's easy to be discouraged about your own struggles. But remember this: a person who experiences miraculous deliverance in one or two areas of life does not experience deliverance from temptation in every other area of life. Just because they no longer struggle with cocaine or alcohol addiction doesn't mean they never struggle with anger or lust. In other areas of temptation they must do exactly what you do—resist the Devil and say 'No!' to temptation.

The Scrooge Principle for Conquering Sinful Habits

Past
What have I lost in the past because of this sinful habit?
Present
What am I losing in the present because of this sinful habit?
Future
What will I lose in the future because of this sinful habit?

“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36)

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

1) What is the law of sowing and reaping?

- A) Paul said in his letter to the Galatians: “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:7–9).
- B) This passage teaches that each of us is a “sower” who will reap a harvest of his own planting. If you sow to the Spirit, you will reap a harvest of blessing. If you sow to the flesh, you will reap a harvest of sorrow and adversity.
- C) Ignorance of the law of sowing and reaping lies behind such trite phrases as: “We all have to sow a few wild oats,” and “Oh, go ahead, God will forgive you.” The world is full of heartbroken “reapers” who didn’t realize they would reap what they sowed. All too often comes the anguished cry, “Why didn’t someone tell me about reaping? Tell everyone it’s not worth it!”

2) What does it mean to sow to the Spirit?

- A) The sixth chapter of Galatians gives several examples of sowing to the Spirit. You sow to the Spirit when you: gently restore those who have sinned (Gal 6:1), bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), and financially support teachers of God’s Word (Gal 6:6).
- B) The larger context of Galatians teaches us other ways to sow to the Spirit. You sow to the Spirit when you obey the Scriptures and have Christ-like attitudes. You sow to the Spirit when you bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23). You sow to the Spirit when you walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25).
- C) When you choose to forgive, you are sowing to the Spirit. When you take your thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, you are sowing to the Spirit (2 Cor 10:3–5). When you refuse to gossip about another person (even though it’s true), you are sowing to the Spirit. Every time you speak the truth, honor your word, pay your bills, or offer praise to God for His goodness, you are sowing to the Spirit.

3) What does it mean to sow to the flesh?

- A) Paul lists many practices that illustrate sowing to the flesh: adultery, sexual impurity, indecency, sensuality, involvement with the occult, hatred, quarrels, fits of temper, selfish ambition, dissension, envy, drunkenness, and carousing (Gal 5:19–21). Sowing to the flesh begins in the mind. Every time you hold a grudge, entertain an impure fantasy, wallow in self-pity, speak ill of another person, or fail to carry out your responsibilities, you are sowing to the flesh. If you are self-centered, critical of others, or envious, you are sowing to the flesh (Gal 5:15, 26).

- (1) As a parent, you can sow a critical spirit within your children by finding fault with others. When your children grow up and begin to criticize you and reject your values, consider that you are reaping what you sowed.

4) What are the ultimate results of reaping what you sow?

- A) Paul states that if you sow to the flesh, you “will from the flesh reap corruption.” The word “corruption” signifies the moral decay that ultimately leads to eternal death in hell. If you sow to the Spirit, you “will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” The essence of eternal life is to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ His Son (John 17:3; 1 John 5:11). As a believer, you will enjoy this relationship throughout eternity on the new earth.
- B) The Christian is not exempt from the law of sowing and reaping—*there will be reaping in this present life*. Some sins lead to disease, some lead to imprisonment, and some can permanently destroy marriages and families. But the good news is that God has graciously pardoned you from the penalty of eternal death, and He wants you to begin sowing to the Spirit! God forgives sin, and He deals with His children in love. Even when He chastens you, He does so in order to bring you back into a right relationship with Him (Heb 12:9–12).

5) What are some principles of the law of sowing and reaping?

- A) You reap what you sow.
 - (1) If you sow wheat, you reap wheat. If you sow kindness, you will reap kindness. If you sow a lie, a quarrel, or a slander, you will reap the same. The warning, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap,” should make you very careful of what you sow.
 - (2) Jacob deceived his father Isaac and stole his brother Esau’s blessing. Years later, Jacob reaped this deceit when his own sons lied to him and told him that their brother Joseph was dead (compare Genesis 27:9–29 with Genesis 37:31–35). Jacob’s heart was broken, and he mourned the loss of his son. Even though he didn’t know it at the time, he was reaping what he sowed!
 - (3) Paul persecuted many Christians before his own conversion. He later reaped great persecution for the gospel of Christ (Acts 9:16; 2 Cor 11:23–27). Consider the connection between Paul’s role in Stephen’s stoning and the time Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 7:58; 14:19).
- B) You reap in a different season than you sow.
 - (1) Notice that Galatians 6:7 starts by saying, “Do not be deceived.” Why does Paul begin with this warning? The answer is found in the fact that your reaping does not come immediately after you sow. Because of this, you can be deceived into thinking that the reaping will not come. Solomon said, “Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11). If you could see the long-term results of your choices, you would always sow to the Spirit.

- (2) Reaping comes in God's time—His appointed season. An example of this is seen in God's judgment of Israel. They failed to obey the Sabbatical year law which required rest for the land every seventh year (Exod 23:10–11). The people thought God's lack of immediate judgment proved that God didn't really care whether or not they planted crops on the Sabbatical year. They failed, however, to reckon with the nature of God. He does not lie, and whatever is sown will be reaped. Israel spent one year in captivity for every year they ignored God's command—a total of 70 years! (2 Chr 36:20–21).

C) You reap more than you sow.

- (1) In agriculture, the law of surplus is what makes sowing worthwhile. For every kernel of corn planted, the farmer hopes to gain at least one ear of corn bearing many kernels. In the spiritual realm, this law also holds true. God warned, "They sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7). There is a chain reaction that takes place when you do wrong.
- (2) Consider the story of Achan who disregarded the official ban placed on the spoils of Jericho. Thinking no one would know, he stole a robe, some silver and some gold. What was the result? In the next battle, 36 innocent men lost their lives (Joshua 7:1, 5–26). What happened to Achan? He and his entire family were executed, and all his possessions were burned with fire. He sowed the wind, and he reaped the whirlwind!

D) You reap in proportion to how you sow.

- (1) Although you always reap more than you sow, your reaping is determined by the quantity of your sowing. Paul said, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6). If a person sows one acre of wheat, he will receive what one acre can produce. However, if he sows 100 acres of wheat, he will receive what 100 acres can produce.
- (2) This principle operates both positively and negatively. The more you sow to the Spirit, the more you will reap the blessings of a righteous harvest. The more you sow to the flesh, the more you will reap the sorrow of an unrighteous harvest. This principle shows us why it is better to be saved early rather than late in life.

E) You reap what others have sown.

- (1) If you stop and think about it, you'll realize that you are reaping things you didn't sow. You may be reaping the benefits of having godly parents. You may be reaping the sorrow and heartbreak caused by ungodly parents. Joshua and Caleb spent almost 40 years wandering in the desert because of the other spies' rebellion and lack of trust in God (read about this story in Numbers 13–14).
- (2) David coveted his neighbor's wife, committed adultery, lied about it and then murdered Uriah in an attempt to conceal his sin (2 Samuel 11:2–21). David's confession and forgiveness (Psalm 51) did not stop the harvest. Indeed, Nathan told David: "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be

your wife.’ Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’” David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die” (2 Samuel 12:10–14).

6) What are some implications of the law of sowing and reaping?

- A) What you are tomorrow depends on what you *do* today. Right now you are making choices that will affect the rest of your life. It’s imperative that you sow the seeds of obedience. In the future, they will bloom into a harvest of righteousness, not just for you, but also for your children and grandchildren. As the saying goes, “Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”
- B) It’s easy to become discouraged in doing good because the harvest often seems a long way off. That’s why you must persevere! God promises that you will reap if you don’t give up.
- C) Those in positions of influence are targeted by Satan because their sowing has the ability to touch many people. Be sure to keep them in your prayers!

Forgiveness

1) What does it mean to be forgiven?

A) When Jesus wanted to illustrate forgiveness, he told the story of a man who was in debt (Matt 18:21–27). In the story, the man owed the king 10,000 talents (it would have taken roughly 193,000 years of work to pay the debt).¹ The amount was so great that it was impossible to pay, and the man begged the king to give him more time. The king had pity on the man and “forgave him the debt.” This part of the story teaches us:

- (1) Our debt to God is impossible to pay. The 10,000 talents represent our debt to God. When we sin against God, we are sinning against an infinite and eternal being. This means that our sins take on an infinite and eternal quality that warrants eternal punishment. No matter how hard we work, we can never pay our debt to God.
- (2) Forgiveness flows from God’s love for us. The king’s “pity” for the man in debt represents God’s love and mercy to us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- (3) Forgiveness cancels our debt. The king’s forgiveness of the debt represents God’s forgiveness of our sins. When we confess and repent of our sins, God forgives us. This means that:²
 - (a) Our guilt is removed (Rom 8:1).
 - (b) We no longer have to pay the penalty for our sins—death (Rom 6:23).³
 - (c) We are reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18; Eph 2:13, 19).

2) What does it mean to forgive others?⁴

A) Jesus’ story continues in the next few verses (Matt 18:28–35). The man whose enormous debt had been forgiven went out and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii (it would have taken roughly four months of work to pay the debt). He demanded the debt be paid immediately. The servant begged for more time, but the man rejected his plea and had him thrown into prison. When the king found out, he was furious. He summoned the former debtor and said, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” Then he handed the man over to the torturers until the 10,000 talents were paid. This part of the story teaches us:

¹ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Publishing, 2008), p. 449.

² While salvation clearly involves much more than what is mentioned here, the focus of this study is on forgiveness in particular.

³ This doesn’t mean that we won’t reap what we have sown (see the lesson on Sowing and Reaping).

⁴ You can’t understand what it means to forgive others until you grasp what it means for you to be forgiven by God.

- (1) We must forgive others because God has forgiven us. The king's mercy to the man in debt represents God's grace and mercy to us as sinners. His example of forgiveness is the basis and motivation of our forgiving others. God has forgiven our sins—how can we refuse to forgive the sins of others?
- (2) Refusing to forgive is ungrateful and offensive to God. The man whose enormous debt had been forgiven went out and began “to choke” a fellow servant who owed him a mere pittance. This represents the absurdity and ingratitude of refusing to forgive others after we ourselves have been forgiven. No matter how badly we are wronged, it cannot compare to our sin against an infinite and eternal God. Until we truly grasp the magnitude of our own sin, we will find ourselves unwilling to forgive others.
- (3) We must love others. The anger and hostility the former debtor had toward his fellow servant represents our misplaced resentment toward those who wrong us. God calls us to love one another in the same way that He first loved us (1 John 4:19–21). In the same way that God's forgiveness flows from His love for us, our forgiveness should flow from our love for others.
- (4) God will not forgive those who will not forgive others. The man whose enormous debt had been forgiven ruined his life because he would not forgive his fellow servant. If he had shown mercy, he would have remained in the king's favor. But the king was rightfully provoked to anger when he discovered what the man had done. In the same way, God is just to deny us forgiveness if we refuse to forgive those who have wronged us.
- (5) When someone repents of their sin against us and asks our forgiveness, we must forgive them. This means that:
 - (a) Their guilt toward us is removed (although they must also repent before God).
 - (b) They no longer have to pay us the penalty for their offense (although they may have to pay the penalty prescribed by law, make restitution and reap what they have sown).
 - (c) They are reconciled to us (although restoration is a process that is often difficult and painful).

3) What is involved in forgiving someone who has wronged me?

- A) Forgiveness involves cultivating the right attitude. You will be unwilling to forgive others until your heart and mind have been transformed by the truth of God's word. Meditate on the following truths:
 - (1) You can do nothing apart from God's power and grace (John 15:4; Phil 4:13). The ability to forgive others is not something you can do on your own—you have to have God's help. Pray and ask God to give you the love and humility necessary to truly forgive.
 - (2) Your sin before God is infinitely greater than the offense of the one who wronged you (Rom 6:23a; Matt 25:46). Can what was done to you be compared to the magnitude of what you have done to God?

- (3) God forgave you, thus you are obligated to forgive others (Col 3:13; Matt 6:14–16). If God was willing and eager to forgive your sins, how can you be unwilling to forgive the sins of others?
- (4) God loves the person who wronged you (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 3:10–11). If God loves the person who sinned against you, how can you not also love them and desire to forgive them?

B) Forgiveness involves loving the person who wronged you.

- (1) If the person who wronged you is a fellow believer, loving them means confronting them (see Matt 18:15; Luke 17:3).
 - (a) All too often we are silent and withdrawn when someone sins against us. We think they should come to us, but Jesus said we should take the initiative and go to them.
 - (b) Meet with them privately and entreat them in a spirit of gentleness and kindness (Eph 4:32). Tell them, “I love you as a fellow believer and want God’s best for you. When you did [clearly state the offense] to me, I believe that you violated God’s command to love others as Christ loves us. Can we discuss this so that there can be unity and peace between us?”
 - (c) Confronting another believer is appropriate only in cases of clear sin. We are not to be rebuking other Christians every time we feel offended or mistreated. Our feelings and interactions with others should be governed by 1 Corinthians 13. In cases of petty or trivial matters, it is best to overlook the perceived offense.
- (2) If the person who wronged you is not a Christian, loving them means responding with a Christ-like attitude (see Matt 5:39–48).
 - (a) Pray for them (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). Love for others compels us to pray for our enemies and seek their salvation. Never forget that you too were once a sinner.
 - (b) Return good for evil (Prov 25:21–22; 1 Thess 5:15). When we are kind to those who are cruel and help those who despise us, we demonstrate God’s love and bring conviction to their heart.
 - (c) Leave vengeance to God (Rom 12:19; Lev 19:18). Our natural response when someone wrongs us is to seek revenge: “Just wait until I get the chance, I’ll pay them back.” We must reject such thinking and leave the offender in the hands of God.
 - (d) Establish boundaries and limit contact where appropriate (1 Cor 6:19–20; 15:33; Matt 10:23). There are situations that require us to put distance between ourselves and the offender (e.g., physical/sexual abuse, etc.). Being kind and loving does not mean allowing complete access to your life. Sometimes the wisest course of action is to break off contact with the offender until such time as they are truly repentant.

- (3) In certain cases, the one who wronged you may no longer be alive (or you may have no way of contacting or interacting with them). In that case, I recommend that you imagine them coming to you and asking for your forgiveness. You should then make the conscious decision to release them from their debt (consider forgiving them in writing if it is helpful). This is not just a silly mental exercise. By doing this, you demonstrate to yourself and God that you are ready and willing to forgive. That is all that is required of you in this situation.
- C) Forgiveness involves releasing the one who wronged you. When the person who sinned against you repents and asks your forgiveness, tell them, “I forgive you.”
- (1) Forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to release others from their debt to us. This means that we no longer charge them as guilty of sinning against us, and we do not demand that they suffer for what they did to us (although they may have to pay the penalty prescribed by law, make restitution and reap what they have sown).
- (2) We should be ready, willing and eager to forgive (this is our part), but if the person who sinned against us is unwilling to acknowledge their sin and repent (this is their part), then they cannot receive our forgiveness (Matt 18:15; Luke 17:3).
- (a) In the case of a serious wrong, you should make sure the offender is truly repentant. Reconciliation, the goal of forgiveness, is impossible if the person who sinned is unclear about his confession and repentance. Here are seven marks of a truly repentant person:⁵
- Accepts full responsibility for their actions (instead of: “If have done anything to offend you...”).
 - Welcomes accountability from others.
 - Does not continue in the sinful behavior.
 - Does not have a defensive attitude about being in the wrong.
 - Does not dismiss or downplay their sinful behavior.
 - Does not resent doubt about their sincerity or the need to demonstrate sincerity—especially in cases involving repeated offenses.
 - Makes restitution where necessary.
- (b) As long as the repentance is genuine, you must always forgive those who repent (Matt 18:21–22). There is no limit to forgiveness. How many times do you want God to forgive you?
- D) Forgiveness involves reconciliation with the one who wronged you (Matt 5:21–24). Restoration of a relationship that has been damaged by sin is a difficult and often painful task. But the true end of forgiveness is reconciliation.⁶

⁵ Steve Cornell, “How to move from Forgiveness to Reconciliation,” *The Gospel Coalition*. Cited: Oct 11, 2013. Online: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/03/29/how-to-move-from-forgiveness-to-reconciliation/>.

⁶ The suggestions mentioned are sourced from Cornell’s article above.

- (1) Be humble toward the offender. You should not demand that they “earn” your forgiveness (although it may be necessary for them to work to restore trust). This requires true humility. Those who focus on making sure the offender understands how much they have been hurt are allowing self-serving pride to control them.
 - (2) Be clear about guidelines for restoration. Restoration can involve things like restitution, maintaining financial accountability, holding down a job, or seeking treatment for substance abuse. Make sure these considerations are clearly communicated and understood.
 - (3) Be realistic about the process. Restoration often requires hard work and long periods of time. Periodic failure by an offender doesn’t always indicate an unrepentant heart. Behavior patterns often run in deep channels. A key indicator of change is the attitude of the offender. While you should proceed with caution, be careful about demanding guarantees from a person who has truly expressed repentance. If they stumble, the process of loving confrontation, confession, and forgiveness may need to be repeated. Setbacks and disappointments are often part of the process. Don't give up!
- E) Forgiveness involves taking your thoughts and emotions captive (2 Cor 10:5). The wrongs done to us by others can be very damaging and hurtful. If an unkind word can haunt our thoughts for months or even years, how much more can physical, mental and sexual abuse! Because of this, we must be proactive in bringing our thoughts and emotions into submission to God’s word.
- (1) Ask God to give you mental and emotional healing (Ps 34:18; 147:3). He desires to bring true healing and peace to your heart. Make it a matter of daily prayer. Ask God to replace the sorrow and bitterness with love and joy.
 - (2) Reject the impulse to relive the offense. You will never be free from the emotional damage of being wronged if you continue to relive the offense over and over in your mind. Ask God to help you reject those thoughts and purpose to meditate on Scripture whenever the memory returns (see the verses in this lesson).
 - (3) Remember that everything that happens to you is subject to God’s control (Gen 45:5–8; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6). Indeed, nothing can happen to you without His direct involvement and permission. God is not caught by surprise when people wrong you. You must learn to see the offenses of others as part of God’s working in your life.
 - (4) What others intend for evil, God can turn to good (Gen 50:18–21). God does not condone evil nor does He approve of wickedness. But because He is all-wise and all-powerful, “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Rom 8:28 NIV). There is nothing anyone can do that can keep God from His ultimate purpose of conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ!

4) I confronted the person who wronged me, but they won't listen to me. What should I do?

- A) Jesus gave specific instructions about what to do if a fellow believer refuses the repent of their sin against us:
- (1) Confront them again with one or two other believers (Matt 18:16). This will confirm the fact that a sin has been committed, and they will be witnesses to your attempt to restore that person to fellowship.
 - (2) If that fails, bring the matter before the church body (Matt 18:17). In this way you will have the support and backing of the entire congregation in your attempt to resolve the issue.
 - (3) If the person refuses to listen to the church, the leadership and the congregation should jointly act to remove them from fellowship (2 Thess 3:14; 1 Cor 5:9-13). This does not mean that you simply forget about them. Instead, this action is intended to show the person the seriousness of their sin and call them to repentance. Continue to pray from them and ask God to restore them.
 - (4) Throughout this process, ask God to help you remain ready, willing and eager to forgive. God is always glad to welcome back a sinner who returns to the fold. How can we do any less?

5) How should I go about asking someone to forgive me?

- A) Since other people can't see into your heart and tell when you are truly repentant, it's important to be clear in what you say when asking their forgiveness. I recommend the following approach:
- (1) Acknowledge your sin. Consider saying, "What I did to you was sinful and wrong. It was a clear violation of loving God and loving others."
 - (a) Avoid saying things like, "If I offended you," or "If you felt wronged." These trite phrases do not express repentance and can often make the situation even worse.
 - (2) Express sorrow for hurting them. Consider saying, "I want you to know how sorry I am for hurting you. I know that what I did was very painful to you."
 - (3) Clearly ask their forgiveness. Consider saying, "I know I don't deserve it, but I want to humbly ask you to forgive me. I'm willing to make the appropriate restitution, and I purpose, through God's grace, never to do this to you again."
 - (a) Avoid saying things like, "Let bygones be bygones," or "The past is the past." If you do, they will often feel later that you never really repented.
 - (4) Remain humble. Avoid the impulse to justify your actions or give explanations for your behavior. If they express anger or sorrow over what you did, take it humbly and, if appropriate, repeat steps 1 and 2.

Judge Not

1) What is the common understanding of Jesus' command to "Judge Not"?

- A) One of Jesus' most quoted teachings is "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt 7:1; Luke 6:37). The common understanding of this command is that we are not allowed to say that what another person does is wrong. Consider the following:
- (1) On May 19, 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle delivered a family-values speech at the Commonwealth Club of California. In the speech he chided Murphy Brown—the fictional 40-something, divorced news anchor played by Candice Bergen on a CBS sitcom—for her decision to have a child outside of marriage. "Bearing babies irresponsibly is simply wrong," he said. "It doesn't help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice." Reaction was swift—Quayle was ridiculed, called "judgmental," and labeled a bigot.¹
 - (2) Stryper, a Christian metal band, was formed in Orange County, California by brothers Michael and Robert Sweet and guitarist Oz Fox. During one of Stryper's concert tours, they hired the secular group White Lion as the opening act. During some of the concerts, White Lion used filthy, vulgar profanity on stage. At one concert they even threw pornographic magazines into the audience. In an interview Michael Sweet was asked, "How did you guys deal with that when it happened?" Michael replied, "We felt we couldn't judge any other group. If we told them, hey, you can't do this and you can't do that, we would be judging them."²

2) Does the Bible agree with this understanding of Jesus' command?

- A) The Bible commands us both to judge others and not to judge others. This had led to much confusion and misunderstanding regarding this topic. Clearly there is a kind of judging that is right and proper and a kind of judging that is wrong and sinful. Which kind is which?
- B) Dealing with this particular topic is a good way of introducing some important principles of biblical interpretation:
- (1) *Balance Scripture with Scripture.* Another way of saying this is that the truth about something is the whole truth (the entirety of what God has said). The Bible often addresses issues in different places and from differing points of view. It is imperative that we seek out everything God has said about a certain subject before we come to a conclusion.

¹ Isabell Sawhill (2012, May 25). "20 years later, it turns out Dan Quayle was right about Murphy Brown and unmarried moms." *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

² Michael Sweet, Online interview at <http://www.michaelsweet.com>. Article no longer available.

- (2) *Scripture never contradicts itself.* Whenever we read passages of Scripture that seem to contradict each other (e.g. Romans 4:2 and James 2:21), we must seek to understand the distinctive message of each passage as well as the balance that exists between them.

3) What kind of judging does the Bible prohibit us from doing?

A) We must not judge others hypocritically.

- (1) “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Matt 7:1-5).
- (2) “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things” (Rom 2:1).

B) We must not judge others by our own standard of right and wrong.

- (1) “Jesus answered them, ‘I did one work, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:21-24).

C) We must not judge others without regard for their weaknesses.

- (1) “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Rom 14:1-4).

D) We must not judge others concerning matters that do not involve right and wrong.

- (1) “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:16-17).
- (2) “One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God” (Rom 14:5-6).

4) What kind of judging does the Bible require us to do?

A) We are commanded to judge between right and wrong.

- (1) “But test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess 5:21–22).
- (2) “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14).
- (3) “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Eph 5:11).

B) We are commanded to judge if someone is a genuine Christian.

- (1) “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt 7:15–20).
- (2) “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. ‘Purge the evil person from among you’” (1 Cor 5:9–13).

C) We are commanded to judge whether a believer has committed a sin.

- (1) “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt 18:15–17).
- (2) “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal 6:1).
- (3) “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear” (1 Tim 5:19–20).

(4) “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (2 Thess 3:6, 14–15).

D) We are commanded to judge disputes between fellow believers.

(1) “When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!” (1 Cor 6:1–3).

5) How should I respond when someone plays the “judge not” card?

A) Affirm the fact that Christians are commanded to judge between right and wrong (Eph 5:11; 1 Thess 5:21–22).

B) Explain what Jesus really meant: we must not judge by our own standard of right and wrong, and we must not judge hypocritically (Matt 7).

C) Confront them with the truth of God’s word. If they insist on arguing, remind them of what John said: “Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” (1 John 2:4–6).

Matters of Conscience

- 1) **What should I do when I believe a certain activity or practice is permissible (“lawful”) and other Christians don’t?**
 - A) First, you should study the Scriptures and verify that the given activity is in harmony with God’s Word. If it’s not, you should stop doing it, ask God to forgive you, and express gratitude to those who warned you (1 John 2:1; 1 Pet 4:8; Jam 5:19–20).
 - (1) Some activities are *directly* prohibited by Scripture. For example, the practice of homosexuality is clearly forbidden (cf. 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10). The same goes for fornication, adultery, slander, drunkenness, murder, and many other such practices (cf. Gal 5:19–21; Rom 1:18–32).
 - (2) Some activities are *indirectly* prohibited by Scripture. For example, consider the practice of taking Meth or LSD. Although Scripture doesn’t explicitly prohibit you from taking such drugs, it does prohibit you by *necessary inference*: you must obey the law (1 Pet 2:13–17), you must live above reproach (Rom 14:16), and you must be a good steward of your body (1 Cor 6:19–20).
 - (3) Some activities are permitted by Scripture, yet *may still bad for you or for others*. It’s not enough to simply determine whether something is permissible. There are other issues to consider:
 - (a) Paul said, “All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful” (1 Cor 6:12a). This means you should evaluate whether a given activity is beneficial to yourself and others. Ask yourself: Does this activity help me to run my race with endurance? (cf. Heb 12:1); Does it contribute in some way to being a disciple of Jesus Christ? (cf. 1 Tim 4:8); Does it uplift or encourage? (cf. Prov 17:22).
 - (b) Paul said, “All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything” (1 Cor 6:12b). This means you should determine whether a given activity has a controlling or mastering influence over you. The activity may be good in-and-of-itself, but if it starts to dominate your life or interfere with your priorities, you shouldn’t do it.
 - (c) Paul said, “All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up” (1 Cor 10:23b). This means you should consider whether a given activity is edifying to yourself and others. Loving others is about more than simply not harming them. Love also seeks their highest good and does all it can to edify and build them up in the faith. A certain activity may be good in-and-of-itself, but if it doesn’t “build up,” you would do well to reevaluate it.
 - B) Second, you should discern whether those who disagree with you are “weak” in the faith (Rom 14:1). A fellow believer is said to be “weak” if they *would be influenced by your liberty to violate their conscience and do something they believe to be wrong* (1 Cor 8:10; cf. Rom 14:20–22). This is an important factor to consider because a fellow believer may believe that what you’re doing is wrong, and yet not be influenced to violate their conscience. If you can both agree to disagree on the matter, then unity

has been preserved and nothing more needs to be done (other than being gracious and sensitive to the person who believes the practice to be wrong).

- (1) How can you tell whether a fellow believer is “weak”? Here are some questions you could ask them: Does your conscience bother you when you do this? Do you have any doubts about doing this? Do you feel pressured or influenced to do this when you see others doing it? If they assure you that there’s no cause for concern, then you can feel free to exercise your liberty. However, if you discern that they are “weak,” then you should take the initiative to limit your liberty (Rom 15:1–2).
 - (2) What about the contentious? There are always some who are easily offended and want to argue endlessly about various matters. Such people are far from being classified as “weak,” for they have no intention of being influenced by anyone else’s opinion or liberty. Rather, they are what Paul called “divisive.” You are to admonish such people, and if they persist, you should avoid them (Tit 3:9–10).
 - (3) Should I be worried about “offending” other believers? Unfortunately, the KJV’s translation of 1 Corinthians 8:13 has been misunderstood by many modern English readers: “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” The word translated “to offend,” in context, does not mean “to cause dislike, anger, or vexation.” Rather, it means “to cause to fall into sin.” While believers should try to avoid angering or vexing one another (Rom 12:18), Paul’s point in this verse is that *you should avoid doing things that will cause other believers to violate their conscience.*
 - (4) What about those who have a very sensitive conscience? There’s a sense in which it’s good to have a sensitive conscience, that is, a conscience which is keenly aware of the difference between right and wrong (Heb 5:14). However, some Christians have all kinds of doubts and they struggle to feel like they can do anything “in faith.” Most of this is what I call “emotional doubt,” that is, they are not struggling with doubts about what God’s Word says, but rather with anxious and troubled feelings. In such cases, we should be careful not to “steamroll” over their doubts. If they continue to feel convicted about something, don’t push. Limit your liberty for their benefit (Rom 15:1–2).¹
- C) Third, if the Christian who believes that what you’re doing is wrong qualifies as a “weak” brother, then you have an obligation to limit your liberty out of love and concern for his soul (Rom 14:15–16; 1 Cor 8:13). If you encourage him to follow your example and he violates his conscience, then you have sinned against him and against Christ (1 Cor 8:10–12). This is so serious that Paul said, “If anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?” (1 Cor 8:10). This means that *even*

¹ Here are some suggestions for those struggle with a hyper-sensitive conscience: (1) Recognize the weakness of your conscience. (2) Immerse yourself in Scripture, (3) Cultivate your relationship with God, (4) Pray for God to strengthen your faith, (5) Be patient—God doesn’t adjust our consciences overnight, and (6) Keep your conscience clear during steps 1–5. Don’t do anything you have doubts about, unless it is something God’s Word commands you to do.

the possibility of causing a “weak” brother to violate his conscience should be avoided. The burden is on the “strong” to look out for and take care of the “weak” (Rom 15:1-2).

- (1) Should I be constantly worried that someone may see me doing some activity and be led into sin? You should *always* be concerned about how your life affects those around you. This is what it means to love others. Furthermore, if a certain activity has caused believers in your community to violate their conscience, you should definitely limit your liberty and seek to build them up in the faith. That being said, you are not called to be in bondage to every conceivable way in which someone might stumble. Follow the leadership of the Spirit and enjoy your liberty in Christ! Just make sure that you remain concerned for and protective of the weak.

- (2) Isn't it hypocritical and deceptive to limit my liberty around the weak? Won't I be leading them to believe that I think the activity in question is wrong? Not at all. The Holy Spirit never intended for you to deceive the weak. *You should be open and honest with them about the fact that you don't believe the given activity is wrong.* However, you should also tell them that you would never do anything to cause them to violate their conscience, and that you are limiting your liberty for their sake. In this way, you communicate your love for them while at the same time affirming your own view of the issue. This is the example Paul left us, for he said quite openly, “For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings” (1 Cor 9:19-23).²

- D) Fourth, you must not despise or disdain your “weak” brother (Rom 14:3). Instead, you should “welcome him” and not quarrel with him over his beliefs (Rom 14:1). If, at some future time, he wants to discuss the matter, you should do so in a spirit of gentleness and humility. You must be careful *not to force or coerce him into agreeing with you.* As Paul said, “Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Rom 14:19).

² Moo's comments on Romans 14:22 are helpful: “Paul is not, then, telling the ‘strong’ Christian to be quiet about his or her faith in Christ—a plea that would be quite out of place in the NT! Nor is he necessarily requiring ‘strong’ believers never to mention their views on these matters or to speak of their sense of freedom before others. As the context suggests, the silence that Paul requires is related to the need to avoid putting a stumbling block in the way of the ‘weak.’ This will mean that the ‘strong’ are not to brag about their convictions before the ‘weak’ and, especially, that they are not to propagandize the ‘weak’” (Moo, *Romans* NICNT, p. 861).

2) What should I do when I believe a certain activity or practice is prohibited (“unlawful”) and other Christians don’t?

- A) First, you should study the Scriptures and verify that the given activity is truly prohibited. If it’s not, you should classify the activity as a matter of conscience and accept that it may be done in good conscience by other Christians.
- (1) If it’s *explicitly* forbidden (e.g., incest), you should stand firmly against it. If other Christians are practicing it, you should confront them with the truth (cf. 1 Cor 5:1–5). If this takes place in a church setting, the leadership has a responsibility to exercise authority in the matter, up to and including excommunication (1 Cor 5:13; Matt 18:15–17).
 - (2) If it’s *indirectly* prohibited (e.g., smoking), you should be prepared to show how Scripture prohibits the practice *by necessary inference* (cf. 1 Cor 6:19–20). Be patient in such matters, since some may struggle to see the inference. If the issue turns into a dispute, seek guidance from your pastor and ask him to help settle the matter.
- B) Second, once you have determined that Scripture does not explicitly or implicitly address the issue, *you should not pass judgment on those who practice the activity in question*. When discussing the issue of whether it was lawful to eat meat, Paul said, “Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God” (Rom 14:3–4, 6b). This means there are certain activities which some believers can practice in good conscience, while others cannot. You should be gracious and accommodating in such matters.
- C) Third, though you now realize that the given activity is a matter of conscience, you should *not* be quick to begin practicing it, *even if other believers you have confidence in are doing it*. Rather, you should give careful consideration to the following questions:
- (1) Is this a personal conviction? A personal conviction is the Spirit-led certainty that you should or should not practice a given matter of conscience. In such cases, it’s very simple—if your conscience convicts you, don’t do it. If you ignore your conscience and do it anyway, you commit sin and defile your conscience (1 Cor 8:7–12; cf. Rom 2:14–15).
 - (a) Recognize that personal convictions *apply only to yourself*. This is important because many have mistakenly tried to force their personal convictions on others.
 - (b) If possible (you will have to evaluate this yourself), allow other believers to practice the activity, even in your presence. For example, you may be a teetotaler, while another Christian may enjoy a glass of wine. If you can be around them without being led to violate your conscience, then fellowship

together in love and unity. As the saying goes, “In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love.”

- (2) Can I do this in faith? Paul said, “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23). If there is doubt in your mind over whether or not you should do a certain activity, then you shouldn’t do it (“when in doubt, don’t”). If you ignore your doubts and do it anyway, you commit sin.
- D) Fourth, you should be soaking yourself in God’s Word. This is, of course, something we should all be doing, but it’s especially important for those who have doubts and struggle with keeping a clear conscience. The more you know and understand the truth, the more your mind will become transformed (Rom 12:1–2). Paul prayed for the Colossians saying, “We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:9–10). Make this prayer your own, and ask God to help you grow in grace and in the knowledge of His will.

New Perspectives

The Kingdom

1) Introduction to the Kingdom.

- A) The Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus' ministry. When He began to preach, He told the Jews, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17). He proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom throughout Galilee (Mark 1:14; cf. Matt 4:23; 9:35), and He did so with a sense of purpose and urgency (Luke 4:43; 8:1). He also sent His disciples out to preach the coming of the Kingdom (Luke 9:59–60; 10:1, 9–11).
- B) After His death and resurrection, Jesus continued to teach His disciples about the Kingdom until His ascension to Heaven (Acts 1:3). They in turn carried the message of the Kingdom throughout the Roman Empire (Acts 8:12). We see this especially in the missionary journeys of Paul.
- (1) Paul's custom was to go into the Jewish churches (synagogues) and persuade them concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 17:1–3; 19:8).
 - (2) He wrote to his new converts about the Kingdom (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5).
 - (3) He preached the Kingdom of God to the inquiring Jews in Rome and those who visited him while he was under house arrest (Acts 28:23, 30–31).
- C) Although we discussed the Kingdom briefly in the lesson on salvation, I want to specifically welcome you to the Kingdom of God! When you placed your faith in Christ, you were delivered from the power of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of God (Col 1:13). You are now a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven!

2) What is the Kingdom of God?

- A) A kingdom is a nation that is ruled by a king. Those living in a kingdom are called "subjects." This word signifies that they are under the authority of the king. They owe him their loyalty and obedience. They are also called "citizens" which means that they have a right to live in the kingdom because they were born there or were naturalized into the kingdom. The king is responsible for making the laws and for taking care of those under His rule. The laws of a kingdom form the foundation of its culture. A culture is a set of shared beliefs and practices that uniquely identify the group of people who follow them.
- B) The Kingdom of God has all the elements mentioned above. The king is Jesus Christ (Heb 1:8), and the subjects are those who have been saved. As Christians, we owe Jesus our loyalty and obedience. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God because we have been born again (John 3:3). Jesus has a law for His Kingdom: the law of love (see 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2; 5:14; James 2:8–12; Rom 13:8–10; Matt 22:37–40). This law—loving God and loving others—forms the foundation of the Kingdom's culture. Indeed, the Bible tells us that the love we have for each other uniquely identifies us as citizens of the Kingdom of God (John 13:35; 1 John 3:10). Other expressions of this law of love include servanthood (Mark 9:35), self-denial (Matt 16:24) and evangelism (Matt 28:19–20).

- C) God has always wanted to have a kingdom of people who live in a loving relationship with Him and one another (Matt 25:34; Isa 2:2–5; Micah 4:1–4). In the beginning, God created mankind and established the first earthly kingdom by giving Adam dominion over the entire created order (Gen 1:27–28). Adam sinned and forfeited his authority to Satan (John 12:31; Acts 26:18; Col 1:13). As a result, every person born into this world is enslaved by Satan and under God’s wrath (Eph 2:1–3). God’s purpose in sending Jesus was to end Satan’s dominion over the world (John 12:31; Col 2:15), provide a way for people to be redeemed from Satan’s enslavement (Heb 2:14–15) and restore His Kingdom to its original state (Rev 5:9–10; 11:15).

3) Is the Kingdom of God a physical or spiritual kingdom?

- A) The Kingdom of God is both a physical *and* a spiritual kingdom. This duality has often been a source of confusion. It’s why Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God as being present, yet future; revealed, yet a mystery; among us, yet not of this world; like a small seed, yet pervading everything.
- (1) A Spiritual Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is manifested on earth today in the lives of Christians like you. As a spiritual kingdom, its focus is on righteousness (measuring up to the standard of God’s word), peace (well-being in one’s relationships), and joy (the satisfaction of having what is good from God’s perspective) (Rom 14:17).
- (2) A Physical Kingdom. The Kingdom of God will one day exist on earth in a physical sense. In Daniel 2:44 we are told: “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”
- (a) The Kingdom of God on earth will reach around the globe. It will have a capital city, Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ will rule and reign there. The law of love will be the law of the earth, and everyone will be required to worship God (Zech 14).
- B) Jesus’ disciples remained confused about the spiritual aspect of the Kingdom until Jesus’ ascension. Just before He left, they asked Him if He was now going to fulfill their expectations and restore Israel’s political independence (Acts 1:6). They still failed to grasp the true scope of the Kingdom. They failed to realize that Jesus’ Kingdom was within the hearts of men, and that He was teaching a new lifestyle with new values, attitudes, relationships—in short, a new culture: the Kingdom Culture.¹

4) What are the practical implications of being a citizen of the Kingdom of God?

- A) Realizing that you are a citizen of the Kingdom of God helps you understand:
- (1) Spiritual Warfare. During World War II many catch phrases were used to remind people of the conflict being fought overseas. One of these phrases was, “Don’t

¹ Jim Peterson, *Living Proof: Sharing the Gospel Naturally* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1989), p. 89.

- you know there's a war on?" The same truth needs to be understood by you as a disciple of Jesus. The Kingdom of God is at war with the kingdom of darkness (Satan's kingdom). Satan is opposed to God and resists every citizen of the Kingdom. As a disciple, you can expect to be tempted and tested as Satan tries to defeat you.
- (2) Earthly Life. When you were saved, God could have immediately taken you to Heaven. Why did He leave you here on earth? God's purpose in leaving His servants on earth is to conform them to the image of His Son (Rom 8:28-29), to have them make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20), and for them to do good works which will be rewarded in the future, physical Kingdom (Eph 2:10; Rev 2:25-27).
- (a) In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus told a parable about a master who was preparing to go on a long journey. He called his servants, gave each of them some money (some more and some less) and then departed. When he returned some time later, he called his servants to account for their use of the money he had given them. All but one of the servants had invested the money and doubled the original amount. The master said to each of these servants, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." The point of the story is that God expects you to use your talents and opportunities here so that you will be prepared for ministry and authority in His future, earthly kingdom.
- (b) The kingdom is the framework for understanding that you work for Christ in whatever you are doing right now, and Christ Himself will reward you in the future for how well you perform your current task. In other words, the kingdom gives meaning to all the time you spend working at your job, in your home, and raising your kids. It's all for God's Kingdom (Col 3:23-25).
- (3) Suffering. When you suffer, you can take satisfaction in knowing that you are destined for leadership in Christ's Kingdom. Paul told Timothy: "If we endure, we will also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12). Paul told the Thessalonians: "Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering" (2 Thess 1:4-5). Suffering takes on new meaning when you understand that it's all for Christ's coming Kingdom.
- (4) Evangelism. Winning others for Christ is part of expanding the Kingdom of God and taking back the hearts and minds of the world from Satan's captivity. As a disciple, you should be seeking to spread the Kingdom of God wherever you go.

A Biblical Framework for Life

1) What is the purpose of my life?

- A) God created human beings to be in a loving relationship with Him and with each other. This relationship is the only thing that will satisfy your soul. Augustine summarized it this way: “You [God] have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

2) How do I fulfill God’s desire to have a loving relationship with me?

- A) The perfect example of a loving relationship with God is found in the life of Jesus Christ. He loved God with all His heart, mind, soul and strength, and He loved His neighbor as Himself (Matt 22:36–40). If you want to fulfill your purpose in life, you need to be like Christ. You need to be His disciple.
- B) Part of being a disciple of Jesus is learning to think about life from a godly, biblical perspective. When you were a sinner, the world revolved around you: your ambitions, your dreams, your goals, your feelings, and your desires. When you were born again, you experienced a complete change in orientation. God is now the center of your life. This means that your outlook on life is radically different than it was. You now have a new priority structure for living.

3) What is the God-centered priority structure that should guide my life?

- A) The following list of priorities will help you live a God-centered life. Your decisions should be governed by this list, which is in order of importance from the greatest to the least (note that your job actually comes in last in this list):
- (1) God. God is the first priority of your life. Your dreams and desires should never come before God and His plans for your life. Your decisions should be made with this consideration: *Is this in harmony with God’s will and His place of supremacy in my life?*
 - (2) Your spouse. Putting God first will enable you to be the husband/wife God wants you to be. You cannot succeed as a spouse if your relationship with God is marred by sin. The most important thing your husband/wife needs is the affection and companionship of a spouse who is totally committed to loving God with all their heart.
 - (3) Your children. Your children do not come before your spouse. You cannot succeed as a parent if you are not focusing on the needs of your spouse first. The most important thing a child needs is the environment of a healthy, loving husband-wife relationship in the home.
 - (4) Your church. The needs of your family take precedence over the needs of the church. All too often people allow their ministry to take priority over their family. Eventually the problems created by this in the home will undermine your ability to minister in the church.

(5) **Your job.** The Church is your spiritual family. While your job is essential in providing for your family, it should not prevent you from obeying God's command to meet together regularly with other believers (Heb 10:25). You are an essential part of the body of Christ, and your fellow believers need you in order to be successful in their own relationship with God.

B) Think about how this priority structure will guide your decision making:

- (1) It will ensure that you find a church that is suited to the needs of your family.
- (2) It will prompt you to find a job that allows you to attend church on a regular basis.
- (3) It will make sure that you don't let the time spent with your children crowd out the time you spend with your spouse.
- (4) It will ensure that you don't spend more time ministering to others than you do to your own family.
- (5) It will remind you that your job should never take priority over your wife and children.

4) What are some life principles for singles?

- A) Each person, with God's guidance, must discern whether they are gifted for marriage or for singleness. God leads most of His children into marriage, but there are some individuals who are gifted to remain single. They are then able to serve God without the distractions that come from having a family (1 Cor 7:1-2, 7, 32).
- B) No matter what your current state (single or married), God wants you to bloom where you're planted. Make it your goal to serve Christ as energetically and effectively as you can, and let God lead you in the calling He has for you. For many, if not most, that calling is eventually marriage.
- C) The time and opportunities you have when you are single should be spent preparing yourself to fulfill the God-given role you will take on in the future. I can recommend no better method of preparation than going to a Bible college. If this is not possible, then seek out church programs, etc. that will equip you to meet the many challenges you will face.

5) What are some life principles for men?

- A) Men are leaders, both in the home and in the church. You are to set the direction for the home and act as an example of godly living for your wife and children. Your responsibility is to make the decisions that will keep your family in the path of godliness (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23; 1 Tim 3:1ff; Titus 1:5-9).
- B) Men are to provide for their families. This includes their spiritual and emotional well-being, not just their physical needs (1 Tim 5:8; 1 Thess 2:9).
- C) Men are to love and care for their wives. This means keeping yourself pure in the midst of the world's pollution and perversion (Eph 5:28-29; 1 Pet 3:7).
- D) Men are to take the initiative in raising their children to follow Christ (Eph 6:4).

6) What are some life principles for women?

- A) Women were created to be their husband's helpers (Gen 2:18–24; 1 Cor 11:8–9). If you are wondering whether or not to pursue a particular endeavor, ask yourself this important question: *Does this help my husband?* Usually that one simple question will make your decision clear.¹
- B) Women are to obey and respect their husbands. As a wife, you must ask yourself some tough questions on a regular basis: Do I manage my time in a manner that assists my husband or serves my own agenda? Do I ask for my husband's input before agreeing to do a particular project? (Eph 5:22–23).
- C) Women are to bear children and be workers at home. While it is the man's responsibility to be the *provider* of the home, it is the woman's responsibility to be the *caretaker* of the home. Domesticity—devotion to the quality of home life—is an essential facet of femininity (Titus 2:3–5; 1 Tim 5:14).²
 - (1) “Single women (especially young women), may I advise you not to wait until marriage to cultivate this? Whether you get married or not, you can express your femininity by developing a love and devotion for the home. In fact, don't assume that if you ignore cultivating a heart for the home while you are single, you will automatically have it once you get married. I have talked to many married women who admitted they didn't value domesticity when they got married. They didn't like being at home; they didn't like caring for the home. They didn't value homemaking as a worthy profession. Why? Because they didn't develop a vision for the importance of home-life while they were single. They filled their single years with every possible pursuit but a devotion to the home. I'm not saying other pursuits are wrong; the single years do provide opportunities for many other God-honoring pursuits. But these should be balanced with cultivating a love for the home.”³
- D) Women are to focus on inward beauty and not outward appearance. While a woman does well to please her husband in her appearance, she is not to be preoccupied with physical beauty (1 Tim 2:9–10). Instead, she should work to develop inner character which God says is precious in His sight (1 Pet 3:3–6).

7) What are some life principles for children?

- A) Children are to obey their parents and submit to their authority. A child who does not learn to submit to their parents will struggle the rest of their lives to submit to God. As a parent, you do well to teach your children to obey with a good attitude.
- B) Children are to follow their parent's guidance when it comes to friends and recreation. A child does not have the wisdom and life experience to make these decisions without the guidance of their parents (Eph 6:1–3; Col 3:20). Do not allow

¹ Carolyn Mahaney, “Femininity: Developing a Biblical Perspective,” *Biblical Womanhood in the Home* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2002), p. 25.

² *Ibid*, p. 29.

³ *Ibid*, p. 29–30.

your children to choose their own entertainment. You should be filtering and previewing the movies they watch, the music they listen to, and the books they read. Make sure your children cultivate the right relationships with their peers. These relationships will have a huge impact on your children's character and development.

Guidelines for Entertainment

1) What are some biblical principles that should guide my entertainment choices?

A) Beware of anything that makes you calloused to sin or lessens your hatred of evil.

(1) The Bible tells us to “abhor what is evil” and “abstain from every form of evil” (Rom 12:9; 1 Thess 5:22). This is important because the world is filled with all sorts of wickedness and perversion. As humans, our natural tendency is to get used to whatever we consistently encounter in our environment. The enemy knows this and tries to make us as calloused to sin as he can. As Alexander Pope said in his 1732 Essay on Man, “Vice is a monster of so frightful mien, As to be hated needs but to be seen; Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face, We first endure, then pity, then embrace.” It is difficult to hate what you are used to.

(2) It’s easy to tell when a movie or book has too much violence or cursing, but are you also noticing when your entertainment choice is pushing a worldly philosophy or value system? Ungodly attitudes and belief systems can be as damaging to your mind as the more obvious sensual allurements.

B) Beware of anything that bothers your conscience.

(1) In his first letter to Timothy, Paul urged him to hold on to “faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith” (1 Tim 1:19 NASB). Paul also told the Romans “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23 NASB). The main thrust of Paul’s message is that you shouldn’t do anything that you believe is wrong. This principle applies to those “gray areas” of life which are not specifically mentioned in Scripture. You need to be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and respond in obedience when you feel checked about a certain activity or form of entertainment. Keep your conscience clear!

C) Beware of anything that would make another believer stumble.

(1) Romans 14 is a thought provoking chapter on the impact that your actions have on other believers. Paul said, “Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Rom 14:13). He also said, “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble” (Rom 14:21). This is an important factor that should be taken into account when you participate in various kinds of entertainment. You need to be sensitive to the concerns and weaknesses of those around you. There are times when it’s necessary to limit your desires in deference to someone else. Don’t be irritated or frustrated—be kind and remember that one day, someone may have to be sensitive to you.

D) Beware of anything that appeals to or affects your areas of weakness.

(1) We all have areas of weakness, and most of us know what they are. Unfortunately, the enemy knows them too, and the temptations we face are always tailored for a perfect fit. James, the Lord’s brother, said, “Each person is

tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:14). Entertainment, probably more than anything else, has the ability to appeal to your areas of weakness. Because of this, it is imperative that you filter your activities through the grid of what is spiritually healthy for you. Know your weaknesses and don't let the enemy trap you!

E) Beware of anything that portrays sin as amusing or glorifies evil.

- (1) Paul urged the Romans: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2). The world is constantly trying to squeeze you into its mold, and one of its most effective tools is sugarcoated sin. How many of us have read a book or watched a movie where the rebellious attitudes of the hero are presented as funny? Often disrespect for authority is portrayed as cool and immorality is shown as comical. There are even TV shows that glorify witchcraft and homosexuality. It's important to avoid this kind of entertainment because the enemy will use it to influence and shape your perspective of sin. God doesn't think sin is funny—to Him it's deadly serious.

F) Beware of anything that stimulates wrong thoughts or attitudes.

- (1) At first glance this principle seems impossible to put into practice. After all, we're surrounded by the world's pollution everywhere we go. But the fact that the enemy is peddling his perversion in the streets is no reason to invite him into your home. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul told them, “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8). The various ways you choose to entertain yourself should pass the test of this verse. Remember, God isn't trying to prevent you from enjoying life. He's trying to protect you from activities that will stimulate wrong thoughts or attitudes. Sin begins in the mind. Avoid anything that gives it a chance to get started.

G) Beware of loving pleasure more than loving God.

- (1) In his last letter to Timothy, Paul warned him, “In the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim 3:1-5). Entertainment, even in its most wholesome form, can be used by the enemy to take God's rightful place of supremacy in your life. A hobby or sport can gradually take up more and more time in your busy schedule until it squeezes out your time with God. Some of your favorite activities can become idols if you allow them to be more important than God. God has given you so much to enjoy. Make sure you don't worship the creation more than the Creator.
- (2) A good test of whether or not a certain entertainment has become too important in your life is to ask yourself this question: If God were to tell you to stop doing that particular activity, would you welcome His guidance with gratitude or resent His command as an intrusion?

H) Beware of the company you keep.

- (1) How you entertain yourself is often determined by the friends you keep. Paul said, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals'" (1 Cor 15:33). Spend your time with other believers and friends who will edify you and build you up in the faith.

2) What is the role of the man/husband when it comes to entertainment?

- A) The man/husband sets the direction in the home (or relationship) when it comes to entertainment. This is an important responsibility and should not be taken lightly.
- B) The husband sets the example for his wife and children. They are watching how you entertain yourself. Remember that what you allow in moderation, your children will often excuse in excess.
- C) Children should not be allowed to make their own choices when it comes to entertainment. They do not have the experience or discernment to make godly decisions. You, as the parent, should control how they entertain themselves. My advice is that you do not allow your children to have their own TVs, radios, iPods, cell-phones or computers. You should supervise and filter what they watch and listen to.

3) What is the role of the woman/wife when it comes to entertainment?

- A) The wife is not to lay down the law to her husband when it comes to entertainment. If you find that your husband is engaging in entertainment that you are not comfortable with, go to him and share your concern without accusing or nagging. If he continues to pursue an activity you dislike, make it a matter of prayer and ask God to change his heart. God will change your husband's mind, or He may change your mind. Be willing to accept either possibility.
- B) As wife and mother, you have control over most of your children's entertainment choices. Be aware of the books they read, the music they listen to and the movies they watch. My advice is that you preview whatever they have access to in the way of entertainment. Make sure it supports your values and promotes godliness.

4) You've talked a lot about what I should avoid when it comes to entertainment. What are some things that I should pursue?

- A) Fellowship with other believers. Getting together with other Christians and playing games is a great way to have fun in an edifying environment.
- B) Christian movies. There are lots of movies that are made by and for Christians. *Facing the Giants* and *Courageous* are two such movies that I have recently enjoyed.
- C) Christian books. When you get tired of reading non-fiction and want to relax with something else, pick out a Christian novel. There are many good choices available at Christian bookstores.

- D) Christian websites. Seek out God-centered websites. I have a list of recommended sites available under the Links menu on my website (surfing the web can be fun but it's also dangerous; consider installing a filter to prevent bad sites from popping up.)
- E) Christian radio and music stations. Find a Christian radio station in your listening area and keep it tuned in as you drive around town.

5) What about music?

A) The apostle Paul mentions music in his letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians:

- (1) "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16).
- (2) "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:18-20).

B) Here are some principles from these verses:

- (1) Music and singing are associated with an attitude of thankfulness and gratitude toward God. Are you paying attention to the attitudes the music you listen to is encouraging you to have?
- (2) Music is an activity that you are encouraged to do with other believers. It has the unique ability to unite a group of individuals into a single unit (the essence of harmony).
- (3) Music and lyrics are closely connected. Some music, like rap, has lyrics that are obviously vulgar and ungodly, but other kinds of music can have more subtle lyric issues: bad values, beliefs, attitudes, etc. If you are listening to Christian music, do the lyrics exalt God or focus on self? If you are listening to secular music, do the values glorify God? Even music that is not about God or Christian living should be in harmony with what is right and true.
- (4) Music can exert a controlling influence over your mind. The music you listen to should be in harmony with the truth. If not, you risk giving yourself over to something that is not of the Holy Spirit. You can listen to music that creates a desire for romance, passion and sex. Does the music you listen to cause you to have godly or ungodly desires?
- (5) Music is associated with edification and the uplifting of the heart and mind. Does the music you listen to encourage you or depress you? Does it create a spirit of discontent or a spirit of hope and joy?
- (6) Music prompts a physical response in the listener. Some music can put you to sleep, and other music can make you want to sing and dance. Be sensitive to what the music you listen to is prompting you to do with your body.

- (7) Music expresses emotion. Certain kinds of music are designed to convey anger and frustration. Other kinds of music express peace and happiness. Be aware of the kinds of emotions that the music you listen to is creating.
 - (8) Music is always associated with the artist. How many teenager's rooms have posters on the wall of their favorite music groups? People naturally admire the artists of the music styles they enjoy. Are the performers you listen to living godly lives? Are their lifestyles worth imitating or would they lead you astray?
- C) My advice to new converts is to avoid any music that reminds you of what you used to listen to as sinner. Music often goes hand-in-hand with drinking and partying. I have found that music can lead people back into their old habits and lifestyles.

Basic Doctrines

God

1) Who is God?

- A) God is spirit. Jesus said, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24; cf. John 1:18; Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17). God is not composed of matter or energy, and He does not have the limitations involved with a physical body.
- B) God is personal. God has the characteristics of personality: intellect, emotions, and will. He creates, thinks, feels, knows, plans, and acts (Isa 57:15–21; Jer 3:12–13). He is conscious of His own existence (Exod 3:14), and He does whatever seems best to Him (Ps 115:3). The fact that God is personal means that it’s possible to have a relationship with Him.
- C) God is infinite. When describing God’s infinity, we use words like eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent:
- (1) Eternal—God had no beginning and will have no end. He has always existed and will always exist (cf. Ps 90:2; 93:2; Rev 4:8).
 - (2) Omniscient—God is all-knowing. God doesn’t learn anything, for He knows everything (Ps 147:5; Isa 40:13–14; 1 John 3:20). God knows what will happen *before* it happens (Isa 14:24; 46:9–11), and He knows everything that *could have* happened (Exod 13:17; 1 Sam 23:8–14; Jer 23:21–22). Nothing takes God by surprise!
 - (3) Omnipotent—God is all-powerful. Nothing is difficult or challenging for God (Matt 19:25–26; Rev 19:6). He has no limits *except that He never acts contrary to His own nature and character*. It’s important to understand this clarification, because there are many things God cannot do: lie, break his word, deny himself, etc. (Heb 6:18; 2 Tim 2:13).
 - (4) Omnipresent—God is present everywhere. There is nowhere you can go to escape God’s presence (Ps 139:7–10; Isa 66:1), and nothing happens that He does not see (Jer 23:24; Heb 4:13). Nothing can be hidden from God!
- D) God is unchanging. In His nature, attributes, and character, God never changes (Mal 3:6). He is the “I AM”—the immutable, eternal, fixed, changeless and invariable God of the universe (Exod 3:14). He always loves what is right and hates what is wrong. God may alter His decisions based on man’s response (cf. Jer 18:7–10; Ezek 33:13–15; Jonah 3:4–10), but God Himself is unchanging.
- E) God is holy. The prophet Isaiah repeatedly referred to God as “The Holy One of Israel” (Isa 1:4; 5:19; 12:6; 29:19; 30:11; 41:14; 54:5; 60:9). The angels cry, “Holy, holy, holy” before God continually (Rev 4:8). God’s holiness is the unique excellence of his character. He is the standard of moral perfection, and His actions are marked by

integrity and goodness.¹ He is completely separate from evil, and all His ways are righteous (Ps 145:17).

- F) God is love. The apostle John said, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love...God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:8, 16). Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Paul said, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Charles Wesley, the great hymn writer, said it well: “And can it be that I should gain, An int’rest in the Savior’s blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! how can it be That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”
- G) God is a Trinity. The doctrine of the “Trinity” (lit. “a unity of three”) comes from the fact that the Bible clearly affirms the existence of three distinct Persons that are all identified as the one God of the universe. This is not a contradiction, for the Bible does not teach that God is both one person and three persons. Nor does it teach that God is both one God and three Gods. Rather, it reveals that God is one in essence and three in person.²
- (1) A diagram is often helpful to explain the Trinity (last page of lesson). The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all God; they are not three names for the same person. The Persons are distinct: the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father.

2) How does the Bible teach that God is a Trinity?

- A) If there is only one God, yet there are three distinct Persons who are called God, then it follows that God is a Trinity: one God who exists as three Persons who share the same nature. Here is how the Bible teaches the existence of the Trinity:
- (1) There is only one God.
- (a) “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deut 6:4).
- (b) “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me” (Isa 46:9).
- (2) The Father is God.
- (a) “Grace to you and peace from God our Father...” (2 Thess 1:2).
- (b) “For when he received honor and glory from God the Father...” (2 Pet 1:17).

¹ *I Believe: Fundamentals of the Christian Faith*, written by the Bible Faculty of God’s Bible School and College (Revivalist Press, 2006), p. 20.

² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

(3) The Son is God.

(a) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh...” (John 1:1, 14).

(b) “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30–33).

(4) The Holy Spirit is God.

(a) “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ... You have not lied to man but to God’” (Acts 5:3–4).

(5) The Father, Son and Spirit are distinct Persons.

(a) “And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’” (Mark 1:10–11).

(b) “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me” (John 15:26).

(6) Conclusion: God exists as three distinct Persons who share the same nature.

3) What are some misunderstandings about the Trinity?

A) Misunderstanding #1: The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible, therefore it cannot be true.

(1) It’s true that the word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible, but there are many biblical concepts which are not mentioned directly in Scripture. For example, the words “omniscience,” “omnipotence,” and “omnipresence,” are not found in the Bible, but we use them to describe the attributes of God. A specific word doesn’t have to be in the Bible in order for the concept it describes to be true.

B) Misunderstanding #2: Christians believe there are three Gods.

(1) Because Christians refer to the Father as God, the Son as God and the Holy Spirit as God, some people think Christians believe in three gods. This is not true! Christians believe in *one God who exists in three Persons*. Over the centuries, people have tried to come up with simple illustrations for the Trinity. There are limits to every illustration, but you may find some of them to be helpful. For example, God is NOT $1+1+1=3$, God is $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. St. Patrick is thought to have used the shamrock as an illustration of the Trinity: a leaf with one stem but 3 lobes.

C) Misunderstanding #3: Jesus is not God.

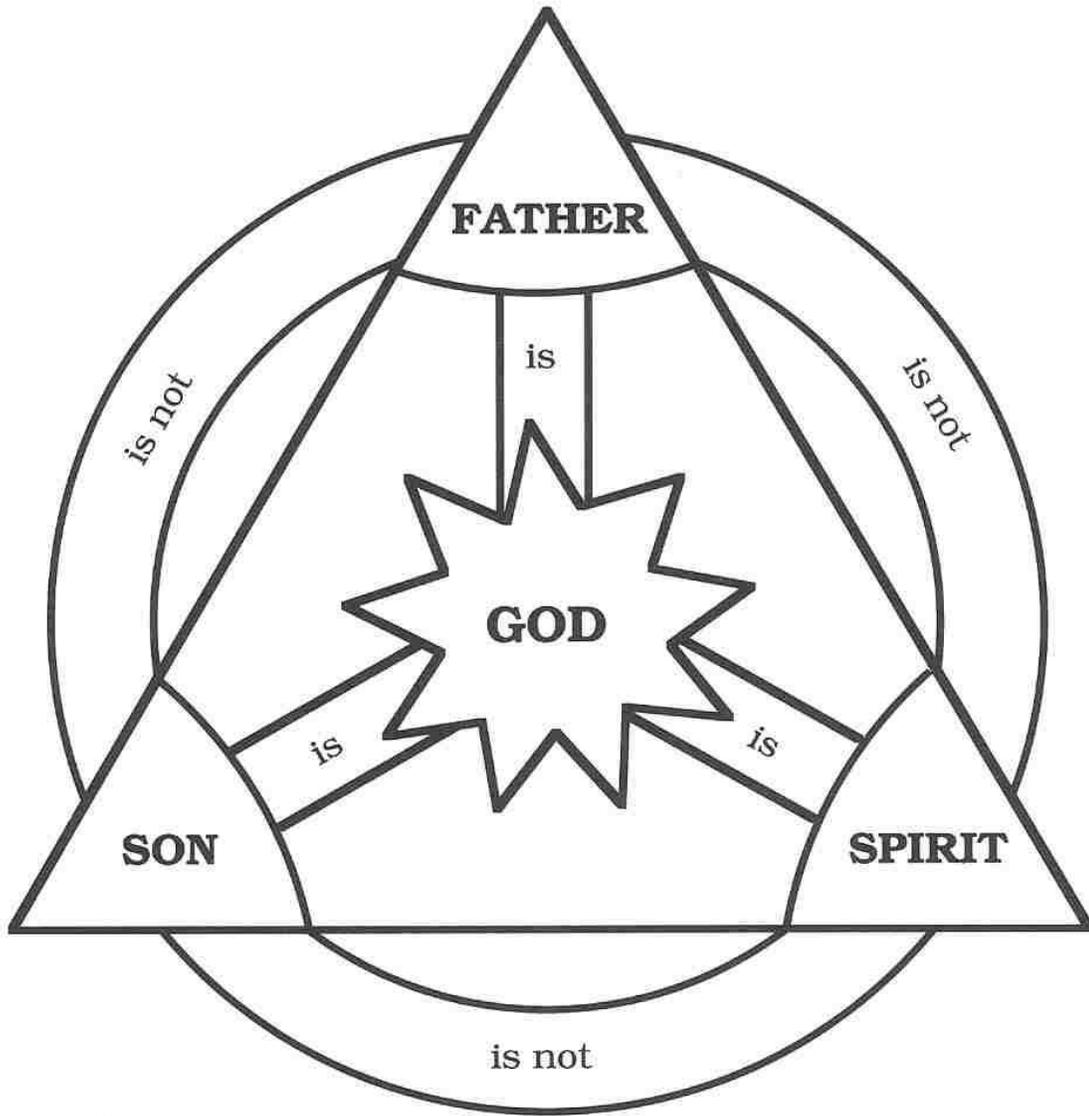
- (1) Jesus IS truly God. He accepted worship as God and claimed to deserve the same honor as the Father (Matt 14:33; 28:17–18; John 5:22–23; 9:38). He claimed to be the divine Son of God, a title the Jews rightly understood to be a claim to equality with God (John 5:17–18; 10:30–33; 19:7).

D) Misunderstanding #4: The Father, Son and Spirit are just different ways that God has revealed himself.

- (1) Not true. The Bible clearly shows that the Father, Son and Spirit are distinct Persons.
 - (a) The Father sends the Son (Gal 4:4; 1 John 4:14).
 - (b) The Father sends the Spirit (John 14:26).
 - (c) The Father and the Son count as two witnesses (John 5:31–37; 8:16–18).
 - (d) The Father and the Son glorify one another (John 17:1, 4–5) and the Spirit glorifies Jesus the Son (John 16:14).

4) What are some modern religious movements that deny the doctrine of the Trinity?

- A) Examples of major religious movements that deny the doctrine of the Trinity include the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism), the Unitarian Universalist Church, and Oneness Pentecostalism.
 - (1) Jehovah's Witnesses—they believe the doctrine of the Trinity has no explicit basis in Scripture, and they deny the deity of Jesus Christ.
 - (2) Mormons—they believe that the Godhead consists of three distinct beings who are one in purpose but not one in nature. Mormonism affirms the existence of many gods.
 - (3) Unitarians—they deny the deity of Jesus Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit.
 - (4) Oneness Pentecostals—they believe that the Father, Son and Spirit are merely manifestations of a single God, not unique Persons within the Trinity.



Angels

1) What are angels?

- A) Angels are spirits—they do not have physical, material bodies. The clearest statement regarding the nature of angels is found in Hebrews where the writer says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14 NIV). Because angels are spirits, they are without gender, being neither male or female.
- B) Angels are personal—they can be spoken to and interacted with (cf. Gen 18:1–8; Heb 13:2). They also have emotions, intelligence and will (2 Sam 14:20; Rev 22:9).
- C) Angels are moral—they have the capacity for moral choice. Some of them, simply called “angels,” are obedient to God and carry out His will (Matt 25:31; Luke 1:26). Others, normally called “demons,” disobeyed, fell from their holy position, and now stand in active opposition to the work and plan of God (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8–10).¹

2) Where did angels come from?

- A) Angels were created by God. This is implied in the Psalms: “Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts! Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created” (Psalm 148:2, 5). It is reasonable to conclude that the angels were created at the beginning of the six days of creation (cf. Gen 2:1–2; Job 38:4–7). “Apparently the angels were all created directly at one time, since they presumably do not have the power to propagate themselves in the normal fashion (Matt 22:30), and we are told of no new direct creations by God after the original creative effort was completed (Gen 2:2–3).”²

3) Are there different types of angels?

- A) There is little definite information on this subject. We do know that there are “archangels,” who evidently are of higher stature than ordinary angels. The Bible only uses this term twice, once in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and once in Jude 1:9. Michael is the only angel identified by name as an archangel. Although Gabriel is often thought of as an archangel, there is no text in Scripture that confirms this belief; nor are we told how many archangels there are (although it seems that there may be several; cf. Dan 10:13).³
- B) Cherubim and seraphim are winged creatures that appear in Scripture and make their most memorable appearances in the visions of Ezekiel (Ezek 1:4–28; 10:3–22), Isaiah (Isa 6:2–6), and John (Rev 4:7). Although they are not specifically called angels, it seems reasonable to conclude that they are among the spiritual creatures designated by the general term *angel*.

¹ J. Hampton Keathley III, *Angelology: The Doctrine of Angels*, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1998, p. 2.

² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 463.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

- (1) Cherubim (also called cherubs) are revealed as powerful guards or attendants to the divine throne. God placed cherubim and a flaming sword at the garden of Eden to guard the way of the tree of life (Gen 3:24). In the tabernacle and also the temple, gold cherubim on the mercy seat signified the presence of God (Exod 37:7-9; Num 7:89; Ps 80:1).
 - (2) Seraphim only appear in Isaiah's vision. Isaiah saw the LORD sitting on a throne, and seraphim stood over the throne crying out, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isa 6:3).
- C) Attempts have been made to devise an organizational pattern for the angelic hierarchy, but it is impossible to be certain with so little data. They appear to be organized into various ranks, orders and positions. The Scriptures speak of the "assembly" and "council" of the angels (Ps 89:5, 7), of their organization for battle (Rev 12:7), of a king over the demon-locusts (Rev 9:11), and of a demonic "Prince of Persia" (Dan 10:13). They are also given governmental classifications which indicate organization and ranking (Eph 3:10—good angels; and Eph 6:12—demons).

4) What do angels look like?

- A) Angels are normally invisible to the human eye (Num 22:31; 2 Kgs 6:17). When they do manifest themselves in a visible form, it is usually to speak to and interact with human beings. Descriptions in the Bible of the appearance of angels varies from the fantastic to the ordinary. Indeed, Hebrews 13:2 tells us that angels can appear so much like human beings that it is possible to have them in your home and never realize who they are. Here are some passages which describe the appearance of angels:
- (1) Abraham's visitors (Gen 18-19). These angels are described as looking like men. There is no indication of anything strange about their appearance.
 - (2) Angels at Christ's tomb (Matt 28:2-4). These angels are described as looking like men. Their bodies and faces shone like lightning and their clothes were a dazzling white.
 - (3) Daniel's angel (Dan 10). Daniel's angel appeared as a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a precious gem [beryl]. His face flashed like lightning, and his eyes flamed like torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice roared like a vast multitude of people.
 - (4) Cherubim (Ezek 1; 10). Cherubim are described as having four faces. The face in front is like a man, the face on the right is like a lion, the face on the left is like an ox and the face in back is like an eagle. They have two pairs of wings. One pair spreads out from the middle of the back. The other pair is used to cover the body. They have legs like a man, but their feet are cloven like calves' feet, which shine like burnished brass. They have four human hands, one located under each wing.
 - (5) Seraphim (Isa 6:1-4). Seraphim are described as having six wings. Two are used to cover their face, two to cover their feet and two are used to fly.

(6) The four living creatures (Rev 4:6–8). There is some debate among scholars as to whether these creatures are seraphim or a distinct kind of angel. They are described as being covered with eyes, both in front and behind, and having six wings like a seraphim. One looked like a lion, one looked like an ox, one had a human face and the last looked like an eagle.

5) How many angels are there?

A) There are vast numbers of angels. Scripture has various ways of indicating their numbers: “myriads” (Deut 33:2 NIV); “twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands” (Ps 68:17); “twelve legions” (36,000 to 72,000—the size of the Roman legion varied between 3,000 and 6,000; Matt 26:53). While there is no reason to take any of these figures as exact numbers, it is clear that there are vast numbers of angels.⁴

6) Why were angels created?

A) Praise. Angels continually praise and glorify God (Rev 5:11–12; 7:11; 8:1–4). While this activity usually takes place in God’s presence, on at least one occasion it took place on earth—at the birth of Jesus the angels proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:13–14).⁵

B) Communication. Angels are often used to communicate God’s message to humans. This role is in keeping with the meaning of the word *angel* (“messenger”). Two angels warned Lot about the coming destruction of Sodom (Gen 19). Gabriel appeared and spoke to Zachariah (Luke 1:13–20) and to Mary (Luke 1:26–28). Angels also spoke to Philip (Acts 8:26), Cornelius (Acts 10:3–7), Peter (Acts 11:13; 12:7–11) and Paul (Acts 27:23).⁶

C) Ministry. Angels minister to believers, both physically and spiritually. Angels ministered to Jesus after His temptation (Matt 4:11) and during His stress in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). In the early church it was an angel that delivered the apostles (Acts 5:19) and later Peter (Acts 12:6–11) from prison. Angels take a great interest in the spiritual welfare of believers, rejoicing at their conversion (Luke 15:10) and serving them in their needs (Heb 1:14). Angels are spectators of our lives (1 Cor 4:9; 1 Tim 5:21), and are present within the church (1 Cor 11:10). At the death of believers, they convey them to heaven (Luke 16:22).⁷

D) Judgment. Angels execute judgment on the enemies of God. The angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night (2 Kgs 19:35). It was an angel of the Lord that killed Herod (Acts 12:23). The Book of Revelation is full of prophecies regarding the judgment to be administered by angels during the Tribulation (Rev 8:6–9:21; 16:1–17; 19:11–14).⁸

⁴ Ibid., p. 464.

⁵ Ibid., p. 469.

⁶ Ibid., p. 469.

⁷ Ibid., p. 469.

⁸ Ibid., p. 469.

E) Warfare. Scripture reveals that there are times when angels and demons engage in warfare. This warfare takes place in the spirit realm, but seems to correspond in some way with the actual geography of earth. In Daniel 10, the angel tells Daniel that the demon Prince of Persia fought him and delayed him from carrying out his mission of bringing an answer to Daniel's prayer. In Revelation 12:7–9 we are told of a war between Satan and Michael the Archangel. These spiritual conflicts are evidently part of how God carries out His work on earth, but the lack of information leaves us unable to draw many conclusions.

7) Do we have guardian angels?

A) The Bible does not state whether each believer has a specific guardian angel. While it is possible given various Scriptures (Matt 18:10; Ps 34:7; 91:11), there is no way to know for certain. At the very least, we do know that angels guard and protect Christians from harm.

8) Are there bad angels?

A) Originally, all angels were created holy and without sin, but not long after the creation of the world, there was a rebellion by an angel we now call Satan. Although we are not told much about this rebellion, it seems that Satan was lifted up by his own beauty and sought to exalt himself above God. Scripture tells us that he was able to convince one-third of all the angels to join in his rebellion (Rev 12:4). God cast Satan and his followers (which we refer to as demons) from heaven (Luke 10:18). There is no redemption for the angels who sinned (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6). Why this is true we are not told. We will study more about Satan and the demons in another lesson.

9) How powerful are the angels?

A) Angels have superhuman power. This is taught in three ways in the Bible:⁹

- (1) The titles assigned to some of them: principalities, powers, authorities, dominions, thrones (Eph 6:12).
- (2) Direct assertions: for example, “angels, though greater in might and power [than humans]” (2 Pet 2:11); “Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!” (Psalm 103:20).
- (3) The effects attributed to their agency (see 2 Chr 32:21; Acts 12:7–11).

B) Angels possess greater knowledge than humans. This is indicated by their presence at some of the heavenly councils, their involvement in conveying revelation (Gal 3:19) and their interpretation of visions (as in Daniel and Zechariah). Their knowledge is limited however (see Matt 24:36), and they evidently learn by observing human actions and by studying the Word of God (1 Pet 1:12; 1 Cor 4:9; Eph 3:10).¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., p. 465–466.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 465–466.

- C) Angels derive their power from God, and they are restricted to acting within the limits of His permission. This is true even of Satan, whose ability to afflict Job was directly controlled by God (Job 1:12; 2:6).¹¹

10) Should we worship angels?

- A) Angels are created beings just like humans. They are not divine and worshipping them is explicitly forbidden (see Col 2:18). The apostle John, who received revelation about future events from an angel, fell on his face to worship the angel, but the angel quickly told John, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God” (Rev 19:10; also Rev 22:8–9). Angels are powerful beings, but, like us, they are only servants of the living God who alone deserves our worship. This means that we are not to pray to them or trust in them even though God may use them to minister to our needs in various ways. Our trust is to be in God, not angels.¹²

11) Who is the “Angel of the LORD”?

- A) There are numerous references in the Bible to the “angel of the LORD” or “the angel of God” (see Gen 16:7–11; 22:11; Exod 3:2; 14:19, etc.). In some of these passages, the angel of the LORD is identified as God (see Gen 31:11–13; Exod 3:2–6; Josh 5:13–15). However, in other passages, the angel is *not* God (see Luke 1:11–19). Because of this, we need to be careful in our identification of the “angel of the LORD.”¹³
- (1) In the passages where the angel of the LORD is God, many scholars and theologians believe that it is a Christophany: the appearance of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 465–466.

¹² Keathley, p. 8.

¹³ Millard, p. 467.

Our Enemy Satan

1) Who is Satan?

- A) Satan is a fallen angel (see Job 1:6; 2 Cor 11:14).
- B) Satan is the leader of all fallen angels (called demons). Jesus identified Satan with Beelzebub, the prince of demons in Luke 11:14–23. Jesus went on to say that Satan has a kingdom, implying that he guides and directs demonic activity.
- C) Satan is the enemy of God and all believers. Everything we are told about Satan in Scripture shows that he has opposed God since the beginning of the world and will continue to do so until the return of Jesus Christ.

2) How did Satan fall?

- A) There are two passages of Scripture that are understood as describing Satan's original holy condition and his subsequent fall into sin: Ezekiel 28:11–19 and Isaiah 14:12–19. Both passages are addressed to human kings and speak of God's future judgment on them and their cities. However, the language of both passages seems to indicate that someone else is also being described, someone who stands behind the two kings and influences their actions. That person is commonly believed to be Satan.
 - (1) Ezekiel 28:11–29 describes Satan's original holiness, beauty and perfection. In fact, Satan's beauty is singled out as the reason for his pride and fall into evil.
 - (2) Isaiah 14:12–19 describes Satan's pride and desire to exalt himself above God. (Note that in verse 12, the KJV translated the Hebrew word meaning "star of the morning" as "Lucifer." This led to Lucifer being used as a name for Satan.)
 - (3) Scripture indicates that Satan was able to convince one-third of the angels to join in his rebellion (Rev 12:4).

3) What are some common myths about Satan?

- A) Myth—Satan doesn't really exist.
 - (1) The Bible is comprehensive in its teaching about the reality of Satan. "His existence is taught from Genesis to Revelation. Seven Old Testament books teach his existence (Genesis, 1 Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah), and every New Testament writer refers to his reality and activity as a personal being. More importantly, Christ affirmed the fact of Satan's existence" (cf. Luke 10:18; 11:14–23).¹

¹ J. Hampton Keathley III, *Satanology: Our Invisible Adversary, the Devil*, Biblical Studies Press, www.bible.org, 1998, p. 2.

B) Myth—Satan lives in hell.

- (1) Popular culture would have us believe that Satan lives in hell and that he and his demons torture people who go there. Nothing could be further from the truth. Hell is actually a place of fearful torment that God prepared for Satan and the demons (Matt 25:41; Jude 1:6–7). Right now, Satan and his demons roam the earth, eagerly trying to lead people away from God (1 Pet 5:8). They greatly fear hell and do not want to go there before their time (cf. Matt 8:29; James 2:19).

C) Myth—Satan has a tail, two horns and carries a pitchfork.

- (1) Images of Satan as a mischievous little devil serve only to conceal his true purpose of leading people to their eternal destruction. As we have seen, Satan is a spirit and can manifest himself in many ways. In fact, Satan likes to disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

D) Myth—Satan is God’s equal.

- (1) Satan is a created being with finite power. God is an uncreated being with infinite power. Thus Satan is no more the equal of God than we are. Satan is stronger and smarter than human beings, but he is no match for God.

4) What are some of Satan’s names?

A) Satan’s names are descriptive of his character and opposition to God. Here are some of the many names used in Scripture to refer to Satan:²

- (1) Satan. In Hebrew, the word Satan means “adversary.” This emphasizes his role as the opponent of God, of believers, and of all that is right and good (Job 1:6; 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:1).
- (2) The devil. The name “devil” comes from the Greek word *diabolos* which means “slanderer, defamer.” This emphasizes his desire to malign both us and God (Matt 4:1; John 8:44; Eph 6:11).
- (3) The serpent. When Satan deceived Eve in the garden of Eden, he acted through an animal called a “serpent” (Gen 3:1–6). The apostle Paul told to the Corinthians that Eve’s downfall resulted from the serpent’s craftiness (2 Cor 11:3). The name “serpent” describes his subtlety and beguiling nature.
- (4) The tempter. The apostle Paul referred to Satan as “the tempter” (1 Thess 3:5). This name highlights the fact that he is always trying to entice us to sin.
- (5) The dragon. John saw Satan as a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, who with the demons were arrayed against the Lord and His people (Rev 12).
- (6) The evil one. In calling Satan “the evil one,” Jesus and John both depicted him as totally corrupt and carrying on an evil work (John 17:15; 1 John 5:18–19).

² Ibid., p. 3–4.

5) What is Satan doing?

A) Satan is very active in the world today. He is constantly opposing God and working in the lives of both sinners and Christians.

(1) His work in the lives of sinners involves:

- Blinding them to the truth (2 Cor 4:4).
- Influencing the way they live (Eph 2:2).
- Keeping them in his domain of darkness (Acts 26:18; Col 1:13).
- Holding them captive and enslaved to his will (2 Tim 2:26; Rom 6:17).
- Provoking them to sin (1 John 3:8–12).
- Causing his demons to oppress and possess some of them (Mark 9:25–26).

(2) His work in the lives of Christians involves:

- Tempting us to sin (Matt 4:1; 1 Cor 7:5).
- Lying to and deceiving us whenever possible (John 8:44; 2 Cor 11:3).
- Placing snares and traps in our way (1 Tim 3:7; 6:9).
- Exploiting us (2 Cor 2:11).
- Persecuting us (Rev 2:10).
- Accusing us before God (Rev 12:10; Job 1).
- Resisting our efforts to serve and obey God (1 Thess 2:18).

B) Satan is a finite being and cannot be everywhere at once like God can. He is assisted in his evil schemes by his demons, fallen angels who followed him in his rebellion against God (Rev 12:4; Matt 10:1). While Satan does personally tempt certain individuals (e.g. Christ, Job, Peter, Judas, etc.), it is reasonable to believe that we are most often tempted by his demons.

6) What is Satan's final destiny?

A) The book of Revelation reveals that one day Satan and his demons will be completely defeated, “thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur,” and “tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev 20:10).

7) Can Satan put thoughts into our minds?

A) Although there is no direct statement in Scripture concerning this question, there are several different passages that suggest he can. Consider the following verses:

(1) “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man’” (Mat 16:21–23). This implies that Satan was the influence behind Peter’s thoughts.

- (2) “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path” (Matt 13:19). How can Satan snatch something away from a person’s heart unless he is able to perceive their thoughts and put doubts in their mind?
 - (3) “During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him” (John 13:2). This implies that Satan put the thought of betraying Christ into Judas’ mind.
 - (4) “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?’” (Acts 5:3). Here we see that Satan filled Ananias’ heart with greed and successfully tempted him to lie.
 - (5) “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Why would we be commanded to take every thought captive if we had complete control of every thought that came into our minds?
- B) Many Christians have testified to the fact that Satan is able to put thoughts into their minds. Consider what Martin Luther once wrote: “The Devil throws hideous thoughts into the soul—hatred of God, blasphemy, and despair. When I awake at night, the Devil tarries not to seek me out. He disputes with me and makes me give birth to all kinds of strange thoughts.”³
- C) Based on the Scriptures above and the personal experience of many people, I believe Satan and his demons can perceive what we are thinking and introduce thoughts into our minds. That’s why it’s important to exercise control over our thought-life.

³ Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, p. 64.

Hell

1) What is hell?

- A) The English word “hell” is used in the New Testament (NT) to translate three different Greek words: *tartarus*, *hades* and *gehenna*.
- (1) Tartarus. The word *tartarus* is found only once in the NT: “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (*tartarus*) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;” (2 Pet 2:4).
 - (a) This word describes a place where some (but not all) of the fallen angels are being kept until the judgment. We know almost nothing else about this place of imprisonment (see also Jude 1:6 which seems to be speaking of the same place).
 - (2) Hades. The word *hades* occurs ten times in the NT, and it is the normal referent of the English word “hell” (see Luke 16:22–31).
 - (a) It is the place where the spirits of sinners go after physical death (Luke 16:22–23).
 - (i) Human beings will not spend eternity as bodiless spirits. Each person, sinner and saint, will receive a new resurrected body that will last forever—either on the New Earth or in the Lake of Fire (John 6:40; 1 Cor 15:35–50; Rev 20).
 - (b) It is a place of fire, flame and unbearable heat (Luke 16:24).
 - (i) Some have argued that the flames of hell cannot be literal (how can spirits be burned with fire?) but this argument misses the point. Whatever they are, the flames are most certainly real, and the spirits in hell, although they do not have physical eyes, ears and hands, are still capable of sensation and pain. That pain is described in “bodily” terms to facilitate our understanding of the torment being experienced.
 - (c) It is a place of darkness (Matt 25:30).
 - (i) Jesus spoke of sinners being “cast into outer darkness.” Although fire and darkness seem mutually exclusive, Scripture is clear that Hell is a horrible combination of the two. Hell’s fire burns and sears, but gives no light to those trapped within.
 - (d) It is a place of memory and regret (Luke 16:25).
 - (i) The rich man had full memory of his former life on earth. He could remember his wealth and luxury. He could also remember the many chances he had to repent, and he would spend the rest of eternity wishing he had obeyed God.

- (e) It is a place of torment and agony (Luke 16:23, 24, 28).
 - (i) Jesus' repeatedly warns us that hell is a fearful place of agony and pain. The fire of hell not only burns but also creates an intense feeling of what is described in physical terms as thirst (v. 24).
 - (f) It is a place of separation from God and the righteous (Luke 16:26).
 - (i) The parable uses imagery that underscores the complete separation of the wicked from God and those in Heaven.
 - (g) It will be cast into the lake of fire (*gehenna*) at the end of the Millennium, Christ's future thousand-year reign on this present fallen earth.
 - (i) John said, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire (*gehenna*). This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:11-15).
- (3) *Gehenna*. The word *gehenna* occurs twelve times in the NT, and it refers to what is commonly called "the lake of fire" (Rev 20:14-15). The term *gehenna* is derived from the Valley of Hinnom which was used as a burial place for criminals and for burning garbage.
- (a) It was created for the Devil and his angels, and is the final destiny of all who reject God and practice wickedness (Matt 25:41).
 - (b) It is a place of unquenchable, eternal fire and brimstone (Mark 9:43-45), and those who burn there will weep and wail and gnash their teeth (Matt 8:12).
 - (c) It is a place of eternal torment and death for both body and spirit (Matt 10:28). This is why it is called the "second death" (Rev 20:14).
- B) To summarize: hell is a place of torment and regret where the spirits of wicked men and women await their final day of judgment. At that day, they will receive a resurrected body, and then they, along with the Devil and his angels, will be thrown into the lake of fire where they will burn forever in torment and agony.

2) Where is hell?

- A) Various theories on the location of hell have been put forward. A traditional view is that hell is in the center of the earth. This view comes from Jesus' statement, "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell" (Luke 10:15 KJV). We should note, however, that this passage is not concerned with the

geographic location of hell. Capernaum's being thrust "down" is better understood as a reference to its being condemned rather than being pushed in a certain direction.

- B) In the King James Version, Ephesians 4:9 says that before Jesus ascended into heaven, "he also descended...into the lower parts of the earth" (Eph 4:9 KJV). Some Christians take "the lower parts of the earth" as a reference to hell, where they say Jesus spent the time between His death and resurrection. However, the New International Version gives a better translation: "he also descended to the lower, earthly regions" (Eph 4:9 NIV). This verse is simply saying that Jesus came to earth. It is a reference to His incarnation, not to His location after death.
- C) Scripture does not tell us the physical location of hell. Hell is a literal place of real torment, but we do not know where it is. Wherever it is, the location of hell is far less important than the need to avoid going there.

3) Does the punishment of the wicked last forever?

- A) Scripture is clear: there is no hope of ever escaping the endless torment of hell. Jesus said, "And these [the wicked] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt 25:46). Note that the judgment for both groups of people is "eternal." If eternal life is never-ending, then it follows that eternal punishment is never-ending.

4) How can a loving God send people to a place of eternal torment?

- A) Remember this important truth: God is not willing that any should perish, and He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (John 3:16-17; 2 Pet 3:9; Ezek 33:11).
- B) However, you must understand the true magnitude of sin. The penalty for sin is death. God, because He loved you, sent His only Son to die in your place so that you might be saved (John 11:26). If you reject so great a salvation, you are rejecting the life and blood of the infinite, eternal Son of God. What punishment is just for such a crime? The eternal torment of hell and the lake of fire is the only fitting punishment (Heb 2:2-3).
- C) C. H. Spurgeon was right when he cautioned, "When men talk of a little hell, it is because they think they have only a little sin, and believe in a little Savior. But when you get a great sense of sin, you want a great Savior, and feel that, if you do not have Him, you will fall into a great destruction, and suffer a great punishment at the hand of a great God." We must preach the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the fearful punishment of hell, but an ever greater and more merciful Savior.

5) If a righteous person turns from God and does evil, will they go to hell?

- A) Consider what God said: "But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a

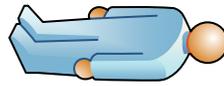
righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die” (Ezek 18:24-26).

- B) The eternal destiny of each person does not depend on whether they did enough righteous things during their life. Rather, it depends on the spiritual condition of their heart when they die. That is why we must live each day in love and faith and submission to the Holy Spirit.

6) How should the reality of hell affect the way I live?

- A) You should fear God and hate sin (Matt 10:28; Ps 97:10).
- B) You should be willing to make any sacrifice, no matter how great, in order to escape the fearful torment of hell (Matt 18:8-9).
- C) You should carry a burden for the lost and do all you can to save them.

THE FIRST DEATH



SINNER

When a sinner dies, their spirit goes to Hell



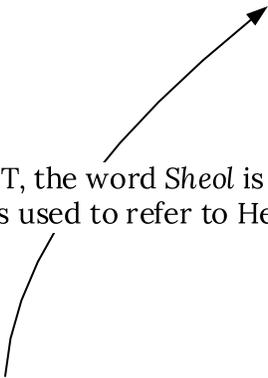
**HELL
(HADES)**

- Fire and torment
- Memory and regret
- Separation from God



Spirits of sinners

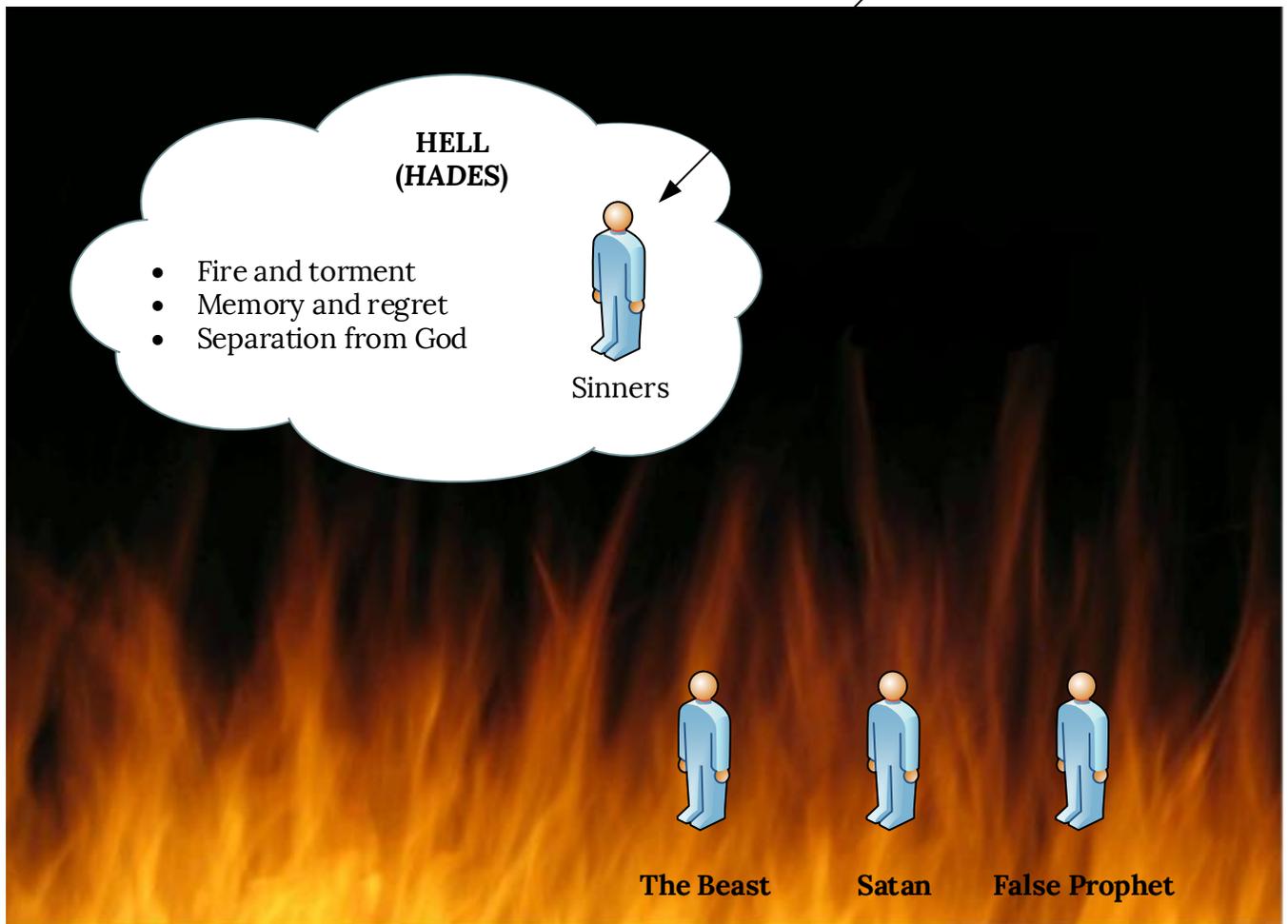
In the OT, the word *Sheol* is sometimes used to refer to Hell



THE SECOND DEATH

After the Great White Throne judgment,
Death, Hell, Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet
are all thrown into the Lake of Fire

The wicked will have a resurrected body
which will suffer eternal decay and destruction



**LAKE OF FIRE
(GEHENNA)**

Heaven

1) What is heaven?

- A) The Bible teaches that heaven is the dwelling place of God (Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55). It is a created realm filled with angelic beings who are continually worshipping and serving God (Rev 4). Within heaven is a dazzling and gigantic city—the New Jerusalem—which contains the throne of God (Rev 22:3).

2) Do we go to heaven when we die?

- A) The apostle Paul said that for a Christian, to be “away from the body” is to be “at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). When we die, our spirit leaves our body and goes to be with God in heaven (Luke 23:43; Phil 1:23). There we will worship God and enjoy His presence while we wait for our bodily resurrection.

3) Will we live in heaven forever?

- A) Christians often talk about living in heaven forever, but in fact heaven is *not* our final home. The Bible teaches:
- (1) At the end of this present world, God will create new heavens and a new earth (Rev 21:1–5).
 - (2) We will live on the new earth in our resurrected bodies (1 Cor 15:50–54; Rev 21:24–27).
 - (a) Although our spirits go to be with Christ immediately after death, our physical bodies remain in the grave “sleeping.” Before the Millennial Kingdom of Christ is established, our physical bodies will be resurrected, glorified, perfected and then reunited with our spirits. We will live in our new spiritual bodies for eternity.
 - (3) God will come from heaven to the new earth, and He will live there with us for eternity (Rev 21:3–4).

4) What is the new earth?

- A) Our present world was originally created perfect and without sin. Sadly, Adam rebelled and the entire universe fell under the terrible effects of sin (Rom 8:19–23). Yet God was not caught by surprise. He had a plan by which He would redeem mankind and all of creation from sin. Just as He promises to make us new, He promises to make a new earth:¹
- (1) “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isa 65:17).

¹ Randy C. Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2004), p. 87.

- (2) “For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain” (Isa 66:22).
 - (3) “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).
 - (4) “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more” (Rev 21:1).
- B) The new earth will be very different from the earth we know today. There will be no sickness, disease, suffering or death. The ground will no longer be under the curse of sin. The toil and sweat of working the land will be gone and thorns and thistles will vanish (Gen 3:17–18; Rev 21:4). There will be no more sea, and the sun and moon will not be needed to give light to the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1, 23). Animals will no longer fear mankind, and they will never harm anyone again (Isa 65:25).
- C) This present earth, with its natural wonders, is but a foretaste and glimpse of the new earth which is to come. God Himself prepared mankind’s first home on earth: “And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen 2:8–9). The phrase “planted a garden” shows God’s personal touch, His intimate interest in the creative details of mankind’s home. In the same way that God poured Himself, His creativity and His love into Eden, God will also pour Himself into the creation of the new earth.²

5) What is the New Jerusalem?

- A) When most people think of heaven, they are actually thinking of the New Jerusalem. As mentioned previously, the New Jerusalem is a dazzling and gigantic city that is currently inside of heaven. But it will not be there forever. The apostle John told us what will happen after God creates the new heavens and the new earth:
- (1) “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away’” (Rev 21:2–4).
- B) The width, the length and the height of the New Jerusalem are all equal (Rev 21:16). This description allows for two possibilities, namely that the city is either in the shape of a cube or of a pyramid. The size of the city is given as 12,000 furlongs. According to our present-day measurements the city would be roughly 1,400 miles long, high and wide. If placed in America, it would reach from New York City to Denver, Colorado, and from Canada to Florida. It would tower up into the sky more than 200 times higher than Mt. Everest!

² Ibid., p. 233–234.

- C) The city rests upon 12 layers of foundations stones with each layer being inlaid with a different precious gem. These are:
- First foundation – inlaid with jasper, an opaque brilliant red stone.
 - Second foundation – inlaid with sapphire, a blue opaque stone with gold specks.
 - Third foundation – inlaid with chalcedony, a sky-blue stone with stripes of other colors running through it.
 - Fourth foundation – inlaid with emerald, a bright green stone.
 - Fifth foundation – inlaid with sardonyx, a white stone with layers of red.
 - Sixth foundation – inlaid with sardius, a fiery red stone.
 - Seventh foundation – inlaid with chrysolite, a transparent golden yellow stone.
 - Eighth foundation – inlaid with beryl, a sea-green stone.
 - Ninth foundation – inlaid with topaz, a transparent golden-green stone.
 - Tenth foundation – inlaid with chrysoprasus, a blue-green stone.
 - Eleventh foundation – inlaid with jacinth, an orange stone.
 - Twelfth foundation – inlaid with amethyst, a flashing purple stone.

These twelve foundations are not only inlaid with costly gems, but each foundation layer carries the name of one of the twelve apostles (Rev 21:14).

- D) The walls of the New Jerusalem are 216 feet high and are made of jasper, an opaque brilliant red stone. The wall is not for protection but for beauty. In comparison to size, a 216-foot wall around a 1,400-mile high city would be like a one-inch curb around the Empire State Building. There are 12 gates to this city, 3 gates on each side. On each gate is the name of one of the tribes of Israel. Each gate is composed of a beautiful solid white pearl.

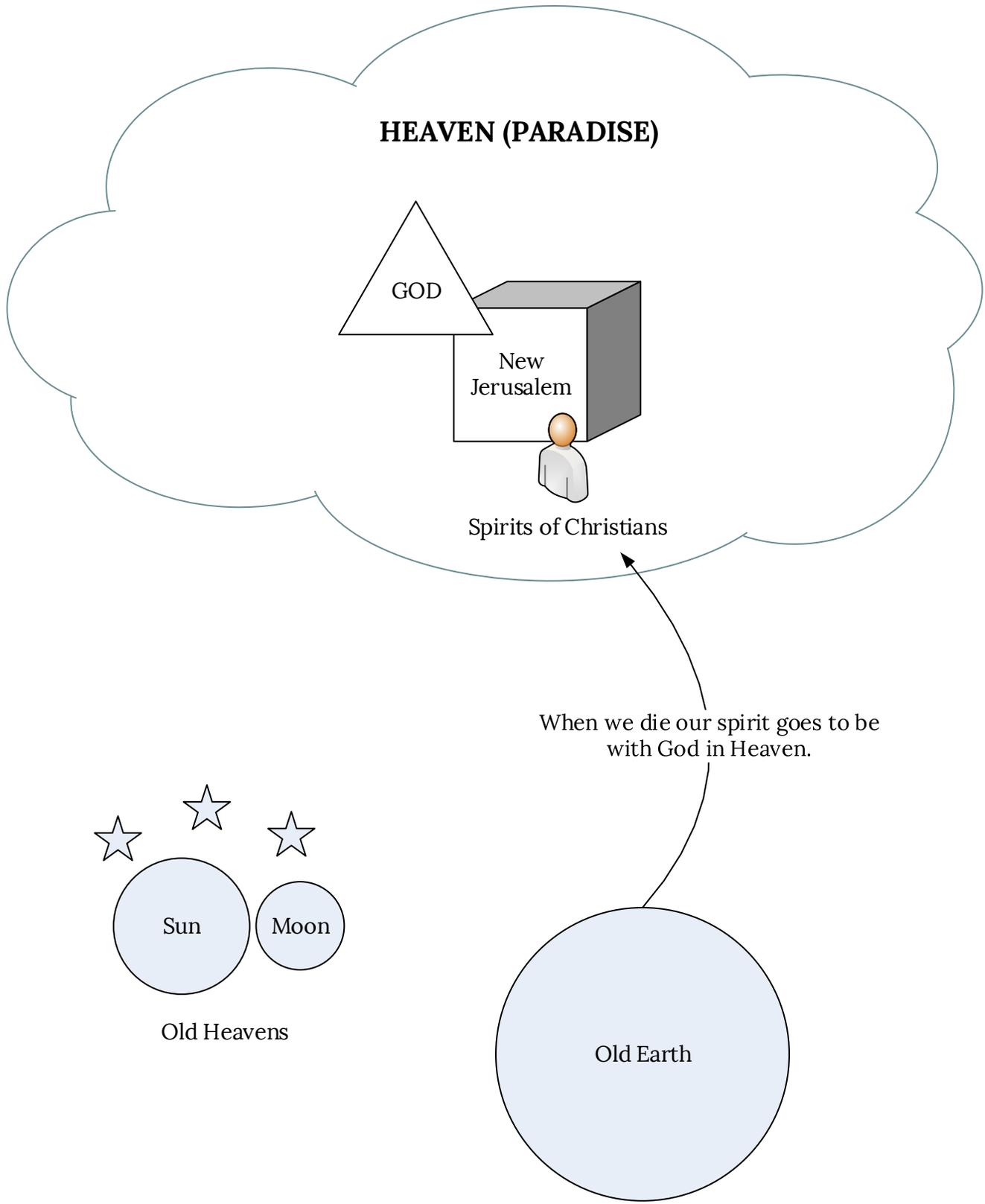
- E) Within the city are even more wonders:

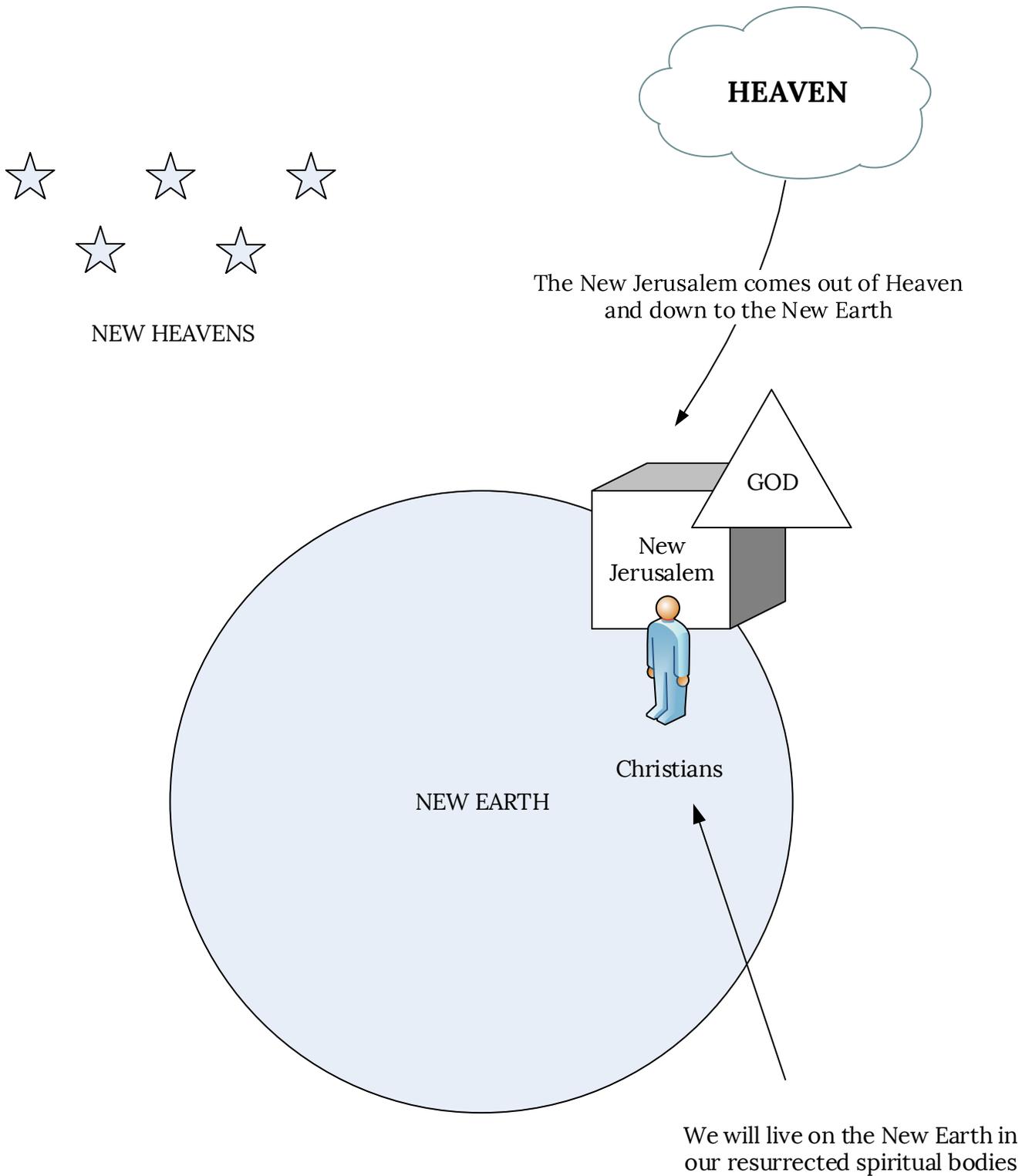
- (1) The main street: “And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass” (Rev 21:21).
- (2) The throne of God: “At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God” (Rev 4:2–5).

- (3) The river of life: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city” (Rev 22:1-2).
- (4) The tree of life: “On either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:2).
- (5) The New Jerusalem will be the focal point of life on the new earth. We will enjoy the presence of God and worship Him forever (Rev 21:24).

6) What will we do for the rest of eternity?

- A) The Bible indicates that life on the new earth will consist of all the things we enjoy in good conscience here on this present earth: God, relationships, work, play, nature and many other things (1 Tim 6:17). Yet there will be significant differences: sin and its curse will be gone, people will no longer be self-centered, and crime and violence will no longer stain our society. Everyone will be a Christian and will always desire to please God in everything they do. Consider what such a world would be like!
- B) Some Christians mistakenly believe that we will be sitting around all the time with a harp in our hand. Nothing could be further from the truth! Although we will enjoy worshipping and singing praises to God, the Bible teaches that we will also be serving God on the new earth (Rev 22:3). There will be organization and administration within society much like there is today (Rev 21:24). All of us will play a part in this new world, and we will find complete fulfillment and joy in our service to God.





The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

1) How do we know that a person called Jesus ever existed?

- A) We know Jesus existed the same way we know that Alexander the Great existed. There are historical records and documents that testify to his existence.
- B) Most of what we know about Jesus is contained in biographies that were written in the 1st century.
 - (1) These biographies (known as the Gospels) are the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and ministry.
 - (2) These biographies were written only a few decades after Jesus' ascension and thus cannot be explained away as legends. "In fact, the fundamental beliefs in Jesus' miracles, resurrection, and deity go back to the very dawning of the Christian movement."¹

2) Is there historical evidence for Jesus' existence outside the Bible?

- A) Around the year 93, a Jewish historian called Josephus mentioned Jesus' name twice in his book, *Antiquities of the Jews*.
 - (1) "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day" (*Antiquities* 18.63).
 - (2) "Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned" (*Antiquities* 20.197).
- B) About 20 years later, Tacitus, a Roman historian, wrote a book surveying the history of Rome. In it he described how Nero (a Roman emperor) "punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called)." He went on to write that "their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilatus" (*Annals* 15.44).
- C) Suetonius, in his work *The Twelve Caesars*, specifically mentioned Christ and His followers. He wrote, for example: "Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous

¹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p. 259. See also Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* and Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*.

disturbance at the instigation of Chrestus [Jesus], he [Emperor Claudius] expelled them from the city” (*Claudius* 25.4; note that in Acts 18:2, Luke mentioned this expulsion by Claudius).

- D) “We have better historical documentation for Jesus than for the founder of any other ancient religion” (Edwin Yamauchi). One expert documented 39 ancient sources that corroborate more than 100 facts concerning Jesus’ life, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection. Seven secular sources and several early creeds concern the deity of Jesus, a doctrine “definitely present in the earliest church,” according to scholar Gary Habermas.²

3) Can we trust the biographies of Jesus?

- A) The biographies of Jesus stand up under even the most skeptical scrutiny. The writers were honest and willing to include difficult-to-explain material; they didn’t allow bias to unduly color their reporting of the actual events. The harmony among the gospels on essential facts, coupled with divergence on some details, lends historical credibility to the accounts. In short, the gospels pass these eight evidential tests:³

- Intention: did the writers intend to accurately preserve history?
- Ability: were the writers able to record events with accuracy?
- Character: are the writers reliable witnesses?
- Consistency: do the biographies agree with each other?
- Bias: any vested interest by the writers to color their writings?
- Cover-up: do the gospels include embarrassing material?
- Corroboration: can the gospels be independently verified?
- Adverse Witness: were others present who could have corrected the biographies if they had been false?

4) Were Jesus’ biographies reliably preserved over the last 2,000 years?

- A) Compared with other ancient documents, there are an unprecedented number of New Testament manuscripts, and they can be dated very close to the original writings. The modern NT is 99.5% free of textual discrepancies, with no major Christian doctrines in doubt.⁴

5) Does archeology confirm the biblical account of Jesus?

- A) Yes it does—in fact, no archeological discovery has ever disproved a biblical reference. Further, archeology has established that Luke, who wrote about ¼ of the NT, was an especially careful historian. The Gospels truly are an accurate and trustworthy source of information about the life of Jesus.⁵

² Ibid., p. 260.

³ Ibid., pp. 39–51, 259–260.

⁴ Ibid., p. 260.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 260–261.

6) Did Jesus really die?

- A) The biographies of Jesus record that He was crucified on a cross, died, was buried, and rose from the dead. Was Jesus' death a sham? If you analyze the medical and historical data, it is clear that Jesus could not have survived the gruesome rigors of crucifixion, much less the gaping wound that pierced His lung and heart. Roman executioners were grimly efficient, knowing they themselves would face death if any of their victims were to come down from the cross alive.⁶

7) Was Jesus' body really gone from the tomb?

- A) Jesus appeared to His disciples no less than seventeen times after His resurrection. "Five of these occurred during the first Easter Sunday, and six more took place between that time and His ascension. The remaining six happened between Pentecost and the completion of the Bible"⁷ (John 20:11-29; 21:1-23; Mark 16:9-18; Matt 28:9-20; Luke 24:13-53; 1 Cor 15:5-7; Acts 1:3-9; 7:55-56; 9:3-6; Gal 1:12; Rev 1:12-20). At one time He appeared to more than 500 people at once (1 Cor 15:6)! "Taken as a whole, the appearances are of such various character and to so many people under so many different circumstances that the proof of the resurrection of Christ is as solid as any historical fact that could be cited in the first century."⁸

8) What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection?

- A) Jesus' resurrection is the validation of His claims and predictions:
- He is God (John 10:30-33).
 - He is the Son of God (Matt 16:13-20; John 5:17-18).
 - He is the only way to God (John 14:6).
 - He is the source of eternal life (John 17:3).
 - He is the source of truth (John 14:6).
 - He is the Messiah (John 4:25-26).
 - He would be tortured and killed (Matt 16:21; 20:18-19).
 - He would rise from the dead on the 3rd day after His death (Matt 20:18-19).
- B) The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith (1 Cor 15:14-17), a faith that is founded on historical fact.

⁶ Ibid., p. 262.

⁷ H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), p. 628.

⁸ Ibid., p. 629.

The Bible Is God's Word

1) How do we know that the Old Testament is God's Word?

A) Jesus' resurrection establishes His claim to be the Son of God. Since Jesus is God, whatever He said is true. Here is what Jesus said about the Old Testament (OT):¹

- We should believe the OT (Luke 16:16–31; 24:25–27).
- The OT is unbreakable (John 10:35).
- The OT is irrevocable (Matt 5:18; Luke 16:17; Luke 24:44).
- The OT has final authority (Matt 4:4, 7, 10; Matt 21:42; Mark 11:17).
- The OT is the truth (John 17:17; Matt 22:29).
- We should believe the teachings of Moses (Matt 23:1–5, 23; Mark 7:9–13; 12:26–27; John 5:45–47).
- We should believe the message of Daniel (Matt 24:15).

B) Jesus preached one of His first public messages from an OT text (Luke 4:16–19).

C) Jesus justified His actions by referring to the OT:

- when He ate on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1–8).
- when He healed on the Sabbath (Matt 12:10–21).
- when he accepted the praise of the crowds at His triumphal entry (Matt 21:16).

D) Jesus believed in the literal history of the OT. He referred to:

- Creation (Mark 10:6).
- Adam and Eve (Matt 19:5–7).
- The murder of Abel (Luke 11:51).
- Noah's ark (Matt 24:38).
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 22:31–32).
- Lot's wife (Luke 17:32).
- Destruction of Sodom (Luke 17:29).
- The burning bush (Luke 20:37).
- Moses and the serpent (John 3:14).
- The wilderness manna (John 6:31).
- The Queen of Sheba and Solomon (Matt 12:42).
- Elijah and the widow (Luke 4:25–26).
- Naaman the leper (Luke 4:27).
- Jonah and the great fish (Matt 12:40).
- The repentance of Nineveh (Matt 12:41).
- The murder of Zachariah (Matt 23:35).

¹ H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), pp. 795–796.

- E) “It has been estimated that over 10% of Jesus’ recorded New Testament (NT) words were taken from the OT. In the four Gospels, 180 of the 1,800 verses which report His teachings are either OT quotes or OT allusions.”²
- F) From this data, we conclude that the OT is God’s Word.

2) How do we know that the New Testament is God’s Word?

- A) When Jesus was here on earth, He did not write His teachings down. Instead, He told His twelve disciples (also called “the apostles”) that they would be guided by the Holy Spirit as they taught others what He had taught them. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would:
- speak through them (Matt 10:19–20; Luke 12:11–12; Mark 13:11).
 - help them remember what he said (John 14:26).
 - guide them into “all the truth” (John 16:13–16).
 - empower them to be his witnesses to both Jew and Gentile (Acts 1:8).
- B) Jesus’ promise to the apostles was fulfilled during the early days of the church. The Holy Spirit guided them as they taught the church the gospel of Jesus Christ. Three of the apostles—Matthew, Peter, and John—wrote down this truth for us to read. Paul, who was later chosen by Jesus to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:15–18; Gal 2:7–8; 1 Tim 1:1), also wrote down the truth given to him by the Holy Spirit, and he sent his letters to be read in the churches.
- C) The remaining four authors of the NT—Mark, Luke, James, and Jude—were not apostles themselves, but were associates of the apostles and thoroughly knowledgeable of their teachings:
- Luke was Paul’s companion (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 1:24).
 - Mark was Peter’s associate (Acts 12:11–12; 1 Pet 5:13).
 - James and Jude were half-brothers of Jesus (Matt 12:46; 13:55–56; Mark 6:3; John 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor 9:5; Gal 1:19).
- D) The NT is a reflection of Jesus’ teaching and the revelation that was given to these men by the Holy Spirit. The writers themselves declared their teachings and writings to be the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise. They said that:
- (1) Their writings were “Scripture.” Peter refers to Paul’s writings as “Scripture” (2 Pet 3:16). Paul quotes Luke’s writings (Luke 10:7) and Deuteronomy 25:4 together under the single phrase “for the Scripture says” (1 Tim 5:18). Paul said that “All Scripture is breathed out by God,” so it follows that the NT (as well as the OT) is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16–17).³
 - (2) Their teachings and writings were the “Word of God.” Paul said, “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which

² Ibid., p. 796.

³ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, revised and expanded edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 94.

- you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess 2:13; cf. 1 Thess 4:2, 8; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6, 14; 1 Cor 14:37; Gal 1:6–9).
- (3) Their writings were from the Spirit. Paul told the Ephesians, “When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power” (Eph 3:4–7). It is clear, then, that the NT writers considered their writing to be just as Spirit-directed as the OT.
- (4) Their message was a continuation of the message of the OT and the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1–2; 2:1–4).
- (5) Their writings were divinely authoritative. Paul told his sons in the faith to “command and teach” his writings (1 Tim 4:11) “with all authority” (Titus 2:15), and he based his own authority and even the truth of the gospel itself on his apostleship (Gal 1:1, 12). Likewise, Peter reminded the believers of apostolic authority, saying, “You should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” (2 Pet 3:2).⁴
- (6) Their writings were to be read and circulated in the churches. It is obvious that Peter had a collection of Paul's letters (2 Pet 3:15–16), and Paul directed the Colossians to read and circulate their epistle (Col 4:16). The Thessalonians, too, were charged to read their epistle to all the believers (1 Thess 5:27).⁵
- E) The church confirmed these claims by their belief and obedience to the truth of the NT writings. In Acts 2:42 the believers “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship.”
- F) From this data, we conclude that the NT is God's Word.

3) What are some theological terms used to describe the Bible?

- A) Inspired. This word refers to the fact that the Bible has been breathed out by God (2 Tim 3:16). Peter said, “No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). The Bible is not the product of men's minds. It is the result of men being moved by the Spirit to write the words that God wanted them to write. Thus the true author of Scripture is God.

⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

B) Inerrant. This word means that the Bible is true and without error in all that it teaches and affirms, including its statements regarding history and the physical universe. For further detail on this issue, see the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

(1) What about errors in copying and translation? The Chicago Statement has this to say about transmission and translation: “Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free. Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the *autographa*. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit’s constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15).”⁶

4) Is the Bible finished?

A) “From the time that the last apostle died, the church has considered the Bible a finished book. It is important to realize that the church did not merely select writings to call Scripture; instead, they recognized that certain writings were inspired by God and had Scriptural authority. The writings that were recognized as Scripture met qualifications that no later writings could meet. For Old Testament books, the church kept the writings that Israel had preserved as Scripture. New Testament Scripture was recognized by the following qualifications: historical tie to the apostles, self-authenticating quality, unanimous church acceptance, respectful use of the Old Testament, and usefulness for resistance of heresy. God still speaks, but can something be added to the Bible now? It is not possible for any new writing to meet the qualifications that led to the inclusion of the original Scriptures. For example, no new writing can be tied to the apostles, for they are not still with us. Neither could any new writing be accepted by the whole church worldwide.”⁷

⁶ Online at Dallas Theological Seminary: <http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI.shtml>.

⁷ *I Believe: Fundamentals of the Christian Faith*, written by the Bible Faculty of God’s Bible School and College (Revivalist Press, 2006), p. 15.

From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man

1) How can we know about God?

- A) We learn about the world around us through the use of our senses. Observation, experimentation, and logical reasoning are the fundamental tools of science and learning.
- B) God, however, is spirit (John 4:24; John 1:18; 1 Tim 6:16). He cannot be observed or experimented on. He must reveal Himself if we are to know anything about Him.
- C) God is also personal (Gen 3:8–19; 1 Cor 2:10–12; Hos 11:8). As finite human beings, we cannot know what is in the mind of another person unless they tell us. It is the same with God. We cannot know what He is thinking or feeling unless He tells us.
 - (1) God is able to reveal Himself to us because we are made in His image (Gen 1:26–27). The image of God in man is essential to our ability to understand His self-revelation. This is a reason to reject the idea of God’s holiness meaning He is “wholly other.”

2) How does God reveal Himself to us?

- A) The act of God by which He makes Himself known to us is called “revelation.” There are two categories of divine revelation: general revelation and special revelation.

3) What is general revelation?

- A) General revelation is defined as God’s revelation of Himself to all people in all places at all times. God has revealed Himself in:
 - (1) Creation (Rom 1:18–23). Creation is the visible evidence of God’s invisible attributes. Although creation does not speak to us with an audible voice, everyone understands its message (Ps 19:1–6).
 - (2) Conscience (Rom 2:14–16). God has revealed Himself in the conscience of human beings, giving them an innate sense of right and wrong.
 - (3) Providence (Acts 14:14–17). God’s blessings testify to His existence. His goodness is found throughout the earth, and He “sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt 5:45).

4) What does general revelation tell us about God?

- A) The content of general revelation can be summarized as follows:
 - God exists (Rom 1:20; Acts 14:17).
 - God is infinite (Rom 1:20).
 - God is powerful (Rom 1:20).
 - God has created the universe and everything in it (Ps 19:1–6).

- God is glorious (Ps 19:1–6).
- God is righteous (Ps 50:6; 97:6).
- God is moral and requires us to do what is right (Rom 2:14–16).
- God is good (Acts 14:14–17).

5) What are the implications of general revelation?

- A) *We are not born as blank slates.* We are designed beings (Gen 1:26). Knowledge of God and morality has been coded into our innermost being (Rom 2:15).
- B) *All men know that God exists.* Romans 1:18–21 emphasizes that God has clearly revealed Himself to all men. This is not merely an objective revelation that may or may not be subjectively received. Paul says, “They *knew* God” (v. 21)—this means that all men everywhere realize that God exists.
- C) *All men reject and distort the knowledge of God.* Instead of being thankful for God’s revelation and seeking Him, people “suppress” their knowledge of God and resist the truth (Rom 1:18, 21–32).
- D) *There are no “innocent” people in the world.* Everyone is responsible before God for their knowledge of His existence. Those who reject the truth of general revelation have truly rejected God.
- E) *Rejection of God breeds idolatry.* Man’s rejection of God’s general revelation explains the phenomenon of the various religions of the world (Acts 17:22–23). Man-made religions (which are forms of idolatry) do not represent man’s search for God; they represent man’s rejection of God!

6) What is special revelation?

- A) Special revelation is defined as God’s revelation of Himself to particular persons at specific times in different ways (cf. Heb 1:1). Here are some of the methods God has used in special revelation:
- (1) Miraculous Events—God directly and supernaturally interacting with the physical world.
- The plagues on Egypt (Exod 8:10, 22; 9:14–16; 10:2).
 - Water from the rock for Israel (Exod 17:1–7).
 - The miracles of Peter and John (Acts 3; 4:16).
- (2) Divine Speech—God revealing Himself through human language.
- Through angels (Gen 18; 19; Luke 1:26–37).
 - Through an audible voice (Gen 3:9–19; Exod 20:1–17; 1 Sam 3:1–7).
 - Through an animal (Num 22:28)!
 - Through dreams (Gen 28:12; Matt 1:20; 2:13; 2:19–22).
 - Through visions (Acts 9:10; 10:10–16; Rev 1).
 - Through prophets and men of God (Deut 18:15–22; Jer 1).
 - Through Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21).

(3) Visible Manifestations—God manifesting Himself in visible form.

(a) In fire (Exod 24:15–17; 40:34–38).

(b) In human form:

- to Abraham (Gen 18).
- to Jacob (Gen 32:24–30).
- to Joshua (Josh 5:13–15).

(4) The Incarnation—God’s Son coming to earth and taking on human flesh.

(a) In these last days, God has spoken to us through His only Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1–2; John 1:18; Matt 11:27). If you want to know what God is like, consider Jesus. He is the Word of God in flesh (John 1:14).

7) What does special revelation tell us about God?

A) The main message of special revelation is the gospel. Mankind is fallen—we are sinners by nature and by deed (Eph 2:1–3; Rom 5:12). God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to die and pay the penalty for our sin (John 3:16). Those who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ for their salvation will be saved from God’s judgment (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:37; 16:30–31).

8) What are the implications of special revelation?

A) *Special revelation is progressive.* Later revelation builds on earlier revelation. Each new revelation complements and supplements previous revelation, and there is never any contradiction between earlier and later revelation (although God’s direction in certain matters may change; cf. Mark 7:19).

B) *General revelation as revealed in creation is subservient to special revelation.* The Bible and creation (nature) do not stand as two equally authoritative sources of revelation. The Bible sets itself apart from creation in authority and importance by what it claims about itself (2 Tim 3:16). This means we must interpret creation through the lens of Scripture, not the other way around. Our observations and conclusions about the natural world must be in harmony with God’s Word.¹

C) *General revelation as revealed in our conscience is subservient to special revelation.* The human conscience can become hardened to sin and “seared” to the point where it is no longer sensitive to wrong doing (1 Tim 4:2). Thus people can sin and yet feel no sense of guilt. A cannibalistic society will have many people whose consciences are hardened to the evil of murder. Modern American society shows very little sensitivity to lying, disrespect for parental authority, and sexual immorality.

¹ Mike Rowe, “God’s Two Books: Are General and Special Revelation Equal?” Web blog post. *God&Neighbor*, 8 Feb 2013. Web. 11 Nov 2016.

9) Are the heathen lost?

- A) The biblical answer to this question is clear: all human beings are born in sin (Ps 51:5; 58:3) and are “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). For “just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12 NIV). Paul, speaking explicitly about those who have only general revelation, says they are “without excuse” (Rom 1:20). Likewise, he adds, “All who sin apart from the law will perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law” (Rom 2:12 NIV). Summing up his conclusion for the whole section, Paul pronounces, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:22–23 NIV).

10) What about those who don't have the Bible?

- A) Those who have no written record of God's law still have in their conscience an understanding of God's moral standards (Rom 1:32; 2:14–15). They will be held accountable for the truth they know (Rom 2:12).

11) Is it fair to condemn those who have not heard the gospel?

- A) Yes, it is just to condemn those who have never received God's special revelation. God has revealed Himself in creation, conscience, and providence, and yet fallen humanity has universally rejected that light (Rom 3:10–18). God is not obligated to give them any more light, since they have turned from the light they have (Rom 1:18).
- (1) Suppose someone is lost in the darkness of a dense jungle, and suddenly they see a shaft of light in the distance. What should they do? Obviously, they should go toward it. If they turn away from that light and become forever lost in darkness, they have only themselves to blame. The Scriptures say, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).
 - (2) Even though God is not obligated to give light to those who reject general revelation, He seems to do so anyway. Even the king of Sodom had the privilege of encountering Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen 14) before his fiery end.

12) Are the truths of general revelation enough for someone to be saved?

- A) There is no recorded instance in the Bible of someone being saved apart from some kind of special revelation. While there are instances where the amount of special revelation involved is very small (Rom 4:3), there is always more than what is known from general revelation.
- B) The Bible's emphasis concerning this question is on the response of the individual. If an unbeliever responds to general revelation and truly seeks God, God will provide the special revelation sufficient for salvation (Acts 8:26–40). After God led Peter to the Gentile Cornelius, Peter declared, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism [Jew vs. Gentile] but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34–35 NIV). The writer of Hebrews tells us that those who seek, find: “He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Heb 11:6 NIV).

- (1) Some believe that a sinner can be saved apart from any special revelation. Their argument is as follows: if rejecting general revelation is enough to condemn you, then believing it is enough to save you. For an excellent article contrasting these two views, see “Heathen, Salvation of” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* by Norman L. Geisler.

13) Do people have to know about Christ in order to be saved?

- A) The Bible records that Abraham was saved apart from any knowledge of Christ (Gen 15:6). After Christ’s death, the record of people being saved always centers on Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross (Acts 2:22–47; 8:35; 10:38–45; 16:31). This appears to indicate that what people need to *consciously* know and believe in order to be saved has changed—it now includes the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- B) It should be emphasized, however, that Christ is and always has been the only way of salvation. Those who were saved before His death were justified on the basis of His future sacrifice on the cross. Their salvation depended on His atonement, even though they may not have had personal knowledge of Him. As we noted in the previous question, if an unbeliever responds to general revelation and truly seeks God, God will provide the special revelation sufficient for salvation (Acts 8:26–40).
 - (1) Those who believe that a person can be saved apart from special revelation do not agree with this view. They don’t believe that explicit knowledge of the incarnate Jesus is necessary for salvation. See chapter 13 of *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli for an explanation of this viewpoint.

14) What about those who are unable to hear the gospel?

- A) This question is often raised when considering the destiny of those who die in infancy. There are several indications in Scripture that people are not considered morally responsible before a certain age, which we call “the age of accountability.”²
 - (1) Moses said, “And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land” (Deut 1:39 NIV). “Even with the Hebrew idea of corporate responsibility, these children were not held responsible for the sins of Israel.”³
 - (2) “In the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 7, there are two references to the time when the boy “knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right” (vv. 15–16). Underlying these statements is the apparent fact that prior to a certain point in life, there is no moral responsibility, because there is no awareness of right and wrong.”⁴

² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 654.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 654.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 655.

- B) In the case of a mentally handicapped person, the age of accountability may never come. These individuals will not be held responsible for something they are unable to understand or comprehend.

15) Will people be saved from every nation?

- A) The Bible assures us that there will be “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Rev 7:9). However, that does not mean the percentage of people saved will be the same from all countries. Who is saved depends on who believes, and that will vary from place to place.

Saints or Sinners?

1) I often hear Christians say, “We’re all sinners,” or “I’m just a sinner saved by grace.” Is it appropriate for believers to refer to themselves as “sinners”?

A) The problem of sin.

- (1) Every human being is born spiritually dead. This means they are separated from God and cut off from the source of spiritual life, Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:3; Eph 2:1–2; Ps 51:5).
- (2) Every human being is born a sinner by nature. This means that although they are not yet personally guilty¹ of any sin, as soon as they are able, they will seek their own way and violate God’s law (Eph 2:3; Ps 58:3; Prov 22:15; Gen 8:21).
- (3) Every human being commits sin. This means that everyone (with the sole exception of Jesus; Heb 4:15) acts on their sinful nature and breaks God’s law (Rom 3:10–12, 23).
- (4) The NT consistently refers to the unsaved as “sinners” (cf. Luke 5:32; 1 Pet 4:18; 1 Tim 1:9; Rom 5:8). This terminology communicates the fact that unbelievers not only commit acts of sin, but are sinners by nature. They are enslaved to sin, and sin dominates their thoughts, their attitudes and their behavior (John 8:34; Rom 8:7–8).

B) Salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

- (1) When we are saved, we become spiritually alive in Christ. This means that we are united with Him spiritually—we are connected to the source of spiritual life (Eph 2:4–5; Col 2:13; 1 Cor 15:22).
- (2) When we are saved, we receive a new spiritual nature through the new birth (1 Pet 1:3; 2 Cor 5:17; 2 Pet 1:3–4). This means that we are changed, spiritually speaking, into a completely different person.
- (3) When we are saved, God forgives us and cleanses us from all sin. This means that we are no longer guilty of breaking His law (Col 1:13–14; Eph 1:7; Rom 4:7–8).
- (4) The NT consistently refers to the saved as “saints” (cf. Rom 1:7; 16:15; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; Eph 2:19). The word “saint” (*hagios*) literally means “holy one.” As Christians, we have been washed in the precious blood of Jesus Christ and are holy before God (Col 1:21–22; Col 3:12; Eph 1:3–4; Eph 5:25–27).

C) A contrast of characteristics.

- (1) The letter of 1 John contains a thorough explanation of what it means to be a child of God. In the letter, John contrasts the children of God with the children

¹ We are born spiritually dead *because of Adam’s sin* (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22), but we are not *personally guilty of Adam’s sin* (cf. Ezek 18:4, 20; Jer 31:29–30).

of the devil. These two *distinct* groups are characterized by definite patterns of behavior:

(a) A child of God:

- (i) Positively: has fellowship with the Father and His Son (1:3), walks/abides in the light (1:7; 2:10), confesses his sins (1:9), keeps His commandments (2:5; 3:22, 24), loves his brother (2:10; 3:14), knows God, the Father—the One from the beginning (2:13, 14; 4:6, 7), has overcome the evil one (2:13, 14), is strong (2:14), does the will of God (2:17), confesses Jesus as the Son of God, and believes him to be the Christ (2:23; 4:15; 5:1), does righteousness (3:7), purifies himself just as Christ is pure (3:3), is receiving what he asks for from the Father (3:22), does what is pleasing to Him (3:22), abides in Him (3:24), loves [others] (4:7), overcomes the world (5:4), and has the Son and life (5:12).
- (ii) Negatively: he has no cause of stumbling in himself (2:10), and does not make a practice of sinning (3:6, 9; 5:18).

(b) A child of the devil:

- (i) Positively: walks in darkness (1:5; 2:11), may claim to be sinless (1:8), may claim to have never sinned (1:10), hates his brother (2:9, 11; 3:15), loves the world (2:15), may deny that Jesus is the Christ thereby denying the Father and the Son (2:22), and commits sin and acts of lawlessness (3:4, 6, 8).
- (ii) Negatively: does not keep his commandments (2:4), does not know where he is going because the darkness he walks in has blinded him (2:11), has not seen God (3:6), does not do righteousness (3:10), does not love his brother (3:10; 4:21), does not love (3:14), does not listen to the inspired author (4:6), does not know God (4:8), and does not have the Son of God or eternal life (5:12).

(2) The contrast is stunning. A child of God walks in the light and does not sin. A child of the devil walks in darkness and commits sin.

D) Theological and practical implications.

- (1) Scripture separates people into two groups: those who are saved and those who are lost. There is no hierarchy of spiritual states with saints at the top, the very wicked at the bottom, and everyone else in between. Rather, there are only two kinds of people—either you are child of God or you are a child of the devil.
- (2) When a sinner commits an act of sin, they are behaving in accord with their nature and in harmony with the will of their father the devil (John 8:44). A sinner sins because that is who they are—everything they do is tainted by self and sin (Isa 64:6). When a saint commits an act of sin, they are behaving in opposition to their nature and out of harmony with the will of God their Father (John 8:47). A Christian sins because they have given into temptation, and the Holy Spirit immediately convicts them and prompts them to repent. They then respond in obedience and return to a life of walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25). Genuine Christians do not practice willful sin—unrepentant persistence in sin is evidence

of either a false profession (1 John 2:4, 19) or a re-entanglement and defeat by the “defilements of the world” (2 Pet 2:20–22).

(3) How we view ourselves spiritually has a huge impact on how we live our lives. Paul deals with this issue in Romans 6:1–10. A saint is dead to sin—therefore do not let “sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires” (Rom 6:12). We are to think of ourselves, and talk to ourselves, in terms of our new nature! You have been freed from sin to God and are a saint—now act like it!

(a) Michael Kruger comments: “If we think of ourselves as ‘sinners’ and call ourselves ‘sinners,’ then our sins become something rather ordinary and inevitable. They are just the result of who we are. Sure, we wish we didn’t sin, but that’s what ‘sinners’ do. If instead we view ourselves as who we really are—‘saints’—then we will see our sin in a whole new light. We are ‘holy ones,’ and the sins we commit are a deep, profound, and serious departure from God’s calling. Our sin, in a sense, is even more heinous because it is now being done by someone who has a new nature and a new identity.”²

E) Conclusion—in the light of Scripture, the appropriate word for those who have been saved by grace is “saint.” The word “sinner” should be used to speak of those who are lost in sin and separated from God.³ We, as Christians, are “holy ones,” and we are called to hate sin and walk in holiness. If we do sin—and it should never be the practice of our lives—we should repent and ask God’s forgiveness. We should then recommit ourselves to Him and keep walking in the light.

(1) We must be careful how we describe the spiritual state of a true believer; otherwise, we run the risk of speaking heresy. Paul said that if the ministry of Christ leaves us in the state of still being sinners, then Christ is the minister of sin. I say with Paul—“May it never be!” (Gal 2:17 NASB).

2) **When I tell other Christians that I’m not a sinner, they accuse me of advocating “sinless perfection.” How should I respond?**

A) The Bible emphasizes that Christians have been born again. They have a new nature and are no longer slaves to sin. But Scripture is not naïve about the fact that believers can and sometimes do commit sin (1 Cor 3:1–3; 1 John 2:1–2; Ecc 7:20). In fact, it is possible for genuine Christians, through ignorance or the deception of the enemy, to behave in ways that are very fleshly and sinful (1 Cor 5:1–2; Jam 4:1–12).

(1) Sin in the church is a serious issue. Many of Paul’s letters contain direct rebukes of the kinds of sins mentioned above. When individuals persisted in wrongdoing, Paul called for church discipline (1 Cor 5:11–13; 2 Thess 3:6; cf. also 2 John 1:10–11). That discipline was designed to bring them to repentance and restore them to fellowship.

² Michael J. Kruger, “Saint or Sinner? Rethinking the Language of Our Christian Identity,” Blog Post, Cited 3/5/2014. Note that I disagree completely with his understanding of Romans 7.

³ Paul referred to himself as the “foremost” (or “chief”) of sinners (1 Tim 1:15), but Paul used this terminology to refer to his old life as a persecutor of the church. He says, “formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13).

- B) However, the fact that a saint can sin does not mean that we should refer to ourselves as sinners. We are saints who sometimes sin, not sinners who sometimes obey. If someone reacts to your claim of not being a sinner, I recommend the following response: "I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ and He has called me to live a holy life. I'm doing my best, with the help of His grace, to resist the devil and to walk in the Spirit every day. If I do sin, I ask God to forgive me and I keep pressing forward. I do not and I will not allow my life to be characterized by willful sin."

Sin and the Believer

- 1) **Paul said that I am “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11). Does this mean I will no longer be tempted?**
- A) No, being dead to sin does not mean that you will no longer be tempted. Adam and Eve were sinless, and both of them were tempted (Gen 3:12–13; 1 Tim 2:14). Jesus was sinless, and He was also tempted (cf. Matt 4:1–11; 26:37–44; Heb 2:18; 4:15). This shows that the ability to be tempted is an innate characteristic of being human. It is not the result of having sinned, nor is it a sign of a lack of consecration.
- B) Being “dead to sin” means that your relationship to sin has been severed—sin no longer has mastery over you (Rom 6:6–7). When you were a sinner, sin reigned over you, and you were under its control. As a believer, the only control sin has in your life is the control that you allow it to have (Rom 6:12–14).
- C) God permits Satan to tempt believers so they will learn to resist him (James 4:7). Each temptation is a test of our faith. It gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our love for God and to build the spiritual muscle of endurance (Rom 5:3–4). Temptation is a part of the process by which we are being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:28–29).
- 2) **Paul said that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24). Does this mean I will no longer experience the pull of the flesh?**
- A) No, the death of the flesh¹ does not mean that you will no longer experience its pull. Peter said, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Pet 2:11). Paul said, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14). This shows that the flesh, though crucified, can still pull a believer toward self-centered living.
- B) The crucifixion of the flesh means that your relationship to the flesh has been severed—the flesh no longer has mastery over you (Gal 5:16; Rom 8:13). When you were a sinner, you walked² according to the flesh (Gal 5:19–21) and you were a “flesh-minder” (someone whose mind is focused on the flesh and its desires and joins in with the flesh in acting on those desires; cf. Rom 8:5–8).

¹ The word “flesh,” when used in its ethical/moral sense (e.g., Gal 5:16–24, Rom 8:5–9), refers to that aspect of our being which comes to all men through Adam’s fall, has mastery over the sinner, and produces many evil works (Rom 7:14–15; Gal 5:19–21). When we are born again, the flesh is crucified and its controlling power over us is broken (Gal 5:24). It will, at times, pull us toward self-centered living (Rom 13:14; 1 Pet 2:11), but as long as we are walking by the Spirit, we will not “carry out the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16, 18; Eph 5:18).

² The word “walk” (*peripateo*) occurs frequently in Paul’s letters in the sense of “live” or “conduct yourself” (cf. Rom 6:4; 8:4; 13:13; 14:15; 1 Cor 3:3; 7:17; 2 Cor 4:2; 5:7; 10:2, 3; 12:18; Eph 2:2, 10; 4:17; 5:2, 15; Phil 3:17, 18; Col 2:6; 3:7; 4:5; 2 Thess 1:12; 4:1, 12). Thus “walking in the flesh” means living in accordance with and submitting to the flesh. Note Paul’s indicative (state) vs. active (conduct) language in Galatians 5:25.

- C) Paul said in Romans 8:1–14 that a believer is no longer characterized by the flesh. Instead, they: a) walk according to the Spirit, b) are a “Spirit-minder” (someone whose mind is focused on the Spirit and His desires and resists the desires of the flesh), c) are spiritually alive and have peace with God, d) are putting to death the deeds of the body, and e) are not in the flesh. As a believer, the only control the flesh has in your life is the control you allow it to have (Rom 8:12–13).
- D) Believers are called to action. They are commanded to live out in practice (imperative/ action) what is true of them in Christ (indicative/state). Paul said that we are “dead to sin” (state), and commanded us to “not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires” (action). Paul said that we “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (state), and commanded us to be walking “by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (action). Thus the life of a believer is characterized by resisting temptation and saying “No” to the flesh.

3) Some people say the conflict described in Galatians 5:17 means that believers are unable to gain true victory over the flesh. Is that true?

- A) Galatians 5:17 must be interpreted in light of the previous verse. Consider the following expanded translation of verse 16: “But I say, be walking in the Spirit and you will not ever (lit. “no never”) fulfill the desire of the flesh.” Paul uses a double negative to make his denial as emphatic as possible. His point is that as long as a believer is presently, actively walking by the Spirit, they will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.
- B) Now let’s examine verse 17. Note that it begins with the word “for,” indicating that Paul is continuing the thought of the previous verse and is about to give further explanation:
- (1) “For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (5:17a LEB). The flesh desires things that are “against” or contrary to what the Spirit desires, and the Spirit desires things that are contrary to what the flesh desires. Doing the one necessarily means *not* doing the other.
 - (2) “for these are in opposition to one another” (5:17b LEB). The flesh and the Spirit are opposed to each other, and both want to frustrate the desires of the other.
 - (3) “so that you may not be doing whatever things you may be desiring” (5:17c). Even though we are dead to the law (2:19), we are *not* free to do whatever we want. We only have two choices: give in to the desires of the flesh, or yield to the leadership of the Spirit. Our responsibility is to yield to the desires of the Spirit. If we do, we “will not fulfill the desires of the flesh” (5:16).
- C) Instead of painting a discouraging picture of the believer locked in a losing battle with the flesh, Galatians 5:16–17 proclaims a liberating truth: the Christian that is presently, actively walking by the Spirit will not fulfill the desires of the flesh because the Spirit will empower them to love God and love others. What a wonderful truth—every believer can enjoy a life free from the willful indulgence of the flesh!

4) Some people point to Paul's personal testimony in Romans 7:14–25 as evidence that believers are unable to gain true victory over sin. Is that true?

- A) Romans 7:14–25 is widely believed to be Paul's personal testimony of the losing battle between the flesh and the Spirit. One reason for this is the connection people make between Galatians 5:17 and Romans 7. They misunderstand what Galatians 5:17 is saying (they think it's saying that the flesh prevents us from doing what the Spirit wants us to do), and they import that thought into Romans 7 (thus Paul's cry of despair comes from a losing battle with his flesh). I have stated what I believe to be the correct understanding of Galatians 5:17 above. Let's consider the following reasons why Galatians and Romans are different:
- (1) The conflict is different. In Galatians 5:17 the conflict is between the flesh and the Spirit. The conflict in Romans 7:14–25 is between the flesh and Paul's mind (cf. Rom 7:23–24)—the Spirit is not mentioned anywhere in the passage. The struggle Paul testified to was the conflict that raged between his mind (which was enlightened by the law and wanted to obey) and his flesh (which resisted his attempts to please God).
 - (2) The spiritual state of the individuals is different. In Romans 7:14–25, Paul speaks of himself as: “fleshly” (v. 14), “sold into slavery to sin” (v. 14), having “sin that lives in me” (v. 17), “captive to the law of sin” (v. 23), and “serving the law of sin” (v.25). This characterization indicates that Paul was referring to his past life as a devout but unregenerate Pharisee who wanted to obey God's law. Galatians 5:17 is referring to a believer: “brethren” (v. 13), “those who belong to Jesus Christ” (v. 24), “[we] live by the Spirit” (v. 25).
 - (3) The solution is different. The answer to the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit in Galatians 5:17 is for the believer to be presently, actively walking by the Spirit. The answer to Paul's struggle between his mind and his flesh was for him to be “set free” (v. 24) “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 25; also Rom 8:1–2).
- B) If Paul wasn't testifying about the losing battle in his life between the flesh and the Spirit, then what was he talking about? Remember—Paul was born a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. He was circumcised on the eighth day in obedience to the Law, and was a member of the sect called the Pharisees. The Pharisees were renowned for their zealous observance, not only of the Mosaic Law, but of the tradition of the elders as well.
- C) What do you think happened when the devoutly religious but still unregenerate Paul tried to live a life that was holy and separated from sin? Exactly what is described in Romans 7:14–25! His mind, which was enlightened by God's word, recognized what was good and desired to obey, but his flesh, which still had mastery over him, repeatedly thwarted his attempts to live a life free from sin. “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24).³ Paul gives the answer to his plea for help in Romans 8:2—“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

³ Paul's use of the present tense in Romans 7:14–25 should be understood as a historical present. This technique uses the present tense to describe a past event in order to bring that event into the present and make it come alive for the reader/listener.

D) Romans, along with Paul's other letters, must be read through the lens of Paul's personal background and experience with the Law as a unregenerate Jew. This is a unique perspective, quite different from the Gentiles who grew up living out the works of the flesh and only learning about the Law after being saved. Paul grew up reading the Law and wanting to follow it as an obedient Jew. But just as growing up in the church doesn't give you the ability to live a Christian life, so being a Pharisee didn't give the Paul the ability to live a holy life apart from Jesus' saving grace.

The Security of the Believer

1) What does the Bible say about the security of the believer?

- A) The testimony of Jesus Christ. During his earthly ministry, Jesus made several statements concerning the security of believers.
- (1) “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).
 - (2) “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:37–40).
 - (3) “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:27–29).
- B) The testimony of Paul. Paul’s majestic speech in Romans 8 is one of the most beautiful and compelling passages on the security of the believer.
- (1) “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:29–31, 33–35, 37–39).
- C) The seal of the Holy Spirit. The Father has graciously given the Holy Spirit to all believers as a pledge, or down-payment as it were, of their future redemption.
- (1) “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Eph 1:13–14; 4:30).

D) The keeping power of God. The New Testament is filled with statements concerning the ability of God to keep believers until the day of salvation.

- (1) “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).
- (2) “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Pet 1:3–5 NKJV).
- (3) “Even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:6–9).
- (4) “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).
- (5) “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24–25).

2) What does the Bible say about the danger of apostasy and the necessity of perseverance?

A) The danger of apostasy. Hebrews is filled with warnings about the danger of falling away from God because of unbelief.

- (1) “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb 2:1–3a).
- (2) “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience” (Heb 3:12–14; 4:1, 11).
- (3) “For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, [while] they are

- crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt” (Heb 6:4–6).
- (4) “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:26–29).
 - (5) “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven” (Heb 12:25).
- B) The example of apostasy. The NT mentions individuals who had fallen away from God and were leading others to do the same.
- (1) “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:18–20).
 - (2) “But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some” (2 Tim 2:16–18).
 - (3) “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them” (2 Pet 2:20–21).
- C) The need to stand firm in the faith. Several passages speak of the necessity of persevering in the faith.
- (1) “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Col 1:21–23).
 - (2) “And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures [has endured] to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13).

- (3) “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23).
 - (4) “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die” (Ezek 18:24).
 - (5) “Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (Rom 11:20–23).
 - (6) “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Rev 2:5).
 - (7) “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Rev 22:18–19).
- D) The concern for the faith of believers. Paul expressed concern in several of his letters for the faith of his new converts (he also expressed concern for himself).
- (1) “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?” (Gal 3:1–4).
 - (2) “I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” (Gal 4:11; 5:1, 4).
 - (3) “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain” (1 Thess 3:5).
 - (4) “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the

wilderness. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 9:27–10:5, 11–12).

3) **How do we reconcile the promises concerning the security of the believer with the danger of apostasy and the command to persevere in the faith?**

A) The following is my attempt to harmonize the Scriptures above into a simple yet balanced position statement:¹

(1) The believer who is standing firm in the faith and walking by the Spirit can rest in the certainty that they are kept by the power of God and their eternal salvation is secure.

B) Unpacking the statement.

(1) The phrase “standing firm in the faith” emphasizes that we *stay* saved the same way we *get* saved—by grace through faith. We do not get saved by grace and then stay saved by works. We remain in a saving relationship with God by standing firm in our faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Rom 11:20; 1 Cor 16:13).

(2) The phrase “walking by the Spirit” emphasizes that saving faith obeys. While we do not stay saved by works, our obedience to Christ demonstrates that we have true, saving faith (Jam 2:14–26). God wants us to be living holy lives and walking in the light (1 Pet 1:14–16; 1 John 1:7).

(3) The present tense wording of both phrases emphasizes that Scripture tells us to be actively “striving” to enter the kingdom (Luke 13:23–24). This keeps our focus where it needs to be—on persevering. It also emphasizes that true, saving faith is the attitude of a lifetime, not merely the act of a moment. The New Testament affirms that eternal life in Christ is the present possession of *those who have a present, living faith*.²

(4) The phrase “rest in the certainty” emphasizes that the believer who is striving to enter the kingdom can have absolute certainty about the eternal destiny of their soul. Scripture is clear that nothing can separate such a person from the love of God (Rom 8:38–39).

(5) The phrase “kept by the power of God” emphasizes that God’s grace is working in the life of a believer to enable them to live a holy life and be in a right relationship with Him. As Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The

¹ This statement is not meant to be exhaustive in scope or to answer every question related to this issue. It is meant to be a place of common ground where those on different sides of the debate can come together in agreement.

² Eternal life is found “in Christ,” that is, it flows from a living relationship with the living Savior Jesus Christ. Thus the condition for possessing eternal life in Christ is a present, living faith (cf. John 1:12). See Robert Shank, *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 63–64.

one who remains in me and I in him—this one bears much fruit, for apart from me you are not able to do anything” (John 15:5).

- (6) The phrase “their eternal salvation is secure” emphasizes that the assurance of final salvation at “the day of redemption” is not a false hope or illusion—our eternal destiny is truly secure. The Father has given us to the Son, and no one can snatch us out of His hand.

C) Theological and Practical Implications.

- (1) Believers are told to examine themselves “to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5; cf. Phil 2:12). Those who do not have true saving faith must be converted; those who already believe must continue in the faith. This kind of examination should be done within the context of a local body of believers—hence the command not to neglect meeting together (Heb 10:24–25).³
- (2) The church has a great responsibility in the matter of perseverance. It is required not only to warn believers of the danger of apostasy but also to discipline them when they sin. If a believer continues in sin and does not respond to calls for repentance, the church has recourse to more serious methods of discipline, including excommunication (cf. Matt 18:15–17; 1 Cor 5:11–13). This discipline has two purposes:⁴
- (a) To show the offender the grim reality of their position. Their refusal to repent cuts them off from God and puts Christ to open shame (cf. Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–29).
- (b) To bring the offender to repentance. Paul taught that the sinner should be received back into the church once he had repented of his sin (cf. 2 Cor 2:6–11).
- (3) Believers are told to persevere in the faith. Our responsibility is to put our hand to the plow and not look back (Luke 9:62; Heb 10:38). We are to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” and we are to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Heb 12:1b NIV).⁵
- (a) God has promised to keep, establish, strengthen and sustain us. However, that does not mean that we no longer need to watch “lest we drift away” (Heb 2:1–4). God’s power enables us to resist temptation, but God does not remove temptation or the necessity to fight against it. The way to victory is through daily submission to Christ.⁶

³ I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), p. 212.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

- (4) Jesus' imperative in Luke 13:24, "Keep striving to enter the kingdom," also comes with a promise—"he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). We need not and should not live in fear, continually worrying about the eternal destiny of our soul. We know that if we trust in God, His power *will* preserve us. Paul faced the test of martyrdom confident that he would be victorious through the power of God (2 Tim 4:7-8).⁷

D) Conclusion.

- (1) The Bible affirms our security in Christ and urges us to place our trust in His sustaining power. At the same time the Bible affirms the danger of apostasy and urges us to have a present, living faith. We must learn to balance these two truths—if we are standing firm in the faith and walking daily in the Spirit, God *will* keep us from stumbling. As we continue to trust and obey, we can rest in the knowledge that nothing can separate us from God's love. He remains faithful, and we are indeed kept by His power.

⁷ Ibid., p. 209.

The Gift of Tongues

1) What is the gift of tongues?

A) The word “tongue” comes from the Greek *glossa* which is used in the NT to signify either the tongue in a person’s mouth (e.g., Mark 7:33) or the language which a person speaks (e.g., Acts 2:11). The word “language” comes from the Greek *dialektos* which is used in the NT to signify the particular language spoken by an individual (e.g., Acts 22:2).

B) The close connection between *glossa* and *dialektos* is seen in Acts 2 where the disciples “were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (*glossa*) as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language (*dialektos*)” (Acts 2:4–6). Throughout the NT, *glossa* and *dialektos* are consistently used to refer to human languages.¹

(1) The single exception to this usage is found in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: “If I speak in the tongues (*glossa*) of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). This verse informs us that there is a language which is spoken by angels. It follows that this “tongue” is unintelligible to humans without interpretation.

(2) There is no support in Scripture for the notion that tongues is ecstatic speech consisting of syllables that sound like nonsense or gibberish. Speaking in tongues is always presented in the context of a specific language, even if the language is angelic.²

C) The word “gift” comes from the Greek *charisma* which is used in the NT to signify that which is given freely to another (e.g., Rom 5:15). When used in context with the word “spiritual” or “Spirit,” it means a Spirit-given ability, capacity or skill that is given to a believer in order for them to carry out their function within the body of Christ.³

D) In conclusion, the “gift of tongues” is the Spirit-given ability to speak in a language or languages⁴ which are either unknown to the speaker (Acts 2:4–6) or which the

¹ On *dialektos*, see Acts 1:19; 2:6, 8; 21:40; 22:2; 26:14. On *glossa*, see Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:2, 4–6, 13–14, 18–19, 22–23, 26–27, 39; Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15.

² Carson comments: “On balance, then, the evidence favors the view that Paul thought the gift of tongues was a gift of real languages, that is, languages that were cognitive, whether of men or of angels. Certainly tongues in Acts exercise some different *functions* from those in 1 Corinthians; but there is no substantial evidence that suggests Paul thought the two were *essentially* different.” D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Baker, 1987), p. 83 (italics in the original).

³ For examples of this usage, see the spiritual gift lists in Romans 12:3–8, 1 Corinthians 12–14, Ephesians 4:11–16, and 1 Peter 4:10–11.

⁴ Both the singular and plural forms of “tongue” occur in 1 Cor 12–14. The plural form suggests that the “gift” of languages is really “gifts of languages” (cf. 1 Cor 12:28). To speak in a tongue is therefore

speaker is unable to interpret for others apart from the gift of interpretation (1 Cor 14:13). The language itself may or may not be understood by those who are listening (Acts 2:8; 1 Cor 14:2).

2) What is the gift of the interpretation of tongues?

- A) The gift of interpretation is the Spirit-given ability to comprehend a language which the hearer did not previously understand and communicate the meaning of what was said to others (e.g., 1 Cor 14:27). The gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation are complementary gifts, and they are meant to be used together for the edification of the church.

3) What is the purpose of the gift of tongues?

- A) The gift of tongues is a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are given by God to the church so it can function as He intended. Specifically, we see the following purposes for the gift of tongues:
- (1) To edify the church (1 Cor 12:7–10; 1 Pet 4:10; Eph 4:11–16). Paul said that spiritual gifts were intended for “the common good,” and Peter said that we should use our gifts to “serve one another.” We should always use our gifts to build up the body of Christ.
 - (2) To communicate truth (Acts 2:4–11). The Jews listening to Peter and the other disciples said, “we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (v. 11).
 - (3) To fulfill prophecy (Acts 2:14–21). Peter claimed that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which was manifested as “divided tongues as of fire” and “other tongues,” was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32.
 - (4) To authenticate the presence, ministry and work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–48; 19:1–7).
 - (a) In Acts 10, Cornelius and his household spoke in tongues, “and the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45).
 - (b) In Acts 19, the Ephesian disciples spoke in tongues after being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. This confirmed the genuine saving work of the Spirit in connection with the gospel message, and it served as a sign that the disciples had truly received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2).
 - (c) It should be noted that speaking in tongues did not accompany the conversion of most believers in the early church, nor does Scripture designate it as *the* sign of true saving faith (see Acts 2:41; 8:14–17, 26–39; 16:25–34). While every believer in Christ has the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor

to speak in a language which one has not learned. To speak in tongues would be to speak in multiple languages one has not learned.

12:13; Eph 1:13–14), not every believer speaks in tongues (1 Cor 12:29–31).

(5) To be a sign to sinners (1 Cor 14:21–25). Paul said that speaking in tongues could act as a sign to unbelievers that what was being spoken was from God. As support for this claim, he quoted Isaiah 28:11–12 in which God promised to “speak” to his people through “a foreign tongue.” The Assyrians later fulfilled this prophecy, and their language (heard by the captive Israelites) confirmed that God’s message through Isaiah was true. In the same way, speaking in tongues is a sign to sinners that the message of the gospel is from God (cf. Acts 2:6, 37–41).

(6) To edify the speaker (1 Cor 14:4). Paul said that the one who speaks in tongues “builds himself up,” that is, he edifies himself. This means that there is a spiritual strengthening that comes from the act of speaking in tongues.⁵

B) In conclusion, it’s important to remember that although spiritual gifts can be personally edifying, they were not given so we could use them on ourselves. Rather, they were given so we could encourage and build up other believers in the faith (1 Cor 14:5).

4) What are the biblical guidelines for speaking in tongues in a public gathering of believers?

A) The gift of tongues is designed to strengthen and edify the body of Christ. However, the Holy Spirit gave strict guidelines on how the gift is to be used in a church service:

(1) The number of individuals which may speak in tongues is limited to two or at most three: “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three” (1 Cor 14:27a).

(2) Each individual must speak in turn: “each in turn” (1 Cor 14:27b). There should never be more than one person speaking in tongues at a time.

(3) Each statement must be interpreted for the edification of the church. If there is no one present with the gift of interpretation, “let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God” (1 Cor 14:27c–28).

(4) If the number of individuals does not exceed three and there is an interpreter present, the use of tongues must not be forbidden: “So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor 14:39). That being said, each individual should submit themselves to the leadership of the elders—they should not insist on exercising their right (cf. Eph 5:21; 1 Pet 5:5; Heb 13:17).

(5) The principles of propriety and order must always govern the use of tongues in a

⁵ Paul does not comment on the nature of this edification. Since 1 Cor 14:1–4 makes edification dependent on understanding and 1 Cor 14:13 directs the speaker to pray that he may interpret, it may be that the speaker understands his intent (“giving thanks”; 1 Cor 14:16–17), yet does not understand all the words he is speaking (1 Cor 14:14). An intent to give thanks would be self-edifying, but without interpretation, others cannot join in and say “Amen” (1 Cor 14:16).

church service: “But all things should be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40).

- B) If the use of the gift of tongues does not follow the Spirit-given guidelines above, then it is not in harmony with God’s will and can be used by the Devil to hinder the cause of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 14:23, 33, 40).

5) Are all believers given the gift of tongues?

- A) No, the gift of tongues is not bestowed on every believer. Paul said, “Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Cor 12:30). The answer to this question is an implied ‘No.’ God has given different gifts to different people so the body of Christ would have everything it needs to function properly and grow.

(1) When Paul said, “Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy” (1 Cor 14:5a), he was not saying the Corinthians all needed to receive the gift of tongues. He was merely expressing his approval of the gift itself and acknowledging its value (cf. 1 Cor 14:18). However, the gift of prophesy, which edifies the entire body of believers, is the greater gift, and so Paul encouraged them to seek and use those gifts which have the ability to influence and affect the entire church (such gifts are called “greater” for this reason).

(2) The gift of tongues can only edify the church if it is complemented by the gift of interpretation. However, when interpreted, tongues can qualify as a “greater” gift since it is being used to edify the entire body of believers. Paul was not denigrating the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, he was simply clarifying how it must be used in order to properly benefit the church.

6) Is the gift of tongues a necessary proof of true faith?

- A) No, the gift of tongues is not a necessary proof of true faith. This is confirmed by the fact that not every believer is given the gift of tongues (1 Cor 12:30). If we required everyone to be able to speak in tongues before we acknowledged them to be a true Christian, we would grieve the Holy Spirit, disregard the Scriptures and do great harm to sincere believers.

B) While the church is commanded to “earnestly desire the higher gifts” (1 Cor 12:31) and the individual “who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret” (1 Cor 14:13), there is no guarantee that every request for a particular gift will be answered in the affirmative. The gift of tongues is not a sign of spiritual maturity or true faith and should not be sought as one. Indeed, the church in which speaking in tongues was most prevalent was the Corinthian church, and its members were rebuked by Paul for being fleshly, unloving, and immature (1 Cor 3:1–3).

C) Speaking in tongues without love is an empty and ineffectual use of the gift. Paul said, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). He concluded by saying, “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit” (1 Cor 14:1–2).

D) Churches who place an excessive focus on speaking in tongues will find themselves in the same state as the Corinthians. It is clear from Paul's letter that they were obsessed with speaking in tongues and had neglected the other gifts (1 Cor 12–13). This led to confusion, disorder, division and pride.

7) Is speaking in tongues an uncontrollable phenomenon?

A) No, speaking in tongues is *not* uncontrollable. Paul's instructions on the use of tongues in the church demonstrate that an individual with the gift of tongues is able to remain silent: "But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God" (1 Cor 14:28).

8) Is the gift of tongues still being given by the Holy Spirit?

A) Some claim that the "miracle gifts" of tongues and healing have ceased—that the end of the apostolic age brought about a cessation of the miracles associated with that age.⁶ My response is that there is no biblical data to support such a claim. I think Carson is right when he says:

- (1) "At the exegetical level, the charismatic movement is surely right to argue that the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*), including the more spectacular of them, have not been permanently withdrawn. Critics may rightly insist that in many (though certainly not all) charismatic circles, too much attention is devoted to too few gifts, and almost always the spectacular ones. But in my judgment there is no substantial exegetical or theological impediment to recognizing the continued existence of the gift of, say, tongues. Some of the gifts need to be carefully circumscribed so far as their authority status is concerned, and all need to be tested. Moreover, in a thoroughly mature church, it is doubtful that much attention would be focused on such matters. Nor is it necessary to argue that, say, the gift of tongues must be present in every church for that church to be complete: there is no warrant for that, either, and ample evidence that the Lord of the church dispenses and withdraws some of his gracious gifts at various times and for various purposes. But when all the caveats are in, there is no biblical warrant for ruling out all manifestations of contemporary tongues, on the ground that the gift was withdrawn in the subapostolic period."⁷

⁶ The technical term for this perspective is "cessationism." For a detailed presentation of this view, see Benjamin B. Warfield's book called *Counterfeit Miracles*.

⁷ Carson, p. 182.

Biblical Faith

1) What is the meaning of the word “faith”?

- A) The word “faith” has the dictionary definition of “strong belief or trust in someone or something.” When used in a religious context, the word generally refers to a belief in the existence of God or some system of religion.¹
- B) The word “faith” has also picked up some additional meaning based on its use in popular culture. For example, faith is often thought of as believing in something which has no basis in reality. Steven Pinker, the Johnstone Professor of Psychology at Harvard was quoted as saying, “Requiring students to take a course in a ‘Reason and Faith’ category would be like requiring them to take a course in astronomy and astrology.” Pinker went on to say, “Faith is believing in something without good reasons to do so. It has no place in anything but a religious institution, and our society has no shortage of these.”² Pinker’s comments illustrate the common perception that faith is something people use to ignore the evidence. It’s what Bill Maher called a neurological disorder that “stops people from thinking.”³
- C) Is this the kind of faith Christians have? Are believers supposed to ignore the facts and believe in spite of the evidence? Is faith a blind leap in the dark? The answer is a resounding ‘No!’ Indeed, just the opposite is true. Christians believe in what best explains both reality *and* reason—God and His Word.

2) What is biblical faith?

- A) The title of this lesson is “Biblical Faith.” Although this lesson could also be called “Christian Faith,” the word “biblical” serves two purposes: (1) it emphasizes that a proper understanding of faith comes from God’s Word, and (2) it distinguishes the kind of faith a Christian has from “faith” as defined by Pinker, Maher and popular culture. Biblical faith is faith as defined by Scripture.⁴ As we study the Bible, we see that biblical faith has the following characteristics:

- (1) Biblical faith is grounded in reality.
 - (a) Biblical faith acknowledges the reality of the universe. This stands in contrast to a religion like Hinduism, which holds that “the ultimate reality is ‘Brahman,’ the one infinite impersonal existence. Brahman is all that exists,

¹ The Merriam-Webster online dictionary gives the following simple definitions for the word “faith”: (1) strong belief or trust in someone or something; (2) belief in the existence of God (strong religious feelings or beliefs); (3) a system of religious beliefs. The verb form of faith is “believe, trust.”

² Lisa Miller, “Harvard’s Crisis of Faith,” *Newsweek*, February 22, 2010, p. 44.

³ Quoted from Joe Scarborough’s interview of Bill Maher on MSNBC’s *Scarborough Country*, February 15, 2005.

⁴ Such a faith will naturally be grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, since He is the culmination of God’s self-revelation and the ultimate object of biblical faith. OT saints like Abraham did not have the full revelation that NT saints enjoy today; nevertheless, Abraham believed God and obeyed His Word to the full extent of his knowledge. God was thus pleased to count his faith as righteousness on the basis of Christ’s future work (Gen 15:6).

and anything else that appears to exist is *maya* [illusion], and does not truly exist at all.”⁵

- (b) Biblical faith, far from denying the existence of the universe, embraces it as fact. The apostle Paul, when witnessing to the Galatians at Lystra, acknowledged the reality of the physical world: “We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain [idols] to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:16–17).
- (c) When writing to the Romans, Paul said: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19–20). Paul believed in the reality of the universe, and he recognized that it revealed many of the attributes of God.
- (d) Douglas Groothuis said, “We may be entitled to our own opinions, but we are not entitled to our own facts.”⁶ Biblical faith is based on the “facts”—the existence of the universe and the reality of what can be perceived with our senses. Thus biblical faith is firmly grounded in reality.
- (2) Biblical faith uses reason and logic to discern the existence of God.
- (a) Given the reality of the universe, a logical question that follows is: ‘Why does the universe exist?’ Indeed, Gottfried Leibniz, a German philosopher once wrote, “The first question which we have a right to ask will be, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’”⁷ Leibniz came to the conclusion that the answer is found in God, who exists necessarily and is the explanation of why anything else exists.
- (b) We can express Leibniz’s thinking in the form of a simple argument.⁸

- Premise 1: Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature, or in an external cause.
- Premise 2: If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
- Premise 3: The universe exists.
- Conclusion: The explanation of the universe’s existence is God.

⁵ David Burnett, *Clash of Worlds* (London: Monarch, 2002) p. 71.

⁶ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011) p. 124.

⁷ Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, “The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Based on Reason” in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, second edition, ed. and trans. Leroy E. Loemaker (2 vols. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1969), Volume I, pages 638–639.

⁸ Sourced from “Life, the Universe, and Nothing: Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?” William Lane Craig vs. Lawrence Krauss, transcript of their debate in Sydney, Australia on August 13, 2013.

- (c) The logic of this argument is airtight. If the three premises are true, then the conclusion is unavoidable. But are the three premises more plausibly true than false?
- (i) Premise 1 states that there are only two kinds of things: things which exist by necessity of their own nature (like numbers, sets and other mathematical objects) and things which exist because something else caused them to exist (like clocks, cars, and cruise ships). God falls into the category of things that are *necessary*, while the universe falls into the category of things that are *contingent*. This premise is certainly more plausibly true than false.
- (ii) Premise 2 states that the universe did not cause itself (it is *contingent*). If the universe has a cause of its existence, that cause must be spaceless, timeless, immaterial, uncaused, and unimaginably powerful. In other words, God. This is also more plausibly true than false.
- (iii) Premise 3 is undeniable for any sincere seeker after truth. Obviously, the universe exists! Thus the conclusion logically follows: God is the explanation for the existence of the universe.
- (d) The argument above is known as the Leibniz Contingency Argument. There are also many other arguments for the existence of God which employ rational thought and sound reasoning.⁹
- (e) The Bible affirms that faith must begin with the belief that God exists. The author of Hebrews said, “Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6).
- (f) Biblical faith does not avoid logic or sidestep reason. Instead, it thinks clearly and critically about the implications of the existence of the universe, and it correctly discerns that God does indeed exist.¹⁰
- (3) Biblical faith welcomes and pursues truth.
- (a) We can deduce several important truths from the fact that God created the universe:
- God is eternal, for He existed prior to the universe.
 - God is infinitely wise and powerful, for He created the universe.
 - God is a living being, for life only comes from life.

⁹ See the Reasonable Faith Animated Videos on Dr. William Lane Craig’s YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/drcraigvideos>.

¹⁰ Scientists and physicists use similar reasoning about the observable universe to infer the existence of dark energy and dark matter. If you go to NASA’s science website, they include dark energy and matter under the category of “What We Study” (see <https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy>). How silly (and tragic) it would be to infer the existence of invisible energy and matter and yet refuse to infer the existence of the invisible God!

- God is personal, for persons only come from other persons.
 - God is good, for He has richly provided us with everything to enjoy.
 - God is the supreme ruler, for He created and established all things.
 - God is worthy of worship, for He made us, and we belong to Him.
- (b) The proper reaction to these truths is gratitude to God for His goodness and the pursuit of a relationship with Him. Paul told the men of Athens, “The God who made the world and everything in it...made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:24–27 NIV).
- (c) Sadly, men are not grateful for the testimony of the universe to the existence of God. Instead, they suppress what they know to be true (Rom 1:18). Paul told the Romans, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom 1:21–23).
- (d) Biblical faith is grateful for the revelation of God’s existence through the “the things that have been made” and eagerly pursues a relationship with Him.
- (4) Biblical faith accepts the historical fact of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- (a) History is the study of past events. Past events are not available in the present; we cannot observe them or recreate them. We can only interact with the physical evidence which remains: records, artifacts, texts, structures, etc.¹¹ Furthermore, those who do the work of history have personal biases, worldviews and presuppositions which affect their research. This means two different historians can examine the same historical evidence and arrive at different conclusions.¹²
- (b) Because of this, historians employ various principles when examining historical evidence. These principles help, as best as possible, to eliminate bias and determine whether or not a given event actually took place. When examining the ancient texts which give an account of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we can apply the following principles to judge their authenticity:¹³

¹¹ For a defense of the claim that history is objectively knowable, see Norman L. Geisler, “History, Objectivity of,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 319–328.

¹² For a defense of the claim that there can be historical evidence for a miracle, see Norman L. Geisler, “Miracles, Alleged Impossibility of” and “Miracles, Arguments Against,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 452–468.

¹³ These principles are taken from Gary R. Habermas and Mike R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), pp. 36–40.

- *Multiple independent sources support historical claims.* When an event is attested by more than one independent source, this is a strong indication of historicity.
 - *Attestation by an enemy supports historical claims.* When an event is affirmed by a source who does not sympathize with the person or cause that benefits from the occurrence of the event, this is a strong indication of authenticity.
 - *Eyewitness testimony supports historical claims.* When an event is attested by eyewitnesses, rather than by secondhand or hearsay accounts, this is a strong indication of authenticity.
 - *Early testimony supports historical claims.* The smaller the time between an event and the testimony about the event, the more reliable the testimony, since there is less time for exaggeration, or even legend, to affect the account.
 - *Embarrassing admissions support historical claims.* When those claiming an event occurred include embarrassing details in their testimony (such as an admission of personal failure, etc.), this is an indication of authenticity (cf. Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50).
- (c) When we apply these principles to the ancient texts which speak of Jesus' death and resurrection, several historical facts emerge. These facts are so strongly attested by the evidence that they are granted by nearly all scholars who study the resurrection, even the rather skeptical ones.¹⁴ The facts are:¹⁵
- Jesus died on the cross and was buried.
 - Jesus' tomb was empty and no one ever produced His body.
 - Jesus' disciples testified that they saw Jesus resurrected from the dead.
 - Jesus' disciples were transformed following their alleged interaction with Jesus.
- (d) When we examine the various explanations for these historical facts, the one that accounts for the evidence simply and exhaustively and is logically consistent is that Jesus actually rose from the dead. The explanations include:¹⁶
- *The disciples were wrong about Jesus' death.* This fails to explain the many unfriendly Roman sources which affirmed Jesus' death. It also doesn't account for the extremity of Jesus' wounds and the fact that the Roman guards faced death if they allowed a prisoner to survive crucifixion.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 44–47. This approach is called the “minimal facts approach,” and it allows us to discuss the historical reliability of the New Testament without regard to its claims of inspiration.

¹⁵ J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013) p. 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 43–53.

- *The disciples lied about the resurrection.* This fails to explain the transformation of the disciples. It also doesn't account for the precautions of the Jewish authorities (Matt 27:62–66).
 - *The disciples were delusional.* This fails to explain the empty tomb and the number of different sightings of Jesus. It also doesn't account for the extreme skepticism of the disciples themselves (Mark 16:9–14; Luke 24:10–11; John 20:24–28).
 - *The disciples were fooled by an imposter.* This fails to account for the miracles and “convincing proofs” (Acts 1:2–3) which were performed by the resurrected Jesus. It also doesn't explain why someone other than the disciples would be motivated to fake Jesus resurrection.
 - *The disciples' interactions with Jesus were only visions.* This fails to explain the empty tomb and directly contradicts the eyewitness testimony of the disciples.
 - *The disciples' accounts of the events were later distorted.* This fails to explain the early claims of the disciples. It also doesn't explain why Jesus' body was not produced in order to silence the disciples.
 - *The disciples accurately reported Jesus' resurrection from the dead.* Although it requires the existence of the supernatural, this explanation best accounts for all the historical facts.
- (e) Biblical faith accepts the historical fact of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Cor 15:1–19). This event is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, for Jesus' resurrection validates all His claims:
- He is the Messiah (John 4:25–26).
 - He is God (John 10:30–33).
 - He is the Son of God (Matt 16:13–20; John 5:17–18).
 - He is the only way to God (John 14:6).
 - He is the source of eternal life (John 17:3).
 - He is the source of truth (John 14:6).

(5) Biblical faith believes what God says.

- (a) Since Jesus is God, whatever He says is true. Jesus said that the Old Testament is the truth (John 17:17; Matt 22:29). He also said that we should believe the OT (Luke 16:16–31; 24:25–27). The New Testament is the record of Jesus' teachings and the further revelation that was given by Jesus through the Holy Spirit. It follows that Jesus expects us to believe the NT as well as the OT (John 20:25–31; Mark 16:14; John 14:26; 16:13–16; Acts 1:8). Biblical faith believes the Bible, for it is the record of what God has said.¹⁷

¹⁷ Although the Bible is the foundation and object of biblical faith, God also speaks in other ways. He speaks through Jesus (Acts 9:3–6, 10–16; Rev 1:10–19), the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 13:2), angels

(b) Since biblical faith believes what God says, it's very important to have an *accurate understanding of what God said*. It doesn't do any good to say, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it," if we misunderstood what He said! Indeed, Scripture itself warns us that some of what God has said is "hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16; cf. Matt 22:29; John 20:9). Biblical faith recognizes the importance of careful interpretation, for misinterpreting what God has said is ultimately no better than disbelieving Him (cf. 1 Cor 5:9–13; 2 Tim 2:15). Here are some examples of misunderstanding what God has said, especially concerning faith itself:

- (i) If someone were to say, "I believe that God will welcome into heaven anyone who has tried to live a good life," that would be a statement of belief, but not of biblical faith. Biblical faith believes God to be exactly as He has revealed Himself to be in His Word (John 10:7–10; 14:6; 1 Tim 2:3–6). If we believe Him to be anything different, we are not believing what God has said.
- (ii) If someone were to say, "I asked God to help me win the lottery, and I have faith that He will do it," that would be a statement of belief, but not of biblical faith. Biblical faith believes that God can do anything He wants (Matt 8:5–10; Mark 9:22–23) and that He will do everything He has promised (Heb 10:23). If we ask God for something *we* want, without regard for His will, and then believe that He will do it, we are not believing what God has said (cf. James 4:1–4; 1 John 5:14–15).
- (iii) If someone were to say, "Jesus said, 'Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith,' and so I'm believing God for the healing of my aunt Margaret," that would be a statement of belief, but not of biblical faith. Biblical faith balances Scripture with Scripture (1 John 5:14–15), carefully interprets God's Word (2 Tim 2:15; 2 Pet 3:16), and seeks God's will in all things (Luke 9:23; Matt 26:39). If we pick a verse that appeals to us, wrench it out of context, ignore what God says elsewhere, and then demand that God honor our belief with a miracle, we are not believing what God has said.
- (iv) If someone were to say, "God's been blessing my ministry, and so I'm stepping out in faith and believing Him for the money for a new building," that would be a statement of belief, but not of biblical faith. Biblical faith recognizes the uncertainties of life (James 4:13–17; Prov 27:1), makes plans for the future with humility (Acts 18:21; Romans 1:10, 13), exercises wisdom in setting goals (Prov 21:5; 22:3; 24:27; 27:23; Luke 14:21), and is vigilant against selfish ambition (Phil 2:3; James 4:3). If we presume on God,

(Acts 5:19–20; Rev 22:1–9), other Christians (Acts 8:30–35; 21:11; Heb 13:7), and circumstances (Acts 8:1–25). Biblical faith also believes what God says through these other means. However, we have an obligation to check what is said to make sure it's in harmony with Scripture (Acts 17:11; Gal 1:8; 1 John 4:1; 2 Thess 2:2). If it's not, we should reject it. Also, if our personal impressions, visions, dreams or experiences do not agree with God's Word, then they're not from God and should not be believed (1 Thess 5:21).

without seeking His will or accounting for the possibility that we're wrong, we are not believing what God has said.

- (6) Biblical faith draws the right conclusions from what God has said.
- (a) Not only does biblical faith believe what God says, it also *reasons correctly and draws necessary inferences from what God has said*. Several stories in the Gospels about faith are examples of this kind of right thinking. For example:
- (i) In the sermon on the mount, Jesus asked the people why they were worried about their clothing. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin...but if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matt 6:28–30). Jesus' point was that the people's knowledge of God's care and provision for creation (cf. Ps 65:9–13; 104:10–28; 145:15–16) should have led them to conclude that He would also care and provide for them. Not drawing the proper conclusion brought a rebuke from Jesus.
- (1) The word *oligopistos* ("little faith") speaks to the *quality* of the faith in question, not the quantity. A study of the contexts in which the word occurs (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Luke 12:28) shows that Jesus used it to indicate that there was something *wrong* with the person's faith. It wasn't that they needed more faith. Rather, they needed a different *kind* of faith—one that believed and drew the proper conclusions from what God had said. This understanding is confirmed by Jesus' reaction when the disciples came to Him and said, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5). His response showed that it was the quality of their faith that mattered. The right kind of faith, even if it's as small as a mustard seed, is enough to move mountains (Luke 17:6).
- (ii) When the Roman centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant, Jesus told him, "I will come and heal him" (Matt 8:7). Once Jesus' intention to grant the centurion's request was made, the centurion told Him: "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof...But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it" (Luke 7:6–8). The centurion believed that Jesus had the power and authority to cure diseases, and he reasoned correctly that Jesus did not need to be in physical proximity to his servant in order to heal him. All Jesus needed to do was say the word. "When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Luke 9:9). Drawing the proper conclusion brought approval from Jesus.
- (iii) One day, when evening had come, Jesus told the disciples, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake" (Luke 8:22). As they sailed, a great storm arose on the sea, and the boat was being swamped by the waves. The disciples were afraid, and they woke Jesus saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" (Luke 8:24). Jesus rebuked the storm and then asked

the disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mark 4:40). The disciples should have realized that Jesus’ command to sail across the lake meant that they would arrive safely on the other side. After all, He would not command them to do something without also enabling them to carry out His will. Not drawing the proper conclusion brought a rebuke from Jesus.

- (iv) The woman with the discharge of blood (a condition which likely caused her to be continually unclean) heard the reports about Jesus’ healings and how those who merely touched Him were cured (cf. Mark 3:10). Because of this, she reasoned that she didn’t need to have physical contact with Jesus in order to be healed (for she no doubt wanted to avoid making Him unclean). Just a touch of His garment should be enough (others soon followed her example; cf. Matt 14:35–36). When she touched the fringe of Jesus’ garment, she was immediately healed. Jesus, realizing that power had gone out from Him, discovered the woman and praised her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace” (Luke 8:48). Drawing the proper conclusion brought approval from Jesus.
- (v) When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he realized that Jesus could do anything. That included empowering Peter to walk on the water too! This was the right conclusion, for when Peter asked Jesus to command him to come, Jesus said, “Come” (Matt 14:28–29). Peter acted in faith and came to Jesus on the water. “But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ Jesus immediately reached out His hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith (*oligopistos*), why did you doubt?’” (Matt 14:30–31). Peter should have known that Jesus would not have told him to come only to let him drown. The same power that kept Peter above the water as he walked toward Jesus could keep him safe no matter how much the wind blew. Not drawing the proper conclusion brought a rebuke from Jesus.

(7) Biblical faith obeys what God commands.

- (a) Biblical faith is not merely an intellectual assent that the statements and claims in the Bible are true. Biblical faith believes what God says and *then responds in obedience to what God commands*. Consider the ten plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7:14–12:32). When God warned Pharaoh about the seventh plague of hail that would come the next day, God told the Egyptians to get their animals and servants to safety. Moses recorded: “Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field” (Exod 9:20–21). The question is: which Egyptians truly believed what God said? The ones who obeyed His command!
- (b) Faith without obedience is no faith at all. That’s why James said, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (James 2:19; cf. Deut 6:4). The demons’ belief in God does them no good, for they have chosen to rebel against Him (and thus there is nothing left but a fearful expectation of judgment). This means that those who profess faith in God

and yet refuse to do what God commands have joined ranks with the Devil! James said, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:14, 17, 26).

- (c) Several stories in the Gospels illustrate that biblical faith responds in obedience to what God commands. For example:
- (i) In Jerusalem, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. Jesus spit on the ground, made mud with His saliva, and then anointed the man’s eyes with the mud. Jesus said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (John 9:7). At this point, the man was still blind. He remained blind all the way to the pool of Siloam. But he obeyed Jesus’ command, even though nothing happened until the mud was washed from his eyes. The man’s obedience proved his faith.
 - (ii) On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village there, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and cried out, “‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’ When he saw them he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests’” (Luke 17:13–14; cf. Matt 8:1–4). When the men turned to go, they were still lepers. They remained lepers as they began to walk away. But they all obeyed Jesus’ command, even though they weren’t cleansed until they had gone some distance from Him. The lepers’ obedience proved their faith.
 - (iii) Jesus was in a synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. Jesus’ enemies were also there, watching to see if He would heal the man on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. Jesus “said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Come here.’ And he said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?’ But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was restored” (Mark 3:3–5). Jesus did not heal the man and then hold his hand up for all to see. Instead, Jesus told the man to stretch out his withered hand. It remained withered until the man acted in faith and obeyed Jesus’ command. The man’s obedience proved his faith.
- (8) Biblical faith persists in spite of hardship and adversity.
- (a) Biblical faith not only obeys what God commands, it also *persists in spite of difficulty and opposition*. Biblical faith is like a muscle: the more it works against an opposing force, the more it grows and develops (cf. James 1:3–4; Rom 5:3–4). That’s why God tests us, for we must learn to endure through hardship if we want to have strong, spiritual muscles of faith.
 - (b) Several stories in the Gospels illustrate that biblical faith persists in spite of adversity. For example:
 - (i) When Jesus withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon, “Behold, a

Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.' But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' And he answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly" (Matt 15:22–28). Look at the difficulties Jesus put in the path of this desperate mother: He ignored her cries for help, He told His disciples that He was sent "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," He called her a "dog," and He refused to give her the "children's bread." How did she respond? She believed in Him as the Messiah (she called Him "Son of David"), she harassed His disciples, she threw herself at His feet, and she answered His objection with humility and wisdom (she correctly perceived that the Gentiles were meant to benefit from the Jews' blessings). True faith persists in spite of adversity.

- (ii) When Jesus, Peter, James and John came down from the mount of transfiguration, they found the other disciples arguing with some scribes over their failure to cast out a demon. When Jesus realized what was going on, He was angry: "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" (Matt 17:17). This was clearly a rebuke of the people, for it was not the first time their unbelief had hindered the Spirit's work (cf. Mark 6:5–6). The boy's father was also at fault, and when Jesus exposed his lack of faith, he cried out for help: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). After Jesus exorcised the demon, the disciples came to Him privately and asked what they had done wrong, for they had cast out demons before (Mark 6:7, 13). Jesus said, "Because of your little faith (*oligopistos*). For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt 17:20). The disciples expected the demon to come out immediately, and when it resisted them, they gave up. Had they persisted in faith and called out to God in prayer, they would have prevailed (cf. Mark 9:29). Jesus' mention of a mustard seed was intended to teach them that it was not the quantity of their faith, but the *quality* of their faith that mattered. If they would persist in faith in spite of adversity, even speck-sized faith was enough to move mountains!

(9) Biblical faith lasts a lifetime.

- (a) Biblical faith is *the attitude of a lifetime, not merely the act of a moment*. When the author of Hebrews wanted to encourage his readers to persevere in the faith, he said, "Do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who

shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” (Heb 10:35–39). How do people of faith behave? How can you tell them from others? They *live* by faith. It is the pattern and habit of their lives. It is an initial belief that is continually affirmed, and it is the foundation of their confidence and their conduct.

- (i) Their Confidence. In the very next verse, the author of Hebrews said, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). We might paraphrase this as follows: “A person who has faith lives as though things which are nonexistent will someday exist; they live as though things which cannot be seen are really there.” When God says that a childless man will some day have as many descendants as the stars of heaven, biblical faith believes (Gen 15:5–6; Heb 11:12). When God says that He has prepared a city for His children, biblical faith believes (Heb 11:16; Rev 21:10–22:5). This confidence is *not* an optimistic outlook on life or a general attitude of hopefulness. Anyone can have that kind of perspective. This confidence is a steady, continual belief in the Word of God. It is a never-ending conviction that everything God has said is true and everything God has promised will happen.
- (ii) Their Conduct. The author of Hebrews goes on in chapter eleven to give many examples of what *living* by faith looks like. When someone is convinced that what God has said is true, their whole life is affected by that belief. A man will build an ark to the saving of his household (Heb 11:7). A man will leave his father’s house and go to a land he has never seen (Heb 11:8). A woman will conceive and bear a child in her old age (Heb 11:11). A man will reject the riches of Egypt and choose suffering and reproach with the people of God (Heb 11:24–27). A prostitute will welcome the spies of a foreign invader (Heb 11:31). And what more shall we say? Biblical faith lasts a lifetime, and when death draws near and God’s promises have still not been received, it looks into the future and greets those promises from afar, acknowledging by word and deed that it has been a stranger and exile on this passing earth (Heb 11:13).

B) In summary, we have seen that biblical faith:

- Is grounded in reality.
- Uses reason and logic to discern the existence of God.
- Welcomes and pursues truth.
- Accepts the historical fact of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- Believes what God says.
- Draws the right conclusions from what God has said.
- Obeys what God commands.
- Persists in spite of hardship and adversity.
- Lasts a lifetime.

Future Events

The Return of the King

1) Is Jesus Christ coming back to earth?

- A) Yes, Jesus Christ is coming back to earth! Though He is spiritually present in the hearts of believers now, the day is coming when He will physically return to earth and rule the world from the city of Jerusalem in Israel.
- B) Jesus' return—the return of the King—is often called the “Second Coming” or the “Second Advent.”¹ These terms are used to distinguish Jesus' first coming as the lowly baby of Bethlehem (His incarnation) from His second coming as the mighty and glorious Son-of-God-in-power (cf. Rom 1:4; Rev 1:12–18).
 - (1) Another word that refers to the Second Coming is *parousia*. This is a Greek word meaning “coming, arrival,” and it is used in several passages to refer to Christ's return (cf. 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; Jam 5:7; 2 Pet 3:4).

2) How do we know that Jesus is coming again?

- A) Jesus told us He would return:
 - (1) “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matt 16:27).
 - (2) “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” (Luke 21:25–27; cf. Mark 13:26).
 - (3) “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).
- B) The angels said He would return:
 - (1) “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:10–11).
- C) The apostles said He would return:
 - (1) Paul: “So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” (1 Thess 3:13).

¹The terms “Second Coming” and “Second Advent” are not direct quotes from Scripture. They were coined by theologians and scholars as a way to refer exclusively to Christ's coming return.

- (2) James: “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:7–8).
- (3) Peter: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Pet 3:10).

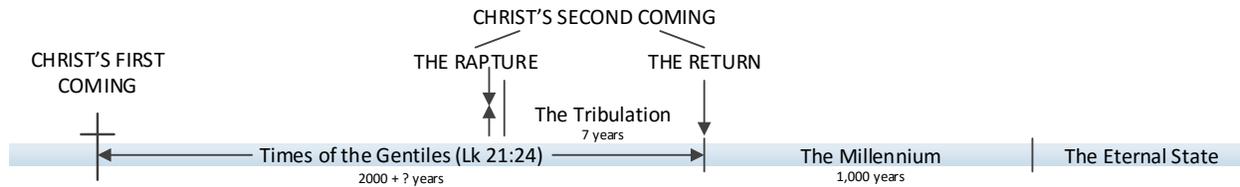
D) The prophets said He would return:

- (1) Enoch: “It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him’” (Jude 1:14–15).
- (2) Daniel: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13–14; cf. Mark 13:26; 14:62).
- (3) Zechariah: “On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him” (Zech 14:4–5).

3) What are the two phases of the Second Coming?

- A) The Scripture passages that mention the Second Coming indicate that there are two distinct stages or phases to Christ’s return. The first stage, called the Rapture, is when Christ returns in the air for His church (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 4:16–17). The second and final stage, called the Return, is when Christ returns to earth with His church and establishes His thousand-year (Millennium) reign² (1 Thess 3:13; Rev 19:11–20:6).

² Don’t misunderstand—Jesus’ kingdom is eternal (cf. Isa 9:7). However, the first thousand years of Christ’s reign (called the Millennium) take place on this present, fallen earth. At the end of the Millennium, there will be one final rebellion led by Satan (Rev 20:7–10). Jesus will crush this rebellion and throw Satan into the lake of fire. Then there will be a new heaven and a new earth, “for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more” (Rev 21:1). The rest of Christ’s reign will take place on this new earth and it will never end.



B) The Rapture.

- (1) The Rapture is the first phase of the Second Coming. Jesus Christ will descend from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (1 Thess 4:16).
 - (a) First, the bodies of believers who have died will be resurrected as new spiritual bodies and reunited with their spirits (1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:42, 52; cf. 2 Cor 5:6–8; Phil 1:21–24).
 - (b) Next, the bodies of believers who are still alive will be changed into new spiritual bodies. They will never have to experience physical death (1 Cor 15:52).
 - (c) Then, all believers will be taken up (lit. “to seize, to catch up”³) into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17).
- (2) The Rapture is a future, signless and imminent event. It is future, meaning it has not yet taken place. It is signless, meaning no sign must precede its occurrence. It is imminent, meaning it could take place at any moment. Unlike the Return, there is no prophecy that must be fulfilled before the Rapture can occur—it can happen now.
- (3) The Rapture will be covered in more detail in a separate lesson. For now, it is enough to understand that the Rapture is the first stage of the Second Coming and will take place prior to Christ’s physical return to earth.

C) The Return.

- (1) The Return is the second and final phase of the Second Coming—it is the visible, physical and glorious return of Jesus Christ to earth *with* His church.
- (2) The Return is a future, signed and non-imminent event. It is future, meaning it has not yet taken place. It is signed, meaning certain prophecies and signs must precede its occurrence (cf. Matt 24:4–14). It is non-imminent, meaning it will take place *after* the Tribulation and in connection with the Campaign of Armageddon (Rev 16:14, 16; 19:11–21; Zech 12–14).

³ The word “rapture” comes from the Latin Vulgate of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 in which the Greek word *harpagesometha* (“to seize, to catch up”) is translated as “rapiémur” (from *rápere* meaning “to grab, to carry off”). The Latin *rápere* eventually became the English *rapture*.

4) What will happen when Jesus returns?

- A) Christ will defeat the Antichrist. At the end of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will gather his forces together in the plain of Megiddo (the Jezreel Valley).⁴ He will attack Jerusalem and ravage the Jews (Zech 14:2). Then Jesus and all the saints will come from heaven on white horses. Christ will destroy the armies of the Antichrist, and the beast and the false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19:11–21).
- B) Christ will bind Satan. After the defeat of the Antichrist, Jesus will send His angel to seize the devil, “that ancient serpent,” and bind him. Satan will be sealed in a pit and prevented from deceiving the nations for a thousand years (cf. Rev 20:1–3).
- C) Christ will gather and restore Israel. “The most frequently mentioned promise in the Old Testament is God’s promise that He will one day gather and restore the nation of Israel (cf. Isa 27:12–13; Jer 30:10; 33:6–9; Ezek 36:24–38; 37:1–28).”⁵ During the Tribulation period, the Jews will be scattered for the last time. When Christ returns, He will gather them and bring them into the wilderness for judgment. All rebels will be purged and only the faithful will be allowed to enter the land and Christ’s kingdom (Ezek 20:33–38).⁶
- D) Christ will judge the Gentiles. When Jesus returns, the nations will stand before Him and He will separate them into two groups—the sheep (believers) will stand on His right and the goats (unbelievers) on the left. The righteous will enter into eternal life, while the unrighteous will depart into eternal punishment. This is known as the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46).
- E) Christ will resurrect those martyred during the Tribulation (Rev 20:4b). This resurrection is called the “first resurrection” (Rev 20:5).
- (1) It is “first” in the sense that it comes *before* the resurrection of unbelievers at the end of the Millennium. It is also “first” in the sense that it is a resurrection of believers to eternal life (Rev 20:6), while the last resurrection is a resurrection of unbelievers to eternal death (Rev 20:13–14).
- (2) The term “first resurrection” applies most directly to the martyrs of the Tribulation, but it also applies to earlier instances of a resurrection to life:⁷ (1) Jesus Christ is the “first fruits” of the first resurrection (1 Cor 15:20), and (2) the “dead in Christ” will be resurrected at the Rapture (1 Thess 4:16).
- F) Christ will establish His earthly kingdom. Christ’s return will mark the beginning of His 1,000-year reign—the Millennium—on this present, fallen earth. He will establish and expand the borders of Israel (cf. Ezek 47:13–23) and build a new temple in

⁴ This valley is also referred to by the hill at its western end: Mount Megiddo. In Hebrew, “Mount Megiddo” is *har meghiddo*, which is translated “Armageddon” by several English translations. Thus the Valley of Armageddon is actually the Valley of Jezreel.

⁵ Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), pp. 386–387.

⁶ Mark Hitchcock, *The Complete Book of Bible Prophecy*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), p. 71.

⁷ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 419.

Jerusalem (Ezek 40–46). Christ will rule the world with a rod of iron (Ps 2). It will be a time a great spiritual triumph in which ethnic Israel will fulfill her destiny, and the Gentiles will partake in tremendous blessings through Christ and His nation of priests.

5) When will Jesus return?

- A) The disciples asked Jesus this same question after His resurrection. He told them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:7; cf. Matt 24:36). Thus the answer to this question is—no one knows when Jesus will return. Since it is not for us to know, we should not be caught up in trying to figure out the date of Christ’s return. Those who claim to know when Jesus will return are wrong. You should not listen to them or believe them.

6) Why has Jesus waited so long to return?

- A) The apostle Peter said, “Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:8–9 NIV).
- B) Peter’s point is that we should not be worried or discouraged by the fact that Jesus has waited so long to return (more than 2,000 years so far). The Father knows the right time for His Son to return and is waiting patiently, not wanting anyone to perish. We should imitate His example and work as hard as we can to achieve His desire for “all people to be saved” (1 Tim 2:1–4).

7) How then should we live?

- A) Charles Dyer once said, “God gave prophecy to change our hearts, not to fill our heads with knowledge. God never predicted future events just to satisfy our curiosity about the future. Every time God announces events that are future, He includes with His predictions practical applications to life. God’s pronouncements about the future carry with them specific advice for the ‘here and now.’”⁸
- B) The apostle Peter tells us that our knowledge of the Second Coming should affect the way we live (2 Pet 3:10–18):
- We should live holy and godly lives (v. 11).
 - We should wait patiently (v. 12).
 - We should hasten Jesus’ coming by working to save the lost (v. 12).
 - We should be diligent to live peaceful lives that are pure and blameless (v.14).
 - We should understand that God’s patience is for our salvation (v. 15).
 - We should be on guard so that we are not led astray by error (v.17).
 - We should grow in grace and in the knowledge of God (v.18).

⁸ Hitchcock, *The End*, p. 12.

The Rapture of the Saints

1) What is the Rapture?

A) The Rapture is the first phase of the Second Coming in which Christ will come in the air for His church. There are three main passages¹ on the Rapture in the New Testament:

- (1) “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1–3).
- (2) “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:13–18).
- (3) “Behold! I tell you a mystery.² We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’” (1 Cor 15:51–55).

B) These passages teach us the following:

- (1) The Rapture is a truth that comes directly from Jesus: “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord” (1 Thess 4:15a). This means that Paul received a special revelation from Christ Himself concerning this event (cf. Acts 9:1–6; 18:9–10; Gal 1:11–12; 2 Cor 12:2–4).

¹ Note that I do not include Matthew 24:40–41. The context of these verses is the physical return of Christ to earth (the Return), not the Rapture. Thus the idea of “taken” is in reference to judgment and corresponds to “swept away” in v. 39 (cf. Luke 17:34–37 as a clarification on this same topic). For more detail, see Larry D. Pettegrew, “Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse,” *TMSJ* 13.2 (Fall 2002): 187–188.

² Paul calls the Rapture a “mystery” (1 Cor 15:51). In NT terminology, a “mystery” is something that was not revealed in the OT and cannot be known apart from special revelation (cf. Eph 3:1–10; Col 1:26–27).

- (2) At the Rapture, Jesus will descend from heaven to the air (i.e., the sky). He will come with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (1 Thess 4:16).
- (a) First, the bodies of believers who have died will be resurrected as new spiritual bodies and reunited with their spirits (1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:42, 52; cf. 2 Cor 5:6–8; Phil 1:21–24).
- (b) Next, the bodies of believers who are still alive will be changed into new spiritual bodies. They will never have to experience physical death (1 Cor 15:52).
- (c) Then, all believers will be taken up (lit. “to seize, to catch up”³) into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17).
- (3) Jesus revealed the mystery of the Rapture so we would have comfort and hope in the midst of grief. We have the knowledge that our loved ones who die in Christ are merely “asleep,” waiting for the call of their Savior (1 Thess 4:13, 18).

2) Is there a difference between the Rapture and the return of Christ to earth?

- A) When we examine the scriptures that speak of Christ’s Second Coming, it is apparent that the Second Coming consists of two events: the Rapture and the Return. When we compare the main Rapture passages (John 14:1–3; 1 Thess 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:51–55)⁴ with the main Return passages (Rev 19:11–20:6; Matt 24:26–31; Zech 12–14; Joel 3),⁵ it becomes clear that these two events are separate and distinct. Specifically, we observe the following differences:⁶
- (1) At the Rapture, Christ comes *for* His own and calls them to be with Him (John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:17; 2 Thess 2:1). At the Return, Christ comes *with* His own and they join Him in the fight against the Antichrist (1 Thess 3:13; Jude 1:14; Rev 19:14; Mal 4:1–3).
- (2) At the Rapture, the saints meet Christ in the *air* (1 Thess 4:17). At the Return, the saints come with Christ to the *earth* (Jude 1:14; Rev 19:14; Zech 14:4).

³ The word “rapture” comes from the Latin Vulgate of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 in which the Greek word *harpagesometha* (“to seize, to catch up”) is translated as “rapiémur” (from *rápere* meaning “to grab, to carry off”). The Latin *rápere* eventually became the English *rapture*.

⁴ Other passages that refer to the Rapture include: Rom 8:19; 1 Cor 16:22; Phil 3:20–21; Col 3:4; 1 Thess 1:10; 2:19–20; 5:9, 23; 2 Thess 2:1; 1 Tim 6:14; Tit 2:13; Heb 9:28; Jam 5:7–9; 1 Pet 1:7, 13; 1 John 2:28–3:2; Jude 21; Rev 2:25; 3:10.

⁵ Other passages that refer to the Return include: Dan 2:44–45; 7:9–14; 12:1–3; Matt 24:32–41; Mark 13:24–32; 14:62; Luke 21:25–33; Acts 1:9–11; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:6–10; 2:8; 2 Pet 3:1–14; Jude 14–15; Rev 1:7; 22:12.

⁶ Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006) pp. 179–181 and Edward E. Hinson, “The Rapture and the Return: Two Aspects of Christ’s Coming,” in Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, editors, *When the Trumpet Sounds* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), pp. 151–162.

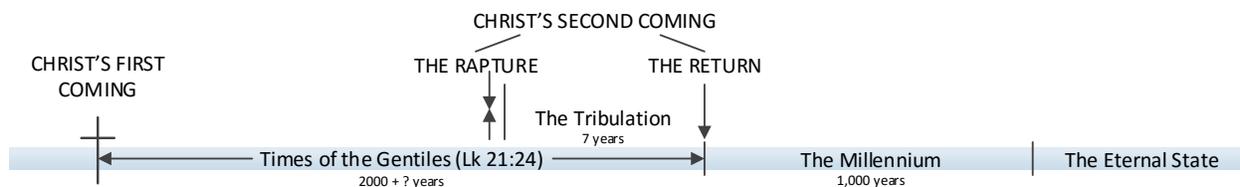
- (3) The Rapture involves the removal of all *believers* from the earth, leaving only unbelievers (1 Thess 4:17). The Return involves the removal of all *unbelievers*, leaving only believers on the earth (Matt 25:31–46; Ezek 20:33–38).
 - (4) At the Rapture, *only the saints* will see Christ (1 Cor 15:51–52). At the Return, *every eye* will see Christ (Matt 24:30; Zech 12:10; Rev 1:7).
 - (5) At the Rapture, the saved are *delivered from wrath* (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10). At the Return, the unsaved *experience the full wrath* of God (Zeph 1:14–18; Rev 6:12–17; 19:11–15). Judgment of sin is not associated with the Rapture, but it is very much a part of the Return.
 - (6) There are no signs for the Rapture. The apostles expected Christ to come for His Bride at any moment, and they told the churches to eagerly await His call (1 Thess 4:13–5:3; Phil 4:5; Jam 5:7–9; Heb 9:28; 1 John 2:18; Tit 2:13). For this reason we say the Rapture is *imminent*—it could happen at any moment. By contrast, the return of Christ to earth will be preceded by many great and terrible signs (Matt 24:4–14; Mark 13:19–26; Luke 21:11).
- B) The differences mentioned above justify the interpretation that the Rapture and the Return are two separate and distinct events. At the Rapture, all believers will be taken from the earth so that God’s wrath can be poured out on the wicked. At the Return, Christ will return to the earth with the saints, crush the armies of the Antichrist, and establish His earthly kingdom.

3) Is there an interval of time between the Rapture and the Return?

- A) Scripture indicates that the Rapture and the Return will be separated by an interval of time known as the Tribulation:
- (1) Christ told His disciples that a period of tribulation would come upon the world prior to His return (cf. Matt 24:15–25). This time of judgment and distress is called “the Day of the Lord” in the Old Testament (cf. Isa 13:9–16; Joel 2:1–11; 3:1–21; Zeph 1:14–18; Mal 4:1–6). The prophet Daniel was told by the angel Gabriel that this distress would last for “one week” (a week of years, or seven years; cf. Dan 9:24–27). In Revelation, we learn that the seven years will be divided into two periods of 3½ years (“a time, and times, and half a time;” Rev 11:2–3; 12:6–7, 14; 13:5). The entire seven-year week is referred to as “the Tribulation,” and the last 3½ years of the Tribulation are called “the Great Tribulation” (cf. Matt 24:21; Rev 7:14). The middle of the Tribulation is marked by the appearance of the “abomination of desolation,” an event in which God’s temple is desecrated by the Antichrist (cf. Dan 9:27; Matt 24:15).
 - (2) The Tribulation as a whole, and the last 3½ years in particular, is the time God has appointed to pour out His wrath and judgment on the wicked. It will bring this present age to a close, fulfill the many predictions of Israel’s prophets, and force mankind, especially the Jews, to choose between Christ and the Antichrist.
 - (3) Jesus told the church in Philadelphia that he would keep them “from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (Rev 3:10). Paul told the Thessalonians that Jesus would deliver “us from the wrath to

come” and that “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). Peter said that Noah and Lot are examples of the fact that “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment” (2 Pet 2:1–9). These Scriptures indicate that God does not intend believers to experience either the outpouring of His wrath in the Tribulation (which is intended specifically for the wicked; cf. Rev 6:16–17; 15:1, 7; 16:1–2; 19:15) or His final and eternal wrath in the lake of fire (cf. Rev 14:10).

- (a) Clearly, some of the wicked will repent during the Tribulation (Rev 7:9–17) and they *will* experience some of the wrath of God. But Jesus specifically states that the days of the “great tribulation” will be shortened for “the sake of the elect” (a direct reference to Tribulation saints; Matt 24:21–22). So even here we see God’s desire for believers to escape the wrath that He pours out on the wicked.
- (4) Since the church is *not* meant to endure the outpouring of God’s wrath on the wicked, it follows that the Rapture will occur prior to the Tribulation. Once the Tribulation is over, Jesus will return to the earth with His saints. Thus there is an interval of time between the Rapture and the Return, i.e., the Tribulation.



- (a) The “Pre-Tribulation Rapture” position holds that the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation period begins. This is my personal position.⁷
- (b) The “Mid-Tribulation Rapture” position holds that the Rapture will occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation (just before the 3½ years known as the Great Tribulation).
- (c) The “Pre-wrath Rapture” position holds that the Rapture will occur about ¾ of the way through the Tribulation, when the wrath of God begins to be poured out on the earth at the opening of the sixth seal (Rev 6:12–17).⁸

4) Will people be saved after the Rapture (during the Tribulation)?

- A) Yes, people will be saved after the Rapture. Revelation reveals that the gospel will be preached during the Tribulation (see Rev 11:3–13; 14:6–7) and vast numbers of people will be converted (see Rev 7:9–17; 14:1–4; 20:4; Joel 2:31–32). At the Return, these believers will be ushered into the millennial kingdom of Christ and they will repopulate the earth (cf. Isa 65:20–25; Luke 20:34–36). They will live unusually long lives and be resurrected after the Millennium is complete (Rev 20:5).

⁷ For a good explanation and defense of this position, see Richard L. Mayhue “Why a Pretribulation Rapture?” TMSJ 13.2 (Fall 2002): 241–253.

⁸ For a critique of this view see Renald E. Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View: An Examination and Critique* (Kregel Publications, 2001).

- (1) At the Rapture, all believers will be removed from the earth—only the unsaved will remain. Yet when Jesus returns to the earth with His saints, large numbers of believers populate the earth (they are the “sheep” of Matt 25:31–34). How can this be? These “tribulation saints” are believers who are saved during the Tribulation period (after the Rapture but before the Return).

5) How then should we live?

- A) The apostle John told the church: “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.” (1 John 2:18, 24–25).
- B) The Rapture is imminent—all believers must be prepared for it to occur now, without sign or warning. This means that we ought to, as Peter said, “live holy and godly lives, as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Pet 3:11–12 NIV). We should be making every effort “to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Pet 3:14). Let us live each day saying, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).

The Importance of Prophecy

1) Why is it important to study and understand Bible prophecy?

A) Prophecy is a major part of divine revelation.¹

(1) Consider the following statistics on the amount of prophecy² in the Bible:

- Number of verses in the Bible: 31,124.
- Number of predictions in the Old Testament: 1,239.
- Number of OT verses that contain predictions: 6,641 out of 23,210.
- Percent of the OT that is prophecy: 28.5%.
- Number of predictions in the New Testament: 578.
- Number of NT verses that contain predictions: 1,711 out of 7,914.
- Percent of the NT that is prophecy: 21.5%.
- Percent of the whole Bible that is prophecy: 27%.³

(2) Consider these facts concerning Christ's Second Coming (the Return):

- Of the 333 prophecies concerning Christ, only 109 were fulfilled by His first coming. This leaves 224 prophecies that will be fulfilled in His Second Coming.
- There are over 300 references to the Second Coming in the 260 chapters of the New Testament—one out of every 30 verses.
- Twenty-three of the 27 NT books mention the Lord's coming.
- Jesus refers to His Second Coming at least twenty-one times.
- There are 1,527 OT passages that refer to the Second Coming.
- For every time the Bible mentions the first coming, the Second Coming is mentioned eight times.
- People are exhorted to be ready for the return of Jesus Christ over fifty times.⁴

B) Prophecy helps us understand the Bible.

(1) Reading the Bible without understanding prophecy is like trying to put a jigsaw puzzle together without the picture on the front of the box—it's almost impossible. Prophecy reveals God's plan for the future, and that plan provides a framework which helps us understand the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

¹ The main points in this lesson come from Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 3–20. See also Hitchcock's *The Complete Book of Bible Prophecy*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 15–26. Although I have adapted Hitchcock's material to my lesson format, the bulk of the content comes from these two excellent books.

² When I use the word "prophecy" in this lesson, I am referring specifically to the prediction of future events, not the general sense of "telling-forth" God's Word.

³ J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 674–75.

⁴ John MacArthur Jr., *The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Valencia, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1981), 1.

Prophecy tells us about: a) God's decision to redeem mankind from sin, b) the means by which He would accomplish this redemption, c) the people group through which He would save the world—the Jews, d) the future history of the Gentile nations, e) the mystery of the body of Christ—the Church, and f) the coming kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ. “A person without a basic knowledge of prophecy will be lost in many books in the Old Testament” as well as several books in the New Testament.⁵ If we truly desire to understand God's Word, we must spend time studying Bible prophecy.

C) Prophecy points us to Christ.

(1) The first prophecy in the Bible promised a deliverer who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). The last prophecy in the Bible speaks of Christ's Second Coming—“Surely I am coming soon” (Rev 22:20). From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is filled with prophecies that point to the person and work of our Savior. Look at some of the ways Jesus is revealed in prophecy:⁶

- the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).
- the Passover lamb (Exod 12; John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7).
- the star from Jacob (Num 24:17).
- the priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4).
- the prophet foretold by Moses (Deut 18:18).
- the son of David who would be king of Israel (2 Sam 7; Luke 1:32–33).
- Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6).
- “My servant” (Isa 42:1–4).
- a man of sorrows (Isa 53:3).
- the smashing stone (Dan 2:31–35).
- the son of man (Dan 7:13).
- the Anointed One (Dan 9:25–26a).
- the Son who will rule the world (Ps 2).
- “the shepherd” (Zech 13:7).
- the Lord of the Temple (Mal 3:1).
- the resurrection and the life (John 11:25–27).
- the glorified, risen Savior (Rev 1).
- the Lord of the church (Rev 2–3).
- the Lamb of God (Rev 5:6ff).
- the judge of the nations (Rev 6–11).
- the male child who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 12).
- Faithful and True—the coming King (Rev 19).
- the Lord of heaven and earth (Rev 20–22).

D) Prophecy demonstrates the sovereignty of God.

(1) Someone once noticed a sign on the door of a psychic which read, “Closed due to unforeseen circumstances.” Aren't you glad there are no unforeseen

⁵ Hitchcock, *The End*, p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

circumstances with God? He rules sovereignly over the universe. He knows everything (omniscient), is present everywhere (omnipresent), and possesses all power (omnipotent). This enables Him to predict the future with 100% accuracy. Consider what God says about His ability to foretell the future:⁷

- (a) “This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one” (Isa 44:6–8 NIV).
- (b) “Do not forget this! Keep it in mind! Remember this, you guilty ones. Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish” (Isa 46:8–10 NLT).
- (c) “Daniel answered and said: ‘Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him’” (Dan 2:20–22).

E) Prophecy is evidence of the truth of God’s Word.

- (1) The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies which have come to pass exactly as the Bible said. This is evidence that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Here are some examples:⁸
 - (a) King Cyrus of Persia – The prophet Isaiah wrote during the last half of the eighth century BC (during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah). In his writing, Isaiah foretold the rise of a king by the name of ‘Cyrus’ (Isa 44:28–45:6). Isaiah predicted Cyrus’ conquests and his restoration of the Jewish people to Jerusalem some 150 years before Cyrus became king (2 Chr 36:22–23; cf. Ezra 1:1–11).
 - (b) The Fall of Nineveh – Between 663 and 654 BC God told the prophet Nahum that the great city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, would be destroyed. Moreover, God described exactly how the devastation would occur (Nah 1–3). History records that in the year 612 BC all these predictions were fulfilled—the Babylonians and Medes invaded, plundered, and utterly destroyed the powerful city of Nineveh.
 - (c) The Destruction of Tyre – In 587 BC, Ezekiel predicted the destruction of the ancient city of Tyre—first by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek 26:7–11), and then by the Greek king, Alexander the Great (Ezek 26:12–14).

⁷ Ibid., pp. 12–14.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 14–20.

Ezekiel's prophecy was made some 255 years before Alexander marched against Tyre in 332 BC. Alexander destroyed the mainland city and then used stones and timber from the debris to construct a causeway across the water to the island stronghold. This fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy that the very stones, timbers, and dust of the city would be cast "into the water" (Ezek 26:12).

F) Prophecy guards us from heresy.

- (1) From the earliest days of Christianity, the teachings of the church have been twisted by false teachers. Almost every book in the New Testament contains at least one passage that addresses false doctrine (e.g., 2 Cor 10–12; Phil 3; 2 Tim 3; Tit 1). In a few instances, the false teaching that troubled the early church concerned speculation about the last days and the coming of Christ. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul corrected a false teaching that the Day of the LORD had already come. In 2 Peter 3, a group of scoffers took the false teaching in another direction—they mocked the idea that Jesus was coming back at all. An accurate understanding of Bible prophecy protects God's people from those who would misuse it and goes a long way in preventing the spread of false teachings.⁹

G) Prophecy motivates us to live godly lives.

- (1) Prophecy was not given just to satisfy our curiosity or stir our imagination. "God intends for prophecy to change our attitudes and actions so they will be more in line with His Word and His character."¹⁰ Charles Dyer once said, "God gave prophecy to change our hearts, not to fill our heads with knowledge. Every time God announces events that are future, He includes with His predictions practical applications to life. God's pronouncements about the future carry with them specific advice for the 'here and now.'"¹¹
- (2) The apostle Peter tells us that our knowledge of the Second Coming should affect the way we live (2 Pet 3:10–18):
 - We should live holy and godly lives (v. 11).
 - We should wait patiently (v. 12)
 - We should hasten Jesus' coming by working to save the lost (v. 12).
 - We should be diligent to live peaceful lives that are pure and blameless (v.14).
 - We should understand that God's patience is for our salvation (v. 15).
 - We should be on guard so that we are not led astray by error (v.17).
 - We should grow in grace and in the knowledge of God (v.18).

H) Prophecy is an effective tool for evangelism.

- (1) "The first Christian book many unbelievers read is a book about Bible prophecy. God often uses the prospect of the last days and the coming of Christ to awaken people to their need for a Savior. This phenomenon shouldn't surprise us,

⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

¹¹ Charles Dyer, *World News and Bible Prophecy* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1995), p. 270.

because Bible prophecy fascinates everyone—even unbelievers. Most people have the same basic questions about the future: What’s going to happen to the world? Are these the last days of the world as we know it? Is Jesus really coming back? Will the human race survive in the future? Is there life after death? Are heaven and hell real? The Bible answers all these questions, and we should use this knowledge to share Christ with others as God opens the door of opportunity.”¹² Randall Price said: “What good is it to be able to understand the seven heads described in Revelation 13:1 if we don’t use our own head? Of what profit is it to discern the ten toes of Daniel 2:41-44 if we don’t move our own two feet? And what value is it to know about the great mouth that speaks lies (Dan 7:8; Rev 13:5), unless we open our mouth and speak the truth? In every generation where prophecy has been properly proclaimed, the results have been a harvest of souls to the glory of God.”¹³

- I) Prophecy holds a special blessing for those who study and live by what it says.
 - (1) In Revelation 1:3, the Lord pronounced a special blessing on those who study the book of Revelation: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.” Revelation is the only book in the Bible which contains this specific, unique promise. For this reason it has often been called the “Blessing Book.” Jesus urges us to pay attention to what He said and carefully obey what He commanded. Let’s live our lives in the light of prophecy!¹⁴

¹² Hitchcock, *The End*, pp. 9–10.

¹³ Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy: God’s Stage for the Final Drama*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998), p. 50.

¹⁴ Hitchcock, *The End*, p. 5.

Daniel – The Key to Understanding Prophecy

1) Why is Daniel the key to understanding prophecy?

- A) Among the prophetic books of Scripture (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Revelation), none provides a more comprehensive and chronological overview of the future of the world than the book of Daniel.¹
- B) Consider the following list of important predictions from the book of Daniel:²
- The successive rule of four great world empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (chapters 2 and 7).
 - The appearance of the Messiah some 483 years after the decree was given to rebuild Jerusalem (9:25). This prophecy was fulfilled when Christ rode into Jerusalem at the Triumphal Entry.
 - The violent death of the Messiah (9:26).
 - The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (9:26).
 - The reuniting of the Roman Empire in the last days under the rule of ten kings or leaders (2:41–44; 7:24).
 - The rise of the Antichrist to power (7:8, 20; 8:23).
 - The Antichrist’s military conquests (11:38–44).
 - The beginning of the Tribulation—the Antichrist’s seven-year covenant with Israel (9:27).
 - The Antichrist’s breaking of the covenant at its midpoint (9:27).
 - The Antichrist’s claim that he is God (11:36).
 - The Antichrist’s persecution of God’s people (7:21).
 - The setting up of the “abomination of desolation” in the last days’ Temple by the Antichrist (9:27; 12:11).
 - The final doom of the Antichrist (7:11, 26; 9:27).
 - The second coming of Christ (2:44–45; 7:13).
 - The resurrection of the dead (12:2).
 - The rewarding of the righteous (12:3, 13).
 - The judgment of the wicked (7:9; 12:2).
 - The establishment of Christ’s Kingdom (2:44–45; 7:14, 22, 27).

2) Who was Daniel?

- A) Daniel (“God is my judge”) was a Jew who lived around 600 years before the birth of Jesus. He was a descendant of one of Judah’s prominent families and may have been of royal blood (cf. Dan 1:3). His contemporary, Ezekiel, recorded that God considered him to be one of the godliest men who ever lived (Ezek 14:14, 20).
- B) Daniel was born into a world that was dominated by the Babylonian Empire. In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, the reigning monarch of Babylon, marched on Judah and besieged Jerusalem. Several months later, Jerusalem fell, and young Daniel (probably

¹ John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1971), p. 8.

² Sourced from Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), pp. 71–72.

between 14 and 17 years old) was deported to Babylon in February of 604 BC.

- C) Daniel spent the rest of his life in exile in Babylon (modern Iraq). He lived into his late eighties (through the entire 70 year captivity), and witnessed the decline and fall of the Babylonian Empire, as well as the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire. God blessed Daniel, and he rose in power until he was second only to Nebuchadnezzar himself. God also revealed the future of the world to Daniel, from the Babylonian Empire all the way to the millennial Kingdom of Christ.



3) What are the three key prophetic sections of Daniel?

A) Daniel 2—Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Great Statue.

- (1) The second chapter of Daniel records a dream that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar. In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a statue of a man. It was large and exceedingly bright, and its appearance was frightening. It was made out of four different metals. As he watched, a stone came and struck the statue on its feet and shattered them. Then the entire statue collapsed into dust and blew away, but the stone became a huge mountain filling the whole earth.
- (2) Daniel interpreted the dream for Nebuchadnezzar. He told the king that the four metals represented four different empires that would rule the known world, one

after the other.³

Part of the Statue	Empire	Reference
Head of gold	Babylon	Dan 2:32a, 37–38
Chest and arms of silver	Medo-Persia	Dan 2:32b, 39a
Belly and thighs of bronze	Greece	Dan 2:32c, 39b
Legs of iron	Rome	Dan 2:33a, 40
Feet and toes of iron and clay	Rome II ⁴	Dan 2:33b, 41–43

- (3) The stone that destroyed the statue represented Christ at His Second Coming. When Jesus returns to earth with His saints, He will defeat the Antichrist and all those opposed to His rule (Rev 19:11–21). The mountain that filled the earth represented Christ’s worldwide kingdom. It will put an end to the empires of men and will last forever.

B) Daniel 7–Daniel’s Night Vision of the Four Beasts.⁵

- (1) The seventh chapter of Daniel records a night vision that God gave to Daniel. In the vision, Daniel saw four great beasts coming up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, the second was like a bear, and the third was like a leopard. Each beast lost its dominion to the next, “but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time” (Dan 7:12).⁶
- (2) The fourth and last beast was “terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong” (Dan 7:7). It was different from the other beasts, and it had ten horns. As Daniel watched, a little horn came up among the others. It pulled three of the ten horns out by the roots, and took their place. It had eyes like a man and a mouth speaking great things, and it made war with the saints and prevailed over them (Dan 7:8, 21).
- (3) Then Daniel saw a heavenly courtroom. It was presided over by the “Ancient of Days” (God the Father). The books were opened and judgment was pronounced. The court decreed that the little horn should be destroyed and its dominion given to another. “And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a

³ Daniel states that these four empires would rule the world, but this does not mean they controlled the entire surface of the earth. For example, the third empire, Greece, was said to “rule over all the earth” (Dan 2:39), yet we know its sphere of influence was not actually global in scope. Rather, these empires ruled the civilized world of Daniel’s time: parts of Europe, Asia Minor and the Middle East.

⁴ The final stage of the Roman empire—the feet and toes of iron and clay—has not yet arisen. Therefore, I have designated it as “Rome II.”

⁵ The events in Daniel’s vision are recorded in mostly chronological order. However, there are certain statements that, for narrative effect, are out of sequence (e.g., Dan 7:11–12). I have placed these events in proper order in my own description of the vision. See John Niemelä, “Sequence in Daniel 7:1–28,” Online: <http://pre-trib.org/articles>.

⁶ The dominance of each empire ceased when it was conquered, but they “were prolonged” in the sense that each was absorbed into the next empire. Rome conquered Greece, but Greece continued to live on as a part of the Roman Empire. In a sense, Rome itself lives on in the fragmented nations of modern times. Sometime before the end, these nations will unite to form the final phase of that empire (Rome II). By contrast, when Christ returns, He will completely destroy Rome II, and it will be replaced by His millennial Kingdom.

son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him” (Dan 7:13; cf. Matt 26:64). The Father gave Him dominion and glory and a kingdom—“his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:14). Then the fourth beast was killed and its body given over to be burned with fire.

- (4) Daniel was anxious and alarmed, and he approached one of those standing near the courtroom and “asked him the truth concerning all this” (Dan 7:16). The unnamed individual (likely an angel), explained that the four beasts represented four different empires that would rule the known world, one after the other.

Beast	Empire	Reference
Lion with eagle wings ⁷	Babylon	Dan 7:4, 17
Bear raised up on one side ⁸	Medo-Persia	Dan 7:5, 17
Leopard with four heads ⁹	Greece	Dan 7:6, 17
Beast with iron teeth	Rome	Dan 7:7–8, 19–26
Ten horns	Rome II	Dan 7:7, 24

- (5) The ten horns of the fourth beast represented ten kings that will arise (they will unite to form the final phase of the Roman Empire—Rome II). The little horn represented a king that will come up after them. He will be different from the others and will put down three of the ten kings. He is called, among other names, the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:3), the “Antichrist” (1 John 2:18), and the “beast” (Rev 13:1ff.). He will blaspheme God and oppress the saints for 3½ years (the last half of the Tribulation). Then the heavenly court will sit in judgment, and his dominion will be taken away and given to Christ (the son of man). Christ will return to earth with His saints, defeat the Antichrist, and establish His everlasting Kingdom (Dan 7:25–27).

C) Daniel 9—Gabriel’s Revelation of Israel’s Seventy Weeks.

- (1) The ninth chapter of Daniel, which took place in the first year of Darius, records Daniel’s realization (through a study of Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10) that the Jews’ seventy-year exile in Babylon was drawing to a close.¹⁰ This prompted him to turn to the Lord in prayer. He clothed himself with sackcloth, put ashes in his hair and observed a fast. He humbled himself and offered a confession of Israel’s

⁷ The lion is the king of beasts, and the eagle is the king of birds. Most scholars understand the beast’s human heart as a reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s experience in Daniel 4.

⁸ The bear is raised on one side to show the one-sided union of the Persian and Median Empires—Persia was greater and more powerful, and had absorbed the Medes (cf. Dan 8:3). The three ribs in its mouth may represent Medo-Persia’s three major conquests: Babylon (539 BC), Lydia (546 BC), and Egypt (525 BC).

⁹ The leopard’s four wings may signify the speed with which Greece conquered the world (within 10 years), and the four heads likely represent Greece’s eventual split into four kingdoms (cf. Dan 8:8): Greece/Macedonia (Antipater), Thrace/Asia Minor (Lysimachus), Syria/Babylon (Seleucus I Nicator), and Egypt/Palestine (Ptolemy I Soter).

¹⁰ Darius was also known as Cyrus the Great. His first year was 538n BC. There are two ways in which Jeremiah’s prophecy was fulfilled: (1) from the first deportation in 605 BC to the beginning of temple reconstruction in 536 BC, (2) from the destruction of the temple in 587 BC to the completion of the temple in 515 BC.

- sin, asking God for mercy, forgiveness and restoration. While Daniel was still praying, the angel Gabriel appeared and said, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding” (Dan 9:22).
- (2) Gabriel told Daniel that seventy ‘weeks’ had been determined “for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place” (Dan 9:24).
- (a) Gabriel’s prophecy concerned the Jews and the city of Jerusalem. This sets it apart from Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 where the focus was on the future world empires of the Gentiles.
- (b) The word ‘weeks’ signifies a set of seven years, thus seventy ‘weeks’ = 70×7 years = 490 years.¹¹
- (c) The six divine goals for Israel have been interpreted in a variety of ways, but it seems best to understand them as signifying the complete scope of God’s dealings with His chosen people, from the post-exile period all the way to the beginning of the Millennium.
- (3) Gabriel said the 490 years would begin with “the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” From that time to “the coming of an anointed one, a prince” there would be seven ‘weeks’ and sixty-two ‘weeks’ (Dan 9:25).
- (a) The decree to rebuild Jerusalem was the fourth of four decrees¹² made by Persian rulers in reference to the Jews. It was made by Artaxerxes in Nisan 444 BC and gave the Jews permission to rebuild Jerusalem’s city walls.¹³
- (b) The phrase “an anointed one, a prince” refers to the Messiah.¹⁴ A total of seven ‘weeks’ (7×7 years = 49 years) and sixty-two ‘weeks’ (62×7 years = 434 years) would elapse between the decree and the coming of Christ ($49 + 434 =$

¹¹ Years is the best interpretation of ‘weeks’ (lit. ‘seven’) since 490 days, weeks or months all lead to chronological dead ends. It is important to note that the ‘weeks’ are not said to be *consecutive*. Gabriel merely states that the time involved to complete the six goals mentioned in Daniel 9:24 would be a *total* of 490 years. This means that it is possible for there to be gaps of time between the ‘weeks.’ Daniel 9:25–27 give more detail on the grouping of the ‘weeks,’ but the consecutive nature of some of the ‘weeks’ does not mean that every ‘week’ is consecutive.

¹² The four decrees are as follows: 1) the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC (2 Chr 36:20b–23; Ezra 1:1–4), 2) the decree of Darius in c. 519 BC (Ezra 6:1–12), 3) the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra in 457 BC (Ezra 7:11–26), and 4) the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in Nisan 444 BC (Neh 2:1–8; note that Tishri-based years were used for Artaxerxes’ reign).

¹³ This decree is favored by dispensational evangelicals (e.g., Walvoord, Hitchcock, Showers, Anderson, Pentecost, Newman, and Ice). The reason for this is that the first three decrees did not permit the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s defenses (i.e., the wall and moat; cf. Ezra 4). For a thorough treatment of this issue, see Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 115–139.

¹⁴ Walvoord, *Daniel*, p. 229. This is the view of the majority of conservative scholars.

483 years).¹⁵

- (i) The first 49 years is likely a reference to the time it took to rebuild Jerusalem. Nehemiah's wall construction project only took 52 days (Neh 6:15), but many more years would have been needed to restore Jerusalem to her former glory. Once Jerusalem was rebuilt, another 434 years would pass until Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem in AD 33.
- (4) Gabriel then told Daniel that after the sixty-two 'weeks' had passed, the "Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed" (Dan 9:26 NIV).
- (a) The "Anointed One" being cut off and having nothing is a reference to Jesus' death. Christ rose from the dead, but His earthly kingdom has not yet been established. He is even now sitting at the right hand of the Father, waiting for His enemies to be put under His feet (Ps 110).
 - (b) The "ruler who will come" refers to the Antichrist, the little horn of Daniel 7:8. His people, that is, the Romans, "will destroy the city and the sanctuary." This was fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Note that this event is said to occur "after the sixty-two weeks." This indicates that there is a gap of time between the sixty-two 'weeks' and the final 'week' (cf. Dan 9:26).
- (5) Gabriel's revelation concluded with a description of the final 'week': "He will make a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering. And the abomination of desolation will be on a wing of the temple until the decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator" (Dan 9:27 HCSB).
- (a) The "he" refers back to the Antichrist—the "ruler who will come" (Dan 9:26). The Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for one 'week' (7 years). This final 'week' is commonly called the "Tribulation," and the last half of the 'week' (3½ years) is called the "Great Tribulation" (cf. Matt 24:21; Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 11:3).¹⁶

¹⁵ Given a 360-day year (which is used in this context; cf. Dan 12:11–12), 483 years is $483 \times 360 = 173,880$ days. Are there 173,880 days between the decree in Nisan 444 BC and Christ's triumphal entry on March 29, AD 33? The Julian date for the triumphal entry is 1733198.5. If we subtract 173,880 days from this date, we get a Julian date of 1559318.5. This date is March 8, 444 BC, the same month and year of Artaxerxes' decree (cf. Neh 2:1)! This is an amazing confirmation of the prophetic chronology of Daniel 9. Note: Julian date conversions may be calculated here: <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEhelp/julian.html>.

¹⁶ There are 1,260 days in 3½ years (42 months \times 30 days/month = 1,260 days)—so what are we to make of the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11 and the 1,335 days of Daniel 12:12? I understand these to also be references to the last 3½ years of the Tribulation (the "great tribulation")—the extra 30 and 75 days will most likely taken up with the judgments and other events that immediately follow the Second Coming (e.g., Matt 25:31–46).

- (b) At the mid-point of the last ‘week,’ the Antichrist will reveal his true nature to the Jews. He will put a stop to the daily sacrifices and offerings, and he will erect an “abomination of desolation” (an idol) within the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. Dan 11:31; 12:11; Matt 24:15).
- (i) The Antichrist’s treachery at the mid-point of the Tribulation will not be the first desecration of the Temple. Daniel also predicted that a desecration would occur *prior* to the end times (Dan 11:31).¹⁷ This prophecy was fulfilled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 168 BC, and his actions serve as a type for the Antichrist’s future desecration of the Tribulation Temple.
- (1) On December 16, 168 BC, “Antiochus ordered his general, Apollonius, and a contingent of 22,000 soldiers, into Jerusalem on what he claimed was a peaceful mission. However, when they were inside the city, they attacked the Jews on a Sabbath, when the people were resting. Apollonius killed many Jews, took women and children captive as slaves, plundered the temple, and burned the city. Antiochus’ objective was to exterminate Judaism and to Hellenize Palestine. Consequently he prohibited the Jews from following the Mosaic Law and did away with the Jewish sacrifices, festivals, and circumcision (1 Macc 1:44–54). He even burned copies of their law.”¹⁸
- (2) As a final measure, he installed an image of Zeus, the Greek god, in the temple and erected an altar to Zeus on the altar of burnt offerings (cf. 2 Macc 6:2). Then Antiochus sacrificed a pig, an unclean animal, on the altar, and ordered the Jews to sacrifice swine’s flesh on the altar. The Jews referred to this act as “the abomination that caused desolation” (cf. Dan 12:11; Matt 24:15), since it polluted their altar and made offering sacrifices to Yahweh on it impossible.¹⁹
- (ii) Many years later, when Jesus was giving His “Olivet Discourse,” He cited the Greek translation of Daniel 12:11 (LXX) as the sign of the beginning of the “great tribulation”—the last 3½ years of the Tribulation. Thus Antiochus’ actions (Dan 11:31) are a preview of atrocities that will someday befall the Jews (Dan 9:27; 12:11).²⁰
- (c) The Antichrist will continue to have his wicked way in the world until the destruction that is decreed for him is poured out (cf. Rev 19:11–21).

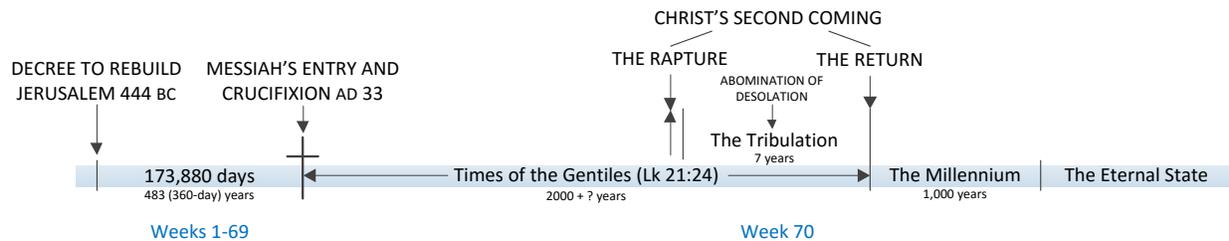
¹⁷ Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Daniel,” (2014 Edition), p. 133. Online: <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/daniel.pdf>.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 139–140.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 140.

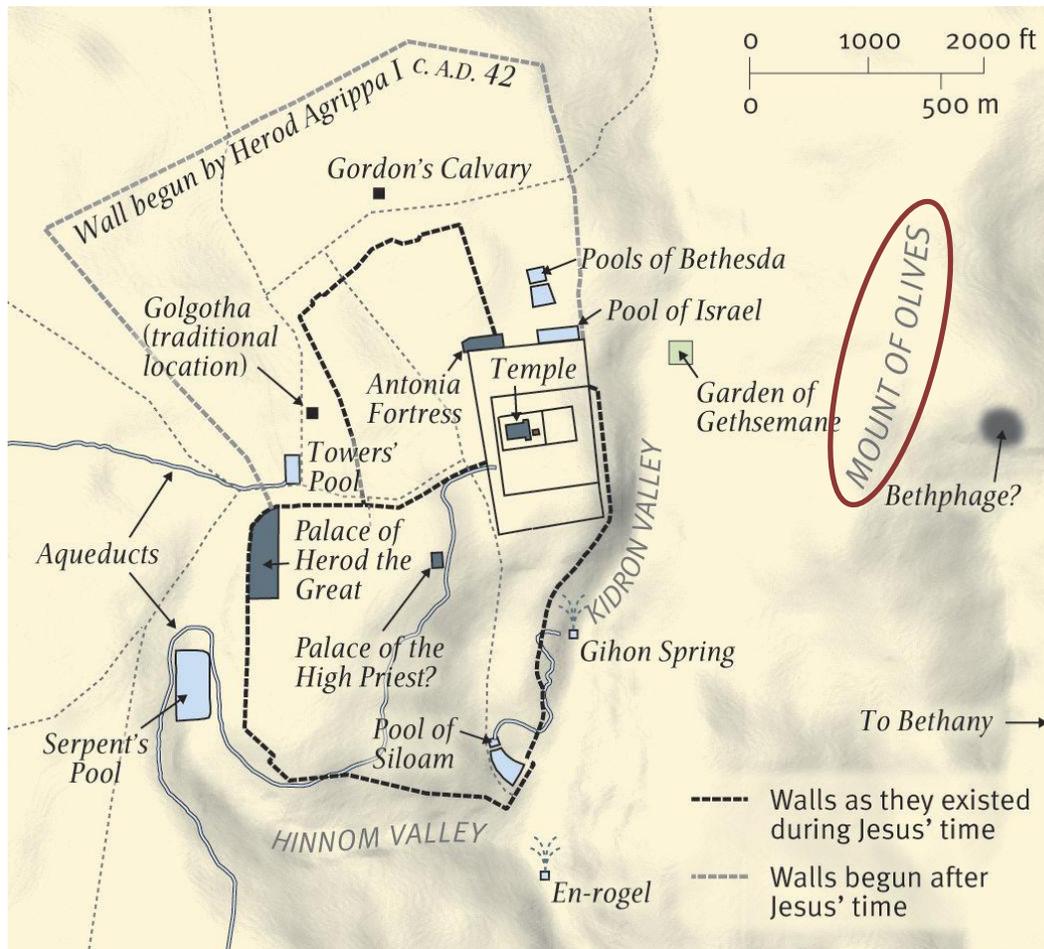
- (6) In conclusion, Daniel 9 is a comprehensive overview of Israel's history from the time of Nehemiah in 444 BC, until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The events that are revealed take place over a total of 490 years (70 'weeks').
- In the first period of seven 'weeks' (49 years), the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt (9:25).
 - In the second period of sixty-two 'weeks' (434 years) which followed, the Messiah appeared and made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (9:25).
 - In the gap between the sixty-ninth 'week' and the seventieth 'week,' two major events took place: the cutting off of the Messiah (the death of Christ) and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (9:26).
 - The final 'week' (the 70th 'week') will begin with the introduction of a covenant between the Antichrist and the Jews. This covenant will be observed for the first half of the 70th 'week' (3½ years). At the mid-point of the 70th 'week,' the Antichrist will reveal himself and desecrate the Tribulation Temple. This will signify that Israel has begun a time of "great tribulation" (9:27).
 - The culmination of the prophecy of the 70 'weeks' is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. His return marks the end of Israel's 490 years, as well as the end of the world empires of the Gentiles foretold in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. For most of the intervening period, the two great lines of prophecy relating to the Gentiles and to Israel have/will run concurrently, and both will end with the same climactic event—the return of Jesus Christ.



The Olivet Discourse

1) What is the Olivet Discourse?

- A) The “Olivet Discourse” is the name given to a private conversation Jesus had with His disciples (Peter, James, John and Andrew) three days before He died on the cross. It took place on the Mount of Olives, a mountain ridge covered with olive trees that runs along the eastern side of Jerusalem.



- B) In this conversation, Jesus gave a sweeping overview of the future from the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 to His own return at the end of the Tribulation. Jesus concluded by urging His disciples to “stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (Matt 24:42). Jesus’ point is clear—prophecy is designed to change our hearts, not simply fill our heads with facts about the future. The Son of Man is coming back to judge sinners and reward the faithful. We must be ready for His return!

2) Outline and Content of the Olivet Discourse.

A) Historical Setting.

Matthew 24:1-2	Mark 13:1-2	Luke 21:5-6
<p>1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.</p> <p>2 But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."</p>	<p>1 And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"</p> <p>2 And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."</p>	<p>5 And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said,</p> <p>6 "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."</p>

- (1) As Jesus left the Temple complex, His disciples marveled over its grandeur. The beautiful buildings were the result of a renovation project begun by Herod the Great in 20 BC. He rebuilt the second Temple from the foundations up, doubled the size of the Temple Mount and added impressive new structures—the Antonia Fortress to the north and the Royal Stoa to the south. At that time, construction had been underway for over 50 years, and it would continue for another 34 years until the Jewish revolt in AD 64.



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- (2) The stones which impressed the disciples were indeed magnificent, and some of them are still visible in the retaining walls today. These "Herodian Stones" are huge, each measuring ten to twelve feet in length and weighing many tons. One foundation stone discovered in the western retaining wall measures 45 feet long by 11 feet high by 15 feet wide. It weighs nearly 600 tons.
- (3) To the amazement of His disciples, Jesus responded by predicting the destruction of the Temple: "there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Matt 24:2). This was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and set the Temple on fire. There were large quantities of gold in the Temple, and much of it melted and seeped into the crevices between the stones. When the ruins cooled down, the Romans systematically removed everything, stone by stone, in order to get to the gold that had solidified inside the crevices (the picture below shows some of the

rubble the Romans left behind in the street along the western side of the Temple Mount).



B) Three Questions.

Matthew 24:3	Mark 13:3-4	Luke 21:7
3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"	3 And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"	7 And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

(1) The thought of the Temple being destroyed was very disturbing to Jesus' disciples. They couldn't imagine such a thing happening apart from the end of the age and the coming of the Messiah in judgment (cf. Zech 12-14). Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Jesus privately when His prediction would come to pass. They asked three questions which, at the same time, included requests for three signs. These questions were:

- Q1—"When will Jerusalem and the Temple be destroyed, and what will be the sign that it is about to occur?"

- Q2–“What will be the sign of your coming?”
- Q3–“What will be the sign of the end of the age?”

(2) Jesus answered all their questions, but not in the same order as they were asked. Instead, He answered Q3 first, Q1 second, and Q2 last. Matthew, Mark and Luke record the answers to Q2 and Q3, while only Luke records the answer to Q1.

C) General Characteristics of the Present Age (Q3 answered negatively).

Matthew 24:4-6	Mark 13:5-7	Luke 21:8-9
4 And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.	5 And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. 6 Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. 7 And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.	8 And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. 9 And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

(1) As He began to answer His disciples’ questions, Jesus wanted to make sure they would not be led astray, and so He answered Q3 negatively, that is, He told them about events that were not signs of the end of the age: the rise of false messiahs and the scourge of local wars. Jesus said, “these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once” (Luke 21:9b).

D) Signs of the End of the Age—Events Prior to the Tribulation (Q3 answered positively).

Matthew 24:7-8	Mark 13:8	Luke 21:10-11
7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.	8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.	10 Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

(1) Jesus now answered Q3 positively, telling His disciples about the events that would be the sign of the end of the age:

(a) “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”—the wording here echoes Isaiah 19:1-2 and 2 Chronicles 15:5-6 where it is used to indicate that a particular region was completely engrossed in conflict. The context suggests that this particular conflict will be global in scope (cf. Matt 24:14).

- (b) “Earthquakes, famines, pestilences”—all these have occurred regularly since the Flood, but they will intensify as the end approaches.
- (c) “Terrors and great signs from heaven”—the appearance of comets in the sky has long been a source of fear, and as the age draws to a close, these will no doubt increase in frequency. Meteorite strikes may also increase—the impact from these celestial stones can be many times more powerful than an atomic bomb.
- (2) Jesus said that these events “are but the beginning of the birth pains” (Mark 13:8). The phrase “birth pains” echoes Jeremiah 30:6–7 where the prophet speaks of the travail that will accompany the great “Day of the LORD” (cf. Jer 30:3, 7, 24). Since the ‘Day’ in “Day of the LORD” does not refer to an actual 24-hour day, but rather to a definite period of time, Jesus qualified His statement by saying that these signs are merely the “beginning” of that Day—they signify that it is about to begin.¹

E) Interruption—The Personal Experience of Jesus’ Disciples (leading up to Q1).

Mark 13:9–13	Luke 21:12–19
<p>9 “But be on your guard. For they will</p> <p>deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.</p> <p>10 And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.</p> <p>11 And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour,</p> <p>for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>12 And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.</p> <p>13 And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.</p> <p>But the one who endures to the end will be saved.</p>	<p>12 But before all this</p> <p>they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake.</p> <p>13 This will be your opportunity to bear witness.</p> <p>14 Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.</p> <p>16 You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.</p> <p>17 You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.</p>

¹ There is debate about whether Matthew 24:4–14 refers to the time leading up to the Tribulation or to the first half of the Tribulation itself (or both). Personally, I take Luke’s divisional break in 21:10 (“Then he said to them”) as an indication that Jesus had transitioned from speaking about the general characteristics of the current age (Matt 24:4–6) to the signs that herald the beginning of the Tribulation. Thus Matthew 24:7–8 are events which take place *just before* the beginning of the Tribulation, and Matthew 24:9–14 are events which take place *in the first half* of the Tribulation itself. For a summary of this debate, see J. B. Hixson, “The Olivet Discourse in the History of Dispensational Thought,” (Unpublished paper, Ph.D. Studies, Baptist Bible Seminary, August 2003).

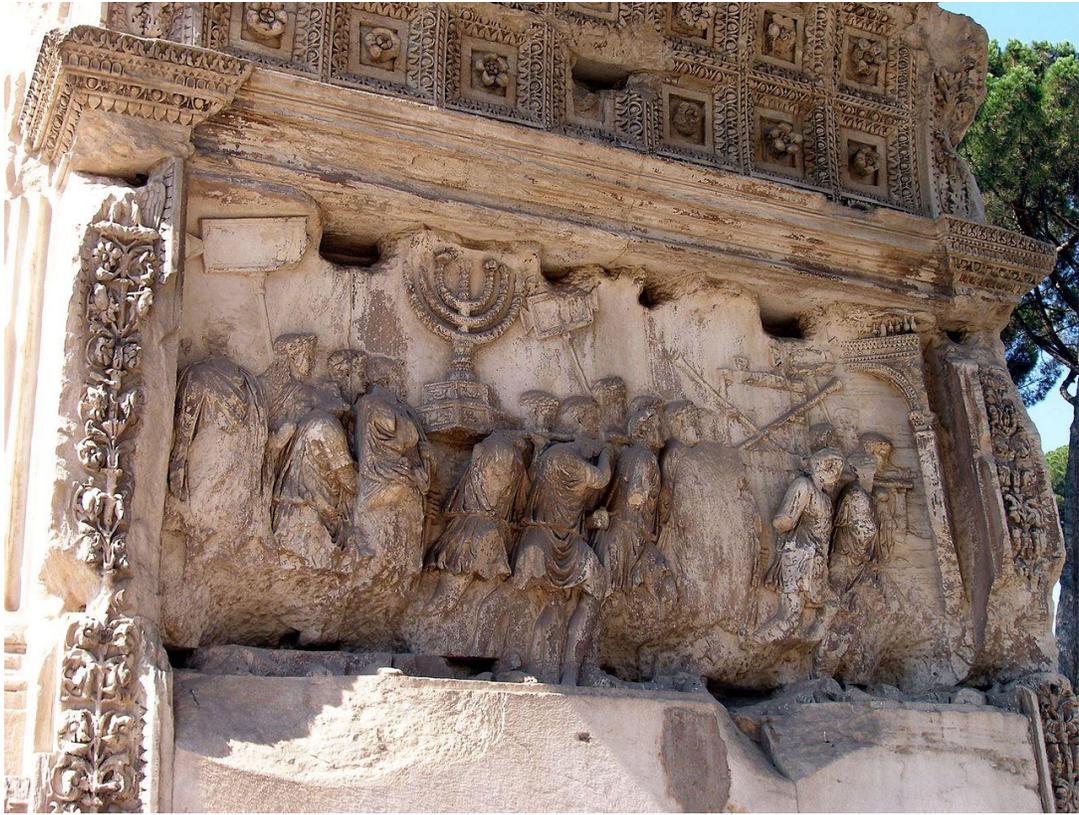
- (1) In the middle of His answer of Q3, Jesus paused and turned the clock back to the present day: “But before all this” (Luke 21:12a). He then revealed to His disciples the persecution they would personally experience for the sake of the gospel. He told them not to expect the end of the age to come soon. In fact, Jesus predicted that some of them would be martyred before that time came (Luke 21:16).

F) The Sign of the Fall of Jerusalem (Q1 answered).

Luke 21:20–24
<p>20 “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, 22 for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. 23 Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.</p>

- (1) After telling His disciples that they would suffer for the sake of the gospel, Jesus answered Q1. He told them that the sign of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple would be the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies (Luke 21:20). History/tradition tells us that this prophecy was fulfilled in a remarkable way.²
- (a) In AD 66, the Jews revolted against their oppressors, the Romans. Gaius Cestius Gallus, the Governor of Syria and commander of the 12th Legion, responded by marching his army to Jerusalem and surrounding the city. The surrounding of Jerusalem was the sign that Jesus had given, and the Jewish believers realized that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed. Jesus had commanded them to leave the city when they saw this sign, but it was impossible to do so while the Romans were still outside.
- (b) After a siege of only nine days, Gallus realized that his supply lines were vulnerable to Jewish attack. He didn’t have enough supplies on hand to maintain an extended siege, so he decided to fall back to the coast. During Gallus’ withdrawal, his column was ambushed near Beth Horon and suffered heavy losses. He escaped to Antipatris but not before he lost about 6,000 men and a large amount of war material. For the time being, Jerusalem was no longer surrounded by armies, and so the Jewish believers were able to leave the city. They crossed the Jordan River and set up a new community in the town of Pella. There they waited for Christ’s prophecy to be fulfilled.
- (c) In the year AD 68, Vespasian and his son, Titus, besieged Jerusalem once again, and in the year AD 70, the city fell and the Temple was destroyed. Over a million Jews were killed in the final onslaught, but the Jewish believers who heeded Jesus’ warning were saved (the picture below is from the Arch of Titus—it shows captured Jews being paraded through the streets of Rome during Titus’ victory procession).

² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III.5.3; Epiphanius, *Treatise on Weights and Measures* 15. See also “Pella, Flight to” in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity, 1997).



- (2) Since that time, Jerusalem has indeed been “trampled underfoot by the Gentiles,” and continues to be so to the present day. Jerusalem will not be free of the oppression of Gentile nations until the Messiah returns (Zech 14:11).

G) Signs of the End of the Age—The First Half of the Tribulation (Q3 continued).

Matthew 24:9–14

9 “**Then** they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.
 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.
 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.
 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.
 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved.
 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, **and then the end will come.**

- (1) After interrupting His answer of Q3 to tell the disciples about the sign of Jerusalem’s coming destruction, Jesus continued His discussion of the signs which would herald the end of the age. In Matthew 24:7–8 Jesus spoke of the events which will precede the Tribulation. Now, in Matthew 24:9–14, Jesus described the first half of the Tribulation itself. The events immediately preceding the Tribulation and the events of the first half of the Tribulation form the complete answer to Q3—this entire group of events constitutes the sign of the end of the age.

H) Second Half of the Tribulation (leading up to Q2).

Matthew 24:15-28	Mark 13:14-23
<p>15 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, 18 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 19 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23 Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand. 26 So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. 27 For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.</p>	<p>14 “But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, 16 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 17 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 18 Pray that it may not happen in winter. 19 For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. 20 And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. 21 And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. 23 But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.</p>

- (1) Having given a brief overview of the first half of the Tribulation (Matt 24:9–14), Jesus now connects His prophecy to Daniel’s 70th Week (cf. Dan 12:11 (LXX); also Dan 9:27). As we have seen in the lesson on Daniel, the 70th week of Daniel 9 corresponds to the seven-year Tribulation period. At the mid-point of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will reveal his true nature to the Jews. He will put a stop to the daily sacrifices and offerings, and he will erect an “abomination of desolation” (an idol) within the Tribulation Temple in Jerusalem.
- (2) Jesus told His disciples that the desecration of the Tribulation Temple would be the sign of the beginning of the “great tribulation”—the last 3½ years of the Daniel’s 70th Week. Just as the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies in AD 66 meant that believers should flee to the mountains, so the “abomination of desolation” will mean that everyone should once again flee the city. Thus the events which form the sign of the end of the age culminate in the ‘super-sign’ of the “abomination of desolation.”

(3) Jesus went on to say that the second half of the Tribulation will be terrible—so terrible, in fact, that if the wrath of God was not cut short, everyone (saved and sinner alike) would be killed. “But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short” (Matt 24:22). The “elect” refer to those who will be saved during the Tribulation (cf. Rev 7:9–17).

(4) False christs and prophets will continue to arise, and they will perform signs and wonders. But Christ will not yet appear. He will not return until the very end of the seven-year Tribulation period.

I) Sign of the Second Coming (Q2 answered).

Matthew 24:29–30	Mark 13:24–26	Luke 21:25–28
<p>29 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven,</p> <p>and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</p> <p>30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.</p>	<p>24 “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven,</p> <p>and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.</p> <p>26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.</p>	<p>25 “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars,</p> <p>and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,</p> <p>26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</p> <p>27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.</p> <p>28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”</p>

(1) Jesus now answered Q2—the sign of His coming will begin with the darkening of the sun, the moon and the stars. Then, with the suddenness and brilliance of lightning (Matt 24:27), the heavens will be ablaze with the glory of God—this is “the sign of the Son of Man” (Matt 24:30). Jesus will appear in the sky and everyone on earth will see Him. He will descend to the earth through the clouds and set His feet “on the Mount of Olives” (Zech 14:4). He will defeat the Antichrist and save both Jerusalem and the believing Jews (Zech 12–14; Rev 19:11–21).

(2) At this point in the conversation, Jesus had answered all three questions:

- Q1—“When will Jerusalem and the Temple be destroyed, and what will be the sign that it is about to occur?”

Answer: the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies.

- Q2–“What will be the sign of your coming?”

Answer: the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars, and the brilliant light of the glory of God.

- Q3–“What will be the sign of the end of the age?”

Answer: the events that take place just before the beginning of the Tribulation (Matt 24:7–8) as well as the events that occur during the first half of the Tribulation (Matt 24:9–14). These events culminate with the ‘super-sign’ of the ‘abomination of desolation’ in the Tribulation Temple (Matt 24:15–28).

J) The Gathering of the Elect (after Q2).

Matthew 24:31	Mark 13:27
31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.	27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

- (1) Jesus’ statement about the gathering of the elect by the angels echoes Deuteronomy 30:4 and Ezekiel 11:17. In the OT “to scatter to the four winds”³ or “to regather from the four winds” / “from every country” / “from the extremities of the earth”⁴ are recurring expressions. The first refers to the dispersion of the Jews because of their persistent rebellion against God; the second announces the regathering of the Jews to Israel, and a return of national and spiritual unity. The scope of this gathering is universal, for Mark’s formula “from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” combines two OT expressions which mean “everywhere.”

K) Parable of the Fig Tree (a message for believers in the Tribulation).

Matthew 24:32–35	Mark 13:28–31	Luke 21:29–33
32 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.	28 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.	29 And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³ Jer 9:15; 18:17; Ezek 5:10, 12; 12:14; 17:21; Zech 2:10.

⁴ Deut 30:3–4; Isa 11:12; 27:13; 56:8; Jer 23:3; 29:12; 31:8; Ezek 11:17; 20:34, 41; 28:25; 34:13.

M) Conclusion of the Olivet Discourse (how Jesus' prophecy should affect our lives).

(1) Stay Awake! (Matt 24:43-44; Mark 13:34-37; Luke 21:34-36).

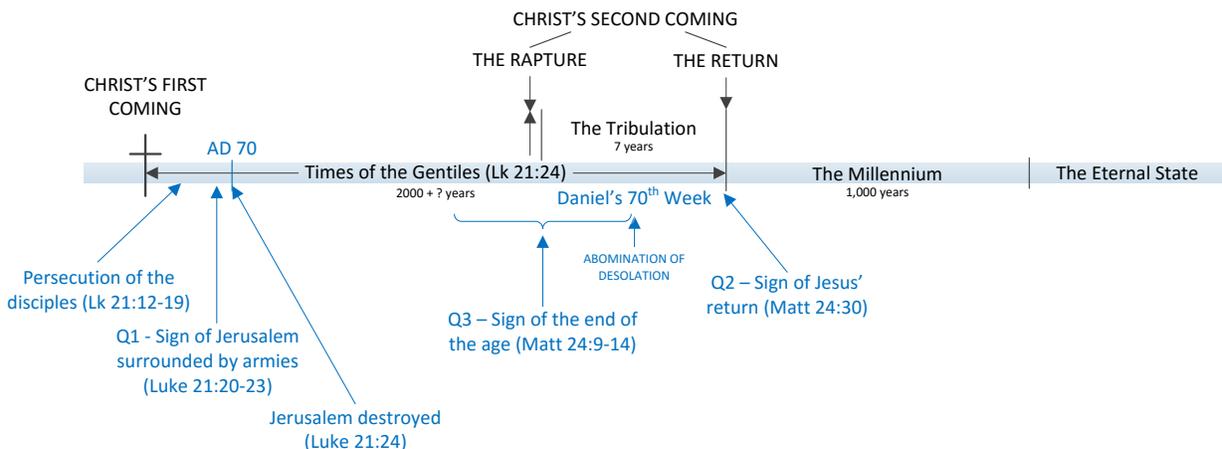
(a) The time before the Rapture of the Church and the beginning of the Tribulation will be a time of dissipation and drunkenness. The cares of this life will cause many to fall into a stupor (Luke 21:34-36). Jesus' message to us is—Stay awake!

(2) Be Faithful! (Matt 24:45-25:30).

(a) The parables of the wise and wicked servants, the wise and foolish virgins, and the servants with the talents are all illustrations of the kind of faithfulness that Jesus expects of His disciples. We are to be faithful while we wait for our Master to return, and we should be working hard to bring others into the kingdom.

(3) Prepare for Judgment! (Matt 25:31-46).

(a) The Olivet Discourse ends with Jesus telling His disciples about the final judgment at the end of the Tribulation. Those who believe will enter into eternal life, and those who do not will enter into eternal punishment. We must prepare ourselves for judgment, for it will surely come to pass. In the meantime, let's be feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger and caring for the sick. When we do, we do these things to Jesus Himself!



Building Godly Character

Humility

1) Why is humility important in the life of a Christian?

A) Humility is essential to successful Christian living. The Bible tells us that God promises to:

- Save the humble (Ps 18:27; 149:4).
- Lead and teach the humble (Ps 25:9).
- Exalt the humble (Ps 147:6).
- Give grace to the humble (Prov 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5).
- Give wisdom to the humble (Prov 11:2).
- Honor the humble (Prov 15:33; 18:12).
- Reward the humble with riches, honor and life (Prov 22:4).
- Dwell with the humble (Isa 57:15).

B) Humility is the proper response when you are in the presence of someone greater than yourself. We should be humble because He is God and we are not. Pride, the opposite of humility, is the first and greatest sin—it is putting yourself in the rightful place of God.

2) What is the biblical definition of humility?

A) The Bible defines humility with respect to your relationship with God, your interaction with others and your opinion of yourself.

(1) Humility in your relationship with God means:

- Submitting your will to God's (James 4:6–7; 2 Chr 7:13–14; 1 Pet 5:5–7).
- Obeying God's commands (Zeph 2:3).
- Repenting of sin and making restitution (Luke 18:9–14; Lev 26:40–42).

(2) Humility in your interaction with others means:

- Submitting to spiritual authority (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5).
- Submitting to fellow believers (Eph 5:21).
- Being a servant (Matt 23:11–12; Phil 2:7).
- Valuing the gifts, talents and abilities of others (Phil 2:3).

(3) Humility in your opinion of yourself means:

- Recognizing that you are only one part of the body of Christ (Rom 12:3–5).
- Evaluating your gifts and abilities objectively (Gal 6:3–5; Rom 12:16).

3) How did Jesus model humility?

A) By Word—Jesus modeled humility in what He taught His disciples:

- Be humble like a little child (Matt 18:1-4).¹
- Be ministers and servants instead of kings and princes (Matt 20:25-28).
- Be servants instead of masters (Matt 23:11-12).
- Be last in order to be first (Mark 9:33-35).
- Be least in order to be greatest (Luke 9:46-48).
- Be lowest in order to be highest (Luke 14:7-11).
- Be humble like the tax collector instead of proud like the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14).

B) By Deed—Jesus modeled humility by the way He lived:

- He submitted to the Father's will (1 John 4:14; Phil 2:5-8).
- He set aside His wealth and privilege for a life of poverty (Phil 2:5-8; 2 Cor 8:9).
- He became a servant (Phil 2:5-8; Matt 20:28).
- He submitted to the authority of His parents (Luke 2:41-51).
- He submitted to the authority of the Holy Spirit (Matt 4:1-2).
- He depended completely on the power and grace of the Holy Spirit (John 5:19, 30).
- He washed His disciples' feet (John 13:3-5, 12-17).
- He obeyed the Father unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:5-8).

4) What are some practical steps I can take to grow in humility?²

- A) Examine your life and confess and forsake any sin (Ps 139:23-24; 1 John 1:9; Prov 28:13). Cultivate the practice of self-examination. A regular evaluation of your attitudes and actions is an essential part of growing in humility.
- B) Acknowledge your sin to other believers (James 5:16). Find a mature believer who is trustworthy and be accountable to them. It will keep you humble and help you resist temptation.
- C) Admit when you are wrong and ask for forgiveness (1 Sam 13:1-14; 2 Sam 10; 24:1-10; Acts 23:1-5). How hard it is to admit when we are wrong! Yet so many hurts and divisions could be prevented if we would humble ourselves and say, "I was wrong, please forgive me."
- D) Submit to authority, both the just and the unjust (1 Pet 2:18). It's easy to submit to the authority of someone who is good and just, but it takes humility to submit to the authority of someone who is harsh and demeaning.

¹ The context is that of rank and position within a kingdom. What rank or status does a child have within a kingdom? None—and that is Jesus' point. "Children are not innocent or selfless, nor do they consistently model humility. Rather, children have no status in society; they are at the mercy of adults" (David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Publishing Group, 2008): pp. 432-33).

² See also Jack Munday, "Twelve Ways to Humble Yourself," Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Online: <http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?articleid=1745>. Cited 9/17/2013.

- E) Receive criticism and correction graciously (Prov 10:17, 12:1). When others criticize you, tell them: “Thank you for caring enough to share that with me. I will make it a matter of prayer.” Look for the kernel of truth in what people say, even if it is hurtful. Ask God to reveal areas in your life that need to be corrected or improved.
- F) Cultivate a teachable spirit (Ps 119:33–37; Prov 16:16; 1 Cor 8:1). A teachable spirit welcomes instruction. Ask yourself, “Am I more inclined to offer my own opinion rather than listening to what others have to say?”
- G) Repay evil with good (1 Peter 3:8–19, 17–18). When you are treated unjustly, the natural response is to retaliate. But responding with kindness to the anger and cruelty of others demonstrates godly character and helps you grow in humility.
- H) Forgive (Eph 4:32; Matt 18:21–35). Forgiveness flows from the recognition that God has forgiven you. The proper response to His mercy is to gladly forgive others. Forgiveness does not exact payment from those who wrong us—it is a humbling denial of self.
- I) Serve others (1 Pet 4:10, 2 Cor 4:5). Serving others is the heart and soul of being a disciple of Jesus. Look for ways to build up other believers by using the talents and gifts God has given you.
- J) Spend time with those who are less fortunate (Luke 14:12–14; Romans 12:16). It is natural and proper to spend time with your friends and loved-ones. But God also wants us to associate with “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.” He promises to reward us when we give to those who cannot repay us.
- K) Cultivate a grateful heart (1 Thess 5:18). Remind yourself regularly that you do not deserve or merit God’s mercy. Be grateful for the gift of salvation and the blessings of God—it will keep you humble.
- L) “Sit in the lowest place” (Luke 14:7–11). Do you find yourself wanting to be in the limelight? Are you irritated when others are honored or chosen instead of you? If so, pride is present. Ask God to help you accept a lowly place—it is the place of humility.
- M) Remember that you can do nothing apart from Jesus (John 15:4–5). It is easy to fall into the trap of self-reliance. But the truth is that we cannot make it on our own. We need God’s grace every day. Make this part of your daily mental thought and you will grow in humility.
- N) Say “God willing” when making future plans (James 4:14–16). How can you boast about the future when you don’t even know what will happen tomorrow? Only God knows and controls the future. Humble yourself and acknowledge your daily dependence on Him.
- O) Learn from the lives of others.
- (1) Examples of those who humbled themselves:
- Hagar (Gen 16:8–9).
 - Ahab (1 Kgs 21:20–24, 27–29).

- Josiah (2 Kgs 22:10–13, 18–20 | 2 Chr 34:26–28).
- Men from the tribes of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun (2 Chr 30:6–11).
- Manasseh (2 Chr 33:9–13, 23).
- Ezra and the remnant (Ezra 8:21–23).
- David (Ps 69:10–11).
- The people of Judah (Isa 58).
- Daniel (Dan 10:2–3, 12).
- Paul (Acts 15:37–40; 2 Tim 4:11).

(2) Examples of those who refused to humble themselves:

- Pharaoh (Exod 10:3–6).
- Asa (2 Chr 16).
- Zedekiah (2 Chr 36:11–16).
- The exiles in Egypt (Jer 44:1–10).
- Belshazzar (Dan 5:18–23).

(3) Examples of those whom God humbled:

- The exodus generation (Deut 8:2–3, 11–16).
- The nation of Judah (2 Chr 28:17–19).
- Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:28–37).
- Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2–3).

Diligence

1) What is the definition of diligence?

- A) The MacMillan Dictionary defines diligence as “the attitude or behavior of someone who works very hard and very carefully.” In ordinary usage, the word diligence conveys the idea of perseverance, dedication and hard work.
- B) The word “diligence” is found throughout our English bibles, and it is used to translate several different Hebrew and Greek words. In this study, we will focus on the book of Proverbs and the Hebrew word *charuts* which is translated “diligence” by most English translations.
- C) Proverbs has a lot to say about various types of people. It talks about the fool, the simple, the wise, the scorner—and it talks about the diligent. As we will see, there are several instructive maxims on what it means to be diligent. Proverbs also describes someone who is the complete opposite of the diligent—the sluggard. This lazy fellow is singled out for some of the most picturesque ridicule in the entire book. The sluggard serves as a direct contrast to the diligent, and ironically, helps us learn a lot about diligence.

2) How does Proverbs describe/characterize the diligent?

- A) “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Prov 10:4).
- B) “The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (Prov 12:24).
- C) “Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth” (Prov 12:27).
- D) “The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied” (Prov 13:4).
- E) “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty” (Prov 21:5).

3) How does Proverbs describe/characterize the sluggard?

- A) “Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest” (Prov 6:6–8).
- B) “How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (Prov 6:9–11).
- C) “Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him” (Prov 10:26).

- D) “The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway” (Prov 15:19).
- E) “Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys” (Prov 18:9).
- F) “The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth” (Prov 19:24; also 26:15).
- G) “The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing” (Prov 20:4).
- H) “The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back” (Prov 21:25–26).
- I) “The sluggard says, “There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!” (Prov 22:13; also 26:13).
- J) “I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (Prov 24:30–34).
- K) “As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed” (Prov 26:14).
- L) “The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly” (Prov 26:16).

4) How did Jesus model diligence?

- A) By Word—Jesus modeled diligence in what He taught His disciples:
- Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14–30).
 - Parable of the Sleeping Servant (Mark 13:33–37).
- B) By Deed—Jesus modeled diligence by the way He lived:
- Jesus at the Feast of Passover (Luke 2:41–52).
 - Jesus at Simon’s house (Mark 1:35–38).
 - Jesus on a mountain (Luke 6:12–13).
 - Jesus on the Sea of Galilee (Matt 8:18, 23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25).

5) What are some practical steps I can take to become more diligent?

- A) Be DAPPER:
- Divide—life is too big to tackle all at once. Divide it into manageable pieces.
 - Assess—take stock of where you are in each area of life.
 - Plan—come up with some simple, realistic steps you can take to begin changing.

- Prioritize—saying ‘Yes’ to one thing means saying ‘No’ to something else (you only have so much time).
- Execute—follow through on your plan. Take action now to get your momentum going.
- Reward—encourage a new pattern of behavior through positive affirmation.

B) Be smart about diligence:

- Identify and remove distractions from your life.
- Put off procrastination.
- Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.
- Consistent, small steps are better than occasional, large leaps.
- Find a role model of diligence and pattern your life after theirs.

Becoming More Like Christ

If Jesus took over the following areas of your life, what changes do you think He might make?

- 1) **Finances.** If Jesus was managing my money and making all the spending decisions, I think He would...

- 2) **Health.** If Jesus was watching my weight and working to keep my body fit and healthy, I think He would...

- 3) **Marriage.** If Jesus took over for me as husband/wife, I think He would...

- 4) **Friendships.** If Jesus was being a friend to all my friends, I think He would...

- 5) **Vocation.** If Jesus took over for me at work, I think He would...

- 6) **Recreation/Fun.** If Jesus was choosing the music I listen to, the books I read, the movies I watch, the games I play, and the websites I visit, I think He would...

7) **Giving.** If Jesus was managing how I contribute to good causes, I think He would...

8) **Self-Image.** If Jesus evaluated how I think about myself, I think He would...

9) **Children.** If Jesus took over for me as father/mother, I think He would...

10) **Church.** If Jesus was attending church in my place, I think He would...

11) **God.** If Jesus began living my life here on earth, I think He would build and strengthen my relationship with God by...

It's great to have a plan for success, but if you fail, what should you do? Here are some thoughts on resilience, the ability to bounce back after defeat:

- If you sinned, repent (1 John 1:9; 2:1).
- Analyze your failure. Ask yourself what contributed to your defeat (Eph 6:10–12).
- Remove stumbling blocks and add stepping stones (Rom 13:14).
- Encourage yourself in the LORD (Ps 34).
- Pray for extra strength in that particular area of life (Matt 26:41).
- Lean on your family and friends. Be accountable to them (Heb 3:13; 10:24–25).
- Live one decision at a time (Ps 23).
- Keep the long-term goal in mind (Heb 12:2).

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