

TRUE CHRISTIANITY

Bringing Many Sons
unto Glory!

Christian Maturity Series
Course One

TRUE CHRISTIANITY

A guide to bring us to glory

Emphasizing the priorities in life

Focusing on what we can take with us
when we leave this world

Looking beyond God's blessings to find His heart

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DEDICATION

With deep gratitude and loving esteem, this *Christian Maturity Series* is dedicated to the honorable

Brian J. Bailey

**President of Zion Fellowship
International**

my spiritual father and able teacher from my youth in the sacred mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, whose exemplary life and ministry have inspired my love for Christ and His Truth; who has always been to me, and to all of us who know him, the ideal Christian gentleman, irreproachable and charitable. But above all, he is a man approved of God, a man to whom God shows His face!

FOREWORD

TRUE CHRISTIANITY is a focus upon the most important subjects of life. Our Lord's discourses concentrated *solely* upon the most critical issues of the heart and that is what every true believer should do as well. The author has searched the sacred Scriptures and selected for this book those verses which he believes most aptly describe God's *ultimates* for every believer. The question may be asked, "What is the mark, the prize, the high calling we are seeking to apprehend?" Let's review the spiritual checklist below and underscore life's greatest objectives!

- What can we take with us when we leave this world?
- How can we make ourselves attractive to God?
- What should we strive for, and what investments should we make during our brief sojourn upon this earth?
- How can we evaluate our spiritual wealth, or lack of it?
- What is greatness in God's eyes? and what is true success?
- Where can true happiness and fulfillment be found?
- What is Christ's summary of all the 31,102 verses of Scripture?
- How can we measure a man's spirituality, and our own?
- How do we advance from point C to point D in our Christian life?
- Where are we on God's map? Where are we headed, and how do we get there?
- What is man's first duty?
- Which sacrifices impress God, and which ones does He refuse?
- What are the sacrifices that destroy Satan?
- What is grace, and what are the conditions for receiving more grace?
- How can we measure our spiritual strength and growth?
- What are the hallmarks of maturity?
- What are the keys for coming to unity and unfeigned love for one another?
- What seven things must be added to our faith?
- By what law will we be judged or rewarded?
- Which is more important—feeling God's presence or doing God's will?
- Upon what have we set our affections?
- Where will we place our emphasis in life?

How we use our time, energy, talents and substance depends uniquely upon one thing—the keenness of our spiritual vision. Proverbs 29:18 warns, "Where there is no [progressing] vision, the people dwell carelessly." Unless a believer's vision is clear and specific he will wander through life and discover at the end of the journey that he has been deflected from the main purpose.

True Christianity narrows our walk to the supreme reason for our existence. It is the converging of all the ultimate themes of Scripture into one central thrust to give us a clearly defined mark to press toward.

TRUE CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

True Christianity is the first of a four-part series on the subject of Christian growth. Our purpose is to inspire the reader to advance from First Peter 2:2 to Revelation 19:7-8—from an infant in Christ unto a glorious mature bride prepared for the Heavenly Bridegroom. Therefore, maintaining a healthy rate of spiritual growth after our new birth is essential to inherit the throne and everything else God has ordained for our lives (Rev. 3:21).

Think for a moment how sobering it would be if a vast inheritance were willed to us, yet (for one reason or another) we failed to lay claim to it and it was given to another. This would be devastating enough if it concerned only an earthly inheritance. Can you imagine, then, the seriousness of mishandling *an eternal inheritance*? Yet, many believers do indeed fall short of what God has purposed for their lives, perhaps because of bondages they are unable or unwilling to overcome, or tests they continue to fail year after year.

Israel in the wilderness is a prime example of this

God had graciously delivered His people out of Egypt's rigorous bondage. He saved them from judgment and death *by the blood of the passover lamb* and purchased them to be His very own. Then He set before them a beautiful land of hills and streams, saying, "Every parcel of ground your foot treads upon belongs to you. Only trust Me with all your heart and follow the instructions I command you." Tragically, the feet of that generation never touched the land of promise.

Why did Israel not receive the promises?

Canaan was theirs by inheritance! It had been foreordained from the beginning of the world that they should inherit the land promised to Abraham. Hebrews 4:3 clearly indicates this! It had been promised repeatedly to their forefathers, yet they never received it because Israel hardened their hearts enroute to the glory land and despised the *delays* along the way. She refused to follow the battle plan or keep pace with God's leadings. At every juncture of the journey they resisted the Spirit of the Lord. God's people failed every one of their tests in the wilderness. Therefore, that generation never entered the land of rest. This is a clear theme of Hebrews chapters three and four. That generation never reached their destination but plodded aimlessly through the wilderness until they died. Thus, Israel went to the grave with unfulfilled promises. See 1 Corinthians 10:11.

Today the Church faces the same situation, as it does in every generation. God is offering a rich spiritual inheritance to every one of His people. Christ has [already] blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). Each of these blessings belong to us *potentially*. And yet, if we do not follow God through the wilderness, pass our tests and obey the battle plan, we will be unable to obtain what has already been willed to us by inheritance. God's promises are inherited only by the overcomers (Rev. 21:7). In Hebrews 4:1, we are exhorted to fear lest we fall short of God's promises as did Israel. The words of Joshua continue to admonish every one of us today when he cried out: "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. How long are ye slack to go to possess the land?" (Josh. 13:1, 18:3). Remember, all of God's promises have *conditions*—they are only received *after* we have accomplished the will of God, and not until then (Heb. 10:36).

The issue, therefore, is not only to make it to heaven but also to fulfill God's purposes for our lives. There is a mark to hit, a race to run, a prize to win, an inheritance to be gained or lost. There are rewards in an eternal kingdom at stake. Many Christians will enter heaven's gates with unfinished courses, calls they have not fulfilled, and crowns they are unable to claim. Are we aware that our earthly task and calling is preparing us for an eternal position in heaven? Do we realize that if our task on earth is not completed, we will not qualify to occupy that special heavenly lot of inheritance that God has foreordained for us, and our crown will be given to someone else? (Rev. 3:11).

Entering Into Rest

Entering into rest is the principal theme of Hebrews chapters three and four. The subject is Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan, a journey each believer must travel. *Rest* for Israel of old involved making it through the wilderness, graduating from their tests, subduing their enemies, and winning numerous other battles. Thus, Paul exhorts New Testament believers to “*labour* to enter into rest” (Heb. 4:11). Rest means reaching our destination. Israel's destination depended upon crossing Jordan, entering Canaan land, and finally securing Mount Zion. Rest, therefore, is a sense of coming into the *fullness* of God's call and purposes for our lives. Rest also involves a keeping of the spiritual sabbath, a “ceasing from our own works” (ceasing from our own ideas, opinions, and ways). *Marriage* is another symbol of rest, no longer being independent and on our own, but under the protection, lordship and guidance of Another, our heavenly Bridegroom (Ruth 3:1).

Rest Is:

1. *Reaching our destination*—graduating from our tests; not being stalled in the wilderness, but learning our lessons and moving forward. It is subduing enemies, winning battles, and meeting God on all the issues in our lives. Rest is maturing into our call, and coming into God's full plan for our lives.

2. *Experiencing the spiritual sabbath*—ceasing from our own works (our own striving, thinking, ways, and words).

See Hebrews 4:4, 4:9-10, Isaiah 58:13.

It is a spiritual work that is accomplished in our hearts.

3. *Marriage*—being under the protection and guidance of Another, where we are not independent and on our own, but every part of our being is thoroughly espoused to Him and under His lordship. Rest is symbolic of marriage (Ruth 3:1).

“His rest shall be glorious”

Isaiah 11:10

ISRAEL'S JOURNEY—OUR ROAD MAP

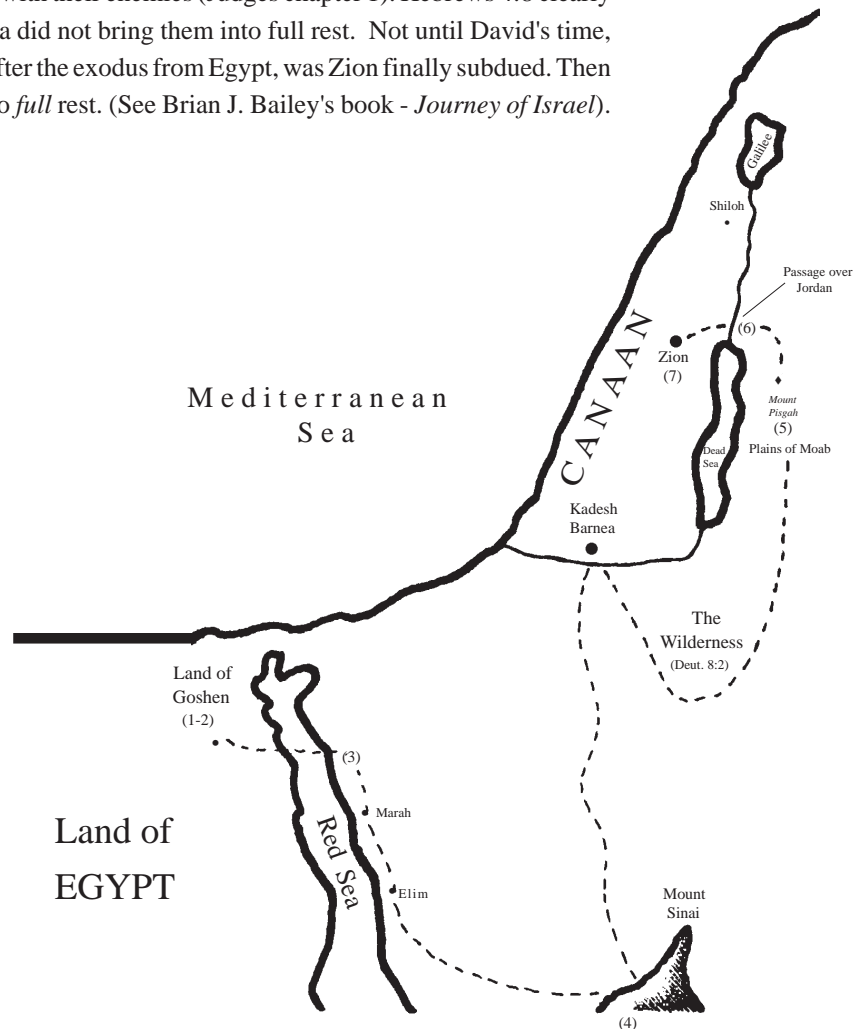
From Egypt to Zion in Seven Stages

1. **Passover** – salvation in Egypt by the blood of the lamb
2. **Unleavened Bread** – feeding on the pure Word of God continually
3. **Red Sea** – a type of water baptism
4. **Mount Sinai** – a type of Pentecost, being filled with the Spirit

* After failing their 10th test at *Kadesh Barnea*, God said they would never enter His rest. They wandered 38 more years.

5. **Death of Moses at Mt. Pisgah** – a clarion trumpet sound to move on from the wilderness into the promised land
6. **Over Jordan** – deep cleansing, circumcision, defeating 31 kings
7. **At Zion** – the full presence of God, ultimate rest (Psa.132:13-16)

The first generation died in the wilderness. Then a new generation (led by Joshua) came into the land of promise. Even so, they were slack and settled for a coexistence with their enemies (Judges chapter 1). Hebrews 4:8 clearly shows that Joshua did not bring them into full rest. Not until David's time, some 443 years after the exodus from Egypt, was Zion finally subdued. Then Israel entered into *full rest*. (See Brian J. Bailey's book - *Journey of Israel*).



The Importance of Fulfilling Our Course

This *Christian Maturity Series* is dedicated to Brian J. Bailey, a spiritual father in the faith to myself and many other sons and daughters around the world. On several occasions, he has recounted an extraordinary experience he had with death many years ago. I believe this “encounter with eternity” is worthy of repeating to the universal Body of Christ.

Before the era of the Charismatic Movement, Brian Bailey was a young man in the ministry, living in a certain city in North America. At that time, it was very unpopular to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and to manifest the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, the Christian community of that city became divided over the issue, and Brian Bailey found himself in the middle of the controversy. One night when the pressure seemed unbearable, he said, “Lord, I have had enough. Take me home.” God answered his prayer—that night he died! Having come out of his body, he stood there a few moments looking down at his body. An angel of the Lord who had come for him was standing beside him, saying nothing. Then with enormous speed, they traveled to heaven. But the closer he approached heaven's gates, the greater the sadness he felt in his heart. Then, before his eyes, in just a moment of time, he could see his whole life spread out before him as if in cameos. He was able to see himself at infancy, in his childhood, as a teenager, right up until the time of his departure from this life. From that point on, however, the cameos ceased and there were only *blanks*.

The anguish of going to heaven without completing the mission

Only then did he realize the agony of dying before one's appointed time, or going to heaven with an unfulfilled course. There was so much more that God had purposed to do in and through his life. God made him to understand in a most vivid manner that it is not only important to make it into heaven but also to fulfill our life's mission and task. Otherwise, we will be unprepared to take our heavenly position. We will settle for an inferior place in the eternal kingdom of God, and we will surrender our crown. God cannot say, “Well done good and faithful servant!” to men and women who have fulfilled *only a fraction* of their life's work!

Brian Bailey also was given a new understanding of Revelation 21:4 which states, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” He understood then that before the judgment seat of Christ, many saints will weep with anguish when they look at all the eternal rewards they are unable to claim because they have been forfeited to others. Thus, we are exhorted in Revelation 3:11 to hold on to what God has given us, “that no man take thy crown.”

We will be summoned to give an account of our lives

A call is not only an *invitation*, it is a *summons* as well. It is a command to appear before the Judge to give an account of what we have done with our life, time, talents, and substance. The parables of the Lord bring this out vividly (Mt. 25:14-30, Lk.19:12-27). Our life's work here on earth is shaping us for an eternal position in the life hereafter. The few years we have upon earth are simply a preparation for eternity. Even our secular occupations develop spiritual qualities within us for reigning with Christ. Therefore, we should *never despise* secular work. Moses was schooled in Pharaoh's court, yet this was creating a capacity in him for being the administrator of the Law. God never used his worldly education but the capacity it created. David, as a shepherd, was trained in the mundane affairs of everyday life. God was preparing him to shepherd and feed *His people* (Psa. 78:70-72).

Not only was God training David in his secular occupation for a spiritual ministry, He was also preparing him for a ministry *in the life to come*, for David will be resurrected in the millennium and be a shepherd to Israel (Jer. 30:9, Ezek. 34:23-24, 37:24-25, Hos. 3:5). Remember, we are also being formed into kings and priests to reign with Christ for all eternity (Rev. 5:9-10; 1:6; 20:6).

Obviously, Brian Bailey, upon receiving mercy from the Lord, returned from his death experience to tell us about that awesome night. Since that time, his life and message have implored everyone within the hearing of his voice to be *finishers*. Paul was a finisher. He said: “I have finished my course.” Jesus declared, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” Faithful Daniel was told that he would stand in his *lot* [of inheritance] at the end of time (See Dan.12:13, Josh.14:8, Jn.17:4, Acts 13:25, 20:24, 2 Tim. 4:7). Do not allow any man to take your crown!

Paul's Two Questions at Conversion

When Paul met Christ on the Damascus road, he asked the two most important questions of life: First he enquired:

- 1.) “Who are you, Lord?” and then he asked,
- 2.) “What do you want me to do?” (Acts 9:5-6).

His two questions zoom in upon the very heart of Christianity. The first question, “Who are you, Lord?” involves *relationship*, knowing God. The second one, “What do You want me to do?” involves *the task* God has planned for our life. The first one is *inward*; the second one is *outward*. This order must never be reversed. The first and most important quest in life is to know God (Jn.17:3). For it is out of *our relationship* with God—knowing God—that we are enabled to fulfill our task and reveal Him to the world.

Knowing God

It is interesting that the Apostle Paul *continued* to ask, “Who are you, Lord?” all the rest of his life. Twenty-eight years after his conversion he cried; “That I might know him” (Phil. 3:10). Though Paul had seen the Lord in many visions and revelations (Acts 26:16, 2 Cor.12:1), yet he yearned for a further unfolding of the knowledge of God to his own heart. Thus there are *degrees* of knowing God.

How well do you know your president?” We see him every day on TV, and we know the stand he takes on all the important issues. But, have you ever shaken his hand or spoken to him personally? Do you know him like his cabinet members know him, and the senators who converse with him frequently? And do you know him as well as his wife knows him? Obviously, we do not! Therefore, we understand easily how there are *different levels* of knowing a person, and this is especially true concerning our relationship with God.

Different Degrees of Knowing God

- As a servant – (casual) who only knows to go here or there, do this or do that.
- As a friend – (close) who knows the mind and purpose of another.
- As a bride – (intimate) who is actually an integral part of another.

Degrees of Knowing God (As a Servant, a Friend, a Bride)

A Servant—“Henceforth I call you not *servants*; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you *friends*; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (Jn.15:15). In one respect, we should always have a *servant spirit* when it concerns our willingness to serve others in an attitude of humility. This is a quality we should always strive for and maintain.

In third world countries it is easier to appreciate what the Lord is trying to convey in John 15:15. Household servants usually come from a background of extreme poverty and they have a *very small capacity* to receive compliments or little gifts. Usually it ruins them. Hagar would be a good example of this! As soon as Hagar the bondwoman was called upon to bear Abram a child, she looked down on Sarah who was unable to have children. Immediately she despised Sarah (cf. Gen.16:1-6).

Household servants are content with meager wages. They are told to do this and to do that, to go here and to go there, without any explanation. There are no questions asked. They simply do what they are told. Seldom is there any depth of dialogue between a servant and a master. A servant does not know or understand the intimate ponderings of the heart of his master. At best, the relationship between a servant and his master is casual and superficial.

A Friend—God wants our relationship with him to exceed that of a servant. A servant does not know the mind of his master. Only with *close friends* does a master share his intimate thoughts. Abraham was called “the Friend of God” (2 Chron. 20:7, Isa. 41:8, Jas. 2:23). Because Abraham was a close friend of the Lord, He showed Abraham His secrets. “And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” (Gen.18:17). In Genesis 18:17-33, God informed Abraham what He was about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah.

A Bride—The bridal relationship is even more intimate than that of a close friend. A real wife learns to know her husband instinctively. Without uttering a word, she often knows what he is thinking and feeling. Intuitively she hears what his *heart* is saying, even more than his words. Consider what God said *within Himself* in Genesis 8:21. (Read Genesis 8:21.) God did not say this out loud. Someone was close enough to hear what He was saying inwardly.

In Exodus 32:9-14, God commanded Moses to step aside while He destroyed Israel for their wickedness. Moses did *not* step aside or leave Him alone. Instead, he stood right in the way and said in effect, “Lord, I know this is not really what you want to do. I know you would rather show mercy.” Then Moses appealed to God on the grounds of protecting His own reputation, saying, “What will the Egyptians say [and the other nations] when they hear you brought Israel out of Egypt but then destroyed them in the wilderness?” Moses heard the *heart* of God, even more than His *words*. And because of this, he changed the mind of God and preserved Israel.

Thus, we are called to go beyond the mechanical relationship of being a *servant*, for servants only know their Master from a distance. *Friends* are much closer to the Master and perceive clearly what He is saying and doing. But, a *bride* knows the very heart of the Master, for she is bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. Therefore, let us seek to qualify to become His Bride (Rev.19:7-8, Jer. 9:24). There are definite qualifications. Let us enquire diligently how we may prepare ourselves to be attractive and appealing unto God.

Created for God

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” Revelation 4:11

First of all, every human being should understand that he was created for another—God. I am convinced that man would have no “identity crisis” if this were properly understood. The human heart is restless and unsatisfied because it is trying to be something on its own, apart from God. The heart is filled with ambition and self-promotion. God, however, did not create us to be the world's greatest teacher, athlete, musician, or achiever. What would it accomplish anyway? All it would do is draw attention to ourselves, not God, and still we would *not* be fulfilled.

How, then, do we find fulfillment? The answer is really quite simple. The first thing we have to do is discover *why* we were created. Revelation 4:11 tells us that God created us for Himself. We were created *by* Him, and *for* Him. We were created to bring Him pleasure. Fulfillment, therefore, is the direct result of satisfying our Creator.

We were created *for* God. We are not our own, we belong to Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20, Psa.100:3). Understanding this truth is basic to finding a satisfied and contented heart. Therefore, we should inquire of God and say, “How can I please you most? What is your will for my life? How can I win your approval? What can I do to edify you and bring pleasure to you?” Remember, the one thing God desires more than anything else in the world is a bride who loves and understands Him (Rev.19:7-8, cf. Jer. 9:24).

Making Ourselves Appealing to God

Our attitude should be, “Lord, I was made to be a blessing to you?” Instead, we often hear complaints like this, “I came to church this morning and received nothing from the worship service.” But what is our purpose for coming to church? Do I come only to get something for myself, or do I come to bring an offering of thanksgiving to God? One thing that makes a wife attractive to a man is *thankfulness*. A cheerful, positive spirit makes a woman appealing to a man. This is perfectly true of our relationship with God too.

One sure way to make it into the promised land (or God's promises) is to have the attitude of Caleb and Joshua who said, “If the Lord *delight* in us, then he will bring us into this land” (Num.14:8). They were saying, “If we win His approval, we will make it in.” The remainder of the congregation was negative, critical, unthankful, and unbelieving, and that was a big “turn off” to God. This is the reason people find no favor with God and fail to enter into His promises.

God wants to be understood. We were created for that purpose. “But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me” (Jer. 9:24). God is looking for someone to whom He can open His heart, someone on His level with whom He can share His deepest secrets. He is searching for those who desire to be made *compatible* to Him, those who are willing to be conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). God cannot fully open His heart to a child. Therefore, He is longing for His people to grow out of their infant stage (1 Pet. 2:2) in order to be on His level of communication—the level of a mature bride (Rev.19:7-8).

I vividly remember the testimony of a man with a fifteen year old son. This son had never grown since birth. At age fifteen, he was still an infant. The father took some time and detail in describing the heartache of having a son who had never grown and developed. But then he said something that I will never forget. God spoke to the man and said, “I see *you* the same way you see your son. *You* have never grown in your spiritual life and because of this you have brought no joy to my heart.” Clearly the Lord cannot be satisfied with us if we do not continue to grow into spiritual maturity.

Created to Minister Unto Him

God created man for fellowship. He wanted people whom He could set His affection upon; those who would freely reciprocate and return that love back to Him out of their own free will. Therefore, our first call is *not* to a ministry but unto Him. Remember Paul's two questions. He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” *Secondly*, he enquired, “What do you want me to do?”

Exodus 30:30 reveals to us *a special anointing*. This was not an anointing to minister unto *the people* but an anointing to minister unto *the Lord*. “And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto *me*.” This precious anointing brings a special love and tenderness that enables the consecrated believer to comfort, love, understand, and worship *the Lord*. As we minister unto the Lord, then guidance, direction, and ministry flows forth from the throne. “As they ministered *to the Lord*, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said. . .” (Acts 13:2).

Loneliness—a Need for More of God

Loneliness is a *spiritual* problem. Human love itself cannot cure loneliness. A man or woman can be in the middle of a crowd and yet be dreadfully alone. Nor can marriage solve loneliness, for in marriage one can still feel alienated and unfulfilled. If you try to find your *all in all* in a person, I suspect that you will never find happiness (Psa. 62:5). If unhappiness is not conquered before marriage, being married will not bring satisfaction either for an unresolved *spiritual problem* is carried into the union.

Loneliness is a need for more of God. He alone can fill that void. If you are lonely or unhappy, draw closer to your Heavenly Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture declares, “You are *complete* in Him” (Col. 2:10). Marriage of itself makes no one complete. Completeness is found only in Christ. The woman at the well had been married five times, and the man she was living with was not her husband (Jn. 4:16-18). She was thirsting within her soul for fulfillment, and had gone from one man to another in search of love and satisfaction. Jesus redirected her, saying, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be *in him* a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn. 4:14).

Christ is entitled, “The Fountain of Living Waters” (Jer. 2:13). He alone is the only true answer for loneliness. When men and women drink deeply from the “Fountain of Living Waters,” they will experience life, satisfaction, and true fulfillment, irrespective of their marital status.

My wife and I are late bloomers. We married at around age forty. We did not plan our life this way, it was just the way God graciously led us. But, I would like to say on behalf of Betsy and myself that we learned contentment and fulfillment *before* we were married. And I would like to say to singles who are getting a little older that it does not matter if *the selection* is getting smaller and smaller. You do not need a large selection; you only need *one*—the one God has chosen.

An excellent seminar lecturer once said, “When God sees that you will be happier, and that you can serve Him more effectively by being married, then God will bring the right person into your life.” I believe this statement is very wise. God alone knows which person is best for us. He also knows when it is *the best time* for marriage.

Summary:

- Human love does not cure loneliness.
- Loneliness is a spiritual problem, reflecting a need for more of God.
- We are “complete in Him.” Marriage in itself does not make us complete.
- Unhappiness before marriage is an unresolved problem which is often carried into marriage.
- Drinking from the “Fountain of Living Waters” is the only solution for loneliness.
- Singles do not need a large selection to choose from; they only need one—God's choice.
- When God sees we will be happier and that we can serve Him better by being married, He will bring the right one into our life. We do not need to go out and frantically search for a mate.

Building on a Good Foundation

*“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them,
I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.” (Mt. 7:24)*

The most important part of a building is *the foundation*. It does not matter how magnificent the superstructure; if the foundation is faulty, the building will not endure long. In 1968, I remember seeing the front cover of a magazine showing *tilting* skyscrapers in Brazil. Instead of standing perfectly erect, literally these buildings were beginning to tip in one direction or another. Multi-million-dollar structures which sprang up everywhere overnight had to be demolished because *the foundations* had not been laid in proper depth. The architects had failed to consider the enormous stress the foundations were required to support for such high-rising buildings.

There is an awesome lesson to be learned from this! If we want to do great things for God, we have to allow Him to lay our foundations deep. Many believers do not want to wait for that work to be done in their lives and they scorn *the preparation period* (Heb.12:5-8). They want success now! After all, foundations are not “seen.” Foundations represent the hidden life of preparation where God humbles and proves us to see if we are obedient (cf. Deut. 8:2). Foundations are not attractive, yet the depth of our foundation determines whether our building will stand or fall. This building is analogous of our life, marriage, home, ministry, and all of our life's works. What has gone into *the foundation* of our home, our ministry, our life? At one time or another, everyone of us is going to be tested by the fierce storms of life. Many “houses” are collapsing today. Great ministries and ministers are crashing. Almost always, the problem comes down to a defective foundation.

The foundation of our life must be *obedience to the words of the Lord* (Matt. 7:24). All of our measurements (beliefs, doctrines, convictions) must be taken from the Chief Corner Stone, the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:20, 1 Pet. 2:6). Spiritual houses are falling everywhere because men and women have ignored the Lord's specifications and have built by their own (Mt. 7:26-27).

Foundation for a Good Marriage

When a home is constructed, it is built for the purpose of lasting a *lifetime*, not just ten or fifteen years. This is also true concerning our marriage and family. It should be planned in such a way that it will last for the rest of our life. What is going into the *foundation* of our home, our marriage, and into the lives of our children? May I suggest that all of this starts long before the wedding day.

The foundation of a marriage begins earlier in life, but especially during courtship. When marriages have serious problems, often the fault lies in its *foundation*. It goes back to the way it started, to the beginning. Was God carefully enquired of as to whom we should marry, or were we self-willed? Was God invited to have input into the most important decision of our life, or was He ignored? Did we wait for God's choice and God's time? Were we prudent in our conduct during the courtship months? Were we morally pure, or was there promiscuity? Premarital relations bring guilt and distrust into a marriage, and a loss of respect.

What about our growing-up years? How was our relationship with our parents, brothers and sisters? The young man who is disrespectful to his mother will also be disrespectful to the woman he marries. The girl who harbors resentment against her father when he crosses her will, does the same to the man in her life when she is married. If she was constantly striving and fighting with her brother, she will strive with her husband too. Marriage does not create problems; it simply reveals them. Marriage only reveals what has never been conquered before marriage. What is not resolved before marriage is taken into the marriage.

What was (or is) our ultimate reason for getting married or pursuing marriage? Is it mainly for companionship or emotional fulfillment? Is marriage primarily a means to cure loneliness? Is it for security or to have a family? All of these, of course, are *part* of the purpose of marriage, yet none of these should be the paramount reason. The supreme purpose for getting married should be to glorify the Lord, and to be able to know and serve Him more effectively. After all, we were created "by Him and for Him." We should pray, "Lord, please give me a spouse whom you will use to help develop my character into your likeness, one who will aid me in fulfilling the task you have planned for my life."

Is our marriage built upon the solid rock of *obedience* to the words of the Lord (Mt. 7:24-25)? Or has it been built upon a foundation determined by our own specifications (Mt. 7:26-27)? Yet if our house has been built upon a poor foundation, we should take courage. God is able to replace new and lasting foundation stones in our life and in our home. Our life and home can and must be built upon the seven pillars of wisdom (Prov. 9:1 cf. Jas. 3:17).

Seek a Growing Marriage

We should seek *a growing marriage!* The only way a marriage deepens is when we are *growing spiritually*. To grow spiritually means that we are becoming more and more like the One who created marriage. As we become like the Lord, we will be transformed continually into a more desirable marriage partner. Jesus is wise, patient, and meek. He is filled with love, joy, peace, and all the other fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). He is not overly sensitive or quick to wrath. He is merciful, gracious, longsuffering and forgiving. He holds no grudges or resentment. How well do we line up with our Chief Corner Stone, the One from whom all spiritual dimensions are drawn?

Summary

Guidelines for a good foundation for marriage:

- Be obedient to the Word of God. Obedience to Christ must be our foundation.
- Resolve conflicts with family members—parents, brothers, sisters, others.
- Enquire of God for the mate of His choice. Wait for His time.
- Keep yourself morally pure during courtship. Remove yourself from *vulnerable* situations.
- Have respect for authority—parents, teachers, law officers, bosses, ministers. If there is no submission or respect for authority, a spirit of lawlessness will reign in your children.
- Be financially responsible. Many pressures in marriages are because of finance.
- Let the ultimate purpose for marriage be to glorify God, become like Him, and fulfill His task.
- Seek a *growing* marriage. Marriage deepens as we grow spiritually and become like the Lord.

Marriage does not create problems; it reveals what was not conquered before marriage.

Importance of Beginnings

Born of Envy or Born of God

“And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel *envied* her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die” (Gen. 30:1, 1-6). Here we have a situation where one sister was fruitful but the other barren. Rachel's envy provoked her to obtain children *by any means possible*. Her course of action to acquire “children” is reenacted over and over throughout the Church today. *Envy* prompted Rachel to give her handmaiden to Jacob in order to have children by her. This resulted in the birth of Dan. We could say then, that Dan was born out of *envy*. The motive for Dan being birthed into this world was *envy*. But, we should consider the fruit that followed.

How many works that are “started for God” are birthed out of the motive of envy (Phil. 1:15)! And, let there be no mistake about it, there is nothing wrong with wanting to do something for God. The desire to be productive and fruitful for God is inborn. The problem, however, lies in our motives. Are we willing to say, “Lord, in what particular way can I be fruitful for You? *How* can I serve You best?” Or are we trying to “make our mark in life” at any cost? Are we willing to allow God to purify our motives? Are we able to lay down *our cause*? There are many who believe they are protectors and champions of God's cause, but it is their own.

I have observed over the years that serious consequences result when people *repeatedly* resist what God is addressing in their lives concerning their motives. When the issues are evaded, ignored, and resisted over and over, spiritual dullness and deception gain a stronghold (Jas. 1:22). And while they continue on headstrong and determined in their “cause” for the Lord, in the long run they *scatter* the harvest, rather than gather it in. The Lord warns, “He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Mt. 12:30, Lk. 11:23). If we fail to do it God's way, but insist on doing it our own way, it will bring more harm than good to the kingdom of God. Therefore, may every endeavor be born, not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. Let us be in the light and allow our motives to be transparent before God and before our brethren. May all of our works be “wrought in God” and established by Him (Jn. 3:21)!

Used of God But Not Approved of God

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never [got to know] you: depart from me, ye that [practice lawlessness]”.
Matthew 7:22-23.

A number of years ago, there was a woman who was mightily used of God as a prophetess. Undoubtedly, many were blessed by her anointing and ministry. Gradually, pride and deception crept into her life and she began to think she was above the law (Obad.1:3). She believed that God would excuse her sin of adultery because of her extraordinary success in the ministry. When she was confronted with the matter, she glibly replied, “Oh, God would never cast me aside. Too many prophecies I have spoken have come to pass.” She had come to *rely* on her works and special gifts as a means of God's acceptance and as a means of salvation, rather than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

In order to perform the mighty works of Matthew 7:22, one would certainly have to be a blood-washed, Spirit-filled believer. The men and women mentioned in Matthew 7:22-23 clearly acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They perform tremendous miracles of healing and deliverance in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with multitudes being converted under their ministries. At the same time, however, they are living lives of lawlessness. Even so they are counting on their great ministries to save them. How deceptive it is to think that one's iniquity will be excused and overlooked by God because of a mighty ministry—see Ezekiel 33:12-13.

On the Day of Judgment, their appeal for mercy will be on the merits of their works, gifts, and ministry. The sad reply of the Lord will be, “I was never allowed to become acquainted with you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.” Unfortunately, their relationship with God was *superficial* at best. Yes, they were *used* of God as an instrument in His hand but never *approved* of Him. God was never given the opportunity to get to know them. How could He? They had no time for Him. They were too busy promoting themselves and their own kingdom—all in His Name, of course (Isa. 4:1). Therefore, sin and temptation *overcame* and ensnared them, making them habitual practitioners of iniquity (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27).

God used the jawbone of an ass *as an instrument of deliverance*, but what did He do with that instrument when He was finished? He discarded it (Jud.15:15-17)! We do not want to be *as scaffolding*. Scaffolding is used by God to build His Church, but then it is removed and is not a part of His glorious Church. Neither do we wish to be *as shooting stars* who appear in splendor for a moment (as do some ministries) but then disappear and are forgotten.

What then, is real Christianity? It is our prayer that the following will help to answer this all-important question!

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MARKS OF MATURITY

Measuring our spiritual growth

True Christianity forces us to face ourselves honestly. Christian maturity comes gradually as the following “heart issues” are resolved. Below are several *measuring rods* by which we may gauge spiritual growth.

MEASURING RODS

MATURITY IS MEASURED BY THE FOLLOWING:

1. By how well we get along with others (Jn.17:21). This encompasses all of the following:
2. By how much contentment we have learned (Philippians 4:11-12, I Timothy 6:6).
3. By how well we rule our spirit and control our emotions—love or hate (Proverbs 16:32).
4. By how much we have dealt with pride and all other tormenting conflicts (Romans 12:3).
5. By how much patience we possess—rashness and criticism subdued (Prov.18:13, Isaiah 32:4).
6. By how steadfast we are—not up and down, but constant “at all seasons” (Acts 20:18).
7. By how well we control our tongue. Most sins are committed with the tongue (James 3:2).
8. By how holy we are. Great ministry without *character* is of little worth (Matthew 7:20-23).
9. By how much of a servant’s spirit we have. Humility is the mark of greatness (Mark 10:43-45).
10. By our attitudes toward authority. Bad attitudes reveal defiance toward the Lord (Ezekiel 3:7).
11. By the mastery of our thought life. Every battle is won or lost in our mind (1 Peter 1:13).
12. By discreetly managing finances. Money involves conscience and character (Luke 16:10,11).
13. By how much we have *stopped* saying, “It’s not fair” (Genesis 45:5-8, 50:20).
14. By our gratitude. Thankfulness is the key to victory, health (Eph. 5:20, I Thessalonians 5:18).
15. By realizing how much we do *not* know. The immature have all the answers (I Corinthians 8:2).
16. By our ability to handle rejection—having understanding and forgiveness (Acts 5:41).

17. By our responses to delays—a proof of how far down our roots go (Psalm 40:1-2, Isaiah 64:4).
18. By how well we handle personal failure, or looking like one (I Samuel 30:6, Isaiah 49:4).
19. By how well we cope with the loss of something (Job 1:21).
20. By how well we handle hostility sent our way (Romans 12:17-21).
21. By how well we manage success! Do we continue to depend on God? (Deuteronomy 8:11-14).
22. By how much wisdom we accumulate. Wisdom is the principal thing (Proverbs 4:7, Luke 2:52).
23. By how much love we possess. Love is totally unselfish, the bond of perfection (Colossians 3:14).
24. By how responsible and reliable we are, and by how much we fear the Lord (Nehemiah 7:2).
25. By how well we manage our time. Wasting time is wasting *life* (Psalm 90:12, Ephesians 5:15-17).
26. By our attitude toward fallen brethren—cleansed of an “*I told you so*” attitude (Galatians 6:1).
27. By how well we know ourselves, even as God knows us (1 Corinthians 13:12), and by how much hypocrisy has been purged from our hearts (Matthew 7:1-5). Hypocrisy is self-blindness.
28. By how much of the fruit of the Spirit we possess (a summary of all the above).

Growth, strength, and maturity can all be measured by this—“By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20, Galatians 5:22-23). All nine fruits of the Spirit reveal the nature of God. Thus, when all of these fruits are abounding within us, we will be very much like Him. This is our calling and our goal (Rom. 8:29, 1 Jn. 3:2).

On the following pages we will do a brief explanation of each point.

MARKS OF MATURITY EXPLAINED

Resolving Heart Issues

1. HOW WELL DO WE GET ALONG WITH OTHERS? Christianity involves us with people! Therefore it is quite unscriptural to be a *lone* Christian. Being detached from a body of believers is symptomatic of unresolved conflicts such as hurts, distrust, or indifference. At times, it seems easier to shun involvement with others; but by doing so, deep-rooted problems are never really faced, and the same old ruts and routines continue. We need one another for balance and growth. In fact, maturity is not possible without each other (Jn.17:11, 21, 23)!

It is unscriptural and dangerous to be alone! Satan talks more frequently to those who are off by themselves. The whole Christian message involves us with others. How spiritual we are depends on how well we can adjust socially and how well we get along with other Christians, our boss, those in authority, and especially our family. These are the real heart issues of life (Matt. 22:36-40). Christianity is *relationships*!

There are scattered sheep everywhere. Christians who are alone and unattached to a body of believers are usually this way for the following major reasons:

- **Poor childhood and background**—resulting in the inability to cope or adjust socially.
- **Offended and unable to recover**—Hurts, embarrassments, disillusionments and bitterness have caused some to avoid and shun Christian fellowship and the local church. Some even who were preachers of the gospel have withdrawn from the ministry because someone or something has offended them (Heb.12:15).
- **Over-righteous**—(Ecc.7:16) These have such a high standard that when some of the church members are not living up to their self-conceived standard, they leave the church. After going to a number of churches and finding fault with all of them, the pattern is established and they cease attending anywhere.
- **Independent**—These are the ones who feel that they know more than the pastor and resent being admonished by *anyone*. They are accountable to no man, and fantasize that they are a special messenger sent from God. Others are not committed anywhere and answerable to no one. They go from church to church or just stay home, watch Christian TV, listen to tapes, or start their own Bible studies.

True Christianity involves you and me with others! Scripture urges us to love one another, have fellowship one with another, exhort one another, edify one another, serve one another, forgive one another, and to *be knit together* in love (Col. 2:2). Real Christianity places people into families (Psa. 68:6). This is for our safety and growth. Satan preys upon the isolated ones more than on those in groups. How scriptural is your Christianity? Is First Thessalonians 5:12-13 or Hebrews 10:25, 13:17 being violated? Are you accountable to anyone?

Christianity is relationships! The whole Bible is summed up in just *two* things — How we treat *people* and how we treat *God* (Mt. 22:36-40). Let us not miss the point.

2. DO WE HAVE CONTENTMENT? Contentment is truly one of God’s greatest treasures. “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Contentment thrives in men like David who had his desires reduced down to one thing—the Lord Himself (Psa. 27:4). He had found fullness of joy in God’s presence (Psa. 16:11). Paul had *learned* contentment in all his circumstances (Phil. 4:11). He did not have a beautiful home, the comfort of an understanding wife, fancy clothes, or any of the other luxuries of life. Instead, he had suffered the loss of all things, including his past positions and titles and the acclaim of man (Phil. 3:7-10). Yet, the presence of the Lord fully sustained and satisfied him. Many believers drink from the polluted streams of the world in an attempt to satisfy their thirsty souls, but Paul found the secret to contentment with very little of this world’s pleasures. His joy came only from one source. He had tapped into *Christ* and he continued to drink deeply of His life.

3. HOW WELL DO WE RULE OUR SPIRIT? (Prov. 16:32) A Christian is not mature when he is ruled and dominated by his emotions, has outbursts of wrath, and has not learned to handle hurt feelings. Ruling our spirit means saying *no* to our feelings and natural inclinations. The ability to say “no” comes as a result of grace being poured into our lives through the disciplines of the Lord and also by dealing with our self-life. How could we possibly “rule the nations with a rod of iron” when we have not learned to rule our own spirit? (Rev. 21:7, 2:26-27). It is essential to contain our emotions, for out of our hearts spring all of life’s actions and decisions (Prov. 4:23).

4. HAS PRIDE BEEN CONQUERED? Satan is not our biggest enemy—self is! Pride is the number one problem of man. Pride is at the bottom of most of our conflicts and torments. We cannot hope to be a mature Christian until pride has been leveled low. Pride makes men *pretend* to be something they are not. Pride demands recognition. If a proud man is ignored or unnoticed, he is offended. Pride is the reason for a fierce disposition. Outbursts of wrath result when a proud person cannot have his way or his will has been crossed. But humility frees the heart of all these maladies!

5. DO WE POSSESS PATIENCE? (Ja. 1:3-4). Patience is a rare virtue! It is obtained by passing through many pressures and hard times (Ja. 5:10-11, Rom. 5:3). Patience is one of the attributes of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). It is that quality of spirit which weighs all the issues carefully and does not make hasty conclusions or quick judgments. Wisdom and knowledge are wanting in the one who reacts in rashness (Isa. 32:4). It is folly to form a conclusion when all the facts have not been thoroughly examined (Prov. 18:13).

6. ARE WE STEADFAST? A Christian is esteemed to be mature by his *stability*. Scripture has much to say about being *rooted, grounded, established and settled*. Believers are up and down because they are still dominated by feelings and mood-swings. Mature Christians, however, are not ruled by emotions or circumstances but by *faith* and by what God has said. Paul declared, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Israel was fickle and rejoiced only when their circumstances were favorable. Then they turned against God when problems arose (Psa. 78:37).

Paul’s life was consistent, irrespective of his circumstances (Acts 20:18-19). He said; “You know after what manner I have been with you *at all seasons*, serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears.” Paul remained steadfast in the good times and in the bad times. It was no up and down situation with him. He had caught a heavenly vision and this is what made the difference in his life. A new vision changes the way we think and live. Ask God for a fresh vision of what He desires to do in and through your life. *Vision* determines our steadfastness! Without an ongoing vision, we will dwell carelessly (Prov. 29:18). Everyone needs a clear mark to press toward.

7. IS OUR TONGUE UNDER CONTROL? The greatest evidence of holiness is controlling the tongue. He who bridles his tongue is a perfect man (Ja. 3:2)! This again is a heart issue for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Lu. 6:45). All the works of the flesh mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21 are released by the tongue. The tongue is the most powerful member of our body. God will not deliver us from a difficult situation until our conversation changes (Psa. 50:23, Job 42).

Here are several areas where we need to control our tongue:

- **Keep Secrets**—(Prov.11:13). “A talebearer revealeth secrets.” Restrain yourself not to reveal the confidential matters of others. God reproved Ham for exposing his father's *nakedness* (Gen. 9:20-27).
- **No Negative Confessions**—These are *contagious* and affect our brethren. The negative confession of the ten spies discouraged the whole congregation of Israel, causing them to murmur and harden themselves against the promises of God. (See Num.13:26-33, 14:1-10, 32:9, Deut.1:28.)
- **No Verbal Retaliation**—When someone hurts us, we should pray for grace not to retaliate with our words (Isa. 53:7, 1 Pet. 2:22-23). This is meekness! Argument and vindictiveness bring hardness into our hearts (Prov. 24:29). A furious man can be disarmed if we reply back in softness (Prov.15:1).
- **Avoid Foolish Talk**—There is a difference between foolishness and divine joy (Eph. 4:29). Foolish questions induce us to give foolish answers (Tit. 3:9, Prov. 26:4). We should *avoid* unedifying topics and nip them in the bud.
- **Unfeigned Lips** —(Psa.17:1-3, 120:2). Pray that the Lord will spare us from situations where we are forced to say things we do not mean! Let us not be deceitful or filled with rationalizations, but “without guile” as Nathanael (Jn.1:47). Those who are nearest to God have a clean tongue (Rev.14:5).
- **Watch Flattery**—Flattery is an evil spirit, it is a snare. Satan is a flatterer. People get *hooked* by the words of a flatterer. A sincere compliment or encouraging word means a lot, but flattery overdoes it and the motive is not right. Flattery always wants something in return (Prov. 26:28). Flattery is a tactic of the coming antichrist, and he will catch many by means of flattery (Dan.11:32).
- **Careful of Commitments**—“Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth” (Prov. 6:2). The mouth can cause our flesh to sin by making promises, agreements, or commitments we later regret and are unable to keep (Ecc. 5:1-6, 5:6). Exercise much caution and forethought *before* you give your word.
- **Clean Illustrations**—We should never use unclean graphic illustrations in our sermons. Our words paint pictures in people's minds. Avoid detailed testimonies of past sins and do not bring up the personal things of others. This actually creates uncleanness in those who listen (1 Thes. 2:3, Eph. 5:12). Words produce fruit (Prov.12:14, 13:2, 18:20-21).
- **No Discord**—The *words* we sow in the hearts of others are seeds that germinate and grow. Wrong words produce bitterness and bad fruit. God hates the sowing of discord (Prov. 6:19). Judas infected the other disciples with his complaining (Jn.12:4-6; Mk.14:4-5). Satan's greatest damage is inflicted with *his mouth* (Rev.12:10). The same is true of us! Most sins are committed with the tongue. When a man judges and criticizes another, he brings the same curses upon himself (Matt. 7:1-2).
- **How We Speak to God**—The Lord said: “Your words have been stout [hard or bold] against me” (Mal. 3:13), see Job 27:2, Num.14:3. How we speak *to* God and *about* God is extremely important. He will deal with us accordingly (Num.14:28). We need our lips purged, as Isaiah. (Isa. 6:5,6).

8. HOW HOLY ARE WE? Holiness is related to what we are *uttering* in the heart (our thoughts, motives, and desires). Righteousness involves our *deeds*, but holiness involves our *motives*. It is possible to do right acts but still not be holy inside; at the same time the heart can still be clinging to other loves and idols within. This truth is confirmed many times in the Word of God.

Several kings “did what was right in the sight of the Lord ...but would not remove the high places” (1 Kgs.15:11-14, 22:43, 2 Kgs.12:2-3, 14:1-4). Though they executed personal acts of righteousness, there were other affections in their hearts that they excused and refused to deal with. The same thing could be said of multitudes of believers today. Many Christians take a public stand against pornography, abortion, and humanism, while cleaving at the same time to other idols in their hearts. Many are *righteous* without being *holy*. Yet God is calling every one of us to a higher level of purity!

According to Matthew 7:20-23, a man's character cannot be evaluated by the special ministry gifts he possesses. A man can have all of these and still be immature. Character is judged by *fruit*. “By their fruits you shall know them.” How much of the fruit of the Spirit can be seen in one's life? This is the real question! Does he or she have meekness, longsuffering, temperance, gentleness, love, joy and peace? Lucifer was highly talented but he had *no character*. He was a brilliant musician with extraordinary *charisma*, yet he was interested only in one thing—the promoting of himself. Character involves such virtues as faithfulness, loyalty, meekness, and right responses when we are hurt. Let us look for the evidence of these in our lives and in the lives of others.

9. HOW MUCH OF A SERVANT'S SPIRIT DO WE HAVE? According to the words of the Lord, *greatness* is determined by *humility* or how much of a servant's heart has been developed in our lives (Mk. 9:33-35, 10:37, 41-45). Jesus was a Servant of all servants. What is a true servant?

A SERVANT IS:

- **Someone who is devoted to another**—dedicated to the needs and well-being of others. It is the opposite of one who is self-centered and absorbed with his own hurts and troubles (Phil. 2:19-21).
- **Not demanding**—he does not insist on his own rights or *equality* but accepts what is given to him with a spirit of thankfulness (Matt. 5:3). No one who is truly “poor in spirit” has a demanding attitude.
- **Not independent**—one who bears with difficulties, “enduring all things for the elect's sake” ... the opposite of the fallen nature that asserts—“I don't have to put up with this” (1 Cor. 9:19, 2 Tim. 2:10).
- **One with no reputation to defend**—a servant is just like our Model Servant (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus never had *identity* problems. He had no *image* to maintain. He was seeking the honour of another—His Father. The Son never sought an earthly name or reputation for Himself.
- **One who is not proud**—therefore, he is not easily offended or quick to wrath. Only *lords* are offended.
- **One who does over and above his duty**—but still does not require a “thank you” or pat on the back (Lk.17:7-10). He lives for the praise of his Master, not the praise of his brethren (Col. 3:23-24).
- **One who has God's presence**—God walks with the lowly servant for He also is a servant (Isa.57:15). He loves to walk with those who are like Himself and compatible with Himself.

**Having a servant's heart is the key to getting along with others, especially those at home.
The true servant fulfills the law of love which is *total unselfishness*— (1 Corinthians 13).**

10. WHAT IS OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THOSE IN AUTHORITY? To what degree are we submitted to the Lord? We would have no way of knowing the answer to this question unless God gave us *tangible object lessons* in life to show us what is in our hearts. Our reactions to human authorities (those God places over us) reveals whether or not we possess the law of submission. God speaks and works *through men*. Often God speaks to us through *human agencies* such as a teacher, pastor, law officer, husband, and others. Therefore, when these are ignored, God is being ignored (Ezek. 3:7, Rom.13:1-7).

Consider the example of Eli the high priest in 1 Samuel chapters 1–4. Eli was backslidden. He misjudged one of the sisters in the church, accusing her of drunkenness. Of course, Hannah was not drunk, but in the bitterness of her soul she was petitioning God for a son as she prayed at the altar. When she explained her situation to God's backslidden minister, he replied, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him" (1 Sam.1:15-20). God honored the words and blessings of Eli. *He honored Eli's office, though He did not necessarily honor Eli.* Faith entered Hannah's heart and she returned home and conceived little Samuel. Hannah was wise enough to discern God speaking through *man*. She put aside offenses and listened for God's voice coming through a minister whose own life was not in order. Thus, we see the importance of our attitudes toward authority.

Christianity is attitudes! The attitude of a wife toward her husband indicates whether or not she possesses the law of submission (1 Pet. 3:1-7). Attitudes toward a pastor, law officers, or a grumpy boss reveal the same (1 Pet. 2:13-14, 2:18). In the final analysis, anyone who says, "I do not listen to man, only the Lord" is not listening to the Lord either. God is trying to speak to him *through men* but he is unable to hear. If God did speak directly, he would not discern it or obey because he is not in the habit of obeying. The *law of obedience* is not resident within him.

11. HAVE WE MASTERED OUR THOUGHT LIFE? It is not possible to be spiritual without first mastering our thought life. What we choose to meditate upon determines victory or defeat, for every battle is won or lost in the mind. Meditation is food. By our meditations we are either feeding the *old* nature or the *new* nature. Remember, thoughts produce fruit (Jer. 6:19). Thoughts become actions, actions become habits, habits become our destiny.

- Discouragement is the consequence of meditating upon and verbalizing what the enemy is saying, rather than what God is saying. God's thoughts are always good toward us (Jer. 29:11). If you are discouraged, what are you *thinking* about? Are your thoughts His thoughts? (Isa. 55:8).

- Sin is *conceived* in the thoughts. It grows as it is *fed* by the meditations, then it is birthed into an act. Sin can be nipped in the bud, in the thoughts. People sin because they have *planned to* and they have it all schemed out. Wrong meditations nourish and strengthen evil habits (Col. 3:9, Rom. 6:12-13). Right meditations weaken evil habits and render them inoperative (Col. 3:10, Eph. 4:22-24).

- Meditations affect our health. Constantly dwelling upon fears, violence and revenge can affect our pulse rate and breathing. Ill thoughts over stimulate the glands, organs, and our nervous system, making us sick. Meditations (things we are constantly thinking about) affect our spirit, our soul, and even our body. Important decisions also spring from what we have logically thought through. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psa.19:14).

- There can be no victory until we have learned to monitor our thought life. It is impossible to be spiritual without girding up the loins of our mind (1 Pet.1:13). What does it mean to “gird up the loins of the mind?” In Bible times, a man wore long flowing garments. When he wanted to go off on a journey, he reached down and tucked the loose garments tightly under his belt and off he would go. This was “girding up the loins.” Peter tells us to do this to our minds. Our thoughts tend to be all over like those loose garments. We have the ability to *tighten up* our thoughts. It is within our choice to turn off wrong thoughts and turn on the right ones. We do have the power to change our focus.

- Holiness is related to what we are saying in our *hearts*. “He that ... speaketh the truth in his heart” (Psa.15:2). We should stop and listen to our thoughts. God hears all the utterings of our hearts. Often we do not realize what we are saying within ourselves. The Word of God discerns our thoughts and motives and tells us who we really are (Heb. 4:12, 1 Chron. 28:9). Remember, our meditations determine whether we have victory or defeat. Housewives often spend much of the day reflecting on something that hurt them until they are worked up into a tizzy. But a door is opened to Satan when we continually review offenses. Think something good about your offender and then pray for him. Meditate upon the things that are pure, lovely, and of good report (Phil. 4:8, Psa.19:14). If you will do these things, the God of peace will be with you.

12. DO WE HAVE FINANCIAL INTEGRITY? There are over 2,000 verses in the Bible pertaining to money. I would like to make a statement that may seem bold at first but it is absolutely the truth: “How we handle money determines whether or not we will succeed in our Christian life.” This is the reason Jesus touches the subject in two-thirds of His parables. *The question is not how much money we have, but how well we manage it.*

Money and how we manage it reveals several important things about us:

- Whether or not we have a good *conscience*
- What our *priorities* are
- Where we have placed our *deepest affections*
- How we utilize our *time*
- Whether we have *good judgment* and *wisdom*
- If we *love our family* more than materialism
- Where we place our *security*
- If we have *faith* or unbelief in our heart
- Whether or not we are a person of *sacrifice*
- If we are *obedient* or not
- Whether or not we have *discipline* and self-control
- Whether or not God can entrust us with *spiritual riches*
- Ultimately, *how committed we are to the Lord*

**All of these are
spiritual issues**

Many believers do not have financial integrity. Christian bookstores are unable to give *credit* to fellow believers because often they would not receive their money. Bible schools, too, have had to change their policies because so many students have failed to pay their overdue tuition fees. The new policy has had to be—“No payment . . . no diploma”! Our faculty has observed that the graduates who have faithfully paid their bills usually succeed in the ministry. The others *never* do!

It is unrighteous to incur large debts and then be purchasing fancy clothes, fine furniture and appliances, and an expensive guitar. We should pay our bills first. This is the Christian way! Paul commands in Romans 13:8, “Owe no man anything.” Is it ethical to entertain ourselves and our friends in elaborate restaurants and to be extravagant when we are not paying our creditors? It is a form of stealing when people avoid paying their debts, hoping they can be written off as “uncollectable.” A mentality like this allows the conscience to become glazed over. It affects a man's relationship with God, for it makes him insensitive to the Holy Spirit. How would you feel if a man owed you (or your company) thousands of dollars, but he had preplanned to file for bankruptcy and had never intended to pay you? Is this living by the golden rule?

“Therefore, if we have not been faithful with money [unrighteous mammon], God will not entrust to us the true riches” (cf. Lu.16:10-12). Christ taught us that unfaithful stewardship of money is an indicator that we would not be faithful with spiritual matters either for it is a principle of the heart. This is the reason God tests us first in the natural things of life such as our job, our family, and money. If we have proven ourselves faithful in these, then we would qualify for “the true riches” or the spiritual ministry and authority. Many Christians *disqualify* themselves because of the issue of money. How we handle money is an integral part of the Gospel message. It involves conscience, character, and where we set our affections. Below are several reasons for financial bondage.

Three Main Reasons for Financial Bondage

A. Failure to Tithe We cannot be blessed if we do not tithe. Proverbs 3:9-10 commands us to tithe with a promise of being blessed and provided for. Therefore, when we fail to tithe, we are not obeying God's Word. Withholding our tithes is also a form of unbelief. People often say, “If I pay my tithes, I will not have enough for myself.” But how can God bless us when we are violating His Word and our heart is void of faith? Prosperity is only promised to those who observe *all* His commandments (Josh.1:8).

Literally, we are stealing from God when we neglect our tithes (Mal. 3:8-11). Also, we are robbing ourselves of the promised blessings. For when we honor the Lord with the choicest of our substance, “He rebukes the devourer for our sakes.” *Devourers* are evil spirits that siphon away our finances. In Malachi, *the devourer* came in the form of a blight that diminished all their crops. There are devourers today that constantly drain our resources such as hospital bills, car repairs, and broken down machinery. Is the blessing of God upon our home and industry? Are we honoring the Lord with the firstfruits of our substance?

In Haggai 1:3-11, the people were neglecting God's house. Life revolved around their *own* houses and other selfish interests. Priorities were not in order; therefore, God blew upon their works. Everyone was working overtime only to put their wages into a bag with holes. God does not honor our works if we are not honoring His work, and that involves tithing.

Tithing was not only an ordinance of Moses' Law. Tithing existed long *before* the Age of the Law. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20). Jacob paid tithes (Gen. 28:22), and both men were blessed exceedingly. Our Lord Jesus Christ also upholds tithing for the New Testament Age. In Matthew 23:23, the people were tithing but neglecting the more important matters of the law such as mercy, justice, and faith. Christ declared, "These [particular] things you should have done" (mercy, justice, and faith), and that they should also continue to tithe. Yes, tithing is an obligation, but the other important matters of the law—faith, justice, and mercy must not be neglected either.

God loves a *cheerful* giver (2 Cor. 9:7). Thus, the *attitude* in which we give is of utmost importance. We should give because we desire to, not only because we must. Also, we should give *in faith*, knowing that God will provide for us. Giving out of *constraint* is not of faith but of duty. Let us offer our sacrifice out of a relationship of love and faith.

B. Mismanagement of Money Why is it that some people who have so little are able to make ends meet, while others who have considerably more are always in debt? The problem is *mismanagement*. Thus, the issue is not how much we have but how well we manage our money. Often people have shortages because they have not wisely used what God has provided. We are stewards of the money God gives us. How are we using it?

Here are a few examples of how money can be mismanaged:

- **Bad Investments**—getting into ventures hastily without praying or seeking counsel from competent advisers.
- **Credit Cards**—Quick, accessible money is a snare, making us spend extravagantly and beyond our limits.
- **Borrowing Indiscreetly**—High interest rates for long periods of time bring bondage. Be led of the Holy Spirit *before* you construct or buy a building. Try to refinance your old loan with a lower interest rate if you can.
- **Bad Timing**—paying excessively for articles that could have been purchased for much less if we had waited. Watch for special sales, and wait for the right time. Make enquiries first for the best bargains.
- **Huge Phone Bills**—Limit the length of your calls; find the best plan for the places you call long distance.
- **Overspending**—unnecessary purchases. We should avoid buying what we do not need and cannot afford.
- **Wasting Resources**—lights, air conditioner left on, water running, etc. The hot water heater uses 25% of our power bill. Think conservative! When on vacation, turn the refrigerator down to low, and hot water heater off.
- **Desiring Only the Best**—The cheapest is not always the best in the long run. However, must we have the finest of everything? Where is our heart? A good used car costs only 20 to 30% of what we would pay for a new one. We are always paying *top dollar* for what is new! Can we be satisfied with something "almost as good" for a much lower price? Are we too proud to go to a used clothing store?

C. Lack of Discipline and Character "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not back from them" (Ecc. 2:10). Solomon had no self-control. Everything he saw with his eyes, he went after. Solomon dabbled with everything under the sun in an attempt to find satisfaction and happiness. Happiness, however, is never found in any of these things but in Christ alone. Many Christians are "entangled with the affairs of this life" (2 Tim. 2:4). The Lord warns that the cares, riches and pleasures of this world *choke* the life of the kingdom (Lu. 8:14). *Our ultimate call* is to fulfill the two great commandments of Matthew 22:36-40, to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and our neighbor as ourself. In order to obey this—our time, energy, and affections must be consecrated to God. If our life is occupied with materialism and working overtime, we cannot fulfill our call.

MONEY affects our spiritual life. Money reveals *who* we are! We cannot be spiritual without managing our money affairs wisely. The bottom line is this—financial bondage hinders us from doing God's will for our life; therefore, we should seek by all means to have financial freedom!

Security is another major reason people love money. Yet, security is found in the center of God's will, not in our money. Unfortunately, the people who clutch to their bank accounts *seldom, if ever*, receive any significant spiritual breakthroughs in their lives. What place does money have in your heart?

13. HAVE WE LEARNED TO STOP SAYING—“IT'S NOT FAIR?” When the complaint, “It's not fair” abounds in our dialogue, it indicates at least two things about our character. It shows that we have not yet learned the ways of the Lord and that we still are not in victory. Man has a terrible flaw—he thinks he deserves something better and he is very unthankful for what he already has. The way to victory is to first understand deep in our hearts that we deserve *nothing*. Yes, the truth is we deserve absolutely nothing, though we are hardly convinced of this! We are not “poor in spirit.”

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Mt. 5:3). In the original Greek, *poor* is described as “a cringing beggar”. This cringing beggar is grateful for every tiny crumb he receives. It is exactly the opposite of the man who is demanding more and better, or “equality.” Christ never demanded *equal rights* and neither should we. Our problem is that we compare ourselves with others and assume that we should have what they have. It is unlike our Lord to expect equality and to demand our rights. Many mental and emotional struggles would cease if Matthew 5:3 were put into practice. I am convinced that most of our problems do not stem from poor self-esteem. Rather, they come from pride and ego, unthankfulness, unredeemed areas of the self-life, and a lack of God's perspective on life's issues. We should teach our children from an early age not to assume that we *deserve* what others have.

14. HOW MUCH GRATITUDE DO WE POSSESS? Gratitude is the key to victory. Thankfulness is a healing tonic to the soul. It overcomes all bitterness, all complaining, and every difficult situation. Thankfulness conditions us to praise, and leads us unto pure worship. Scripture beckons us to enter His gates with thanksgiving, and to come into His courts with praise (Psa. 95:2, 100:4). Thanksgiving is an attitude that genders *faith*. Israel was void of faith—they were unthankful for all that God had done for them. Israel never made it into the land of promise because of a spirit of ingratitude and unbelief. Unthankfulness, as we can see from history, is the first major step to backsliding (see Romans 1:21). Even Lucifer fell from his lofty position because of *ingratitude*. Instead of expressing thankfulness to God for all that He had done for him, he only demanded more. Truly it is not possible to succeed if life without the excellency of a thankful heart.

Are we able to thank the Lord *in* and *for* every situation? (1 Thes. 5:18, Eph. 5:20, Hab. 3:17-19). I believe we have discovered the key to triumphal living when we are able to thank the Lord *in* and *for* each circumstance. Thankfulness rids us of every negative tone such as pessimism, criticism or complaining. Surely thankfulness is the key to victory and moving on in God (Num.14:8). And remember, a thankful spirit is what makes us attractive to God. This is also what makes a woman appealing to a man. A grateful and rejoicing spirit delights the Lord and wins His favor (Isa. 64:5).

Christianity is all about *attitudes*. The attitude in which we do the will of God is the all-important issue to Him. There is only one thing more important than doing the will of God and that is *delighting* to do His will (Psa. 40:8, 37:4). This is well illustrated in life. A father may ask his son or daughter to do a task; but, if they obey reluctantly or with an attitude of defiance, it brings no pleasure to the father. The same is true of our relationship with the heavenly Father.

15. DO WE REALIZE HOW LITTLE WE KNOW? Proverbs 17:27 declares, “He that hath knowledge spareth his words.” This suggests that the more we know, the more we realize how much we do not know, and the slower we are to offer advice (Ja.1:19). Even Job had to be reprovved for “multiplying his words without knowledge” (Job 35:16). God said, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world” (38:2-4). Actually, we know very little. According to Ephesians 2:7, God will be unfolding new revelation unto us for all eternity. We should understand that we have barely scratched the surface of what God has to reveal. Therefore, the man who thinks *he has it all and knows it all* dwells in the pathetic category of Revelation 3:17-19 (cf. 1 Cor. 8:2, Gal. 6:3).

16. HOW WELL DO WE COPE WITH *REJECTION*?

17. HOW WELL DO WE RESPOND TO *PAINFUL DELAYS*?

18. HOW WELL DO WE HANDLE *FAILURE*?

19. HOW WELL DO WE FACE THE *LOSS OF SOMETHING*?

20. HOW WELL DO WE HANDLE *HOSTILITY SENT OUR WAY*?

21. HOW WELL DO WE MANAGE *SUCCESS*?

The above topics determine whether or not we are a strong Christian. Each of these are more fully explained in the section entitled—TRUE STRENGTH. (See page 43)

22. HOW MUCH WISDOM HAVE WE ACCUMULATED? The thing that distinguishes a mature believer from one who is immature, is *wisdom*! Therefore, in Proverbs 4:7, we are exhorted to gather wisdom for “wisdom is the principal thing.” Wisdom transforms the simple (or childlike) into a discerning adult. Jesus Himself grew in wisdom; and, as He increased in wisdom, He grew also in favor with God and man (Lu. 2:52). Wisdom also caused the Son of man to “wax strong in spirit” (Lu. 2:40).

The Book of Proverbs was written to produce kingly wisdom. It was written *by* a king, *to* a king. The theme of Proverbs is “The Making of a King.” The call to each believer is to become kingly (1 Pet. 2:9, Rev.1:6, 3:21, 5:9-10, 1 Sam. 2:8). Wisdom incorporates into itself all the following: prudence, discernment, insight, foresight, good judgment, skill, experience, depth, purity, peace, gentleness, and more. All of these are necessary virtues for ruling upon the throne with the King of kings (Rev. 3:21). Several years ago, a discouraged pastor who had left a lucrative job to go into the ministry lamented to the Lord, saying, “Have I left all this just to shepherd this handful of people?” The Lord replied to him, “You are preparing twenty kings to reign with Me for all eternity!” Instantly, his discouragement vanished!

IMPORTANT THEMES OF PROVERBS

Essentials for the making of a king

- Rightly disciplining a child (The making of a king begins at birth.)
- Inner cleansing and right motives (Do not despise the corrections of the Lord.)
- Having the fear of the Lord (It is the beginning of wisdom.)
- Walking with the right friends (Do not envy the wicked or desire to be with them.)
- Pursuing wisdom relentlessly (It is only granted to the worthy seeker.)
- Giving our heart [our affections] to God (All of life's decisions spring from here.)
- Guarding against vice (Practice moderation, temperance, and self-control.)
- Watching for the snare of flattery (Flattery wants something in return.)
- Power of the tongue for good or evil (It has the power of life and death.)
- On *hearing* and *retaining* what we hear (The key words are - “forget not” and “keep.”)
- Exhortations against bribes or the wrong use of money in any way (See 1 Sam.12:3.)
- Perils of wasting *time* as well as *substance* (Beware of procrastination.)
- Condemnation of pride, arrogance, and a haughty spirit
- Exaltation of humility (“Before honor is humility.”)
- Emphasis on right treatment of the poor (Shun oppression of any form.)
- Traits of the good and evil woman compared, and choosing a wife of the highest quality
- The personality of wisdom (Wisdom is pure, peaceable, etc. cf. Ja. 3:17.)
- Wisdom that builds a house (Laying foundation stones of wisdom that build a marriage.)
- Against scorning, mocking, and boasting (These are never tasteful in the life of a king.)
- Repentance, teachableness, and ceasing from *our own* wisdom
- On not being offended (An offended heart can degenerate to great wickedness.)
- Hating simplicity (The consequences of rejecting wisdom is that God will reject us.)
- Right attitudes toward enemies (There is no place for “getting even” or seeking vengeance.)
- Respecting our parents at any age (“Despise not thy mother when she is old.”)
- Problems in the soul which affect the body (A healthy body depends on a healthy soul.)

EVIDENCE OF THE TRUE MESSAGE

What is the true message of the hour?

Eternal Message

(Ultimates)

- Humility and staying out of the picture
- Doing the will of God for my life
- Hatred for sin and loving righteousness
- Purity of motives, pursuing divine wisdom
- Coming to know God, having my life changed
- Discerning what is on God's heart for today
- Focusing on the Lamb, becoming like Him
- Unity with each other, especially at home
- Man and wife getting their minds together
- Having a repentant, teachable, broken spirit
- Clearing up all conflicts in our heart
- God's Church coming to glory and maturity
- Being a Bride made ready for Christ
- Proclaiming the gospel with power and reality
- Centering on all the fruits of the Spirit

Temporal Message

(These are not ultimates)

- What God can do for *me*
- The quickest way out of my problems
- Claiming my rights in Christ
- Receiving material blessing
- Focusing on me—how great I am going to become in Christ
- How Jesus can make me a success
- Predicting the future

The Prosperity message has failed largely because the emphasis has been on what God can do for me without any emphasis on a holy life. Possessing a servant's heart, becoming a lamb and surrendering rights has not been emphasized, nor has humility been stressed enough. Neither has the importance of moral and marital purity been preached.

23. DO WE POSSESS DIVINE LOVE? If all the characteristics of divine love were summarized they could be comprehended in just one word—*unselfishness*. Love is the opposite of selfishness. Divine love is not just an emotion. It is character! It does what is best for others. Love seeks not her own interests, is not easily provoked. It bears and endures all things. True love is totally unselfish. It is “the bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14). Love is sacrificial, laying down its life for others. Love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom.13:8-10). Love never fails! Christian perfection is determined by how much *God's unselfish nature of love* has been perfected in our lives.

Selfishness is the exact opposite of love. Selfishness considers *self* first. Selfishness is the main reason people cannot get along with each other. Also, it is a major reason for divorce. Someone has said, “If legislators passed a law allowing only unselfish people to divorce, there would be no divorces at all.” Self-denial is at the very heart of Christianity (Mt.16:24). Even the Savior did not please Himself (Rom.15:1-3).

Arriving at Love and True Unity

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the [help of the] Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren.” 1 Peter 1:22

How do we arrive at “unfeigned love of the brethren?” First Peter 1:22 and First John 1:7 show us the way! It comes by a slow and gradual process which requires many acts of obedience and many responses to the truth. The reason there is so little character manifested in the Church is because these precious commodities (love and unity) have a high price tag attached to them, and few are willing to pay the cost to have them.

“Unfeigned love of the brethren” is unity. They are equivalent! Where there is genuine humility, there is unity. By nature, however, we are not humble and we are not unselfish, but *assertive* to promote our will, ways, and opinions, and few are noble enough to give in. Thus, we have continual clashes.

God *understands perfectly* what those things are in our lives that cause conflict and disunity. Thus, He addresses those issues one at a time and at His pace. He will speak clearly to us and there will be no misunderstandings. God will put His finger on something in our life. Perhaps He will impress upon us, “This needs adjustment” or “I want you to wait” or “This relationship is not good for you.” Maybe He will seek to redirect us, saying, “This is not My plan for your life; I have something else in mind” or perhaps, “Your attitude is not right toward this person and it is hindering your growth and adversely affecting others.” The Spirit might speak softly to our heart and say, “I want you to be more pliable; you are too rigid in your opinions.”

When God confronts us on an issue, He also offers grace (divine enablement) to help us respond to what He is asking of us. This is the key—if we respond to Him and obey His voice, a transformation takes place in our heart. Something is deposited into our being. Each time we obey from the heart the fresh truths presented to us, a new purification takes place in our soul. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth.” Read 1 Peter 1:22 again.

With each new response to the light of God's truth, a change takes place within. As this process is repeated over and over, eventually we come to that blessed state of “unfeigned love of the brethren” (1 Pet.1:22). Each new response to the truth remedies in our heart what is causing disunity, those areas of darkness, confusion, selfishness and hardness.

Light Leads to Love and Unity

“But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son [continually] cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7

Light leads to love! There is no other way to arrive at love but by walking in the light. Our fellowship one with another is based upon walking in the light, or walking in the *truth*. Walking in the light (in the truth) is what remedies the darkness and disunity in our hearts. Therefore, it is impossible to have unity or fellowship if we are evading the light. True love is perfected as we are walking in and responding to the light (1 Jn. 2:5). Thus, it is only the *obedient ones* who come into true love and unity.

It is to no avail to announce from the pulpit, “We must have unity here; we must love one another.” True love and unity is possible only when the congregation is responding to the light. Growth continues only as we are saying *yes* to what God is pinpointing in our lives. Each time we say *yes* to God there is a change, there is growth. This is the way to advance from point C to point D in our spiritual life. But when we say *no* to God, our growth stops and *true guidance* also ceases. God will not speak to us about point E, when we have closed our ears to point D.

God is Light—God is Love

Fellowship is what Christianity is all about—fellowship with God and with one another. All of life revolves around relationships (Mt. 22:36-40). All sins involve our relationships with others and God. Thus, our need is for *growing and maturing* fellowship. This comes about as we *grow* in divine love, which leads to unity. However, it is only as we walk in the light (in the truth) that we have this fellowship. Only then does the blood of Jesus Christ [continually] cleanse us of all sin and remedy all of our disunities (1 Jn.1:7).

What are some of the things that destroy our fellowship? *Sin* destroys fellowship. It injures our relationship with God and man. *Hatred and unforgiveness* destroy fellowship and separate us from one another. John said that if we hate our brother we are walking in darkness (1 Jn. 2:9-11). *Error* destroys fellowship. False concepts and false spirits produce evil fruit and erode our fellowship and unity. All of these are central themes of John's first epistle. And although John is known as “the apostle of love,” he is also the apostle of *discernment*.

John first introduces us to the God of Light, and then to the God of love. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn.1:5). In verses 6-7 he makes it clear that our *fellowship* with God and with one another is dependent upon walking in the light. After establishing the fact that “God is light,” he develops the theme that “God is love.” Light precedes love! Walking in the light, obeying the light, being filled with the light, is what brings us to love and unity.

Light precedes love — There can be no love until
we face the light and have our conflicts resolved.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT BRINGS US TO LOVE AND TO UNITY

Light and Darkness Compared

Walking in the Light

- Maintaining a good conscience
- Obeying what we know is right - Living up to the truths we presently have
- Loving truth, actively seeking for more truth
- Quick and positive responses to correction - To welcome reproof and not resent it
- A willingness to expose our whole heart to God, and an *openness* to our brethren
- Walking with brethren who have conviction, who themselves are walking in the light. David always went to Samuel for counsel.
- Keeping offenses and grudges out of our heart See 1 John 2:9-11. Not hardening our heart

Characteristics of Light

- It reveals, enlightens, exposes, and shows up what is hidden. Light shreds the veil of pretense.
- Light makes us genuine and real, cleansing us of falsehood and hypocrisy, making us transparent.
- Light is truth. It is *a liberating power*. (A laser is a powerful concentration of light.)
- Light is health. Germs and sickness breed where there is no light.
- Light shows us where we are going. It is direction and understanding. God is light. He has no fear, confusion, doubt, discouragement, or gloom. God is not taken with surprise by anything.

Walking in Darkness

- Going against our conscience
- Turning from what we know is God's truth and His will - rejecting the light (Prov. 2:13)
- Loving the world and the things of darkness
- Resenting reproof from those over us, and hating to admit any fault or weakness.
- Shielding and hiding from God, withholding the most important facts from our brethren.
- Having friends who are not walking with God *Avoiding* people who are walking in the light, For example, Saul avoided Samuel.
- Allowing evil feelings and hatred in our hearts toward others (1 Jn. 2:9-11, Heb.12:15).

Characteristics of Darkness

- Darkness is a covering, a cloak. In darkness one can pretend and play a role (Jn.3:19-21,15:22).
- Darkness is where sickness and germs breed. It is where the plague of wickedness can spread.
- Darkness is obscurity, confusion, lack of clarity and direction. It is also a realm of unreality.
- Darkness is discouragement, despair, a lie. Depression is darkness; like a gloom or fog.
- Satan is powerful *only* where he is well hidden or disguised as another. Satan loves darkness. His kingdom is darkness. When he is exposed by the light, his power is broken.

24. ARE WE PEOPLE OF RESPONSIBILITY? A responsible person has a tremendous sense of *accountability*. He is ever conscious that he will be answerable to God for himself, his family, and others. A responsible man fears God. Therefore, he is cautious of his words, gestures, attitudes, and actions. He understands that his life is constantly leaving impressions upon those around him and that he is *influencing* their eternal destiny.

A man of responsibility is *reliable* at work, at home, and at church. He is a man of his word. He means what he says and says what he means, and he keeps his promises (Mt. 5:37). When he makes a commitment, he will follow it through (Psa.15:4). When he says, "I'll meet you at 8:00 in the morning," he will be there or he will contact you if he is unable to do so. A responsible man has right attitudes toward authority—toward his boss, law officers, teachers, elected officials, and parents. Also, he is meticulous about paying his debts *before* indulging in other purchases.

The prevailing attitudes of those who are *irresponsible* are something like this: "I don't have to put up with this," "No one tells me what to do," "It's my life and I will do what I want," "If I don't like my job, or the pressure, or my marriage, I will just walk out." Cain discharged himself of all responsibility when God questioned him of the whereabouts of his brother. He glibly replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Pilate thought he could excuse himself of his bloodguiltiness by washing his hands and saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person" (Mt. 27:24). Yet it was in his jurisdiction to release or condemn, and indeed God held him responsible (Jn.19:10). Paul made himself his brother's keeper. He said he was *a debtor* to all men and felt obligated to tell them the truth (Rom.1:14,15). He "endured all things for the elect's sake" and "become all things to all men" that some might be saved (1 Cor. 9:22, 2 Tim. 2:10). Paul put aside convenience and all self-interests in order to serve and rescue fallen man.

25. HOW WELL DO WE MANAGE OUR TIME? Have we made Jesus *Lord of our time*? Time is God's gift to us. Eternity is not concerned with time, but upon earth *time* is the most valuable substance God has entrusted to us. Time is a stewardship, a divine trust. It cannot be bought or borrowed. God will ask us how we have used our time. Suppose we frittered away half our day on nonessentials. If we made this a habit, we would waste half our life. Wasting time is wasting *life*. When we have run out of time, we have run out of *life*! Time is ticking away. How are we using it? God will give us sufficient years to accomplish His purposes for our lives, but if we dissipate precious time, we will be unable to fulfill all of God's will.

Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses. His generation had wandered in the wilderness forty years. They had wasted most of their lives because of disobedience and hardening their hearts. Therefore, Moses prays in Psalm 90 for future generations, that we would not waste our lives in aimless pursuits but that God would give us wisdom to know how to use our time wisely. "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psa. 90:12). May God bring us to the place where everything we do is *productive, meaningful, and efficient, bearing eternal fruit*.

Have We Made Jesus Lord of our Time?

Making the Most of Our Time

- Most of us do not need to be busier. The question is, “Are the projects we are involved with productive?” In Ephesians 5:16,17, we are commanded to “make the most of every opportunity” and to “redeem the time.” We should make every punch count. This includes being in the right places at the right times, meeting the right people and saying the right words. In short, we must be led by the Spirit even in little details.

- Are we rightly delegating responsibilities to the proper people? We should not attempt to do everything ourselves. Even our Lord Jesus understood that He could not be everywhere at once. Therefore, He deposited his mission and message into many other men who could.

- When we say that we cannot crowd everything into a twenty-four hour day, we are too busy. Remember, God knew what He was doing when He created twenty-four hour days. Is it necessary to have two jobs in order to pay for luxuries we can live without? This demands our time and energy, and our *nerves*. Is it economical in the long run for a mother to go to work considering the cost of an extra car, extra taxes, baby sitters, and much more?

- Are we afraid to turn down invitations or requests thinking we may offend someone? Let us learn to say “no” graciously. There is a tactful way to do it, so why not ask God to help us! We should take inventory. Are all our endeavors absolutely necessary (trips, favors, activities, hobbies)? After we have made a list, choose what is most important and *delete* some of the others. What we want is eternal fruit. Let us pray that God will give us wisdom to use our time efficiently and only for the issues that matter for eternity. Time is short; it is running out.

Distractions That Take Our Time and Money

(The more we have, the more we have to maintain)

Below are some one word descriptions of the tasks we have to do to maintain all the extra gadgets, projects, and hobbies that distract us from our time with God and our high calling. They have to be:

adjusted	fixed	oiled	renovated	swept
changed	greased	organized	repaired	tightened
charged	housed	overhauled	scraped	trimmed
cleaned	insured	painted	scrubbed	tuned
counted	inspected	patched	sealed	vacuumed
cultivated	licensed	polished	serviced	varnished
cut	mended	preserved	shampooed	washed
dusted	mortgaged	pruned	sharpened	watered
filed	mowed	recorded	sorted	weeded
filled	mulched	regulated	straightened	winterized

Even good and legitimate things can hinder us from divine fruitfulness. If you are called into the ministry, it might be wise to put a limit on the number of children you have. When you have a larger family, you need a larger house which means higher taxes, higher heating bills, more dental and doctor bills, and a multitude of other necessities. There are many missionaries / ministers who have had to leave the ministry to take care of their children. In doing so, they have neglected hundreds of spiritual children. Keep yourselves from being entangled with the cares of this life, even *legitimate* cares.

26. WHAT IS OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD FALLEN BRETHREN? Galatians 6:1 is another vital evidence of spirituality. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault [or sin], ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” What goes on in our minds when we see a fellow believer stumble.

When a brother or sister falls into sin, there are several common wrong reactions we must guard against:

- a.) Criticism
- b.) Hardness
- c.) Harshness
- d.) An “I told you so” attitude
- e.) “There is no help for him in God” attitude

David said, “Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God” (Psa. 3:2). This is what fellow believers were saying about King David when he fell into sin and was under severe discipline. Many were saying, “He is hopeless; God is finished with him,” but they were mistaken. A mature Christian realizes that he also is *capable* of falling into sin. He has learned to be sensitive to the struggles and temptations that torment others, and is thankful and conscious of the grace that has kept him (1 Pet.1:5).

Hardness and criticism toward a fallen brother reveal the following:

- He is not convinced that he could fall into the same snare himself.
- He is insensitive to some of the torments people feel. If he were sensitive, he would be merciful.
- He needs a greater vision of God's desire to restore. God's heart is for *restoration*.

27. HOW WELL DO WE KNOW OURSELVES? Next to knowing Christ, the most important thing is to know *ourselves* (1 Cor.13:12). We do not understand ourselves and this is the reason we have conflicts. Many of our bondages break when they are brought fully *into the light*. Our problems cannot be solved until we are *convinced* of them. Release never comes until we are *persuaded* of our need. Remember, Job was purged only when he was able to *see himself* in God's light (Job 42:5-6). Only then did his trial come to an end. We must be able to see what God sees in us, and then make an honest confession.

Trials, time, and pressure mellow us. They *condition* us to hear and see what we were unable or unwilling to receive previously. Then, the new enlightenment transforms us (Romans 12:2).

Hypocrisy, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, is *blindness* (Mt. 7:1-5), but it comes from a hardened heart. How severe and harsh one can be with others while the same problem thrives in his own heart and is usually far worse! (Rom. 2:1). Why, then, are people hypocrites? It is because of a *lack of self-knowledge*. They are blinded to the condition of their own hearts (Jer.17:9). True Christianity and maturity involves our whole inner-life being searched out by God and *flooded with divine light*. It means every area of our being must be scrutinized by the all-seeing and redeeming gaze of God (Psa.11:4, Prov. 20:27). God sees and knows every part of us. When we are able to see what He sees, we will be freed. But there is another factor here. God has to *wait* until we are mature enough *before* He can show us what He sees, and our true condition.

28. HOW MUCH OF THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT HAS DEVELOPED? Herein is the ultimate mark of spirituality. This is *the supreme standard* by which we judge men's character, and that is, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Mt. 7:20). Each of the nine fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 is an aspect of the nature of God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit's objective is to produce every one of these beautiful fruits within our life so that our nature is just like the Lord's. Our calling is to be "conformed to His image" (Rom. 8:29). Thus, when all nine of these heavenly virtues are flourishing abundantly, we will be very much like the Lord. Also, a man's *strength* is determined by the evidence of these fruits in his life.

All nine fruits of the Spirit are Strengths
(Galatians 5:22-23)

Love - is the *strength* to put others first. It is the *strength* to be unselfish, to bear and endure all things. Love seeks not her own, but puts others first.

Joy - "The joy of the Lord is our *strength*." Joy cleanses and heals our spirit of hurts, grudges, and depressions. Joy even strengthens us physically and gives us energy.

Peace - is the *strength* to be calm in the storms. It is not shaken with doubts, fears, and the assaults of the enemy. Peace brings stability to our hearts and minds.

Longsuffering - is the *strength* not to "give up" but to endure difficulties, delays, and circumstances.

Gentleness - is the *strength* not to be rough or abrasive with others. It is the strength to be kind. It is an outgrowth of wisdom. Only a strong person can be gentle.

Goodness - is the *strength* to do what is morally right. It puts aside its own desires and does what is *eternally best* for another.

Faith - is the *strength* to overcome the world, Satan, and dark trials (1 Jn. 5:4), and it moves mountains. Faith is greater than any problem we have.

Meekness - is the *strength* not to retaliate, verbally or physically (Isa. 53:7, 1 Pet. 2:21-23). It is also the *strength* to accept our circumstances without anger.

Temperance - (self-control) is the *strength* not to indulge; it is the *strength* to control appetites and passions. Samson was not strong in spirit.

COMING TO GLORY — OUR GOAL

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). This single passage shows us what the mark in life is—to *come to glory*. Sin is to come short of this mark. The ultimate mission of our Lord Jesus Christ was “to bring many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10). He did not come to earth *merely* to rescue fallen humanity from eternal judgment. He came to revolutionize a people into His perfect likeness, “to lift the beggar from the dunghill, to set him among princes, and to make him inherit the throne of glory” (1 Sam. 2:8). Thus, Paul proclaims, “He is able to *save to the uttermost* them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

God desires a mature bride, one who is *glorious*, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph. 5:26-27). He longs for someone to be on His “communication level,” one to whom He can open His heart and share His deepest secrets. God is unable to have that kind of relationship with *a child*. This is the reason we must progress from a new born babe in Christ to a mature bride, from First Peter 2:1-2 to Revelation 19:7-8.

Paul described the Corinthian believers as *babes* and *carnal* (1 Cor. 3:1-3, cf. Heb. 5:12-14). At the time Paul wrote to them, they were unprepared to reign with Christ. The throne is not entrusted to undeveloped infants or the carnal, but to the overcomers (Rev. 2:26, 3:21, 21:7). Paul challenged the Corinthians, saying, “You are [presently] unworthy to judge the smallest matters,” when in fact we are called to judge the world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3). Paul did not throw up his hands in despair as he wrote to them. He was confident that God would “confirm them unto the end, that they might be *blameless* in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8). Paul remembered where *he* had come from. He realized that the same grace that transformed his own life could do the same for the Corinthians *as* they continued to obey and respond daily to God's voice. Yes, the Corinthians were born again, Spirit-filled, and sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11). They had a fine example (Paul) before them, and possessed many of the spiritual gifts. Still, they were young in the faith, immature, carnal, and not cleansed from worldly lusts (2 Cor. 7:1). *They had not yet come to glory.*

What do we mean by “coming to glory.” I believe we have started to enter into glory when others can behold Christ in us (Gal. 1:16, 24). Christ in us is *the hope* of glory (Col. 1:27). When we are born again, Christ is conceived in us as a seed (1 Pet. 1:23). That holy seed within cannot sin (1 Jn. 3:9). But He must be allowed to be fully formed in us (Gal. 4:19) until we come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (see Eph. 4:13-14). Christ is *within us*, of course, when we are born again, and as He is fully formed within, those around us will see the mature Christ manifesting Himself through our lives.

Coming to glory, therefore, is being conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29) and demonstrating His life to the world. Glory involves four things:

- 1.) *Rendering* unto God the glory that is due His name in every circumstance
(Acts 12:23, Rom. 4:20, 1 Cor. 10:31, 2 Cor. 4:15, Rev. 4:11, 11:13, 14:7, 16:9).
- 2.) *Receiving* the glory or approbation which God bestows (Jn. 5:44, 12:43, Rom. 2:7, 2:10, Heb. 3:3).
- 3.) *Reflecting* the glory of God by coming into maturity (1 Cor. 11:7, 2 Cor. 3:18).
- 4.) *Partaking* of the consummated glory that is dispensed to the saints at Christ's coming
(Rom. 8:18, 1 Cor. 15:43, 2 Cor. 4:17, 2 Thes. 1:10, 1 Pet. 5:1, 5:4).

HOW DO WE COME TO GLORY?

- HUNGER, DESIRE - Hunger for God is a divine gift. It is implanted in our hearts by God Himself as we wait before Him, and as He sovereignly draws us (Jn. 6:44). Moses besought God, saying, “I *beseech* thee, show me thy glory” (Ex. 33:18). This resulted in a magnificent appearance of God as described in Exodus 34:5-8. *Beseech* is a very strong word in the original Hebrew and Greek. It signifies *desperation*. God's glory is revealed to the desperate, starving seeker. *Desire* is the key! Christians who are *content as they are* do not come to glory (Rev. 3:15-19). If we have no hunger, let us pray, “Lord, have mercy on me and draw me” (Song 1:4, Jn. 6:44).

- THIRST - David *thirsted* for God (Psa.42:1-2). He was thirsting to see God's power and glory (Psa. 63:1-2). David's desires in life had been reduced down to *one thing*—“to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple” (Psa. 27:4). He was willing to pass through dry wilderness experiences, for such experiences create divine thirst for God and His glory. God may dry up some of our old streams that we may drink solely from Him, *the Fountain of Living Waters* (Jer. 2:13). Remember, God pours His Spirit only upon the *thirsty ones* (Isa. 44:3, 41:17-18, Mt. 5:6).

- AGGRESSIVENESS - God does not visit those who are *passive*. He frowns upon *lukewarmness*. Christ will not choose a bride who is halfhearted (Rev. 3:15-16). If we want to meet God and have our life changed in any significant way, we must be aggressive (Mt.11:12, Prov. 2:1-5). Every believer has “roots” and a background to overcome. Strengths and weaknesses of our particular heritage are carried over into the Christian life. For example, the Quakers and Amish are nonresistant. They are opposed to wars of any kind. Yet this mentality is often carried over into the spiritual life to the extent that even Satan is not resisted or opposed. But the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments alike, are filled with military terms. Jesus Himself declared that *violence of spirit* is required in order to gain kingdom life (Mt.11:12). “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” (cf. Lu.16:16). Only *the aggressive* obtain the promises and come to glory.

- RIGHTEOUSNESS - “The Lord will give grace and glory” to those who walk uprightly before him (Psa. 84:11). God loves righteousness and He favors the righteous ones with His glory. Surely the Lord will bring us into all of His glorious promises as we delight in Him and work righteousness (Num.14:8, Isa. 64:5).

- ORDER - When everything is set *in order* in our lives and in our homes, then the glory of the Lord will be revealed (Isa. 40:3-5). God's glory cannot come until the standards are met. Many things *precede* the coming of God's glory. It was not until the tabernacle was “finished” and every single article was *in its proper place* that the glory of the Lord descended (Ex. 40:33-35). The same was true of Solomon's temple (1 Kg. 6:38, 8:10-11). Of course, these truths apply to us as believers for we are the temple of God. Also, it is of special importance that our home be in order, and that our relationships with our children and spouse be according to Scriptural admonitions.

Much preparation is needed before God can come forth in His glory (Psa.102:16). “And Moses said, This is the thing which the Lord commanded that you should do: and the glory of the Lord shall appear unto you” (Lev. 9:6, 9:4). Before the glory of the Lord appeared to Israel, the first eight chapters of Leviticus had to be accomplished. God's people had to offer the correct sacrifices, perform various cleansings, make proper applications of the blood, have the right spiritual garments, and be anointed. All of these steps are a must in our own personal lives before the glory can come.

• MATURITY - Glory comes upon the *mature*; it comes upon a ripened crop. A farmer whose crop does not ripen to maturity has no joy, but sorrow. God also is a husbandman and He has no pleasure nor can He be satisfied until we *bring forth fruit unto perfection* (Lu. 8:14, Ja. 5:7). Maturity is based upon growing in wisdom. “Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding.” (Prov. 4:7, Psa. 90:12).

The burden of God is for His Church to come to full glory. Christ is coming for a glorious Church (Eph. 5:26-27). He must remove all spots and blemishes from our lives, for God will not have a blemished Bride. That the Church should come to glory has already been predetermined before the world began. It is a fact that the Church will come to glory (Eph. 5:26-27, Isa. 60:1-2, 40:3-5). The question is whether you or I will participate in this glory! Numbers 14:21 declares, “But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.” Just from this one verse we can see where the heart of God has been since the beginning of man.

What is the key to coming to glory? It is simple—by staying on God's path for our life. We must not turn to the right hand or the left or take detours around the issues God is addressing (2 Kg. 22:2). Let us face every situation squarely. If the issue is too difficult, we should pray it through until we have victory. If it is still overwhelming, we should go to the elders for help. Let us climb the spiritual ladder one step at a time. Saints who are highest up the ladder are ones who have not evaded, but faced each and every situation by grace. At the point where we say “no” to God, we cease growing. Let us pray for a soft and cooperating heart. God is able to give us *a heart of flesh* (Ezek. 36:26).

SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR COMING TO GLORY

1. Coming to Glory is the Mark We Are Pressing Toward.

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

2. That Man Should Come to Glory is the Ultimate Mission of Christ.

“In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God...should make the Author of their salvation perfect through suffering” (Hebrews 2:10 *NIV*).

3. God Has Called Us to Be Like Jesus Who is the “Glory of God.”

“He also did predestinate [us] to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

4. Coming to Glory is the Burden of God's Heart For His Bride.

“That he might present it to himself a *glorious* church, not having spot or wrinkle” (Ephesians 5:27).

5. God's Desire is to Bring His Glory to the Whole Earth.

“As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Numbers 14:21).

The simplest definition of sin is—to come short of the mark, the glory of God. Thus, if we are not moving on in our Christian walk, if we are not growing—we are sinning.

TRUE GRACE

What grace is
What grace is not
How to receive grace
How grace is resisted

“I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.” 1 Peter 5:12

“I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that *this is the true grace of God* wherein ye stand” (1 Pet. 5:12). Peter emphasizes the *true* grace of God because there was a *false* theme of grace being preached in the Church, even in his day. Jude also warned against ungodly men who had crept into the Church and were “turning the grace of God into lasciviousness” (Ju.1:4). Real grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Tit. 2:11,12).

True grace is not *permissiveness!* It is never an excuse for sin, nor does it ever condone sin. True grace does not suggest that God turns His head and pretends He does not see our sin, or because knowing our frailty He would excuse our disobedience. Grace never takes away our responsibility to keep the commandments of God, rather it *enables us* to obey them. The Church must realize that God does not *overlook* our sins. Instead, He offers this divine substance called *grace* so that we may be freed from sin's clutches in order to do the will of God. Where sin abounds, grace can much more abound (Rom. 5:20b).

Grace has two specific meanings:

1. Grace is *undeserved and unmerited favor*. It is God's sovereign goodness and kindness toward us.
2. Grace is *divine enablement and strength*. It is a transforming, enabling, energizing power.

This particular study concerns number 2—the divine enablement (or power) aspect of grace.

GRACE IS POWER!

Power to Change Us, Keep Us, and Use Us

God's grace is *enablement* (1 Cor.15:10). It is a *substance* that God deposits into us when we are in need (Heb. 4:16). Grace is the only thing that transforms our life (1 Tim.1:13-14). Unless God sovereignly gives us His grace, nothing ever changes. It is only by an impartation of grace that we are able to keep our hearts free of bitterness (Heb.12:15). Grace is essential for controlling our emotions. “For it is a good thing that the heart be established with *grace*” (Heb.13:9). Grace supplies us with the necessary power *to obey* what God is asking of us (Rom.1:5). Grace is so powerful that its evidence can be plainly *seen* (Acts 11:23).

“*Not under the law, but under grace*” means God expects more of us (Rom. 6:14-15). Before grace came through Jesus Christ, God's people had the law but little power to keep it. Now that grace has come, we have *the available power* to keep the righteous demands of the law. “The righteousness of the law” is to be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4).

Review

Grace alone changes us (1 Cor.15:9,10). Paul, who formerly had wasted the Church of God, said, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (Gal.1:13). Grace transformed Paul's life. He *received* a huge amount (1 Tim.1:13-14).

Grace is given in times of need (Heb. 4:16). We are exhorted to “Come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help *in time of need.*” God faithfully pours sustaining grace into our lives when we are under pressure *if* we call upon Him and keep our attitude right.

Grace is only given to the humble (Ja. 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5,6, Prov. 3:34). There is always a reason some receive grace but others do not. Noah found grace in God's sight and was preserved in judgment. Others were not. Our *attitude* determines whether or not we receive grace. By *hardening the heart*, people resist God and cut off the flow of grace.

Abundant grace enables us to reign in life (Rom. 5:17). “They which receive *abundance* of grace shall reign in life.” If we receive a *small* amount of grace, we cannot reign. The amount of grace we receive depends upon our response as well as God's. The spirit of grace can be insulted (Heb.10:29). Whenever we are injured, grace is available immediately, but failure to appropriate this grace results in bitterness (Heb.12:15). According to Paul, we have no excuse for growing bitter because God does not test us above what we are able to bear (1 Cor.10:13). Thus, when we become bitter, we have resisted available grace, hardened our heart, and refused to let go of an offense.

Perfection calls for more grace (Heb. 6:1-3). Paul exhorted the Hebrews to move *beyond* the first principles, saying, “Let us go on unto perfection.” But then he adds, “This will we do if God permit.” In other words, if God gives more grace.

HOW MUCH GRACE WILL WE RECEIVE?

Many times in Scripture God likens men to *vessels*. We were created with a void or hollow, and therefore we have an innate capacity to *contain* something. What we allow to be poured into our life determines whether we will be a good or bad vessel (Rom. 9:22-23, 2 Tim. 2:20-22). Whatever is poured into us permeates our whole being. Observe the numerous times we find the words “full” or “filled” in God's Word.

When God moved in revival in the Book of Acts, it is interesting to see what the inhabitants of each city were filled with. Some were *filled* with the Holy Spirit, but others were filled with envy. Some were *filled* with faith and power; others with indignation. Some were *filled* with the fruits of righteousness, but others were *filled* with Satan. It depended on what source they were drinking from—the river of God or the river of this world. (See Acts 13:9-10.)

Therefore, because we are vessels and capable of containing something, God wants to fill us with His grace and all the fruits that accompany grace. Each time we allow God to deposit this spiritual substance called *grace* into our lives, we are different. We are changed. Grace is not something *ethereal*. It is a substance and it is *received* into our vessel. Consider King Saul whom God “turned into another man” instantly (1 Sam.10:6, 9). This is an example of experiencing and receiving grace. Unfortunately, he received the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). Saul went back to his old life.

Summary

Because grace is the only thing that transforms us, and since grace is only given to the humble, the only way to move forward in our Christian walk is by humbling ourselves. In order to receive new grace into our lives which leads to new growth, there must be a fresh kneeling at the foot of the cross. This is one reason it is good to have a problem we are unable to solve on our own. When a problem is *beyond our limits*, we have to humble ourselves and go to others for help. This opens the door to new grace (Ja. 4:10).

Grace is given in time of need. Therefore, the ones who have passed through the most difficulties and have met God in them possess the most grace in their lives. A painful situation is an opportunity for life-changing grace to be poured into our vessel. Abundance of grace is imparted to those who are in *abundance of need*. But there is another factor involved here—attitude. How we respond to a difficult situation makes the difference. Often a man has adversity but receives no grace because of a bad attitude. By our response, we can make our difficult circumstance either an *ordeal* or an *opportunity* for new grace. We can choose to open or close our vessel to grace.

It is within the power of our choice to receive or reject grace. When we are injured, immediately we are faced with a decision. We may harden our hearts and reject grace, or we may cry out to God for His grace to sustain us in our time of trouble. His grace is sufficient (2 Cor.12:9) but if we harden our hearts the flow of grace is stopped and bitterness sets in (Heb.12:15). It is like putting a lid on our vessel, prohibiting the inpouring of grace. Therefore, we should keep our vessel open at all times to the wonderful riches of God's grace. The only time we should close our vessel is when there is plague or death in the air (i. e. gossip, false doctrine; see Num.19:14-15).

Paul kept his vessel open to God and accumulated an enormous amount of grace as the years passed (1 Tim.1:13,14). As grace is constantly poured into our lives day after day, we amass what Paul described as “abundance of grace” (Rom. 5:17). Abundance of grace is required to reign in this life and in the age to come. Scripture mentions three levels of grace: sufficient grace—enough to get us through (2 Cor.12:9); abundance of grace—to reign in life (Rom. 5:17), and exceeding abundant grace—to utterly transform us and make us more than conquerors (1 Tim.1:13-14).

“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8). Others did not! Yet God has no favorites. Why do some receive grace but not others? It depends on the *attitude*. God gives grace to the humble but He resists the proud. Thus, our attitude determines *how much* grace we receive (Isa. 57:15).

Climate for grace to be given: *In difficulties, temptations, pressures* (Heb. 4:16, 2 Cor.12:7-9).

Attitude to receive grace: *Humility. Grace is given to the lowly* (Ja. 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5-6, Prov. 3:34).

Grace is given to the sincere (Eph. 6:24)

Paul admonishes, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1). Jesus came to earth as an ordinary man. During His many trials and temptations He obtained grace (divine enablement) from His heavenly Father until He was “*full of grace and truth*” in every area of His life (Jn.1:14). Christ fully comprehends every area of human temptation (Heb. 2:16-18). Today we are beckoned to come to the throne of grace to find help in our time of need, for this grace is found in Christ Jesus who is seated at the right hand of God.

GRACE DEFINED

Grace is much more than undeserved favor. Often in God's Word, grace means *divine enablement or power*. Listed below are several examples of the enabling, transforming power of grace in the Word of God.

GRACE IS POWER TO CARRY A HEAVY LOAD.

*"I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me."
(1 Corinthians 15:10)*

GRACE IS POWER FOR A MIGHTY MINISTRY.

*"For he [the Spirit] who wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the [Jews], the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles. And when James, Cephas, and John...perceived the grace that was given to me ..."
(Galatians 2:8-9)*

GRACE IS POWER TO DO GOD'S WILL.

*"We have received grace ... for obedience."
(Romans 1:5)*

GRACE IS POWER TO TRANSFORM US.

*"Who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ... And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was exceeding abundant."
(1 Timothy 1:13-14)*

GRACE IS POWER TO WIN OVER SIN.

*"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."
(Romans 5:20)*

GRACE IS POWER TO REIGN IN LIFE.

*"They that receive abundance of grace ... shall reign in life."
(Romans 5:17)*

GRACE IS POWER TO UNDERSTAND TRUTH AND DECLARE IT.

*"...According to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see ... the mystery."
(Ephesians 3:7-9)*

GRACE IS POWER TO HANDLE POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY WISELY.

*"For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think."
(Romans 12:3)*

GRACE IS POWER TO MINISTER THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT.

*"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us."
(Romans 12:6)*

GRACE IS POWER TO KEEP BITTERNESS OUT OF OUR HEARTS.

*"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you"
(Hebrews 12:15, 4:16 cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9, 1 Corinthians 10:13)*

GRACE IS POWER TO ESTABLISH OUR HEARTS AND EMOTIONS.

*"It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats."
(Hebrews 13:9)*

TRUE RICHES

Focusing On the Right Issues in Life

“Therefore, if ye have not been faithful [in the case of unrighteous mammon—riches, money, and possessions], who will commit to your trust the true riches.”
Luke 16:11

What do you value most in life? What are you hoping for? Where have you placed your deepest desires and expectations? Are they focused upon the temporal or the eternal? Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt. 6:21). Our *continual meditations* are an indicator of what we cherish most.

People expend most of their lives working toward having temporal things that perish—a beautiful home, an education, an occupation, a comfortable bank account, security, hobbies, sports, clothes, earthly pleasures, and the cares of this life. All of these demand our time, affection, energy and money. Yet, in the final analysis, none of these can be taken into eternity. None of these are the “better and enduring substance” mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 10:34.

What are “the true riches” of Luke 16:11? What treasures should we lay up for ourselves in heaven (Mt. 6:20)? How should we use our time and substance? What investments will return the greatest eternal dividends? What can we take with us when we leave this earthly life and go into the next one? This little study on *The True Riches* is aimed at evaluating our wealth. It is an exhortation to invest in those things which last forever (Lu.10:42). Revelation 14:13 declares that those who die in the Lord have “works that follow them.”

Scripture has much to say about the subject of wealth. There are counterfeit riches and the real ones. There are tangible and intangible treasures. Do you or I have the better and enduring substance or do we have a *substitute*? It is very clear from Revelation 3:18 that God desires us to be rich but with the right kind of riches. He said: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, *that thou mayest be rich.*” Yet, we are exhorted not to trust in the uncertain riches of this world (1 Tim. 6:17-18).

Counterfeit Riches

“But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast [prepared]? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:20-21, v16-21

Jesus said, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of *things* he possesses” (Lu.12:15). In Luke 12:13-15, we have a dispute over a will or inheritance: “Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me.” In this particular case, the Lord did not encourage the brother to “fight for his fair share” or demand equal rights. He saw in this man a motive of covetousness. He warned, “A man's life does not consist in the *abundance of things* he possesses.” He was saying, “This is not where you will find happiness! These are not the true riches; these are not the things to strive for.”

“Therefore, if ye have not been faithful in ... [riches, money, possessions]—who will entrust to you *the true riches*” (Lu.16:11)? Christ implied that worldly riches, money, and possessions are not the *lasting* riches. These are tangible! The better and enduring riches are *intangible*.

“BETTER AND ENDURING SUBSTANCE”

(Intangible riches we can take into eternity)

There are two basic things we can take into the life to come:

- 1.) **OUR CHARACTER**—who we are: what we have allowed God to deposit into our life
- 2.) **OUR WORKS**—those holy things we deposit into others that have changed their lives

*Therefore we should invest in people, not things. People are eternal, things are not.

RICHES WE SHOULD SEEK

The Better and Enduring Substance

1. A GOOD NAME “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver or gold” (Prov. 22:1). A good name is *God's respect* for us. He said, “Them that honour me I will honour” (1 Sam. 2:30). What a treasure it is when God lifts up the light of His countenance upon a man or woman who has earned His approval and favor! When we have pleased Him, not only does God respect us, He also causes man to respect us (Lk. 2:52). Even after death, God causes the *memory of the just* to be blessed (Prov. 10:7, Psa. 45:17). A good name is a treasure that can be left on earth *and* taken into eternity as well.

God promises, “I will have respect unto you” (Lev. 26:9), but this promise is *conditional*. It is based on verse 3 —“If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments, and do them.” It is a tragedy to lose God's respect, for when God's respect is lost, man's respect is lost too. God has removed His favor from many leaders in the Church today. He has taken away their good name because they have changed His moral standards in an attempt to gain wider acceptance of their ministry (Mal. 2:7-9). This is the reason we must *continue to choose* the narrow way, not the popular way, or we will lose God's smile upon our lives. Paul said, “by patient continuance in well doing, [let us] *seek for* glory and honour [a good name] and immortality, eternal life” (Rom. 2:7).

2. GOLD TRIED IN THE FIRE “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich” (Rev. 3:18, v14-19). Gold is a symbol of *divine nature*. “Gold tried in the fire” refers to a divine nature produced in us while in the furnace of affliction (Isa. 48:10, Mal. 3:2-3, Rev. 2:9). This caliber of gold is much more costly than any natural gold on earth, for it speaks of the refining of a man's character. God said, “I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir” (Isa. 13:12). In earthly terms, the Church of Laodicea was very wealthy. They boasted, “*We are rich* and increased with goods and have need of nothing.” But God's appraisal of them was quite different. He said, “*You are poor*, blind and naked.” Yet God desired them to be affluent with *eternal* blessings, saying, “Buy of me gold tried in the fire, *that thou mayest be rich.*”

“*Gold tried in the fire*” is divine character! Divine character means to be like God and to have His attributes. In the fires of God, we are forged into the image of Christ and that is the most important thing in life (Rom. 8:29). When we die and leave this world, we take into eternity who we are—our character. Character is the most important thing in life. Character is formed by God's hammer and intense heat and pressure. It is developed by constantly choosing the right way, not the popular way.

Therefore, character is always related to pain. When we are faced with a difficult decision or a tormenting temptation, will we choose the easy path or will we choose God's way, by His grace? Character is developed as we learn to say “no” to our own feelings, and “yes” to the will of God. Our character is the sum total of all our life's choices and decisions, and this is what we take into eternity. Earthly gold will surely pass away, but the *golden divine nature* wrought within our eternal being will never pass away (Psa. 45:13).

3. TREASURES IN HEAVEN “Lay *not* up for yourselves treasures upon *earth*, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Mt. 6:19-20, Col. 3:1-2). Likewise, wealthy believers are urged by Paul not to trust in the uncertainty of riches, but rather to be *rich in good works* that they may lay up for themselves the riches that endure forever (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

When a believer departs from this brief life and arrives at his final destination, what kind of *home* will be waiting him there? A home is a dwelling. We will have a dwelling place in heaven just as we have had one here on earth. The mansions of heaven differ greatly. Some are more magnificent than others. Are we aware that our heavenly home is under construction right now? The material that goes into our eternal home is being sent up *right now* by our works on earth. One teenage girl had a dream of her parent's home in heaven. It was beautiful and complete. Then she saw a few pieces of building material and enquired, “What are these?” Much to her chagrin she was told, “This is *your* home. This is all you have given us to work with.” Since that time, she too has been *building in the invisible*.

“*Where thieves break through and steal.*” When we speak of thieves breaking through and stealing we think of our property, our home. I believe this is what Jesus had in mind when He delivered the exhortation of Matthew 6:19-21. He was saying, “Invest more in your eternal home than your earthly home.” Much of our time and attention is absorbed by our earthly dwelling place, and it is not wrong, of course, to have a suitable home. But it should not over-occupy our affections so that we are unable to concentrate on our eternal habitation. What kind of material are we sending up to “the heavenly builders” for our eternal mansion? Upon *which* house is our heart most set?

4. RICH IN GOOD WORKS “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord...that they may rest from their labours; *and their works do follow them*” (Rev.14:13). Our works follow us into eternity. Eternal life, of course, is a free gift from God and cannot be earned. *Rewards, however*, will be according to our deeds. Matthew 5:19 proves that everyone's reward will not be identical. All sacrifices made for the Lord out of a pure heart will reap rich rewards. Even smiles or little gestures of kindness are written down in God's book of remembrance.

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12). It was said of one woman in Acts 9:36, that she was “full of good works and [charitable deeds].” Just think of what she was laying up for herself in heaven. Others suffered reproach and had their possessions confiscated because of their Christian testimony and good works. In Paul's words, they had endured *a great fight of afflictions*, fully realizing they would gain a “better and enduring substance” (Heb.10:32-35). See also Titus 3:8, 1 Timothy 6:17-18.

5. MAKING OTHERS RICH “As poor, yet making many rich” (2 Cor. 6:10). The Apostle Paul possessed little of this world's luxuries. Yet, he was able to make many rich (in spirit) by the truths he imparted into their lives. He could say of his converts, “You are my crown” or to put it in other words—“You are my reward” (1 Thes. 2:19-20, Phil. 4:1). Paul made many wealthy, giving them answers for the conflicts in their minds and in their hearts. His teachings showed them how to cope with life: how to find peace and joy, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. Paul desired not ordinary knowledge, but “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ” because superior knowledge does in fact produce superior character in Christians (Phil. 3:8). Superior seed produces superior fruit. Therefore, Paul spent his whole life planting the finest seed of God's Word in the lives of others. Paul rejoiced as he beheld the fruit of his labors and he will continue to do so for all eternity.

As Paul invested his time, energy, teaching, and prayers into the lives of his converts, they were utterly changed. They were enriched with the same revelation that had revolutionized Paul's life. The truths he deposited into these *earthen vessels* transformed them into a treasure for the Lord (2 Cor. 4:7). Paul's goal and purpose was to present the Church as a chaste virgin to Christ at His coming (2 Cor. 11:2,3). God will also entrust *a people* into our care, a people who will become our reward and our crown (Psa. 2:8). Remember—what we invest *in people* is taken into eternity.

6. CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6-10). A contented and happy heart is a priceless treasure. People go to endless lengths in search of happiness and contentment, but cannot find them unless they are granted by God. Solomon attests to this, saying, “God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and *joy*: but to the sinner he giveth travail” (Ecc. 2:26). Joy is God's gift to a man who is good in His sight. Solomon himself possessed wisdom and knowledge, *but no joy*. He had lost his joy because of divided loyalties in his heart. At the time he wrote Ecclesiastes, he was no longer “good in God's sight.” His wells of joy were stopped and polluted with the vanities of this world.

It was clearly understood by Solomon that contentment is a gift of God. He illustrates this truth by comparing the lives of two men (Ecc. 5:19 - 6:2). First he speaks of a man “to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof [or the ability to partake of it and enjoy it].” Then he adds, “This is the gift of God.” Then he continues, “There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is *common* among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him *not* power to eat thereof.” This man has riches, wealth and honour, yet God does *not* allow him to partake of it and enjoy it. Solomon was speaking of *himself* and many others like him (Ecc. 2:4-11).

Joy and contentment are unlike the riches of this world—they cannot be bought or borrowed. These are intangible treasures bestowed only upon the righteous (Psa. 45:7). Contentment can only be gained by drinking from the right Source—the Fountain of Living Waters (Jer. 2:13). Solomon had been drinking from *every* imaginable polluted stream of the world in search for satisfaction, but he found none. Truly, a heart that is divided is destitute of joy.

Joy is a marvelous treasure. The joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10). If depression makes us physically and spiritually weak, joy can make us strong. Joy not only purifies our heart of depressions and hurts, it even brings physical strength. Joy is the key to good mental, emotion, spiritual and physical health. “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Prov. 17:22). Joy ushers us into holiness and purity. *Fullness of joy* is found in God's presence (Psa. 16:11).

Joy is also the fruit of being faithful to what God has commissioned us to do. God will say to the diligent on the day of reckoning, “Well done thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the *joy* of thy Lord” (Mt. 25:21). Joy is another intangible commodity that we can have on this earth and take into eternity as well. In heaven, some will have greater joy than others. Adversity here on earth carves out a deeper cavity in our being to contain God's joy. How much joy will we take into eternity?

7. TREASURES OF DARKNESS “And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places” (Isa. 45:3). *Treasures of darkness* are the special insights we gather up in *night* experiences of our lives. Certain truths can be found only in the dark. They are very costly. Once we have received them, they can be shared with others to encourage them and to lift them up into higher realms of the Spirit. In heaven there is no darkness. This is the only time of our existence that we are able to find such treasures. Let us make the most of this opportunity.

8. TREASURE OF CHRIST'S REPROACH Moses “esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:25,26). Moses considered the will of God more valuable than all the treasures in Egypt. Following Christ is never a popular thing! Christ has *never* appealed to natural man or the flesh, nor will He ever. To the world, Christ is a stumblingblock. He is a figure of shame and controversy. He is thought of as a reproach and a failure. How close would you like to walk with a man of that description? This Man of ordinary appearance is *God in disguise*. And *hidden* within this Man are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and all the blessings and mysteries of life (Col. 2:3).

The Reproach of Christ is a Treasure Because:

- It identifies us with Christ and all of His disguised blessings, including a throne of authority (2 Tim. 2:12).
- We come to know Christ intimately through the *fellowship of His sufferings* (Phil. 3:10).
- We have access to the wisdom and knowledge that is hidden within Him that others do not (Col. 2:3).
- * The Lord will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of Him, and they will lose His favor (Mk. 8:38).

9. A GLORIOUS NEW BODY “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this [house] we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven” (2 Cor. 5:1-2, v1-8). In these verses, Paul is referring to our incorruptible resurrected body. Here is another treasure to invest in! What kind of body do you want to dwell in for all eternity? There will be many differing degrees of glory in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:40-42). Some will have a better resurrection than others (Heb. 11:35). Paul wanted the best resurrection possible (Phil. 3:10-11). He wanted to be in the first resurrection. Not every believer participates in this! Some who are not resurrected at Christ's coming are raised at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:5-6). To be in the first resurrection, we must be holy. We must be an overcomer.

There is a law that determines what degree of “quickenings” we will have on resurrection morning and this is found in Philippians 3:21. “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, *according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*” Our body will be changed to the degree Christ has been allowed to “subdue all things unto himself” in our lives. Every time we obey God, choose His way, and die to ourself, something is “subdued” in our hearts, and something is *planted* in our being. Paul said, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31). Contrariwise, those who do their *own* will have nothing planted in their mortal flesh and in the resurrection there is little to quicken. Thus, they will settle for an inferior resurrection because Christ has not been permitted to “subdue all things unto Himself” in their beings.

10. RICH IN FAITH “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith” (Ja. 2:5). Faith is another of God's sacred treasures. Not all men have faith (2 Thes. 3:2). Even among the redeemed every man is given a *measure* of faith. This faith, however, must continue to grow. Anyone who possesses faith is very wealthy. Faith brings us through dark and difficult times. Faith calms all of our fears. Faith brings provision and healing. Faith makes a way where there seems to be no way. The world, on the other hand, is filled with fear. Man is confused and does not know what to do or which way to turn, and that is because he is destitute of faith. The unredeemed who are void of faith continue to grope in the dark in search of the answers God has already given.

“Through faith we understand” (Heb.11:3). Faith opens our understanding. It is through faith that we understand the account of creation. Through faith we know where we have come from and where we are going. By faith we also know what is coming upon the earth. It is the faith of the Son of God that makes us strong and stable and at peace. It is faith that overcomes the world (1 Jn. 5:4). Faith is the victory. Without faith, the words of God are merely “cunningly devised fables.” Truly, a man void of faith is a man of *indescribable poverty*.

“Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). What education and diplomas could never accomplish, and what all the money in the world could never do, Peter had the authority to perform through faith. In just one instant, a man who had never walked was “walking and leaping and praising God.” Peter and John had no medical degree from a university but they had *the priceless power of God* upon them because of a relationship of faith. These men possessed the true riches. They were in contact with the throne of God, and this contact is what every child of God should be seeking. Let us abandon our lives into the hands of God and avail ourselves to be an instrument of deliverance to a fallen race. There are many preachers but few deliverers.

11. RICH IN PATIENCE, CONSOLATION, AND OTHER FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, *but thou art rich*” (Rev. 2:9). To a church in tribulation and poverty, God declared, “Thou art rich.” But, to a neighboring church who thought they had it all, God said, “You are poor” (Rev. 3:17). The first church was under tremendous pressure, and they were poor materially. Yet the Lord assured them, “You are rich. You have the goods.” Paul tells us, “tribulation worketh patience” (Rom. 5:3). Truly, in their *tribulation*, they were gaining the rare quality of *patience* that would enable them to have empathy and understanding for others. Thus, the cost of obtaining patience and consolation is very high. To have answers and compassion for those who are in trouble is a rare treasure (2 Cor.1:3-7). Therefore, God said to the church in tribulation, “You are rich.”

12. THE LORD OUR EXCEEDING REWARD “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen.15:1). Here is the greatest treasure of all—the Lord Himself. As beautiful as heaven may be, the center of attraction will always be the Son of God. Jeremiah said, - “The Lord is my portion” (Lam. 3:24, cf. Psa.16:5, Deut.18:1-2). Paul said he lived to “win Christ” (Phil. 3:7-11). This is the central theme of scripture. Life should revolve around seeking the approval of our Heavenly Bridegroom and to know His love which surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19). Our whole purpose in life should be to dwell as near to His heart as possible, not only here on earth but in eternity as well (Psa. 27:4, 23:6).

SUMMARY OF THE TRUE RICHES

Treasures we should seek

1. A Good Name—(*God's love and respect for us*). This comes by constantly choosing God's way. When we please Him, not only does God respect us but He causes man to respect us also. See Proverbs 16:7.

2. Gold Tried in the Fire—(*divine nature received in fiery trials*). Character, who we are, is the most important thing in life and this is what we take into eternity. Great character always does what is right, even when in pain. Character (who we are) is the sum total of all our life's choices and decisions.

3. Treasures in Heaven—(*our heavenly home and other rewards*). The material that goes into our eternal home is being sent up now by our works here on earth. Are we investing in a house where thieves cannot break through and steal?

4. Rich in Good Works—(*rewards in heaven*). Although eternal life is a gift that cannot be earned, our rewards will be according to our works. All sacrifices made for the Lord out of a pure heart will reap rich rewards. Even a smile or small gestures of kindness will be remembered by God and rewarded.

5. Making Others Rich—(*eternal substance we put in others that transforms their lives*). Part of our crown and inheritance are the people God entrusts to our care in one form or another. This includes our family. We should invest in people, not things. People are eternal, things are not.

6. Contentment is Great Gain—(*a satisfied, happy heart*). This is all man is seeking for. A satisfied, happy heart is given to those who please God. Adversity carves out a greater capacity in our being to contain joy. Those who have been faithful to God's purposes enter into the joy of the Lord, now, and for all eternity.

7. Treasures of Darkness—(*special insights, nuggets gained in dark trials*). We can share these with others who are going through dark experiences.

8. Treasure of Christ's Reproach—(*identification with One who appears to be a failure*). This man of reproach is God Himself disguised as an ordinary man. In Him are *hidden* all the treasures and mysteries of life. He shares these with people who are close to Him, not the ones who shun Him and are ashamed of Him.

9. A New and Glorified Body—(*our body will be quickened to the degree we have died to self*) and according to what we have permitted God to plant within our mortal flesh by our responses to Him.

10. Rich in Faith—(*brings understanding, provision, healing, prepares us for eternity.*)

11. Rich in Patience and Consolation—(*the rare ability to understand those in trials*).

12. The Lord Himself—(*the greatest gift of all*). To win Christ is to have everything.

TRUE SACRIFICES

Sacrifices That Impress the Lord

The very nature of God is that of sacrifice! He is a giver. “God so loved the world that *he gave* his only begotten Son.” “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Ac. 20:35). God gave us His best and He desires us to give Him the same. In order to come to know God and to win the prize, it requires full sacrifice. Following the Lamb is very costly. Christ Himself walked the road of self-denial, and yet the pathway of sacrifice releases life and brings us to great joy.

Christianity works! It is an absolute reality, but only to those who are *wholehearted*. Christianity does not work if we are double minded. “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (Ja.1:8). The man who is trying to serve two masters has no peace or joy. If Christianity is not working for you, check out the following:

- Are you fully surrendered to Jesus, or is your heart divided with other loves?
- Are you harboring a grudge toward anyone? If we have not forgiven another, we will not feel accepted by God.
- Are you cooperating with the leaders God has placed over you?
- Are you trying to live the Christian life in your own strength?
- Are you practicing serious sin in your life?

If there is a violation of any of the above, we will lose the reality and joy of our faith. Remember, reality is a blessing reserved *only* for those who are committed to doing the whole will of God. And again I want to repeat this—we will not feel forgiven if we have not forgiven others. The proper sacrifices we are about to enumerate will lead us to joy and victory over Satan. Therefore, we should take them to heart.

David was a man after God's own heart. He was determined to accomplish *all* of God's will (Acts 13:22). This is what God is looking for today—men and women who will make the full sacrifice. King Saul, whom David replaced, was only committed to doing *part* of the will of God—the convenient part. Let us be a *David, not a Saul*.

There is no life without sacrifice. King David was a man of great sacrifice. He would not offer anything to the Lord that cost him nothing (2 Sam. 24:24, 23:14-17). Sacrifices that cost us nothing are not sacrifices at all, and they release no life. True messengers, those who have the *real* ministry and life to impart, are those who have paid the dearest price. Others, who have paid nothing for their message, are as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Their message is hollow and without spiritual substance. It costs something to have our heart changed! See Revelation 7:13,14.

Following the Lamb requires our all. It means that our life will be similar to His (Rev.14:1-5). Therefore, we should clutch to nothing but be openhanded to the One who has freely given us all things. Sometimes following God touches our home, living conditions, money, security, choice of mate, life-style, delays, and other experiences. It is a privilege to make these sacrifices to the Lord for they are a sweet savor unto Him, even as Christ's whole life was a sweet savor unto the Father (Eph. 5:2, Phil. 4:18, Rom.12:1). *Joy* is the end result of all sacrifices made unto God out of a pure and willing heart.

Are we willing? Those who lose their lives for His sake shall find it. The dividends gained for doing God's will are astronomical. Actually, we are making no sacrifice at all. *The prize* is so much greater than *the price*. I have heard young Christians say, "I want God's highest and I will pay any price to have it!" Then, when God touches some small issue in their lives, they scream with exasperation. Let us have character and mean what we say!

God Does Not Accept Every Sacrifice

Before we go any further, I would like to say that God does not accept every sacrifice. Often this is not understood. God does not want our sacrifice if our heart is not right with Him. Sacrifice is not to be *a substitute* for something God is requiring of us. Geographically we must be *in the place* God has chosen. He will not receive our sacrifice in some other location. And we must be doing things His way, not our own. God will not accept fleshly worship and worldly music for a praise offering.

- God frowned on the sacrifice Cain brought because his life was not right (Gen. 4:5-8; 1 Jn. 3:11,12).
- Aaron's sons offered "strange fire" (wrong worship) and they were consumed (Lev.10:1,2, 10:10).
- God was angry with Korah's sacrifice because he was attacking God's leader (Num.16:1-3, 15, 35).
- The Lord only accepts our sacrifice if we are in the place he has chosen for us (Deut.12:13,14).
- Saul's sacrifice was rejected because it was a substitute for doing God's will (1 Sam.15:1-3, 9, 22).
- In Malachi's time, they offered blemished sacrifices and polluted bread to God (Mal.1:7-8, 3:3,4).
- God does not want our sacrifice if we have not tried to be reconciled to a brother (Mt. 5:23,24).
- The Lord ignores the sacrifices of those who treat their spouses with cruelty (Mal. 2:13-16).
- Ananias and Sapphira's offering was an abomination because it was done deceitfully (Acts 5:1-10).

Sacrifices That Release Life

Sacrifice of Obedience

Sacrifice of Location

Sacrifice of Righteousness

Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

Sacrifice of Praise

Sacrifice of Joy

Sacrifice of Love

Sacrifice of Buying a Field

Sacrifice of Our Isaac

Sacrifice of a Broken Spirit

Sacrifice of Our Very Life

These are the sacrifices that deal a death blow to Satan for they are sacrifices he cannot make.

SACRIFICES OF A SWEET SAVOR

“Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).

1. SACRIFICE OF OBEDIENCE “For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice” (Jer. 7:22-23, 11:7). God instituted all the animal sacrifices on Mount Sinai *several months after* Israel departed from Egypt. These sacrifices were merely shadows of the sacrifice God's Son would make upon the cross many years later. God made it very clear at the time He brought them out of the land of Egypt that His heart was *not* concerned with the offerings and sacrifices of animals. He was interested in another kind of sacrifice—the sacrifice of obedience. “Obey my voice” (Ex.19:5, 1-5)! He wanted a people who listened in their hearts to His voice and then obeyed out of an attitude of love. This is the true sacrifice.

King David also understood this truth, for he declared, “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened” (Psa. 40:6-7). David knew the heart of God. He realized that God had no pleasure in the ritual of animal sacrifices but in men with listening ears and responding hearts. It is a relationship of obedience that God desires, not lifeless rituals. King Saul never learned this. He was in the habit of partially obeying, then offering lavish sacrifices to compensate for his incomplete obedience. God would accept none of his *substitutes*. Instead, He admonished Saul, saying, “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam.15:22).

The sacrifice of obedience is the key to Christian growth. This is the way to advance from point D to point E. When God puts His finger on a certain area of our life, He expects a response. As we respond, we are changed. However, if we evade or reject what He is addressing, our problem goes unremedied and we cease to grow; in fact, we go backwards. Sacrifice can never take the place of obedience. We may say, “Lord, you cannot have this area of my life. This belongs to me”! But in doing so we come to *a standstill* in our Christian walk. We cannot come to the bargaining table with God. He will not accept a substitute for some other course of action He is requiring of us.

2. GEOGRAPHICAL SACRIFICE “Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: But in the place which the Lord shall choose” (Deut.12:13,14). God is particular *where* we offer our sacrifice (our service and worship). He will only accept our sacrifice *in the place* He has chosen for us. Otherwise our sacrifice will be rejected by Him. We cannot say, “God is calling me to Bible school. I will select a college in Florida or Texas because the climate is warmer down there.”

“Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and *there* I will cause thee to hear my words” (Jer.18:2). It is important to be in the right geographical place because it is “there” that God is able to speak to our hearts. Awaiting us there are just the right people and just the right circumstances which are designed for our perfecting and learning. If we plant ourselves somewhere else, certain areas of our life will remain undeveloped and unredeemed. In the place of His choosing, God has unique *tools* specially tailored for reaching the “hard to get at” places in our life. God may require us to leave an organization or perhaps the church we were raised in. Sometimes a total geographical move is necessary to go on in our walk with God. It could mean leaving friends, relatives, or other sentiments.

Abraham could not go any further with God and fulfill his divine call until he left his father's house (Gen.12:1, Psa. 45:10). This may not be easy at first, but it is possible by grace; and, the joy of the Lord will be found in the place of His choosing (Mk.10:28-30). This is a sacrifice of sweet savor unto the Lord and it is well pleasing in His sight. If, however, we do not move when and where He beckons, we will lose our blessings and joy. We will lose his favor (Mt.10:37-38).

Where we are planted is very important. We will end up where our church or denomination is going. We will be under the same blessings or judgments. In Revelation 18:4, God commands those who are joined to a wrong religious system, "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Some of us may need to forsake the old traditions we were raised in. Water baptism [immersion] breaks old bondages and religious ties to Catholicism. Unfortunately water baptism was not emphasized in the charismatic movement of recent years. The main thrust of that era was the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Provision, too, is found in the place God chooses (1 Kg.17:2-9). Elijah was sent to the brook Cherith and there he was sustained by the ravens. Then he was sent to a poor widow. When God is calling us into His service, He will not accept the excuse, "I can't afford it." If we do not move when God tells us to, the enemy will catch up to us and attack and ensnare our children. Let us move when God's cloud moves (Num. 9:16-23). The safest place on earth is in the center of God's will.

3. SACRIFICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS In Psalm 4:5, we are exhorted: "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord." The sacrifice of righteousness means we do what is right regardless of the consequences. Making a stand for right is *a sacrifice* because often it is not popular, and criticism and frowns are directed against us. Sometimes doing what is right makes us lose financial support, especially when we are in the ministry. But in the long run, God vindicates those who offer the sacrifice of righteousness and who put their trust in Him, not man. God Himself is righteous and He *delights* in the righteous (Psa. 84:11-12).

4. SACRIFICE OF PRAISE / THANKSGIVING "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the Lord" (Psa.116:17, 107:22). The praise and thanksgiving that God appreciates most is *not what He receives from the inhabitants of heaven* where everything is glory and bliss, but from those on earth who are under terrible pressure. It is easy to give thanks when we are prospering on every side. But thanksgiving and praise become *a sacrifice* when our blessings have diminished and we are facing the blackness of the night. When Job was reduced to ashes, he fell down in worship saying, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:20-22). How this warmed the heart of God! This is the most expensive worship of all. Thankfulness also keeps our wells free and flowing, and *right responses* to injury give us an advantage over Satan.

"Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb.13:15). This is a continual way of life! David said, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psa. 34:1). True sacrifices are costly. It is no sacrifice to praise and give thanks when we feel good. What about the times when we feel discouraged and under pressure and everything in our heart wants to do the opposite? When we put aside our feelings to praise and thank the Lord, this is *a sacrifice* well pleasing to God. According to Isaiah 61:3, praise is a spiritual garment. The "spirit of heaviness" is also a covering. To an extent, we have the ability *to put on or put off* these spiritual garments. This ability resides within the power of our choice. Let us choose to *put on* the garment of praise and *put off* the spirit of heaviness, by enabling grace.

5. SACRIFICE OF JOY “Now shall my head be lifted up above my mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy” (Psa. 27:6). David was under pressure; he was surrounded by his enemies. David turned the focus away from his situation and offered the sacrifice of joy unto the Lord, trusting implicitly in His God to protect him. God respects the sacrifice of joy. It brings faith and moves His mighty hand of deliverance. Depression and discouragement can be resisted by the sacrifice of joy. Rather than allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by a dark cloud as we look at our circumstances, we can turn our attention to our Deliverer and begin to offer the sacrifice of joy and shouting. This response brings faith and deliverance. Again, this is a *sacrifice* because we may not feel joyful at first and it requires effort. In addition to this, we should learn to offer the sacrifice of joy to our mate and others. We should discipline ourselves to respond cheerfully to those around us and not drag them down with the heaviness we struggle with.

6. SACRIFICE OF LOVE “And to love [God] with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mk.12:33). This is the real sacrifice God looks for—our love. God desires our affections, thoughts, emotions, and all of our energy to be placed upon the altar. Also, He wants us to love and serve others unselfishly out of a pure heart. This is the true sacrifice. Love is the summation and fulfilling of the law (Rom.13:8-10).

Mark 12:33 is actually the fulfillment of the burnt offering of Leviticus chapter one. This sacrifice was cut up into four parts: The head, the fat, the inwards, and the legs (Lev.1:6-9). All four sections had to be placed upon the altar and totally consumed by God's fire. In order for our lives to become a burnt sacrifice and a sweet savor unto God, these four things must be upon the altar:

- 1.) The head - our thoughts and opinions. “Our thoughts are not His thoughts” (Isa. 55:8).
- 2.) The fat - our energy. Is our energy and strength spent on hobbies, or is it used for God?
- 3.) The inwards - our affections, passions. The things we love or hate have to be upon the altar.
- 4.) The legs - our walk, the places we go, and the trips we make must be consecrated to God.

Our passions (love or hate) must be placed upon the altar or we will miss God's mark for our lives. If we only do the things we like to do, we will never be a noble person. Sometimes people refuse to go to the mission field because they do not like the food or the climate. One woman would not go to a particular church because she did not like their music, even though that church was more spiritual than the others. In order to be effective in God's kingdom, our likes and dislikes have to be nailed to the cross. Let us practice doing the things we don't like to do, and die to some of our preferences.

God spoke to a teenage girl one day and said, “You must eat the bitter as well as the sweet.” The girl hated house work and school work and only wanted to be outdoors. God told her that if she did not discipline herself and accept the bitter as well as the sweet she would grow up to be a poor housekeeper and wife. She was accustomed to doing only what she wanted to do.

7. SACRIFICE OF BUYING A FIELD The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:16 “bought a field.” We have to buy a field too. God has a mission field for all of us, but we have to pay for it. So many people who go to the mission field want everyone else to pay for their field. They say, “I will not go unless this organization promises to pay me such and such a month, and provide a vehicle, and all the other things I want.” Many people do not want to invest anything, but they will have no reward. How much have you paid for your “field”?

8. SACRIFICE OF OUR ISAAC “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee to the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:2). Isaac represents the thing that is dearest to our hearts—a person, a call, the promises, or perhaps a ministry. God tested Abraham to see if he cherished “Isaac” more than Himself. God said, “Give it all back to me.” Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac was a blow to Satan, and so are the other sacrifices we have discussed.

Lucifer had an idol. *The idol of ministry* was more important to him than his relationship with God. With everything that God had bestowed upon Lucifer, all he wanted was more for himself—more position and more self-exaltation. He wanted the very throne. His only desire was to be the center of attention. He was serving God only for the benefits, and today he accuses the brethren of doing the same. This is seen in Job chapter one. Satan accused Job of only serving God for the blessings. When Job had all of his blessings removed, he fell down and worshipped. Thus, he defeated Satan. God proves and tests everyone of us as well to see if we are passing the tests Lucifer failed. When Abraham gave up Isaac, he won a great victory over the Serpent.

9. SACRIFICE OF A BROKEN SPIRIT “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:16,17). A broken spirit is that quality of spirit where self-will, hardness and resistance have been removed from our inner life. This is the end result of offering all the previous sacrifices. This is the kind of heart God wants to give us (Ezek. 36:26). This kind of heart overcomes the world, the flesh, and the devil. A broken spirit is the exact opposite of a man with *an offended spirit* (Prov.18:19).

10. SACRIFICE OF OUR VERY LIFE “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice” (Heb.11:4). Abel offered a lamb. Abel himself was a lamb that would later be slain by *an offended brother* who had hardened his heart. God wants you and me to become harmless lambs (Isa. 53:7, 1 Pet. 2:23). Paul said, “I am now ready to be offered” (2 Tim. 4:6). No one defended Paul at a preliminary hearing prior to his martyrdom (2 Tim. 4:16). If ever Paul needed support it was at this trying moment. Instead of being offended, he prayed that his uncourageous brethren would be forgiven. One way we can know we are ready to die is when we can respond as did Paul. He had become a lamb who once had been a devourer.

Stephen, too, prayed for those who did him injustice (Ac. 7:59,60). It is only by the mercies of God that we can present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom.12:2). Paul had the privilege of giving his life as a martyr. He was now ready to be God's sacrifice. If God has called any of us to give our lives, we must, as Paul and as Stephen, be able to offer our lives as *a lamb*. If this is God's will for your life (it is *not* for everyone), then there will be grace [divine enablement] at that moment, and there is nothing to fear.

The above sacrifices deal a death blow to Satan
for they are sacrifices he cannot make.

BLESSINGS OF A BROKEN SPIRIT

• **Key to Power** When Smith Wigglesworth was asked the secret of his power, he never mentioned his prayer life or long fasts or diligence of study. He simply said, "I am a man with a broken heart." Wigglesworth raised the dead 25 times and had extraordinary power flowing through his life, primarily because of *a broken spirit*.

• **Key to God's Presence** According to Isaiah 57:15, God *dwells* with those who have a broken and contrite heart. A hard heart resists God's presence, but there is no abrasiveness in the man with a broken spirit. God resists the proud because pride resists Him. God will not walk with the proud. He walks with the lowly for He is lowly.

• **Key to Receiving Revelation and Guidance** To a soft and pliable heart, God is able to give impressions and promptings. In a heart of flesh God writes His laws, but in those areas where we are hard and callous He is unable to get through to us. A hard and stony heart is *insensitive* and incapable of hearing the still small voice of the Spirit. God only guides the meek (Psa. 25:9).

• **Key to Unity and Peace.** In the low place there is unity. In the low place each one prefers others before himself. The Scripture commands that in lowliness of mind we should esteem others better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3-4, Rom. 12:10). The man or woman with brokenness is not easily offended or angry. Strivings and conflicts cease when there is a broken spirit (Prov. 13:10). Loud, angry, assertive, domineering, strong personalities need to be broken. Others should not feel *our spirit*; they should feel *God's Spirit* working through us. When people feel our spirit more than God's, we need a broken spirit and this may require many crushing blows. A strong, unbroken spirit indicates a person was not properly disciplined and trained as a child.

• **Key to Not Being Offended** It is not *lambs* who become offended and bitter, but *lords!* The man of humility whose spirit is mellow and broken is never *the offended brother* of Proverbs 18:19. The offended brother has an inflated ego that has been wounded. Grace has been refused and he has hardened his heart and become bitter (Heb. 4:16, cf. 12:15). An offended brother has harbored an offense and entrenched himself in a deep pit. He cannot be won over, not by apology or anything else until he has had a meeting with God.

An offended heart that is left unchecked becomes *exceedingly wicked*. In the last days many will be offended and this will lead to hatred and betrayal of one another (Mt. 24:10). It is a very serious matter to allow the heart to be overgrown with offenses ! (See Prov. 4:23). I would like to repeat this—an offended brother is not a lamb; he is a lord, and he has a high opinion of himself and his own importance. He defends his ways and demands vindication for himself. One of the deceptions of a wounded brother is that he believes *he has a right* to be offended. He feels he is perfectly justified in harboring his anger and spreading his offense and venom to others. The only way to retrieve ourselves from this horrible pit is to become a lamb, surrender our rights, and pattern ourselves after the Captain of our salvation who entrusted all injustices to His heavenly Father (1 Pet. 2:21-23, cf. Mt. 11:6, 13:21).

Hell is for the offended. Hell is filled with offended people who rejected God's grace when they were hurt. They died holding bitterness against God and those they refused to forgive. Actually, our salvation depends upon forgiving others (Mt. 6:14,15). It is that serious!

TRUE STRENGTH

Ways to measure strength

Scripture has much to say about the subject of strength. God makes a distinction between strong and weak believers in His Word. There are several notable ways to determine a man's strength, or the lack of it, and this is the purpose of this little study. Christ warns that many will be offended and turn away from the path in our day (Mt. 24:10). Why do people become offended and turn away from the Lord?—In the final analysis, it is because they are not strong! Therefore, the question arises, “What constitutes strength?”

Matthew 7:22,23 is a future picture of the judgment seat of Christ. For some it will be a “horror scene” because they performed great and mighty works for God, yet they will be denied entrance into heaven. Sometimes the people we assume are *towers of strength* and “having it all together” are not that way at all. It may amaze us who stands in our day and who does not. It is not always easy to discern how far down a man's roots go. It is so essential to be “rooted, grounded, strengthened, and settled” in order to endure to the end (1 Pet. 5:10, Col.1:23, Eph. 3:17).

Self-control is the standard by which God measures a man's strength: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Prov.16:32). The ability to keep our passions in check (love or hate) reveals whether or not we are a person of strength. We cannot possibly rule the nations without first ruling our own spirit (Rev. 2:26).

Samson was strong physically but weak morally. He could conquer a city but was unable to govern his own spirit (Prov.16:32). He was ruled by lust. While he was performing miracles and slaying a thousand Philistines, he was a captive of many manipulating women. Therefore, he cannot be considered a man of strength.

Our goal, therefore, is to become mighty *in spirit* (Lk. 2:40). The two hundred pound weight lifter may be strong physically, but is he strong inwardly? If he cannot control his wrath or his morals, if he is driven with vices, if his feelings are hurt easily or he is dominated by discouragement, and if he cannot cope with family relationships or society—he is not a man of strength. Inward spiritual strength is what really counts (Psa.147:10,11).

In Revelation 3:7-8, God described the church of Philadelphia as having only “a little strength.” The church of Sardis was not strong either. They were exhorted to “Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die” (Rev. 3:2). God's assessment of Sardis was rather pathetic. Some of the church members were so feeble in the faith that they were ready to die. Yet God desires every believer to be overwhelmingly strong—“*strengthened with all might*” (Col.1:11, cf. Eph. 3:16). God distinguishes between strong and weak believers (Rom.14:2, 15:1, Prov. 24:10, 1 Cor. 8:11).

Christ will “divide the spoil with *the strong*” (Isa. 53:12). By His victorious life and perfect sacrifice He has “spoiled principalities and powers” according to Colossians 2:15. “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev.11:15). The nations are His inheritance. All of this is “the spoil” that He took back from the Adversary. But, He shares the spoil *with the strong*—with the overcomers. We are called to judge the world and to judge angels, and we are called to rule the nations with a rod of iron (1 Cor. 6:2-3, Rev. 2:26-27, 3:21). Yet the spoil is *only* divided up amongst the strong, amongst the overcomers (Rev. 21:7).

Strength Can Be Determined by the Following:

- By how *wise* we are
- By how much *humility* we possess
- By how well we *handle failure*
- By how well we *manage success*
- By how well we cope with *rejection and criticism*
- By how well we face the *loss* of something
- By how well we respond to *painful delays*
- By how much we have *conquered fears*
- By how well we handle people who have *hurt us*
- By how *dependent* we are upon the Lord
- By how *wholehearted* we are
- By how much *joy* we have, and *all the other fruits of the Spirit*

1. Wisdom is Strength “A wise man is strong; yea, a man of understanding increaseth strength” (Prov. 24:5). Unnecessary energy and time are often expended because of the absence of wisdom (cf. Ecc.10:10). Wisdom gives perspective and teaches us what to do in every situation. Many times we wear ourselves out from wrong responses to life's difficulties. Recently one of our mission stations in Africa was confiscated by a man with self-seeking motives. God told us to rejoice and not be upset. “The work still belongs to you” the Lord said. “Any fruit that comes from that work will be credited to your account.” When that man stands before God to receive his reward, he will find that everything he has accomplished will be awarded to us. Seeing this situation from God's point of view has given us enormous strength and peace. This is what wisdom produces.

Most bondages in man are *in the mind*, in those areas where wisdom and revelation have not yet penetrated. The Lord promised that “His truth would make us free” in every area of our lives if we *continue* to hearken to His Word (Jn. 8:31,32). The promise of coming to total freedom depends on “continuing in His Word.” Therefore, if something offends us and we close our hearts to God, we will not come to know *all* of the truth or be made totally free. The condition is, “If ye continue in My Word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Wisdom and knowledge produce stability. They are the strength of our salvation (Isa. 33:6). Jesus grew *strong* in spirit as He grew in wisdom and grace (Lu. 2:40, 2:52). Wisdom knows how to reply to all of life's irritations. Wisdom, therefore, produces peace with others and it brings us into favor with God and man. Wisdom builds a home and puts marriages upon good foundations (Prov. 9:1, cf. Ja. 3:17). Wisdom is the principal thing in life; therefore, we are urged to pursue wisdom (Prov. 4:7).

2. Humility is Strength The Christian with genuine humility has rest (Mt.11:28-29). He is not putting on a front or playing a role. He has nothing to prove, nothing to defend, and nothing to lose. The man of true humility is free! He is emotionally stable, he can let offenses go, and he has peace reigning in his soul. This is the reason he has such great inner strength, just as the Lamb of God.

The proud, on the other hand, have an ego—a big one. This ego is easily offended and hurt which sets off many other conflicts. Thus, the proud are tormented and vexed. They are not the master of their emotions and therefore, they are very weak. (Course two covers this more extensively.)

3. Handling Failure is a Mark of Strength Are we ready to “give up” when we fail or make a mistake? God Himself was willing to look like a total failure when He hung upon the cross. Only a man or woman *of strength* can endure the reproach of looking like a failure. At times, failure (or looking like one) is necessary to experience the fellowship of Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10). In times of failure we need that *violence of spirit* mentioned in Matthew 11:12 that refuses to give up.

Have you ever thought that God has let you down or allowed you to look foolish? Has there ever been a time in your life when you were sure God showed you something (and there seemed to be many confirmations too) and then you found that the whole thing was wrong? Did you respond by saying, “If that's the way it is, I quit”? Christian brother or sister, let us be assured that God does not mock us.

In the economy of God, there are times when it is better for us to fail than to succeed. Mellowness and mercy grow out of our acute failures if we do not allow ourselves to become bitter and give up. Personal failure helps to remove criticism and hardness from our hearts. Pride and attitudes of *infallibility* are dealt a deathblow when we fail. God's ultimate intention is to bless us exceedingly.

Peter had a tremendous failure—he cursed and denied the Lord. It was a bitter experience for him. By his pride and boasting he had set himself up for an unnecessary temptation. His daring and rash statement, “Though all men forsake you, I will never” invited Satan to come and put him to the test. Satan is allowed to test us when we make bold declarations like this (Mk.14:29-31, Lu. 22:31-34). The Adversary struck terror into the heart of Peter. He had opened himself to temptation. The failure was so crushing to Peter that he was ready to quit the ministry. In John 21, the Lord publicly restored Peter before his brethren, charging him to “feed His sheep.” Out of the ashes of his failure Peter emerged as the leader of the twelve apostles and then preached powerfully on the day of Pentecost just fifty-four days later. We need that fortitude and ability to bounce back from failure.

Moses, too, had a serious failure, yet his greatness is shown by the mature manner in which he handled it. Moses did not lay down and die when he failed. Failure did not make him sink into the depths of despair and self-pity. He walked with his head up high. We read of his failure in Numbers 20:7-12. When Israel needed water a second time, Moses was instructed by God to *speak* to the Rock, but in his anger he *struck* the Rock. He had lost control; his spirit was provoked (Psa.106:32,33).

The action of Moses striking the Rock a second time destroyed a prophetic *symbol* of the crucifixion. The Rock represented Christ (1 Cor.10:4). Striking the Rock the first time (Ex.17:1-6) was symbolic of Christ being smitten by the rod of God on the cross for our sins. The waters that issued out of the Rock represented the life of Christ flowing out to the thirsty souls of men everywhere. Striking the Rock *a second time* (when Moses was told to *speak* to it) meant that Christ would need to die twice. The broken *type* was so serious that God prohibited Moses from going into the land of promise. To be denied entrance into the land was not easy for Moses to accept. He was only a few steps from crossing Jordan after being in the wilderness forty years. Moses recounts the story in Deuteronomy 3:23-29. He appealed to the Lord to change His mind and allow him to go into the land, but God replied; “No, and do not ask Me again!”

The reaction of Moses is seen in Deuteronomy 4:1. In effect, Moses was saying, “Although I cannot go into the land, I will continue to teach you the ways of God in order that you may go into the land and be blessed there.” He was a faithful shepherd who desired the people to be blessed in the land, even if he was denied that privilege. Moses handled his failure and consequent penalty with great integrity. He continued to walk with God with his head up high. Moses looked beyond any earthly inheritance to his eternal inheritance. Many years later Moses was resurrected and he appeared to Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Jude 1:9, Mt.17:3). Moses *did* make it into the land after all.

If you have failed, the most noble thing that you can do is give your failure to the blood of Jesus, and go on with Him. A hallmark of strength and character is the ability to rise again out of our failure. Giving up on ourselves and God is indicative of spiritual feebleness. Let us be *real* men and women of God and give our failure to the blood of Christ and continue to follow the Lord with all our heart.

4. Strength—Not Being Ruined by Success As paradoxical as it may seem, difficulties are easier to handle than abundance of blessings. Trouble makes man look to God for help, but after being on the mountain-top a while, watch out! Overconfidence and pride insidiously creep in! Special blessings, unusual gifts, and success tempt a man to think that he is uniquely favored of God above all others (Deut.17:20, 2 Cor.12:6-10).

Prosperity can make us forget God (Deut. 6:10-13, 8:7-20, Jer. 22:21). Without special restraints, the heart becomes haughty overnight, and no one is exempt from this. Great success prompts preachers to boast that their church is the fastest growing church in the state. When a man lowers himself to remarks such as this, he has drifted away from *the real goal*, and that is to draw all attention to God and then fade out of the picture. Young converts are especially susceptible to pride. This is the reason God is slow to give us our inheritance (Prov. 20:21, 1 Tim. 3:6). He waits until we are mature (1 Pet. 5:6).

In the book of Acts, every time an apostle performed a miracle, he was beaten up soon after. This was the mercy of God. If we want to have *power without pain*, we will become corrupt over night. Let us be people of strength who take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when we are weakened in this manner, then we are truly strong (2 Cor.12:9-10).

5. Strength—Ability to Cope With Criticism, Rejection, Reproach Jesus warned that offenses must come, but “blessed is he who is *not* offended...” (Mt.11:6, 13:21, 13:57, 15:12, 24:10). The person who is supersensitive and easily offended is a very weak person. They are like the tropical “sensitivity plant” whose leaflets fold and leafstalks droop at the slightest touch. You cannot touch anything in the lives of some people without *wounding* them or making them downcast. To touch them is to make them wilt and almost die.

No one enjoys being ridiculed, yet if we are not willing to be identified with some of Christ's reproach, then we are not worthy of Him. God is not ashamed to be called our God, and He asks us not to be ashamed of Him (Heb. 2:11, 11:16). God will not acknowledge anyone who is ashamed of Him (Mk. 8:38, Lu. 9:26). Many people live in fear of what others will think of them (Jn.12:42,43), but may we have a *greater* fear of what God will think of us. Consider the strength of our Lord Jesus who refused to hide His face from shame and spitting (Isa. 50:6). May we allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts of all shame and the spirit of embarrassment.

Some people never invite Jesus Christ into their lives because of the fear of rejection and reproach. The “fearful” of Revelation 21:8 are those who are afraid of what others would think of them for being identified with Christ. Others who do acknowledge Jesus later turn away from Him because of frowns or disapproval of family and friends. It requires strength to choose God *above* family and friends (Mt.10:37-39, 13:20-21, 24:10-12). The real issue in life is this: Whose approval are we seeking most—God's or man's?

All of us will be tested; sooner or later something unfair is going to cross our pathway. Maybe it will come from other Christians, or from those we look up to and admire. Will we be offended and quit? Will we close our hearts and walk away from the Lord? Will we refuse the life-sustaining grace that is available to us? Will we turn sour and cease to press on wholeheartedly because of a cherished offense? Let us ask God for special grace to get over offenses; for if we are offended easily we are not strong. Do not even consider going into the ministry if you cannot handle criticism. Leadership is the main target of criticism and spiritual assault.

6. Strength—The Ability to Face the Loss of Something Paul testified that he had “suffered the loss of all things,” yet he had great victory within because his heart was not inordinately fixed upon any of those things which he had lost. Therefore, Paul exhorts: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2). How do we react when we lose some earthly thing? Does it seem like the end of the world when some possession or position is taken from us? Are there severe bouts of depression and anger? If so, that thing monopolized our heart. God never intended all of our expectations to be fulfilled in another human being—spouse, children, friends, a career, or some area of accomplishment. Our expectation and joy must be *centered* in Him (Psa. 62:5, Jer.15:16).

Our attitude toward earthly possessions should be—“They are just borrowed.” When Job was stripped in a single day of all that he owned, he worshipped, saying, “The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21-22). Job's reaction to earthly loss proved that his heart was set upon God, not earthly blessings. Abraham, too, was able to freely release Isaac when God required him to do so. Abraham released Isaac in a spirit of faith and worship; there was no anger in Abraham when God said, “Give him back to Me.”

When God shuts a door or thwarts a direction we are trying to take (marriage, a career, or some aspiration), we should thank Him wholeheartedly. God has something far better in mind for us. Also, He could be saving us from situations we would later regret. Just think of all the pouting and anger God endures from His children when in wisdom He spares them from untold misery. Many doors that God closes are simply *prison* doors. People stand outside that door crying and praying to get in, but if they were able to get inside they would do anything to get out again! Our Father alone knows what is best and what will really make us happy in the long run. Let us trust Him.

7. Strength—Right Response to Painful Delays *Time* is a vital proof of our commitment to God. Waiting for God's time is another evidence of possessing divine strength. Delays are purposed by God to reveal our true motives. What is our reaction to God when He detains a speedy answer to our request? Exodus 32:1-9 is a divine account of what many believers do when things are just not happening fast enough; they turn their backs on God and go back into the world. Perhaps you have prayed for years concerning a difficult situation and still there is no clear word or deliverance from God. A mature saint understands that when God is delaying an answer, He is doing so for some very good reasons. He realizes that God will be faithful and speak when it is precisely the right time.

The Lord *waits* that He may be gracious unto us (Isa. 30:18). Painful delays work out special facets of redemption in our hearts, and this is the reason God does not always answer us immediately. Committed Christians understand this truth and do not give God deadlines or ultimatums, but the uncommitted say, “*I have prayed about this for two years and I am tired of waiting; If you do not give me my request right now, I will leave you and go my own way.*” Real Christians are determined to do God's will (not their own) regardless of the cost or delays. During extended delays committed Christians pray like this—“Lord, please give me your grace and bring me through this phase of my journey, and perform in my life everything that is necessary.” This attitude reveals strength and nobility. Waiting for God's time is evidence that we love Him. Failure to wait for God's time could result in the loss of an inheritance and it may upset God's plan for our lives (Isa. 64:4, Prov.20:21).

8. Strength—When We Have Conquered Fears Fears take away our faith and strength. God has not given us the spirit of fear (2 Tim.1:7). *Life* is released through suffering, but fears stop life from flowing. Thus, God wants to deliver us from all our fears (Psa. 34:4). Fear is an enemy because it hinders us from doing the will of God. God does not give us fears to make us humble. He has other ways to do that. According to medical reports there are over twenty-two million Americans who have notable debilitating phobias, though the actual number is believed to be much higher. Fear is an enemy that can be overcome, but we must *take steps* to face them and overcome them.

Fear could come from any of the following:

- Fears that are inherited (propensities to anxiety, hysteria, dread, doom)
 - Fears resulting from being abused as a child (traumas, being neglected, beaten, or molested).
 - Fears from unresolved emotional conflicts (walls, imaginations, inability to relate socially)
 - Fears from not trusting God (Mt. 6:25-34 - rooted in hardness of heart cf. Mk. 6:50-52)
 - Fears from physical problems (Example: hypoglycemia—brain has low oxygen, panic spells)
- Whatever the cause, God has the answer for our fears and longs to give it. Our mind in particular needs a total renewing (Rom.12:2, Isa. 55:8-9) . A renewed mind will utterly transform us.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 Jn. 4:18). Many fears are related to *other people*—the fear of rejection, the fear of failure, the fear of what others are thinking. Unresolved emotional conflicts are remedied as the love of God is perfected within a man, and as he learns to be transparent and open with others. This requires *effort* (1 Jn. 3:14).

Peter exhorts women not to be “fearful with any amazement” (1 Pet. 3:6). This means women must conquer *hysteria*. Most wives have many deep-rooted fears. Husbands must help their wives verbalize and identify their fears, and seek God for wisdom to help them overcome them. *Hysteria produces sin* because the emotions are running wild rather than faith ruling. Uncontrolled emotions produce criticism, anger, irreverence, and unbelief. Women must be sober (1 Tim. 2:9, 2:15, Tit. 2:4).

Some fears are evil spirits that must be cast out. Other fears are conquered only as they are faced head-on and plowed through. *Fear is a picture*. Fear can be a memory of something traumatic in the past or a dread of the future. Therefore, we need a new picture in our mind. *Faith is also a picture*. We need new memories, new pictures of victory and faith that replace the old pictures that have haunted us. By facing our fears and taking proper steps toward them a little at a time, we begin to gain confidence and a new picture. The scales will gradually tip in our favor as we face (by grace) those things of which we are afraid. Our mind is like a computer. It needs to be reprogrammed of the images that have computed fear. New victories will replace the old pictures in our minds.

9. Strength—Properly Handling Those Who Hurt Us God is against injustices, yet He may be more interested in *our reaction to an offender* than the offense itself. When an evil response rears its ugly head, God is after our reaction. Most of our real problems are not outside of us—what someone has said or done. Our real problems are *within ourselves* (pride, blindness, confusion, over-sensitiveness, insecurities, fears, guilt, grudges, no peace, no joy). The problem lies in the fact that we are not strong within and our inner man needs to be built up. A man of strength can refrain from taking vengeance. I am not suggesting that we should be stoic or emotionless, but we do need a Spirit-controlled temperament. As we grow spiritually (in wisdom, joy, peace, love, longsuffering, forbearance, mercy, and patience) we will respond to situations as Christ did.

There was once a woman who was a vibrant witness for Christ. Her ministry brought hundreds of people to the Lord. Her husband was not as consecrated, and on one occasion he fell into moral sin. He felt deep remorse for his unfaithfulness and he asked his wife for forgiveness, but she refused! Instead, she hardened her heart against her husband and against the Lord. She bitterly complained, “Lord, I have been faithful to you, but you have not been faithful to me. You have not kept my husband faithful to me.” She refused to overcome her offense and she died cursing God. She had failed to receive grace in her time of need (Heb. 4:16). Grace alone is our source of strength. While pointing over five hundred souls to eternal life, she herself missed eternal life (see 1 Cor. 9:27).

10. Strength—From Dependence on God The one who realizes his own helplessness, prays earnestly and relies on God for strength. Thus, he is strengthened and he stands. The man who is confident in himself (confident in the flesh - Phil. 3:3) and self-reliant, does not seek God. Thus, he is not strengthened, and falls. This is why strong men in the natural fail, but *ordinary* dependent men succeed. Therefore, the attitude of dependence is a great factor in how strong a person really is. Christ was the strongest man who ever lived. This was because He was the most *dependent* man who ever lived. He relied totally upon His Father for strength and grace to help in time of need. This was the secret of His strength. No one else has ever endured such criticism, rejection and contradiction (Heb.12:3). No one else has ever faced injustices as our Lord. But Jesus possessed supernatural strength as He relied and depended totally upon the Father in prayer and in attitude.

11. Strength—From Being Wholehearted We are strong when *every part of us* is rooted and grounded in love for God (Eph. 3:17). The reason men fail and fall is because there is something between them and God. There is not a whole commitment of love. When God sees something in the heart that will take a man off course, He speaks to that heart, over and over again. Then He gives them scriptures to warn them. When these are ignored, He raises up circumstances to get their attention. Then He sends other brethren to speak to them. Finally, that unsundered issue in their heart becomes an offense, and they turn away from God.

12. Strength—From Joy and All the Fruits of the Spirit A man's strength is measured by his joy. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). Joy keeps our spirit free of bitterness and grudges. Joy purifies the soul and heals past wounds. Joy cures depression and sorrow. “A merry heart does good like a medicine.” Although depression is a spiritual problem it makes the body weak, but joy gives life and strength to our body as well as to our soul. Joy gave the apostles victory over self-pity and a persecution complex when they were ill-treated (Acts 5:41, 16:23-26). Satan cannot disturb the man or woman who is filled with joy. Joy is a buffer against the Enemy. Be open to manifestations of the Spirit that bring release, joy, and healing. If there is anything that is blocking up your well such as hatred, jealousy, unforgiveness, or lust, go to the Lord and to the ministry if necessary to get these blockages unstopped (Gen. 26:15-22). Seek earnestly to be totally free in spirit.

TRUE AND FALSE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

For every one of the fruits of the Spirit, there is a counterfeit. There is false love, false peace, false joy, and false meekness. To illustrate the point: Satan can give peace, but it is a peace based on pride and presumption. People can think that they are alright as they are, and even believe that they are favored of God, when in fact, they are headed for judgment. This little study is by no means exhaustive. Its purpose is to provoke thought. It is an encouragement to exercise our spiritual “senses” to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:13-14).

True Love—False Love

“And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in keen insight and comprehensive discernment; So that you will be able to discern what is best [or highest], distinguishing the moral differences, so that you may be pure and unerring and blameless: That with hearts sincere, you may approach the day of Christ without offense, not stumbling, nor causing others to stumble.” Philippians 1:9-10 (KJV, AMP, NIV).

Paul prays that the love of God would be perfected in all believers, and that our love would *grow* in keen insight and comprehensive discernment in order to know and choose what is highest and best. Mature Christian love is able to discriminate between good and evil. However, there is in the Church today an immature, fleshly *love* that embraces everyone and everything, but this is offensive to God (Ezek.22:26). Therefore, the love message must be purified.

Error results when *truths* are exaggerated and carried too far. When a truth is overemphasized it becomes error, and this is especially true of the love message. God's love cannot be fathomed; it surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19). Yet, when the love message is carried too far it affirms that a God of infinite love would never allow *anyone* to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. Furthermore, the extreme love message asserts that even Satan and all of his fiends will be spared from judgment, too. This is humanistic love! Humanism is actually “a sympathy that disregards God's judgment.” Humanistic love denies that man will be judged if he is unrepentant. Yet God is not the one who withholds life from anyone. It is man who *judges himself* unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). Man is the one who rejects life and chooses death (Deut. 30:19).

Humanistic love fills the Church of Jesus Christ today. Man's idea of love is very wrong! It believes that there are no far-reaching consequences for sin. For example, let us suppose that an influential believer fell into serious sin. Some saints are ready to write him off as hopeless, but others go to the other extreme. They say, “Let's not judge; We should have compassion and restore him promptly to his position of prominence.” In doing so, they think that they are showing unconditional divine love, but in actuality they are demonstrating indiscriminate human love. Our problem is that we have not learned to love people the way God does (Rev. 3:19).

Suppose a fallen Christian leader were reinstated immediately into his place of authority! What if he were received back with open arms and full acceptance, having never faced any consequences or disciplinary action for his sin? The problem in his life that caused him to fall in the first place would never be *remedied*. When a man of God falls, it is because he has skirted roadblock after roadblock and ignored warning after warning in his personal life. God has tried to speak to him on numerous occasions about danger areas in his life, but he has refused to listen. Therefore, immediate restoration of a fallen brother to his position of power would be gross injustice, not only to the man, but to the Body of Christ. Surely he will go out again and *repeat* the same sins, and even worse ones.

But there is another serious factor involved here, and that is the affect this man's fall and *hasty restoration* would have upon the multitudes who hold him in esteem. Without any punishments or restrictions placed upon the fallen leader (all in the name of love), it would be making a statement to all the other onlookers. The statement is this: "Sin has no serious consequences. If the leader can do this and it is treated lightly, surely we can do it too. We can go out and do what we want. God loves us unconditionally in spite of what we do." Then iniquity, like a plague, would break out in the congregation of the Lord.

What we have said about fallen leaders is true of *any* believer. When serious sin is glossed over, it *spreads* throughout the Church. Therefore, real love disciplines, corrects, and rebukes (Rev. 3:20, Prov.13:24, 19:18). God's love separates sin from the sinner, but human love keeps people in bondage. Did you know that it is possible to love people into hell? True love does and says what is eternally best for another, even when it is not appreciated. True love is vulnerable; it risks being rejected in order to help another (Prov. 27:6, Psa.140:5, 2 Cor.12:15). True love is unselfish!

Real love chooses God above family and friends (Mt.10:37). Christ declared: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." When a believer loves his father or mother more than the will of God, it is not divine love—it is human love. When a parent loves a son or daughter more than the will of God, it is not divine love—it is human, natural love. Love must also be cleansed of *partiality*. Isaac and Rebecca had two sons. Isaac loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob (Gen. 25:28). Each parent had a favorite. This is partial, carnal love. Also, in order to have true love we must be cleansed of fascinations, fantasies, and infatuations which deprive us of sound judgment.

The prophet Samuel was admonished in his old age to "stop mourning for Saul" (1 Sam.16:1). There was something in his thinking and in his emotions that needed adjustment. Samuel was mourning over something God was not mourning about. God was telling him to divide soul and spirit in his personal life (Heb. 4:12). We are *spiritual* only when we have God's thoughts and feelings. We are *soulish* when we have our own. Samuel was not in synchronization with the Spirit of the Lord regarding his feelings about Saul. If we are mourning, let us be sure that God is mourning. If we are laughing, let us be sure that God is laughing. Our feelings about people and situations must be God's feelings; otherwise, we could keep people in bondage. Let us be sure that we love men and women the way God does or we will be demonstrating humanistic love rather than divine love.

"*Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*" (Rom.16:17). In this passage, the Apostle Paul is making reference to troublemakers inside the Church who must be avoided. There are times when a believer cannot have close fellowship with *everyone* within the Church. Sometimes a church member is like a cancer cell that spreads a disease throughout the whole body. One *sower of discord* can destroy a whole church. Judas infected all the other brethren (Mk.14:3-6, cf. Jn.12:1-6) with his words and attitudes. Christ never prayed for unity or commanded the apostles to love one another until Judas was gone. Unity is not possible until treacherous and disloyal people like Judas have been removed from the group.

"*Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord*" (2 Chron.19:2). This was God's rebuke to King Jehoshaphat for joining hand in hand with an unrighteous fellow-Israelite named Ahab. This was not a believer / unbeliever situation. Both were fellow-Israelites. Both were of the household of faith.

Both used the same Bible and believed in the same God. In fact, both men believed in the spiritual gifts and looked to the spirit of prophecy for guidance when they faced decisions (2 Chron.18:1-5). Yet God was very angry with their alliance because one group was godly and the other group was ungodly, and the mingling of the two was corrupting the righteous. Jehoshaphat and Ahab became such good comrades that their children started “dating” each other. Finally, Ahab and Jezebel's daughter married Jehoshaphat's son, and that was the ruination of the line of the kings of Judah for many generations (2 Chron. 21:6, 22:3-4). It is for this very reason that we cannot indiscriminately “love everybody” and flow with everything—even in the household of faith.

We Have True Love When:

- We love others the way God loves them
- We understand that reproofs and punishments are remedial, not cruel
- We show discrimination and wisdom in the way we love
- We are willing to risk rejection by telling others the truth
- We love God more than family and friends
- We will do what is eternally best for another
- We are willing to admonish one another, and our children (Rom.15:14, Prov.13:24)
- We limit or break our fellowship with *unrepentant* fellow believers (2 Thes. 3:14,15)
- We are mourning only for what God is mourning over; otherwise we are soulish, not spiritual
- We lay down our lives for our brethren (Jn.15:13). Do not lay down your life for false brethren.
- We are unselfish. The sum total of divine love in First Corinthians 13:4-7 is *unselfishness*.

There are times when God draws a line and everyone has to make a choice between walking with the godly or the ungodly in the Church. Israel, at one time, was divided into two camps, and everyone had to choose between Saul's camp or David's. Jonathan tried to be *everyone's* friend and ended up dying prematurely and in the wrong camp.

True Joy—False Joy

Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than “*enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*” (Heb.11:25). Sin is appealing! It can even be “pleasurable” for a while (Prov. 7:12-27). The “pleasures of sin” allure many who are looking for excitement, entertainment, fame, fortune, and comfort. Worldly pleasures glitter as *an escapism* from boredom and depressing circumstances and Satan is always there to offer the unhappy man or woman a counterfeit. Indeed, earthly pleasures offer *a temporary high*, but the end is always the same—disillusionment and death.

There is only one thing the human hearts seeks and that is happiness. Men and women search everywhere for happiness but they cannot find it—true happiness is not found in the external realm. Real joy comes from a well of life that Christ places *within* each believer (Jn. 4:14, Isa.12:3). But the joy that natural man tries to perpetrate is very different. It is exterior and always depends on circumstances going in his favor. Divine joy is *inward*. It sustains the soul even when the world itself is falling apart (Hab. 3:17-18). Jesus possessed immense joy as He made His way to the Garden of Gethsemane (Jn.17:13). It is this kind of joy that He desires to implant within each believer.

“For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Jeremiah 2:13

Joy is the result of Christ dwelling in our being as a spring of life. He is the *Fountain of Living Waters*. Our joy remains as we continue to make Christ the *source* of our life. Unfortunately, many of the saints of God drink from other sources. Jeremiah's message (Jer. 2:13) was not directed to the unbelievers but to the redeemed. Christianity becomes a disillusionment to all who are double minded (Ja.1:8, 4:8, Mt. 6:24). When God's people drink from all the polluted streams of this world, Jesus does *not* satisfy. “Jesus satisfies” is only something they say. It is not real in their hearts.

Having a ministry does not satisfy, and neither does success or popularity. Christians must be purged from this illusion. Solomon had all of these but was destitute of joy (1 Kg. 4:29-34, Ecc. 2:1-11). Solomon was gifted extraordinarily with wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. He was a fabulous musician too. He wrote over a thousand songs. But Solomon lost the presence of God because he neglected his relationship with God (1 Kg.11:6). His heart was divided with other loves (compare 1 Kg. 3:3 with 11:1). When Solomon preached Ecclesiastes, he was an old and foolish king who would no longer be admonished. These were his *reaping* years. The vineyard of his own inner life lay waste, having been devoured by all the little foxes of the lusts of this life. He had dabbled with everything under the sun. In the final analysis, Solomon became one of the most disenchanting men of all time.

Human love does not satisfy. Human love is one of the most common of “broken cisterns.” The woman at the well had been married five times and the man she was living with was not her husband (Jn. 4:17-18). Christ offered her another source, saying; “...Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be *in him* a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn. 4:14). The Apostle Paul adds that “we are *complete in Him*” (Col. 2:10).

We Have True Joy When:

- We are drawing our life from the wells of salvation, from Christ Himself
- We are not drinking from other worldly sources
- We are not double minded and unstable in all our ways
- We are not trying to find happiness in human love rather than God's love
- We have been cleansed of the illusion that ministry, success, and popularity satisfy
- Our joy is not dependent upon favorable circumstances (Hab. 3:17-18)
- We learn by experience that “fulness of joy” is found in God's presence (Psa.16:11)
- Our joy overcomes persecution complexes and self-pity (Acts 5:41, 16:23-25)

Remember, we can keep our wells unstopped by maintaining a rejoicing spirit. Caleb and Joshua had a thankful, rejoicing spirit, and this kept their wells unblocked and allowed faith to be free and flowing. They had “another spirit” and that is what brought them into the land of promise (Num.14:8). If the Lord delights in us, He will bring us into all those good things He has promised.

True Peace—False Peace

God's peace is inner serenity. It is *calmness* in the midst of the storm (Mk. 4:37-41). Therefore, the peace of God is a great stabilizing force. The world's concept of peace is *the absence of trouble*, and yet, even when outward troubles cease, men and women still suffer immensely from inner anxieties. Paul states that the peace of God will keep or guard our hearts and minds (Phil. 4:7). We need this peace in our hearts (in our affections) and also in our minds because this is where we have confusion. Every saint of God needs a deeper experience of God's peace. When men's hearts fail them for fear of the things that are coming upon the earth (Lk. 21:26), they will look to those who possess the peace of God. Our peace deepens as we continue to walk with God, and as we win battle after battle in the issues confronting our personal lives. God promises to make a covenant of peace that will not be removed (Isa. 54:10). We should pray, "Lord, make that covenant of peace with *me!*"

There is another peace, however, that comes from the Evil One. This peace is a *stupor* that clouds the minds of men and women, causing them to believe that they are alright as they are when in fact they are headed for judgment. This is a peace that is based on pride and presumption. Men and women who are blinded by deception will tell you that they have never felt more confident that what they are doing is right (Prov. 14:12, 16:25). When people have total peace in the wayward path they have chosen, it is often the result of a hardened conscience. Let us examine our peace to see whether it is coming from God or from Satan. Satan's peace makes men presumptuous, overconfident, unaffected, and unalarmed while they continue on a road that is taking them to certain catastrophe.

True Longsuffering—False Longsuffering

Longsuffering is alternately rendered "patience." It means to be even-tempered and forbearing. Longsuffering denotes patience under continual provocation and harassment. Longsuffering is a divine grace. It cannot be put on. Longsuffering (or patient forbearance) could be likened to frankincense. Frankincense gives off a beautiful fragrance when it is placed in the fire. In fact, the hotter the fire, the more beautiful the fragrance. The nature of Jesus is like this. As the fires of affliction increase, so also do the beautiful fragrances of the fruit of longsuffering.

Offerings made by fire to the Lord could not contain *honey* (Lev. 2:11). Honey represents *human sweetness*. When honey is heated, its chemical properties are changed and it is ruined. Honey cannot endure the fire, and neither can human sweetness. Man can try to put on patience and be forbearing and longsuffering but when the fire gets too hot the human honey will decompose and there will be an explosion. We can school ourselves to be gracious and cultured, but all of this is *natural sweetness* and it will never be able to handle the fires of persecution or criticism.

Human graces cannot endure the fire; only the divine graces can. When the Nazis invaded France in World War II, some of the Christians tried to condition themselves for persecution by torturing themselves. They attempted to develop a high level of resistance to pain in order to survive the atrocities of the Germans. However, those who prepared themselves in this fashion were the first to give up. Other believers who relied on *grace alone* were sustained and made it through the German occupation. Longsuffering is counterfeited by hardening the heart, becoming stoical and emotionless, and by putting on a false smile or a facade. Artificial patience and forbearance are able to endure only as long as the flesh can hold out.

True Gentleness—False Gentleness

Gentleness can also be translated “kindness.” It means to be easy and mild with people. It is a benevolent and gracious disposition toward others. *Insecure* people often are unable to demonstrate graciousness to others. It takes strength to be gentle. Samson alluded to this truth when in his riddle he said, “Out of the strong came forth sweetness” (Jud.14:14). This reminds me of a story I heard of two dogs that were sleeping at the entrance of a rural restaurant. One was a large bull dog, and the other a little dog. When anyone came through the entrance the little dog barked ferociously, but the big dog never moved. This perfectly illustrates the point. Someone strong and secure can afford to be gentle. It is that little insecure one who does all the snapping and threatening. Holy confidence and a good self image is needed in our lives to show forth the fruit of gentleness. Men of strength (men of gentleness) are able to freely forgive others and overlook offenses (Gen. 45:4,5, Prov.19:11).

Satan duplicates gentleness, but he does so with ulterior motives. Unredeemed politicians can be known for moderation and leniency. Men of the world are able to display personal sympathy or they have a tact that makes them liked by all. Some in the kingdom of darkness are humanitarian and show sensitivity to the poor and suffering. Charm, tenderness, sensitivity, and graciousness can all be performed by the unsaved. We should understand that not all of Satan's kingdom is grotesque. Some demons and fallen angels are very beautiful, gentle, and gracious. Let us not be deceived into thinking that people are redeemed just because they are so pleasant and kind.

True Goodness—False Goodness

Goodness is the very essence of God's nature. God is good. Everything God does is good. Goodness is one of the attributes God used when He described Himself to Moses. He declared: “The Lord God...abundant in goodness and truth” (Ex. 34:6, Psa. 34:8). Goodness is an action word; it always does what is morally honorable. Goodness is thoroughly pure in motive; it means “incapable of evil.” Goodness means “moral rightness in our dealings with others.” It will do only what is best and necessary for another's eternal welfare, in gentleness. God desires us to be *filled* with His goodness (Rom.15:14, Eph. 5:9).

Goodness is rooted in purity of motives. It has no jealousy but desires only what is best for others. It only wants to draw attention to the Lord, not to self. Goodness, however, has a counterfeit, for there are some who appear to be sacrificial and caring but the underlying motive is to have something in return. Paul said that a man could bestow all of his goods to feed the poor, and even give his body to be burned as a martyr and still not have pure motives (1 Cor.13:3). Many men and women want *preeminence and control*. The real motive of their numerous good deeds and sacrifices is to maneuver their tentacles into people's lives in order to gain control of them. In the final analysis, their concern is not for the best interests of others, but for their own selfish egos.

True Faith—False Faith

True faith is totally divine. It is purely supernatural, but our faith must be purified because it is mixed with presumption and other foreign elements of *self*. The Apostle Peter says: “That the trial [or purifying] of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet.1:7). Many years earlier Christ had prayed that Peter's faith (which was mixed with presumption) would not fail when it was tested (Lu. 22:31,32). Many things we do are not prompted by real faith.

Our faith and our vision needs to be purified. God may give us a glimpse of His purposes for our lives at an early age. The initial revelation that God gives us of our calling may be one hundred percent *divine*, yet our human mind analyzes—when, where, what, and how—and usually our calculations are very incorrect. What God has in mind for us and what we have in mind are very different (Isa. 55:8-9). There are many things that we do and say and think that are not born of true faith. Instead, it is presumption. Thus, our faith must be purified, as well as our vision.

True Meekness—False Meekness

Meekness means *no retaliation*. Meekness can be depicted as “a wild beast that has been tamed.” The root meaning of meekness is “one who has been tamed and does not do his own will.” A meek person bears God's chastenings. It is *holy acceptance*. It bears and accepts circumstances with joy. Anyone who possesses true meekness is a very strong person. Jesus fully accepted the will of His Father without resistance. He was like a lamb before His shearers (Isa. 53:7, Psa. 39:13). Meekness takes *no vengeance* in thought or in deed (Prov. 24:29). True meekness is supernatural, yet the cost to have this virtue developed in our lives is very high (Prov. 23:23). Meekness is a rare quality among Christians. It costs something to have our hearts changed. Moses, noted for his meekness, experienced many crushings.

How does true meekness differ from false meekness? Like true meekness, false meekness does not strike back. However, instead of portraying divine strength, false meekness reflects *passivity, blind submission, compromise, and nonresistance* to such an extent that even Satan is not resisted. All of these are counterfeits of meekness. Christ was the meekest man who ever lived (Mt. 11:29), yet He was able to speak up and say, “Woe unto you hypocrites, serpents, and blind guides; how can you escape the damnation of hell?” The Church should understand the true meaning of humility and meekness.

True Temperance—False Temperance

Temperance is “self-control.” This is a check on all our appetites by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our will is involved here, yet we are not exalting the power of the human will. We are exalting the God of all grace who is able to change our will and make it His (Phil. 2:13). False temperance is a *self-denial* that is produced by the flesh or energized through the power of a religious spirit.

Legalism, self-denial and rigid abstinence is an attempt to *earn* God's favor and make spiritual advancements. One of the popes (while he was still a cardinal) practiced eating small portions to earn “marks.” Later, when he visited Argentina and was warmly received there, he refused the comfort of the bed provided for him. He chose rather to rest on a hard couch. Of course, all of this was well publicized. Let us be sure that our motives are pure and that we are led by God when we fast, pray, give, or abstain (Mt. 6:1-7).

* * * * *

TRUE REPENTANCE

Repentance is an anointing—it is a gift of God. Repentance is a spirit that comes upon men and women to soften their hearts and to change their minds (Zech.12:10). Unless God sovereignly gives us this grace, we are unable to break and we are unable to change (Rom. 2:4). Repentance literally means “to change the mind.” Mind-sets, obstinate wills, and resistance break down when God pours out upon man the spirit of repentance. Even so, humanity may still choose to harden his heart and refuse the gift of God.

The gift of repentance begins at new birth, but repentance (the softening of our hearts and the changing of our minds) must *continue* all the days of our life. Repentance opens the door for God's blessings. It breaks down barriers between ourselves and others, and between ourselves and God. We need this anointing every day. The spirit of repentance is the key to moving on in God and the key to changing. Below are several ways to determine how effectively the spirit of repentance has been allowed to work in our hearts.

Evidences of the Spirit of Repentance

- A Breaking—A realization of how blind and how foolish I have been
- An Honest Confession—“I am wrong, I need to change”
- Sorrow for Hurting God—Not sorrow for losing a position
- A Willingness to Accept Discipline and Demotion if Necessary
- Reversing What I Am Doing—Doing works [fit] for repentance
- Restitution and Actions to Make Right What I Have Damaged, Where Possible
- An Attitude of Acceptance—“I am getting what I deserve,” not “I have been given *a raw deal*”
- No Comparing Ourselves With Others—“I am not nearly as bad as others, therefore, I am alright”
- Not Shifting the Blame to Others in Order to Justify Myself

Repentance—A Breaking Man can be very obstinate and unyielding. (I am referring to believers as well as unbelievers.) Even good men and women struggle with blind spots and stubbornness. Job, for example, was broken in health, in finance, in reputation, and in his marriage—yet he was not broken *in spirit*. During his trial he found fault with God *but none with himself* and declared that he would die before he would change his mind (Job 27:1-6). Later Job's heart softened as his eyes were opened when God came on the scene (Job 42:1-6). The Lord had sovereignly poured out upon Job the spirit of repentance. This is the goodness of God (Rom. 2:4).

Today, the nation of Israel is hard and unbelieving. However, there is coming a time when the nation as a whole will turn back to the Lord (Rom.11:26). The Old Testament describes it this way: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son...” (Zech.12:10, cf. Jer. 31:18-19). When Christ returns, the Jews who formerly opposed Christ are found weeping and crying and making petition to Him. The Israelis will say to themselves, “How foolish and blind and stubborn we have been all these years”, and they will mourn for Christ. A true spirit of repentance has no arguing, defending, or justifying of one's ways. Rather, it says, “I have been so wrong and so blind.”

Repentance—An Honest Confession There is only one way to remove guilt and that is by an honest admission of one's wrongdoings. The man who refuses to admit his faults is unrepentant. He continues to convince himself that what he has done is alright, or at least it is “not that bad.” Offenses not apologized for bring a chasm between ourselves and God and between ourselves and others. An open, honest confession is the first step toward reconciliation with God and with man. God's first requirement is, “Only *acknowledge* thine iniquity” (Jer. 3:13).

Proverbs 28:13 declares, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” King David tried to hide his sin, but his “moisture was turned into the drought of summer” until he acknowledged his transgressions (Psalm 32:1-5, 38:1-18, 51:3). Sometimes the only way to find release from guilt is by confessing our sin *unto men*, not only to God. Jacob's sons suffered from guilt for twenty-two years after betraying their younger brother Joseph (Gen. 42:21,22). The brothers may have acknowledged their sin to God, but until they told the truth to their father (to whom they had lied), they could never find release from their guilt.

It is crucial that criminals acknowledge their bloodguiltiness not only to God, *but also to man* in order to find release. The worst thing that could ever happen to a criminal is to be acquitted of a crime for which he is guilty. He may think he is getting away with murder here on earth, but then his sin is never blotted out and he must face the Great Judge on the Day of Judgment, and that is far worse. Surely, no one ever gets away with anything. All of man's deeds will come to the light, and this is the reason we should never worry about justice being perverted. It is the mercy of God that a man can be found guilty in order to give him the opportunity to confess his sin and find mercy and pardon from our Lord Jesus Christ. If crimes are not brought to the light and confessed here in this life, they will be taken into eternity *unpurged* and the guilty one will face eternal judgment. To find release from guilt, sin and bondages, sometimes a confession *to man* as well as to God is required.

Repentance—Willingness to Accept Discipline and Demotion True repentance is shown when there is sincere remorse for injuring the Lord and bringing shame to the Body of Christ. This is godly sorrow and it brings *life*. The sorrow of this world brings *death* (2 Cor. 7:9-11). Worldly sorrow is of the flesh. It is sorry only for losing position, honor, or something else it wanted. We have seen a lot of “worldly sorrow” in the Church in recent years. Fallen ministers have cried and repented publicly, but the genuineness of their repentance has come into question. When they were asked to accept a period of discipline or to step down until they could regain credibility, some have refused. Their sorrow and tears were *not* for disgracing the Lord or bringing reproach to His Church but for their own personal embarrassment and demotion from their lofty position. This is not true repentance.

One young man complained that the church was unloving and purposely avoiding him. He had been guilty of molesting several of the children there. When he was asked to leave the church, he exclaimed, “People hate me; what have I done that's so bad?” He was quite insensitive to the damage and injury he had brought to others. His only concern was for his own feelings of rejection and discouragement. There were no signs of true repentance.

Forgiveness can be instantaneous, but *restoration* takes time. There needs to be a period of proving oneself to regain credibility. When people fall into serious sin there is *a loss of trust*. If a man molested your child, perhaps you could forgive him, but could you ever *trust* him around your children again? If your pastor fell into adultery, would you want your wife in his office receiving counsel from him a month later? Real repentance involves a willingness to accept discipline and correction so that the problem can be remedied and not recur and cause injury to God, to others, and to oneself.

Repentance—Reversing What I Am Doing “Bring forth therefore fruits [worthy of] repentance” (Mt. 3:8). Repentance means “to change the mind,” which in turn causes a man to change his ways and his works. True repentance, therefore, is an action word. It is doing the *opposite* of what we were doing in the past. For example, if a man were eroding confidence in another man's character and leadership, he would stop sowing his discord, make an apology to the injured brother, and then go around speaking well of him. This is real repentance.

Paul said: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28). This is repentance! Here is a thief who lived off the substance of others in times past, but now he is working diligently to care not only for his own needs but the needs of others. Repentance may mean we have to stop associating with the wrong people and start befriending the right people. It may mean we have to turn off the wrong music and start listening to godly music. Repentance is a 180 degree turn around.

Repentance—Making Restitution Where Possible The purpose of Christianity is to rectify all wrongs of the past and to prepare us for an eternal kingdom. The object of Christianity is to make us blameless and without offense (1 Cor.1:8, Eph.1:4, 5:25, Col.1:22, Jude 1:24). Therefore, we should seek to amend all past obligations as far as possible. Ecclesiastes 3:15 says, “God requireth that which is past.” Thus, God does call the past into account.

Zacchaeus was a prominent tax collector. When he met the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior he was willing to bestow half of his goods to the poor and make restitution (four times as much) to anyone he had overcharged. Jesus replied: “This day is salvation come to this house” (Lk.19:8-9). Certainly, if we have former debts, we should seek a good conscience by taking the proper steps to “owe no man any thing” (Rom.13:8). When Christ becomes our Savior, we are totally forgiven, yet we should make right all our past obligations to man. Perhaps we owe people apologies for past hurts or injuries, and maybe we should remember marriage vows and a family we have neglected. All of this is part of a sincere and true spirit of repentance.

Repentance—“I Am Getting What I Deserve” A repentant and unrepentant spirit are depicted for us in scripture by two criminals. Let us start with the first criminal, Cain. Cain had murdered his younger brother and had shown no remorse whatsoever. In fact, there was never a clear-cut admission of his crime (Gen. 4:9). Because Cain would never confess his guiltiness, God said he would wander aimlessly as a fugitive and vagabond in the earth. (True guidance ceases when man refuses to acknowledge his sin.) Cain's only regret was that his “punishment was greater than he could bear” (Gen. 4:9-13). Never do we see any sorrow for the innocent bloodshed of his younger brother. His response is typical of unrepentant man. In effect, he was saying, “I have been given a raw deal; my sentence is too severe, I have been framed.”

Then we have the example of the repentant thief on the cross. His dying words to a fellow-criminal were this: “We [are receiving] the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss” (Lk. 23:41). Then he said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:42,43). A vital evidence of true repentance is when an individual can say, “I am getting what I deserve.” The unrepentant complains only that his sentence is not fair (cf. Psa.103:10).

Repentance is the ability to admit our sins and *accept* our punishment (Lev. 26:40,41). Cain's attitude is often found in believers. Cain would never humble himself and admit his wrongdoing.

Thus, Cain dwelt in the land of Nod (Nod means *wandering*. cf. Psa. 68:6). God will not give genuine guidance to the unrepentant. Only “repentant” saints are given the true light and the true anointing to guide them safely through life's pilgrimage.

Repentance—Not Comparing Ourselves With Others; Not Shifting the Blame to Others It is easy to fall into the trap of measuring ourselves with others and then assuming we are all right as we are. All of our spiritual measurements must be taken from the Chief Corner Stone (Eph. 2:20), not from others. The question is, “How do I measure up to Christ?” We are released from bondage, not by confessing our neighbor's faults, but our own. When God confronted Job about a problem in his life, he did not say, “But what about my three friends; look at what they have done.” God admonished the three friends later—after Job had confessed *his own* problem (Job 42:1-10).

“Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lu.13:2-5). In these verses, Jesus touches a critical area of need in man—the attitude that “I am not nearly as bad as others, therefore, I am good enough as I am.” The warning of the Lord to mankind is this: “Stop measuring yourself with others; measure yourself by God's standards.”

When God confronts us with issues in our lives, He expects a *truthful acknowledgment* from us. He will not accept evasiveness or excuses about the issues He is addressing. *Excuse* may be defined as follows: “To minimize one's fault or negligence; To try to be free of blame or responsibility; To justify one's self; To consider a fault to be unimportant; To exempt one's self from his obligation; To think one's self to be all right as he is, and better than most.” A true spirit of repentance is not evasive of the issues, nor does it seek to minimize or rationalize away a fault or sin. True repentance cries out, “Lord, I am wrong. Please help me and change me.”

Repentance—In Summary

Repentance is a gift of God, yet man must yield himself to this gift. The Lord offered Cain the gift of repentance, but he refused it (Gen. 4:8-9). Man is not able to change without the gift of repentance (Rom. 2:4). Our mind cannot change and our obstinate will cannot bend until we are melted by the spirit of repentance. We need to walk in this anointing day by day. A repentant spirit (the ability to change our mind and ways) is the key to marching forward in our Christian walk. Let us not remain in the wilderness for the rest of our lives.

Esau “found no place of repentance” after he sold his birthright (Heb.12:16,17). Some decisions in life are irrevocable. After he sold his birthright, he could not change his mind and secure it back to himself. The birthright was lost forever. Sometimes people reject warning after warning from God until finally He says, “I will no longer plead with you. You will remain locked into the choice you have made; you will never change” (Jud. 2:1-4).

Insurrection is another example for which people seldom, if ever, receive the gift of repentance. God has a special frown against men who attack a leader and try to overthrow his position. When I speak of repentance, I am speaking of the ability to break and to change. Believers who attack and attempt to overthrow God's leaders always end up bitter and are never blessed of God. It is a *serious* thing to go into eternity angry and bitter. I question whether a man is ready for heaven in that state!

TRUE FAITH

Faith is totally supernatural. It comes from God alone. Every blessing or gift we possess is received “by grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8). Faith is “not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.” Faith is like a ticket. If it is detached from Jesus Christ, it is void. Faith cannot be manufactured with the natural mind or pumped up like a tire. It is purely divine. Real faith comes from an intimate relationship with the Author of our faith (Heb.12:2).

Faith is a fruit and a gift of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 1 Cor.12:9). Faith (as a *fruit* of the Spirit) sees us through dark times. Job cried out in his darkest hour, “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). The *gift* of faith is different—it releases tremendous power and removes mountains (Mk.11:22-23). The gift of faith is a key that unlocks the doors of people's lives. Real faith is a divine impartation from God. It cannot be pumped up like a tire. When genuine faith enters our being, it is difficult to doubt.

Faith is hindered by intellect. Faith does not come from logic or the natural mind. It is something God puts into our heart. Thus, we must have the right condition of heart to receive this impartation of faith. We can *believe* for a promise and yet not have faith to bring it to pass. Faith and belief are different. When faith enters our heart, it will set our promise into motion and bring that promise to pass.

The Word of God that is preached from the pulpit may be mightily anointed. Yet if the message is not *received* with faith, it will profit us nothing (Heb. 4:2). Even the Lord of glory was unable to perform many mighty works at Nazareth because of an atmosphere of unbelief (Mk. 6:5-6). What is blocking the inflow of faith into our life? Natural logic is often one of the major hindrances to real faith. We should not try to “pump up” faith or depend on the power of positive thinking. Positive thinking in itself is not faith, although a positive attitude is important. Therefore, I want to repeat this: *real faith* is an impartation from God Himself, it is not human at all.

The brain was never meant to be our master but our servant. When a person is too analytical, faith cannot flow. Japan is highly intellectual and because of this, faith is not easily received. It is very difficult to preach there. When Paul Yonggi Cho ministered in Japan several years ago, he was doing well if he had 1200 attending his services. The response to his messages was minimal, and only a few people received their healing or miracle. In the Philippines and in other places, he would often have 40,000 in his meetings with numerous healings. The Japanese mentality is this: “It is better to work than to pray.” Their greatest obstacle to receiving the blessings of God is a dominant, proud mind. We must remember that the natural mind is *an enemy* of God (Rom. 8:7, cf. 1 Cor.1:21).

Faith must be enlarged. Our faith must grow. To put it more accurately, our capacity to receive God's faith must be expanded. In another sense, faith is like a muscle: it has to be exercised in order to grow. It is developed by pressure, time, and exercise. Abraham grew strong in faith (Rom. 4:19-22). God has given to every child of Abraham a *measure* of faith (Rom.12:3), but He desires to enlarge that measure of faith.

“*Have God's faith.*” The literal rendering of Mark 11:22 is: “Have the faith of God.” Therefore, it is God's faith, not our faith. Paul said he lived by the faith of the Son of God, not his own (Gal.2:20). The condition of our heart determines whether God's faith finds an entrance into our being. This is the reason God places the responsibility back on man and says, “Where is *your* faith?” (Lk. 8:25). He is saying: “Why is your heart so hard and unreceptive that My faith cannot operate in your life?”

Faith is hindered by hardness of heart. Hardness of heart and unbelief go hand-in-hand (Mk. 6:52, 16:14). Faith works by love (Gal. 5:6). Faith works in a soft heart, in a heart of love. Hardness of heart stops the life-flow of faith. When people turn from faith, it reveals that there are unresolved problems in their hearts (Heb.10:38). When a man has *a moral breakdown* in his life, faith and understanding leave him, and he begins questioning even the most basic fundamental Christian truths. Also, wrong *motives* destroy one's ability to believe (Jn. 5:44).

Faith will not come to the passive. Sometimes people say, "If God wants it to happen, it will happen!" No, it will not happen. Only the diligent seekers receive faith and the answers they need (Lk.11:9,10). God said, "You will find Me, when you search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Some have supposed that praying a second time is unbelief. To them, praying a second time indicates you did not believe God heard you the first time, but this is untrue. The fact is, prayer is hard work. Laziness is often the reason our prayers are not answered. Elijah had to pray seven times for the rain to come. Do not give up on the first try. God develops character in us through waiting.

The Need For a Balanced "Faith" Message

When we desire something from God, we cannot "claim" at random a passage of scripture and then expect God to respond to our request. This would be presumption, not faith. Rather, we must inquire of the Lord to know exactly what He desires for our lives at that given time. God must sovereignly *quicken* a promise or scripture before it becomes *life* to us and before it becomes our very own.

A serious problem arises when we go to the scriptures for direction. For one thing, there are 31,102 verses. Therefore, when we need guidance, there are well over thirty thousand answers to choose from. Let us ponder the illustration below:

Some Scriptures Say:	Other Scriptures Say:
"Stand still"	"Let us go on"
Do not even ask Me?"	"Why didn't you ask Me?"
"Wait"	"Now is the accepted time"
"Remember the past".	"Forget the past"
"Prepare for the future"	"Live one day at a time"
" Be married, have children"	"It is better not to marry"
"Have abundance"	"Be content with little"
"I will heal thee"	"Thou shalt die and not live."
"Dwell in this place"	"I will send thee far hence"
"I will fight for you"	"You drive out the enemies?"
"I am bringing you down"	"I will lift you up"
"This is a day of rejoicing"	"This is a day of mourning"

Even the inspired scriptures can become error when they are wrongly applied or used out of season.

As we can see in the illustration above, the scriptures contain *a broad range* of ways and means which God used to direct His people in the past. The question is: *which* Bible example should we choose when we need direction? Which verses apply to our present situation? Abraham was told to leave his father's house (Gen.12:1, Acts 7:3). Jesus and Paul were sent back home (Lk. 2:51, Acts 9:30). Thus, we can see our need for *a specific word* from God. Applying general principles of scripture to our circumstances is not enough; we must have a quickened, life-giving, precise word from God for each situation. This is the difference between a *logos* word and a *rhema* word.

Two Greek Renderings for “Word”

Word can be rendered two ways in the original Greek of the New Testament. *Logos* is the written Word of God, the scriptures. *Rhema* is the quickened word (an illuminated word from the scriptures, or otherwise). The *logos* is the *said* word. It is the past, established, written Word of God. James 1:21 commands us to “receive with meekness the engrafted *logos*, which is able to save our soul.” The *logos* is the 31,102 verses of scripture which contain the unchanging laws, standards, and precepts of God. (Other scriptures where *logos* is used: Mk. 7:13, Lk. 3:4, Jn. 8:31, 15:3, Ac. 20:35, Col. 3:16, 1 Tim. 5:17, 2 Tim. 2:15, Ja.1:22-23, 1 Pet.1:27, Rev. 6:9, and others).

The “*logos*” is the *said* word of God; the “*rhema*” is the *saying* word of God. The *rhema* word is a selected, specific, quickened word from God. Often it comes from the *logos* (or written) Word, or from the other gifts of the Spirit, but it never contradicts the written Word. A *rhema* word is a *present tense* word from God to our hearts. It is used in Luke 4:4 where Christ said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every [*rhema*] of God.” Man is taught to pray for “daily bread” (or a fresh word from God each day). The Church is washed from her uncleanness by the [*rhema*] of God (Eph. 5:27), not the *logos* only. Where does faith come from? Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing, not the *logos*, but the [*rhema*] of God. Faith does not come by “claiming” a *logos* word. Faith comes as God sovereignly gives us a *rhema* word. *Rhema* words come to those who diligently seek God.

Hyper Faith

The gift of faith is purely supernatural. It is not belief, it is not a positive attitude, and it is not confidence in God. It is none of these. Rather, it is a divine substance. It is an impartation from God and it comes by hearing a *rhema* word (Rom.10:17). We cannot haphazardly select a scripture and “take it by faith.” Promises from the sacred scriptures become ours only when God gives them to us. A number of years ago several girls tried to walk on water. They assumed, “If Peter could do it, so can we. God is just the same today as He was back then.” All the girls drowned and it became a reproach in the community. They were going on a *logos* word in their attempt to repeat what was a *rhema* to Peter when the Lord had beckoned him to “come” (Mt.14:28,29).

Today's faith message has validity, yet it stretches the truth too far when it emphasizes the *logos* rather than the *rhema* of God. Christians are exhorted: “Just believe it, just confess it, just claim it, only take God at His Word and it will be yours.” These are exhortations to lay hold of the *logos*, and yet faith does not come by the *logos*, but by the *rhema* word of God (Rom.10:17). Faith and belief are different! Belief is often mistaken for faith.

Belief is an attitude: “Lord, I believe You are able.” Belief can *lead* to faith, but it is not faith. Real faith is a substance. When God gives faith to us, it *always* brings the answer. Faith is an impartation from God and it comes to our hearts by the *quickened* word. The gift of faith is not a mental attitude or confidence in God. Real faith is a seed God puts within us, a quickened seed, a *rhema* word. Though we must train ourselves to think positively and make the right confession, this in itself is not faith. Faith is divine.

At one time in his life, Paul Yonggi Cho of Korea needed five million dollars. As he thought upon his situation, he agonized and fretted and stewed. Then he began to pray! He was *believing* God for the answer. He prayed and prayed and prayed, and then the faith of the Son of God came into his being.

God had placed *His* faith within him and Yonggi Cho began to rejoice. Although the funds had not yet come, he knew they were on the way. Faith itself is substance (Heb.11:1), and that faith had come into his spirit. The five million dollars came too.

The hyper-faith message tends to rebuke the devil for everything. It expects *immediate* results, but sometimes God has a *timetable* for our healing or miracle. For example, a man had a serious thyroid problem for eighteen months. During his time of sickness God worked compassion within him. Formerly, he had been very rough and impatient with others, but in his time of trouble God made him mellow in his spirit and then He healed him. This is the reason we cannot always “take authority” over everything *right now*. God has a set time for deliverance (Eccl. 3:1-8).

The hyper-faith movement has attracted many followers. Many have had failures in their lives or have come from spiritually dead churches, or perhaps they have been in some other form of bondage. The faith message has appealed to many because they are told: God can heal, God provides, God gives joy and peace, God speaks, and He can speak to you daily; you can be someone, and you can succeed.” Because people have desperately needed to hear these things, the faith message has given hope to many. In spite of the mixture and imbalance in some of today's faith message, it has helped many to a certain extent. However, our faith must be purified.

Peter said, “That the [purifying] of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet.1:7). Our faith is often mixed with presumption as impulsive Peter had learned earlier in life. Peter also exhorts us to *add seven things* to our faith (2 Peter 1:5-9). He said that if these seven things were in us and abounding, we would never fall. He also warns that if these seven qualities are not added to our faith, we would be blind and unable to see afar off. For example, we are commanded to add *virtue* to our faith. Virtue is moral excellence. Samson had faith, but he did not add moral purity to his faith, and he lost his vision.

Steps That Lead to Real Faith

A rhema (quickened word) comes from a relationship with God and by constantly seeking Him for direction on every matter. Here are a few simple steps that lead to real faith:

- 1). **Obedience** – obedience conditions us for a believing heart. We should obey, even if we do not understand all the details.
- 2). **A Believing Heart** – this is an attitude, “Lord, I know you are able.” It is also a positive confession.
- 3). **True Faith** – this is a divine impartation from God. A believing heart and a right confession will lead to faith.

Israel did not *obey*; therefore, they could not *believe* and they were void of *faith*. They all died in the wilderness. Caleb and Joshua obeyed, resulting in a believing heart and right confession—which led to divine faith.

The Weakness of Seminar Principles

Jesus declared; “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word [or logos] shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35). Principles of the Bible are one hundred percent true! No fundamental believer would ever dispute that. The issue, however, is not our belief in the authenticity of the Word of God or its principles. Our problem is in knowing *which* Bible principle to apply in each situation. Every situation (and person) is different, therefore, a specific key is needed each time. The answer that worked for one man may not work for another. In the kingdom of God, there is *no master key* that perfectly fits everyone's spiritual prison door. A special key is required for our own release as well as our neighbor's. Thus, we see the need for the grace of God—the need for a *rhema* word from God.

However, seminar principles tend to put people, situations, and problems into *categories*. Herein is the weakness of “principles.” Many basic situations and problems are worked out theoretically beforehand. Each problem is analyzed and resolved with answers that are supported by Scripture. This enables us to have a predetermined answer for every problem as it arises. Whenever a problem comes our way, all go to our filing cabinet and look under a particular heading to know what to do. It is systematic, it is backed thoroughly with Scripture, and it is guaranteed to work if we follow the instructions step by step. There is only one problem with this procedure—it just does not work!

“Principles” encourage us to rely on past categorized experiences instead of seeking God for a fresh clear word for our situation. Principles give us *a rulebook*. All the answers are spelled out for us already. When we have principles set forth for us in an orderly fashion, we do not need to seek God for grace anymore. Actually, we do not need God anymore, for we already have the answers, but the question is, are they really *God's* answers?

Israel demanded a king when the Lord was their king (1 Sam. 8:5-7, 12:12). They wanted a lord whom they could see and hear and touch. They wanted something more tangible. God's people hated living by faith. Walking in the Spirit was too undefined, and trusting in a God whom they could not see was too uncertain for them. They wanted a king to lead them. There are many reasons people do not want the Lord to reign over them. It is easier to have a king. Kings can logically explain what we think we need to hear, and best of all, we do not have to live by faith. If we are not careful, a rulebook of principles can become our “king.” One of the signs of losing our walk in the Spirit is exchanging our relationship with God *for principles* (2 Cor. 3:6).

We do not like to live by faith; we resist the unknown. Man always wants to know what is going on and how everything is going to turn out. We want an explanation for our circumstances and we want it *now*. We want it all outlined for us. For this reason, principles and psychology appeal to our logic. Principles can always give us an explanation, but they may not be God's explanation. What if God did not wish to speak to us now as in Job's trial? It was not meant for Job to understand his trial. Sometimes God is silent. If God had explained everything to Job and shown him the outcome of his trial, it could have destroyed what God was doing in his life. In some situations, God does not wish to give us light (Isa. 50:10) and we have to trust in His character. When we are in the fire, we can apply every theory and principle in the book. In the final analysis, they just do not work. The only thing we can do is cry out to God for his life-sustaining *grace*, and that is precisely what God wants us to do.

We are not minimizing established truths, but cautioning against the overreliance on principles as a pat answer for everything. God's order for your life may be different than God's order for someone else. We have to find God's order for *our* life. For example, some lecturers promote having many children, while others teach that we should have few or none. Yet this important decision is a matter of personal conviction from God and that comes from a close relationship with Him.

Summary of Principles

- Our problem is not principles, but knowing *which principle* to apply to each situation. Thus, we need a rhema word.
- There is *no master key* that perfectly fits everyone's situation. We need a specific key each time.
- Relying on categorized principles discourages us from seeking God for a fresh word.
- We do not like to live by faith. Principles, natural logic, and psychology appeal to our natural mind.
- Relying on a set of principles, a rulebook, is a rejection of the Lord as our king. Principles become our new king.
- Principles always give us an answer, but sometimes God is not speaking.
- We must not exchange a spiritual ministry for *an intellectual ministry*, a ministry of principles.

TRUE WORSHIP

“The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23).

John 4:23 is a revelation of the heart of God. The Father is looking for true worshippers, those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Real worship demands *a life* that is totally surrendered to God. True worship is when we love and cherish every part of God with every part of ourselves. True worship is when we are totally His.

True Worship Involves the Following:

- **The Right Music**
- **A Believing Heart**
- **An Attitude of Dependence**
- **A Thankful Spirit**
- **An Obedient Life**
- **A Heart Without Offense Against Another**
- **Laying Down Our Deepest Desires at His Feet**
- **A Realization That We Belong to Another**
- **Being Filled With the One Whom We Worship**
- **Being Under Submission to God's Authority**
- **A Heart That Has Been Circumcised**
- **Prostrating Ourselves Before Him**

True worship is when we love and cherish every part of God with every part of ourselves. Pure worship is when we are totally His.

The Right Music Our music must be right in order to worship God in Spirit and in truth. *Holiness* is related to true worship. The Scriptures beckon us to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (Psa. 96:9). If our music is worldly and mixed with Satan's lyrics and the world's beat, we cannot possibly worship God in the beauty of holiness. God wants to refine our music! After the praise service in Exodus chapter fifteen, Israel's music deteriorated into a *noise* (Ex. 32:17-19). The reason their music had deteriorated was because their relationship with God had deteriorated. The kind of music we listen to or play says much about the condition of our heart and our relationship with God.

A Believing Heart All true worship must come from a heart of belief. The very first duty of man is to believe (Jn. 6:28-29). It is an insult to God when man disbelieves Him. To not believe God is to disagree with God and this grieves His Spirit (Amos 3:3). When God speaks to us, He expects us to agree with Him. Agreeing with God satisfies His heart. The reason Abraham was such a good worshipper was because he agreed with everything God said to him. A believing heart satisfies and edifies the heart of God, and this is the ultimate objective of true worship. May we lift up our hands to God without wrath or *doubting* (1 Tim. 2:8).

An Attitude of Dependence When we come to worship God, we must approach the Lord with an attitude of deep humility and dependence upon Him (Mt. 5:3). The truth is, we do not know how to properly worship. Neither can we find the way into God's presence unless He sovereignly gives us His grace for the way is *hidden*. David prayed: “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles” (Psa. 43:3, 65:4). True worship is fully rooted in grace but grace is extended only to the humble. Deep humility is required to *fully* approach the Lord and to come into the realities of pure worship (Isa. 57:15).

A Thankful Spirit *Thankfulness* is an attitude of heart that overcomes all bitterness and criticism, thus preparing our hearts for worship that edifies our Maker. It is not possible to worship God in Spirit and in truth if there is ungratefulness in our hearts. Unthankfulness is the first step to *turning away* from God (cf. Rom.1:21). Scripture beckons us to “enter his gates with thanksgiving” (Psa.100:4). Thankfulness *conditions us* to praise and worship. True praise and worship requires thankfulness *in and for* our circumstances (1 Thes. 5:18, Eph. 5:20). Thankfulness keeps our spirit free. However, we should never command people to worship. God does not want our sacrifice of praise if it is not from our hearts. Never *command* people to worship. Challenge them by saying: “If you are not thankful for the blood of Jesus and all He has done for you, please do not worship!” When we compel people to worship, and it is not from their heart, it genders disrespect.

An Obedient Life Obedience keeps us in favor with God and opens the door to pure worship. The favor of the Lord is maintained as we continue to do what He asks of us. God will not accept our sacrifice or worship if we are in the wrong place or doing things *our way* (Deut.12:13,14). God can refuse our sacrifice (Mal.1:8-10). In Romans 12:1, we are commanded to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Our life becomes a sweet savor unto the Lord as we offer our whole being to Him, even as Christ did (Eph. 5:2). When we are faced with two choices and we choose God's way, we are worshippers—and this is our reasonable service.

A Heart Without Offense Against Another Before we can come to the altar to worship, God first requires us to put everything right with others whom we have offended (Mt. 5:23,24). We should realize that if our hearts have been hardened toward anyone, we cannot fully open our hearts to the Lord. To be a worshipper of a perfect God, we must also become perfect (Mt. 5:48). We must be perfect in our attitudes. Love must be perfected toward our brethren and toward our enemies. We cannot worship God in Spirit and in truth with evil feelings in our hearts.

Laying Down Our Deepest Desires at His Feet Worship is giving ourselves wholeheartedly to another. True worship is not fully realized if the heart is divided and we are clutching *inordinately* to other loves. Abraham gave back to God his dearest possession—Isaac. He worshipped as he did so (Gen. 22:5)! May we honor Him as our *all in all* as we place at His feet our goals, ambitions, plans, ministry, and even the people we love the most. In doing this, we are saying to God, “*Everything is second to You.*”

A Realization That We Are Not Our Own True Worship involves the attitude of Revelation 4:11. It is the realization that we were made for another—God. We were created *by Him and for Him*, to bring Him pleasure. We are not our own, we are bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20, Psa.100:3). We were created to adore the One who created us, and that is how we find *fulfillment*. Ultimate worship is when we love every part of God with every part of ourselves.

Being Filled With The One Whom We Worship We become like the thing (or person) we worship. Israel followed after vanity and became vain (Jer. 2:5). The heathen, who make idols and worship them, become like them (Psa.115:2-8), but those who are deep worshippers of the Lord become like Him! This is the reason we need to have an ever-increasing revelation of the One we worship. As we behold the Lord and worship Him, we are transformed more and more into His image (2 Cor. 3:17,18). God rewards our worship by imparting to us a part of Himself. As we worship the Lord we are filled with the very essence of who He is, and then we are able to offer this back to Him. It is a pouring back upon Him the same fragrance He has poured upon us.

Being Submitted to God's Authority True worship is expressed by subjecting ourselves to God's rulership and to those He chooses to place over us. True worship is demonstrated by wholly accepting whatever circumstances God brings into our lives. Worship is acknowledging Him as the *Lord* of our life. When we cannot accept our circumstances, but we challenge or question the way He has led us, we are *not* true worshippers. Job was a deep worshipper of the Lord. When he lost everything he had, he fell down and worshipped (Job 1:21-22). Job had surrendered his rights to God and acknowledged Him as his absolute Lord.

A Circumcised Heart Paul said; “We are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). Circumcision is “to cut away what we are born with.” We are born with pride, stubbornness, and other maladies of the fallen nature. True worship comes forth when our heart has been freed by the Sword from the bondages of *tradition and natural thinking*. Many are unable to worship God in the Spirit because they are inhibited with tradition and their natural minds. Some churches are embarrassed and ashamed of raising their hands, clapping, or dancing with joy before the Lord as David did (2 Sam. 6:14-16).

To Prostrate Ourselves Before Him (To lay face down at His feet) If natural man will sell himself for a goal or a cause, how much more should we give ourselves to the Lord of lords to honor and worship Him! The Father seeks for such! Let us become deep worshippers of the One who made us, for He is most worthy!

To Petition God - is to be occupied with our *needs*.

To Praise God - is to be occupied with His *blessings*, out of a thankful heart and with clean hands.

To Worship God - is to be occupied with *Him*. When Job lost everything he had, he fell down in worship, not praise. He was worshipping God simply for who He is. Worship is deeper than praise. Praise leads to worship.

The Importance of Music

Right music is critically important because it affects the presence of the Lord and the moving of the Holy Spirit. Anointed praise and worship brings a revelation of God that transforms us to be like Him. Spirit-inspired praise and worship can release the spiritual gifts and bring deliverance, healing, and the spirit of prophecy for direction. The right music is a key to revival and a growing church. God created music; it is a part of Himself. Heaven itself is filled with music. The right music and pure worship condition us for heaven and eternity. Pure worship also helps to keep us on course and enables us to hit the mark for our lives.

Music is An Integral Part of God's Kingdom, and Satan's Music has tremendous power and can move us in either of two directions. We are influenced greatly by music and therefore the music we listen to must be holy. God has chosen to surround Himself with praise, worship, and the beauty of holiness (Psa. 96:9). Is the music we are listening to fulfilling this purpose? Is our music edifying the Lord and drawing us closer to Him? There is a great attack of Satan in the area of music and it is infiltrating the Church. Have we lost our discernment and sensitivity in the area of music and worship? The spiritual condition of the Church at any time in history has always depended on the condition of its music, praise, and worship!

Revival is Always Associated With Music Great miracles and release for people to find salvation flow with the right music. As we have already said, the right music releases healing, deliverance from bondages, and the prophetic spirit (1 Sam. 16:23, 2 Kgs. 3:15). During the Dark Ages, the Roman Catholic Church banned singing. As a result, all life and joy left and great backsliding came in. Martin Luther not only restored the truth of *justification by faith*, he also brought singing and worship back into the Church. New life and joy returned with the resurrection of music and singing. Luther himself said, "There is nothing more important than music and worship, except for right theology." The revival under the Wesley brothers was accompanied by six thousand new hymns. The Wesley's encouraged their congregations to sing and express the joy of their salvation with songs of praise and worship. The health of the Church at any time in history has always been related to the quality of its music and its worship.

Music Originated From God God loves music and surrounds Himself with praise, worship, and holiness (Rev. 4:8-11). Lucifer was formed by God to lead the choirs of heaven. The sounds of heaven were majestic but then discord sounded, a strange chord entered, a new note of depression came forth. (Much of Satan's music is in a minor key.) The change in Lucifer's music came because of a change in his relationship with God. Rebellion had come in. Satan did not lose his musical ability when he fell. Today, he uses his abilities to pervert music and to turn man away from God with it. All ability comes from God. What we use our abilities for is up to us. For what end will we use our musical abilities?

No Musical Instrument is Evil in Itself If instruments are used properly, they will glorify God. King David made many instruments of music under God's direction (1 Chron. 23:5, 2 Chron. 7:6, 29:26-27, Neh. 12:36). There are many instruments in heaven such as trumpets, horns, and stringed instruments. The evil is not the instrument but in how a person uses the instrument. He can use it for good or for evil. Organs, pianos, trumpets, and flutes are all accepted by most believers, but even these can be instruments of Satan if the one playing them is not consecrated to God. (We should avoid having a *band* in our churches, but rather an *orchestra* of heavenly worship.)

Sometimes a church lacks liberty in the Spirit because of legalism or tradition. In some churches, instruments of music are prohibited. Other forms of enthusiasm and rejoicing before the Lord are quenched. This can stop the flow of the Holy Spirit, because music and worship is directly related to the flow of the Spirit. The Puritans of old put members out of the church and reproached them for singing. John Calvin believed that all Old Testament ordinances were obsolete, including all musical instruments. After A.D. 70, the Pharisees banned songs, clarinets, and other instruments saying they were evil because the heathen used them. The Pharisees took a hard line. This same Pharisaical spirit can stop the flow of the Spirit in the churches today.

Sometimes unnecessary restraints are put upon church congregations because of a fear of *emotionalism*. Emotions in themselves are not evil if they are subject to the Spirit of God. God Himself has emotions and we are created in His likeness. We can go from one extreme to another—from *all* emotions to *no* emotions. Both extremes are wrong. We should find a holy balance. Some churches have too much emotion and some have little or no emotion. There is music which *expresses* emotion, and there is music that *incites* emotions. We should not entertain the latter.

Music is Worship Depending on the kind of music it will produce good or evil worship. Satan uses music to draw people away from God to himself, using a counterfeit anointing. Music played an integral part in the worship of Nebuchadnezzar and his image (see Daniel 3:1-18), and it will be repeated in the worship of Satan and the antichrist in our day (Rev. 13:4, 13:8). Satan's greatest desire is *worship for himself* and he uses music to get it.

Rock music is one of the greatest tools Satan has to bring man into bondage. Secular rock music is terrible. The covers on the albums show us clearly that the source is demonic. Music is known by the fruit it produces. Rock music is associated with the rebel culture. If you let your children listen to it, they will rebel against God, and you. Rock music is also connected with immorality, drugs, and spiritism. The evil spirit that works through a rock artist will come into those whose spirit is open to this kind of worship. Music is worship! What are we worshipping?

Christian Rock

The main thrust of Christian Rock is *beat*. Often the message conveyed is not scripturally correct and the artists are usually filled with the spirit of the world. God does not want His people to use Satan's styles and methods, or to put Scripture to the tunes of the world. This is like bringing in the ark on a new cart (1 Chron. 13:1-14, 15:12-13). It is wrong to try to bring in God's presence by our own methods. God is very particular *how* His presence is brought in and He judged Israel for doing it contrary to His order. We should have music and lyrics that edify God and promote His high calling. There is outer court music, holy place music, and holy of holies music. Let us seek to point people to the highest.

MUSIC IN THREE PARTS:

Melody — (spirit) the message, the most important part.

Harmony— (soul) rapturous feelings (orchestras, etc) to enhance the melody.

Rhythm — (body) the beat, bodily expressions.

Christian rock exalts *beat* first. The beat speaks the loudest, and often we cannot hear the melody or the words. Good, anointed music should affect our spirit first, then our soul, and then our body. If music affects the body first (beat) and the spirit last, it is wrong. Christian rock draws attention to rhythm and beat first.

Our music must be right. Music will attract us either to holiness or to worldliness. We must have the right music in our homes in order for God to come into homes with His glory. It is good to worship together as a family. Perhaps some of us should fast from listening to music for a time, that we ourselves may offer unto the Lord a sacrifice of praise. Let us lose our need to be *entertained*.

“Ye worship ye know not what” (Jn. 4:22). It is possible to think that we are worshipping God, but in reality be worshipping something else because of the music we are giving ourselves over to. Joshua heard “a noise” in the congregation (Ex. 32:17-19). Their worship had degenerated into clamor. Worship is not a noise or clamor. Unfortunately it is in some churches. Worship becomes a noise when the flesh is reigning instead of God.

Several Ways to Evaluate Music

- What kind of person is the artist? Is he or she consecrated to God, or an entertainer?
- Observe titles and album covers. Do they glorify God, or the world and Satan?
- Does the music minister to the Lord? Is it edifying to Him?
- Does it genuinely draw people to the Lord, or to a *beat* and souliness?
- Does it communicate a true message? Is it theologically correct?
- What kind of people follow it - the carnal or the godly?
- Does it copy the world's sounds and lyrics? Are Satan's styles being used?
- Are the words Christian, but the tunes the world's?
- Is my evaluation of music according to truth, or is it clouded by my *preferences*?
(If I only like quiet hymns, am I saying that other music is not of God?)

TRUE LIBERTY

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh” (Gal. 5:13).

Liberty is dangerous. In fact, it can even destroy us! The human race is simply unable to handle unlimited freedom. When our first parents transgressed in Eden, God had no option but to quickly impose limits upon them because of a fallen nature. Without restraints a sinful nature would run wild and all of us would become hopelessly degenerate (Eccl. 8:11). Therefore, God pronounced: “Cursed is the ground *for thy sake*” (Gen. 3:17b). Limitations that are imposed upon us by the curse are actually for our benefit, though often this truth is not appreciated. God-given restraints are the mercy of God to keep us on course. Yet, when a “thorn” in our life has served its purpose, God will remove it. When God sees that we are mature enough to manage freedom, He will deliver us from our prison-like circumstances. But if release is granted prematurely, liberty would be used as Paul warns, “for an occasion to the flesh.”

Therefore, God chooses not to free us immediately from all of our difficult circumstances. He knows we are unable to handle total freedom all at once. He only promises to drive out our enemies and problems “little by little” (Exod. 23:30, Deut. 7:22). The God of all wisdom places over us “tutors and governors” until the appointed time (Gal. 4:1-2). These “tutors and governors” are the people and circumstances in our lives that teach, restrain, and hedge us in for a while. Therefore, hard work, having to be accountable to others; being *locked* into marriage; being tied down to a job; having our plans thwarted and our wills crossed are all situations that are good for us. Confinements are *not* bondages as Satan insists. Rather, they are a safeguard for us and they are working within us Christian character. Thus, when these restrictions are cast off, people fall into the *real* bondages.

Satan's whole desire is to control and bring us into bondage. To accomplish this he undermines the checks God places upon man. Whatever leads to freedom Satan calls *bondage*; and whatever leads to bondage he calls *freedom*. Satan promotes independent and defiant attitudes like this: “Don't fence me in ... do not put any restrictions on me ... It's my life and I will do what I want.” Today there are many liberation movements.

Long-standing problems in our lives (a physical ailment, a bondage, other annoying situations at home, etc.) are permitted by God more than we think. There are important reasons God leaves irritations in our lives for a season. They are actually keeping us on course and forming within us eternal kingly qualities. God will remove these troubles one by one as we mature and are able to use freedom without freedom being our ruin. God will deal with our enemy or problem as we grow in grace and as the pertinent issues in our lives are faced head on (Prov.16:7, 2 Cor.10:6).

I have learned that spiritual *prisons* are the mercy of God and can literally be our salvation. Noah's ark, for example, was a prison. The people in the ark could not go anywhere for a year and it was very unpleasant; yet that prison was their salvation. Sometimes God draws us into awkward circumstances but it is to save and deliver us. When I was a young man the Lord passed me through a long “tunnel experience” in my personal life. I was confused, depressed, and physically impaired for a number of years, but all of these became unspeakable treasures to me. Tunnels are very dark and lonely but they have several tremendous advantages. A tunnel is the shortest way through a “mountain” in our life. Also, *we cannot go off course* when we are in a tunnel, and God always has light at the end of our tunnel and gives us an expected end (Jer. 29:11).

In Scripture, *captivity* represents confinement. It is exile into strange and difficult circumstances. For Israel, it meant going to Babylon in chains of bondage in order to be purged from vanity and idolatry. Yet God promised them a return to their homeland and to normalcy. He sent them into captivity “for their good”, to “give them a heart to know him” (Jer. 24:5-7; cf. Job 42:10). This is the whole purpose of captivity. Captivity is an experience; it is a necessary ingredient for being conformed to the image of the Son of God. In Jeremiah's time, the prophet commanded them to submit to captivity (Jer. 27:12-14). In captivity we are freed from the shackles that vex our souls.

Some seminar lecturers have urged young people to stay at home with their parents (if possible) until they are married. Repeatedly we have seen young adults fall into the snare of fornication because they insist on having their *freedom* and living away from home. While resenting house rules and being under authority they have fallen into the *real* bondages—moral sin, abortion, guilt, regret, bitterness, debt, drugs, and alcohol. God's laws bring life! They are not legalism or bondage. His commandments are not grievous (1 Jn. 5:30), but guide posts that keep us from falling into many sorrows. Freedom is a state of being free in spirit, mind, and soul.

True freedom is when sin does not have dominion over us, and vices, habits, and Satan are not ruling our lives. Freedom is having a good conscience. It is abounding with love, joy, peace, and all of the fruits of the Spirit. We can be marvelously free though confined with difficult circumstances, and we can be enslaved and controlled by Satan though roaming about with no restraints. God is doing everything He can to keep us out of the real bondages. Do not choose the *counterfeit* liberty.

For What Will We Use Our Freedom?

*“Let my son go, that he may serve me”
Exodus 4:23*

Many of us have heart cries and desires, some for which we have petitioned God for years. I would like to ask you a question: If God were to give you your request right now, would it help or hinder your walk with Him? If God gave you your miracle today would it draw you closer to Him or would it take you away from Him? Are you ready for your desired miracle or would that miracle destroy you and cause you to go your own way? Let us consider the following illustrations:

- Moses said to Pharaoh, “Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, *that he may serve ME*” (Exod. 4:22-23). For what purpose does God deliver His people from bondages? The answer is very clear from this passage in Exodus. He sets His people free so that they may be able to serve and glorify *Him!* Unfortunately, when God gives men and women their miracle of deliverance, instead of serving Him they often serve *themselves*. This is precisely what Israel did after God delivered them from Egyptian bondage. Israel did not serve the Lord, but themselves. They used their freedom to go their own way.

- If God restores health to you, for what will you use your healthy body? Will it be used for fornication or adultery? If God blesses you financially, will it draw you closer to Him or will prosperity make you lose your dependency upon God? (Jer. 22:21). Several years ago, an elder in an African church prayed for a new red pickup truck. When he got his new truck, he did not show up for the Sunday service or the midweek service. He was too busy driving people to and from town. They never saw him again. His life was absorbed with driving his truck *and making money*. Material blessing caused him to forget God (Deut. 6:11,12). This is a temptation not only in Africa, but everywhere in the world. Not everyone can handle financial blessing.

- Luke 17:11-19 is the amazing account of the healing of ten lepers. The Lord healed all ten but only *one* returned to give glory to the Lord. All ten of these lepers were delighted to be healed yet only *one* used his healthy body to glorify the Lord. Nine of these men went their own way to use their miracle for their own interests (see Phil. 2:21). Remember, we are set free to serve *Him*.

When Dr. Brian J. Bailey was in France many years ago, he and his wife witnessed and performed many miracles of healing. Their church was located near a notable hospital that treated terminally ill patients. When doctors had no hope for patients, they referred them to the church across the street that advertised: “Jesus Saves, Jesus Heals.” As a last resort, terminally ill patients came to church and God miraculously healed many of them. Yet the interesting thing is this: most of them never returned to church or lived for God after their miracle of healing. Perhaps God is waiting for a deeper commitment from you before He heals you!

- The Lord cut off all of King David's enemies and elevated him to a position of greatness in the earth, according to 2 Samuel 7:9. Normally we would think, “What a blissful state not to have any more problems or enemies.” But, in reality, this is a time of *great danger!* After the Lord had cut off all of David's enemies, he soon grew lax and fell into sin with Bath-sheba (2 Sam. 11-12). For this very reason God is slow to remove all of our problems. This is also the reason God left a thorn in Paul's life, otherwise he would have been “exalted above measure” (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

- I well remember a young lady who was a fabulous musician in one of the Bible schools where I was a resident teacher. Often when she played the piano our hearts were touched with a special anointing. On one occasion she mentioned to me her inconvenience of being without a car. She said that a local mechanic had been negligent for a whole year in replacing her damaged engine. This prompted me to speak to the mechanic who quickly complied and installed another motor. But there was something that I did not know at the time. God had purposely taken away this girl's car and her freedom for a very important reason. God had been trying to speak to her and save her from disaster. As soon as her freedom was restored, she used her liberty for an occasion to the flesh—she went out and broke up another man's marriage. The example I am using here is all too common.

- For what will we use our liberty? What will we do when we receive our release from bondage? Samson used his freedom for an occasion to the flesh. What Samson would not learn in freedom, he had to learn in bondage (Jud. 16:19-31). Our Lord taught that if our eye caused us to offend it would be better to lose that eye in order to be spared from hell fire. Samson had to lose both of his eyes to bring him to his senses, but it saved him from eternal loss (cf. Mt. 5:28,29; 18:9). When a nation sins grievously against the Lord, He gives them over to bondage, slavery, and the oppression of other nations (Psa. 107:10-14). He does so for three reasons: 1.) to punish them; 2.) to restrain them; 3.) and to bring them to repentance (Psa. 90:3). God imposes a yoke on individuals and on whole nations to restrain them and redeem them. When a nation or people gains their independence or throws off their yoke *prematurely*, an evil nature runs rampant and liberty is not used to serve God but *self*. Always observe whether “freedom” and “independence” has helped or hindered the spiritual condition of a person or a nation.

Therefore, we should thank God for our circumstances and irritations and trust Him to bring us out of our confinements when He knows it will bless and not destroy us. Let us ask God to *prepare us* for our miracle so that when it comes we will be ready for it and it will be used for His glory! Remember, a beautiful pearl is formed by years of prolonged irritation, not speedy deliverance.

TRUE FEAR

Wrong Fear - The human heart is filled with fears and phobias! Man worries all the time about what others are going to think of him. Some cannot tolerate reproach or rejection, especially from friends, family, and peers. People dread failure, or looking like one. Sometimes a person is afraid to believe anything but what he was brought up to believe. Fear hinders many from doing the will of God. Fear is the first reason for missing eternal life (Rev. 21:8, Jn.12:42,43). All of these are fears which must be overcome. "I sought the Lord and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psa. 34:4). If we want to go to heaven, we have to be more afraid of offending God than offending people.

No Fear - Some people claim they have NO FEAR, but it is very dangerous to have no fear. Having no fear is the trademark of fools. When I use a table saw, I am afraid to crowd my fingers too close to that saw blade. I am afraid to touch a high voltage wire, and I am afraid to get too close to the edge of a cliff. I am afraid to go out in the cold without a warm jacket and hat. And when I am crossing a busy highway with a child, I hold on to that little hand very tightly. It is good to have the right kind of fear. When people say they have no fear, they are saying they have no wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Right Fear - This is wholesome fear. It is good to be afraid of displeasing God or of coming short of His purposes for our lives. It is good to have a healthy fear of missing heaven. The fear of the Lord is an anointing, it is one of the seven spirits of the Lord (Isa.11:2,3). This anointing produces a reverential respect and awe for God. Anyone who has the fear of the Lord is very wealthy.

The Fear of the Lord:

- Is an anointing (Isa.11:2). It is one of the seven spirits of the Lord.
- Is God's treasure (Isa. 33:6).
- Is the beginning of wisdom (Psa.111:10, Job 28:28, Prov. 9:10).
- Makes us afraid to come short of God's purposes (Heb. 4:1).
- Keeps believers from backsliding (Jer. 32:40).
- Is clean, and keeps us clean (Psa.19:9).
- Is a fountain of life (Prov.14:27); it keeps us from many hurtful snares
- Keeps us from sinning (Prov.16:6).
- Produces discernment (Prov. 8:13), making men hate pride, arrogance, and evil.
- Makes societies have decency (Gen. 20:11). Without His fear, men are evil (Rom. 3:14-18).
- Is a sense that God is watching me, and I will answer to Him (Gen. 42:18, Jonah 1:9, Lk.23:40).
- God's blessing is upon all who fear Him (Psa.115:13).
- The eye of the Lord is upon all who fear Him (Psa. 33:18).
- God's secrets are revealed to those who fear Him (Psa. 25:12,14).
- Some have more fear than others (Neh. 7:2).
- Holy fear must be sought for to have it (Prov. 2:5, 1-5)
- Some refuse the fear of the Lord (Prov.1:29).
- God hardens some from fear because they are so evil (Isa. 63:17, cf. Rom.1:24-28).
- Prosperity and multiplication come from walking in the fear of God (Acts 9:31)
- Holiness is perfected by walking in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

TRUE WISDOM

True wisdom is *hidden* from man (1 Cor. 2:7). Christ taught in parables (Mt.13:11-17) and purposely veiled truth from some. The mysteries of life are revealed only to honorable and worthy seekers (Prov. 25:2, 2:1-7). All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are *hidden* in Christ (Col. 2:3) and therefore, only those who are close to the Master are able to understand life's true meaning (Psa.16:11). Man searches for wisdom and the true meaning of life but he is unable to find it without first honoring the One from whom all wisdom comes (see Job 28:7-28, 1 Cor.1:30).

In Proverbs, wisdom is portrayed as a beautiful virtuous woman (Prov.3:17, 3:13-18, 4:5-9, 9:1). Wisdom is frequently presented in the feminine gender in Proverbs. Wisdom has a *personality* made up of seven divine characteristics (Prov. 9:1 cf. Ja. 3:17). These seven characteristics are what we would like to focus upon now for they are the keys to success in life, especially our marriage. Wisdom, therefore, is much more than skill and ability. Wisdom has a *nature*.

Two women are contrasted in Proverbs—the beautiful virtuous woman (representing wisdom), and the strange woman (representing folly). Mankind will choose to embrace one woman or the other and *becomes like* the one to whom he is joined. When we embrace the virtuous woman, she promotes us to honor (4:8), but anyone who embraces the strange woman will be brought to ruin (5:20-23).

Wisdom Builds a Home and Marriage

“Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars” (Prov. 9:1). A home and marriage is built upon the seven pillars of wisdom. In James 3:17, we are given the interpretation of these seven pillars (or characteristics) of wisdom. Let us build our marriage upon the solid foundation of wisdom. If any one of these seven pillars is missing in our home, it could fall. See also Matthew 7:24-28.

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

James 3:17

1. Pure (pure from defilement). The first characteristic of wisdom is *purity*—moral purity and purity of motives. Wisdom keeps us morally pure. This is a constant theme of Proverbs. Those who are void of wisdom fall into a terrible snare (Prov.7:4-27). Wisdom also produces pure motives. True wisdom shows no spirit of competition; instead, it esteems others first. To build our home upon a good foundation, it must be founded upon moral purity and motives that do not strive to be first.

2. Peaceable (at peace with God, with man, and with one's self). In the original language, *peace* and *unity* are the same word. A man has *peace* within himself when his heart is *united* (Psa. 86:11). If his loyalties are divided, he has no peace. Therefore, the man who is trying to serve two masters is *unwise* (Mt. 6:24, Ja.1:8, 4:8, Rev. 3:15). Wisdom gives us singleness of heart and purpose, and therefore, peace. When we are at peace with God and with ourselves, we are able to be at peace with others. Contention and argument are not of wisdom (Prov.14:1, 21:19).

3. Gentle (a sweet reasonableness). A wise man gives a listening ear to another and is willing to see another's point of view. Wisdom is moderate and *easy* with people and allows for latitude. Rigidness is the opposite of wisdom. The one who lacks wisdom is severe, strict, stiff, inflexible, hard, and overly precise.

4. Easily Entreated (submissive, compliant). This is the mate who is “skilled in knowing when it is best to yield.” Wisdom knows when to be firm and when it is best to let an issue go. It is unwise to apply pressure or *strive* with our mate (2 Tim. 2:24-25, Prov. 25:15). It is much better to pray and ask God to convince our spouse. Most issues, however, are not a matter of right or wrong anyway, but of preference.

5. Full of Mercy and Good Fruits. Divine mercy is much higher than man's. Divine mercy shows compassion to the one who is in trouble, even when his predicament is his own fault. This is the kind of mercy God has demonstrated to us, and the kind He expects us to show others. This is compassion without an “*I told you so*” attitude. We should not always bring up past failures and mistakes to our mate, or God may have to bring up ours. If we are constantly reminding people of their past sins, we have not truly forgiven them (Mt. 6:14,15). Rather than constantly condemn, divine mercy reaches down to a fallen one and tries to mend the broken pieces as best he as can.

6. Without Partiality (no favoritism). Often our emotions are very *partial* and this is not wisdom. Isaac and Rebecca had favorites—Isaac loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob. Partiality ruined their home (Gen. 25:28). Partiality caused Rebecca to teach her favorite son Jacob to lie to his father, and deceive him. Can a marriage ever work when one parent is teaching a child to lie to the other parent? *Favoritism* is carnal love and it bears evil fruit. Isaac and Rebecca's marriage was ordained of God but the marriage still did not work because of unsundered areas of their hearts.

7. Without Hypocrisy (genuine, not being a phony). True wisdom produces deep sincerity and genuineness. A hypocrite is not true or real. He claims to be one thing, but inwardly he is something else. The hypocrite is harsh and critical of others. He judges others for faults when those very same faults are worse in his own life (Mt. 7:1-5, Rom. 2:1). Hypocrisy is blindness and hardness of heart and it destroys ones relationship with others. But as true wisdom and light penetrate the soul of a man and woman, they will *see themselves* and be cleansed of a judgmental spirit.

The Wise Builder—One Who Hears and Obeys

Matthew 7:24-27

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, *and doeth them*, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, *and doeth them not*, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

TRUE SUCCESS

A number of years ago, Brian Bailey and his wife visited Greece. In one of the cities they visited, there were two particular churches. One church had 3,000 people, the other had around 200. The pastor of the large church considered himself quite superior to the pastor of the smaller church. One night, God gave a vision and showed the two churches *as He saw them*. In the church of 3000 there were only nine lights. Only nine people in that large congregation were shining for Christ, but in the second church—200 lights burned brightly for Jesus. Nearly everyone in the second church was on fire for God. Certainly, the lesson is very clear. God is not interested in large numbers only but in how many *lights* we have shining in our church. God is interested in having “trees of righteousness” that are rooted and grounded in Him. For in times of testing, large churches that are filled with uncommitted believers will be blown away by the storm and dwindle to nothing.

On another occasion, a man had a vision and in this vision he saw several people going to heaven. One of the people he saw was an evangelist who carried in his hands a tremendous amount of works. The angel at the entrance smiled, took the works, and put them into the fire of God. All that came out of the fire was a little heap. That was all the evangelist had left. Most of his life's works had been reduced to ashes. After that, he saw a little lady. She only had a small pile of works to present to the angel; but after it was placed in the fire, nearly everything came through intact. The little lady actually had more to show for in eternity than the evangelist.

It is the works that *remain* that count (Jn. 15:16). Everyone's works must be tried by the fire of God (1 Cor. 3:12-15). It is not how many people we have in our church, but how many that are committed to God and on fire for Him. Therefore, pastors must labor to bring their people into righteousness (not just salvation), for the people entrusted to their care represent their works and the fruit of their ministry. This is the reason a minister must have the true anointing and the true message. Then he will have fruit that *abides*. It is better to have a handful of fine flour than a bushel of chaff.

Too often success is measured by worldly standards—numbers, buildings, personalities, publicity, and money. When the tests come, however, all of these could be consumed in a moment if they are not founded upon the solid rock of obedience (Mt. 7:26-27). After three and a half years of ministry, Jesus did not appear to be successful. Many of His disciples deserted Him (Jn. 6:66), and even one of the twelve apostles betrayed Him. At one point, Christ appeared to be a total failure as He hung upon a cruel cross, yet He was the greatest champion of all time. How, then, does God measure success? What is true prosperity?

Success—Doing the Will of God

Success is measured by one thing—whether or not we have accomplished the will of God for our lives! If we have done the will of God, our works will *remain* and not be lost. The will of God for our Lord Jesus Christ was to go to the cross. The cross is not the popular way. To the natural eye, Jesus looked like a total failure. Quite to the contrary, *by His obedience* He defeated a tremendous archangel and all the other demons and fallen angels. He conquered a fallen nature which man could never master, and He paid man's debt. Besides all of this, what He had planted in the lives of the twelve apostles for three and half years produced astounding fruit. These men and the Scriptures they inscribed became the foundation stones of the Church (Eph. 2:20), Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

There is something that needs to be settled in the Church today and that is the erroneous way we evaluate success. True success is not measured by popularity, charisma, personality, and large crowds. This is the world's idea of success. Neither is success measured by demonstrating the spiritual gifts or having the anointing of God. The anointing and the spiritual gifts are *not* evidence that God is pleased (Mt. 7:22-23, 1 Cor. 9:27). God gave Israel miracles, healing, deliverance, protection, and provision during their wilderness journey, even while they were rebellious and disobedient and out of His will for forty years. None of these blessings are proof that God is pleased with us.

Even having the presence of God is *not* necessarily an indication of God's favor. God said to rebellious Israel: "My presence shall go with thee" (Ex. 33:12-17). Yet that was only because God was longsuffering and gracious. Many congregations assume that God's favor is upon them and sanctioning what they are doing because His presence is with them, but that is not always the case. Doing the will of God is even more important than feeling the presence of God. Jesus did not feel good as He went to the cross. He did not feel the anointing and the presence of God as He went to Calvary, but that was the will of God for Him, and that was far more important. Success cannot always be measured by feeling the presence of God. Success is when we do the will of God, for then our works *remain*.

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TRUE BRETHREN

The True Minority

There are only two kinds of people in the world—the redeemed and the unredeemed. It has nothing to do with race, nationality or color. The question is: Are you a child of God or a child of the world? A child of light or a child of darkness? (1 Thes. 5:5). Is Christ in your life or is He not in your life? Every person will spend eternity either in heaven or the lake of fire.

In every nation God has a people, *a minority*, who belong to Him (Acts 10:34,35, Rev. 5:9,10). Out of every nation, tribe, tongue, and people there are *some* who believe the Gospel message and walk in its teachings. This special group is called the “Church”. It is a worldwide family who thinks alike, talks alike, and acts alike, whose mentality is shaped by one rulebook—The Word of God.

One family—the children of light, a minority coming out of every nation

One Father—with the same Spirit in every one of His children

One rulebook—producing the same thinking

False Brethren

*“Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked,
between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” Malachi 3:18*

It is necessary to discern between the righteous and wicked, between him who is really serving God and him who is not serving God! Not every one who appears to be a child of God *is* a child of God. Not every one who goes to church and uses the name of Christ is a true Christian. There are false teachers, false apostles, and false brethren among the true. These appear to be righteous and they can say all the right words but like Judas, they are not righteous and they are not serving the Lord.

In the Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares, both looked alike at first. You could not tell the difference between the good and the bad. They were growing together, but as time went on, it became evident who was who. This illustration is true in many congregations of the Lord. Not every one who sits beside you in church is necessarily a true Christian. See Matthew 13:24-30.

When trouble comes in our times many will be “offended.” As their love for Christ grows cold they will hate and betray one another (Mt. 24:10-12). Some who once used the name of Christ will turn and become the enemies of Christ and the true believers. Their commitment to Christ is superficial, having never allowed God to cleanse their hearts and motives. Times of testing reveal the level of ones commitment. *True* brethren do not hate and betray one another or turn their back on Christ (Mt. 24:13).

Christ taught that those who do the will of God are his true brethren (Mt.12:46-50, Mk.3:33-35, Lk. 8:20-21). Men and women who are doing their *own* will do not make it in the end (Mt. 7:21-23). See also Luke 6:46. At the end of this age there will be a mighty revival. Christ likens this revival to a huge drag net that is cast into the sea. When it is full it is drawn in, but then the good and bad “fish” must be sorted out. The Lord will sever the wicked from the just (Mt.13:47-50). Churches will be bursting at the seams with new converts but then everyone will be tested. God will allow the Antichrist to come forth and he will draw all those who are not sincere unto himself, even some from the Church.

BEING CHRIST'S BRIDE

Marriage is God's greatest object lesson by which He teaches us about our relationship with Himself (Eph. 5:21-33, 1 Cor.11:3). It is an interesting fact that the same things a man looks for in a woman, the Lord looks for in His Bride. Therefore, the following has a natural application as well as a spiritual lesson. In order to qualify to become Christ's Bride we should study the characteristics of the Bridegroom and seek to become *compatible* to Him. Christ will be wedded only to those who are like Himself, to those who are “conformed to His image”.

For Your Consideration

Christ is coming for a mature and glorious Church who has made herself ready (Rev.19:7,8). Christ will not have an immature bride. He will not share His throne with those who have refused to grow out of their spiritual infancy, or with those who do not bear His likeness. Not every believer has the privilege of reigning with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12). This is reserved only for the overcomers. (Rev. 2:26-27, 3:21, 21:7).

There were many fair virgins in the time of Esther, but only *one* was selected to be the queen. Only *one* had the privilege of standing next to the king and issuing his authority from the throne. King Solomon had “virgins without number” but there was *one* in particular whom he termed his “undefiled” (Song 6:8-10). She was one in a thousand!

Christ's parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 is highly significant because the Church is made up of *virgins*. This parable does not concern unbelievers. The fact that they were “virgins” indicates that all were blood-washed believers. All of them were conscious of the Bridegroom's coming. (Unbelievers are not looking for His coming.) The main thrust of this parable is not whether the virgins are saved or lost, but which ones are worthy to participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb when the Bridegroom comes.

The virgins who were welcomed into the marriage feast had *oil* in their lamps and were burning brightly for Jesus. Oil represents the anointing, and the anointing comes from intimate fellowship with the Anointed One. The virgins without oil had *neglected* their relationship with God and they were denied entrance into the feast. The Lord said to them: “I know you not” (Mt. 25:12).

In this passage the word *know* is a Greek word which means “intuition, to recognize immediately.” The Lord said to the foolish virgins that He did not know them intuitively. He was saying: “I do not know you very well.” The marriage feast is for intimate friends, not those Christ scarcely recognizes.

Therefore, I would like to ask you to consider this: although there are millions of believers in the world, not every “virgin” (or blood-washed believer) will take part in the wedding feast, nor will they be ready to rule and reign with Christ. The Bride of Christ is *a smaller group within the Church* who will come to glory and unity. To be Christ's bride we must fulfill the qualifications. The bridal relationship with the King of kings is for wholehearted believers only, not those who are lukewarm. Therefore, not every believer is in that group called the Bride. Let us consider what the Heavenly Bridegroom looks for in His bride.

QUALITIES JESUS LOOKS FOR IN A PROSPECTIVE BRIDE

1. He Desires a Bride Who is in Love With Him. Christ is not attracted to someone who lacks warmth or enthusiasm for Him. When it comes to a question of being married to Him, Christ requires in jealousy: “Be either hot or cold” (Rev. 3:15). He wants someone who wants Him (Prov. 8:17). The Lord will not choose the one who takes Him lightly or constantly rejects His affection. Israel repeatedly “pulled away the shoulder” (Zech. 7:11) and would not listen to Him. That made them very unattractive to Him. Let us be good responders and make ourselves appealing to our Lord.

2. He Desires a Bride Who Agrees With Him. Scripture asks, “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The Lord does not want a virgin who has her own mind, her own ideas, her own vision, and her own cause. An independent spirit and self-will causes conflict with His Spirit. Often a believer argues with God and the Word of God. The Lord expects a prospective Bride to be teachable, one who respects every part of His Word, and who loves every part of Him.

3. He Desires a Bride Who Understands Him. Christ longs for one with whom He can open His heart and share His secrets. He cannot do this with a spiritual infant. The Lord wants His people to grow up so that they can be on His level of communication (Jer. 9:24). A man must have a bride on his level. Marriage is communication!

4. He Desires a Bride Who is Not Guarding Her Identity or Individuality. Jesus lost His identity. He became a servant. Servants do not seek a “name” or a reputation. The Heavenly Bridegroom emptied Himself (Phil. 2:7), and He looks for a bride with the same kind of heart (Mt. 16:24,25). The only way to find our identity is by first understanding why God created us. God created woman to be a helper to her man and to be devoted to him. The reason He formed mankind in general was to have a Bride who was affectionately devoted to Him, not to self (Rev. 4:11). Today there are some women who want to keep their own names and not be totally identified with their husbands. This is an insult to a man, but God feels insulted too when His people want to keep their own identity.

5. He Desires a Bride Who Possesses the “Spirit of Ruth.” (Ru.1:16,17). This is a willingness to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Rev.14:4). It is a willingness to go wherever our Heavenly Bridegroom leads (and some places are not easy), and a loyalty of spirit right to the end (Mt. 24:10-13). Some only follow Christ for a few years and then grow weary of Him and “go back to their gods” as Orpah (Ru.1:15). We are not worthy of Him if we only follow during the easy times.

6. He Desires a Bride Who Has Time for Him. If the desired bride is occupied with *her schedule, agendas, friends, routines, or even her ministry*—the Heavenly Bridegroom will be grieved and look for another who does have time for Him, and who is worthy of Him. The truth is, we always make time for the things we treasure most (cf. Lk.14:18-20). Sometimes the Lord knocks on the door of His own Church but He is not welcome there (Rev. 3:20). Revelation 3:20 is not addressed to unbelievers, but to the Church.

The first call of a wife is unto her husband, not the children. Often this role is reversed. This is true of our relationship with God too. Our first call is to our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondarily, we are called to care for His children (those people He has entrusted to our care). The Ephesian church had labored for Christ to the point of exhaustion, but they had neglected its relationship with Christ. They had *left* their first love (Rev. 2:3-4).

7. He Desires a Bride With a Meek and Quiet Spirit. Christ desires a bride who is very still, quiet, and broken. His bride must conquer hysteria; otherwise, her unbridled emotions will demonstrate criticism and distrust of Him (1 Pet. 3:4-6). The Bridegroom Himself is meek and lowly in heart (Mt. 11:28,29), and He desires those of like disposition. Meekness seeks no retaliation or vengeance. Christ looks for one with a tender and forgiving heart. A hardened heart causes separation and divorce (Mk. 10:4-9). A hardened heart cannot and will not forgive, and ceases to care anymore.

8. He Desires a Bride Who Will Protect His Good Name. A bride is a reflection of her husband. The Lord wants a bride who cares what His “house” looks like and what His “children” look like (Prov. 31:22-31). Poor hygiene and sloppiness (of one's person, home, and church) are a poor representation of the Lord. Attitudes are so important too! The *cheerful countenance* of a believer is a good reflection of the One we belong to, but a sorrowful spirit disgraces Him.

9. He Desires a Bride Who is Not Demanding or Nagging. Christ desires a bride like Esther. She was *content* with what she was given, and never insisted on extravagance (Est. 2:15). Esther knew how to approach a husband for requests more than any other woman in Scripture. Her spirit and attitude were always excellent. Many women do not know how to talk to a husband.

10. He Desires a Bride Who is Not Idle or Bored. A person who is bored is a person without vision or purpose. The virtuous woman in Proverbs chapter 31 had vision. She bought a field. She was also capable and hard working. She used the gifts, money, and substance of her husband discreetly. Christ Himself is industrious and efficient. He will not be attracted to a prospective bride who is wasteful of time and substance. According to many of the Lord's parables, we will be required to give an account of how we have used our time, talents, and money. Those who have not been good stewards of His substance will not be selected to be in the Bridal company.

11. He Desires a Bride Who Maintains An Anointed Life. The anointing comes from a life of communication and fellowship with the Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ. Always remember the example of Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:39-42). Mary learned to sit at Jesus' feet and hear His Word. Martha's relationship with Christ was not as intimate; she was overly-concerned with legitimate cares. When our relationship with Christ is neglected, His anointing and peace are not upon us and our emotions will be out of control. Then criticism, unbelief, and frayed nerves rule our lives. Remember the five foolish virgins. They had no oil because of a *neglected* relationship.

12. He Desires a Bride Who is Not Always Offended. We will not qualify to become Christ's bride if we fail to grow out of our super-sensitivities, moods, and bouts of anger. Christ does not want to be married to a wounded gorilla. A mature bride *trusts* her Bridegroom implicitly, and she holds no resentment toward Him for addressing what she could not see before. In John 6:60,61, Christ's followers were offended at the new truth He presented, and their hearts closed toward Him. Christ only points out one thing at a time (Eph. 5:26), so let us trust Him as He washes us with His Word.

13. He Desires a Bride With Imparted Righteousness. We are *counted* righteous at new birth (Rom. 4:1-8), but we are *made* righteous by continued obedience after that (Rev. 19:7-8). The latter is a *garment* of righteousness. This garment is required at the wedding feast.

14. He Desires a Bride Who Has Become Glorious, Without Spot or Blemish. (See Eph. 5:27). The Lord will not have a blemished Bride. She must be perfectly balanced and proportioned.

THE BRIDE MUST BE WITHOUT BLEMISH

Being without blemish is a message for this hour. Ephesians 5:27 declares that Christ is coming for “a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Therefore, all spots and blemishes must be effaced from those who make up the corporate Bride.

The value of a beautiful garment is greatly diminished when it has just one spot or stain. This is true of our character too. What is admirable in a man cannot cover up what is not admirable. God desires to apply “blemish remover” to all of our spiritual garments (Rev. 7:14) in order to make us spotless and blameless before Him (see Eph.1:4, 5:27, Col.1:22, Jude 1:24, Rev.14:4-5).

Blemishes That Prohibit Us From Coming Within the Veil

“For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach . . . No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God. He shall eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy. Only he shall not go in unto the veil, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries: for I the Lord do sanctify them” (Lev. 21:18, 21-23). A *blemished* priest was hindered from doing the following:

- He could not approach to offer the bread of his God.
- He could not offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire.
- He could not go within the veil.
- He could not come nigh unto the altar.

A priest with a *blemish* was limited in his approach to God and in his ministry to others

In the New Testament, every believer is called to be a priest unto God and to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5,9, Rev.1:6, 5:10). Furthermore, every saint of God is beckoned to come within the veil, into the very presence of God. Access into God's presence has been opened for us because of Christ's perfect Sacrifice (Mt. 27:51, Heb.10:19-20). Yet, there are certain conditions to be met first (Psa. 65:4, Psa.15:1-4, Heb.12:14). Any priest who had a blemish was limited in his approach to God within the veil. He was also limited in his ability to minister to others. The blemishes in Leviticus 21:16-24, though they are physical defects, they have a remarkable *spiritual* significance for all of us. Let's consider the twelve blemishes below:

Twelve Spiritual Blemishes That Must Be Remedied

Leviticus 21:16-24

Blindness - no ongoing vision

Lameness - an injured walk

Flat nose - no discernment

Superfluous - monstrosity

Brokenfooted - unreliable

Brokenhanded - no grasp

Crookbackt - no moral uprightness

Dwarf - never growing up

Blemish in eye - blindspots, hypocrisy

Scurvy - poor spiritual diet

Scabbed - oversensitive, unhealed

Stones broken - unproductive

BLEMISHES THAT DISQUALIFY US FROM COMING WITHIN THE VEIL

1. Blindness—(no vision). Every Christian needs an ongoing vision (Eph.1:18). Proverbs 29:18 warns, “Without a [progressive] vision, the people perish [or dwell carelessly].” Unless people see something new to press toward, they will dwell carelessly. Some will even turn back to the world. An *ongoing vision* transforms passive Christians into those who are marching forward in their walk. The Apostle Paul wanted “a better resurrection.” This is what kept him pressing toward the mark (Phil. 3:11-14). It should get us moving too. Peter exhorts us to “be established in *present truth*” (2 Pet.1:12). It is important to know what God is saying *today* and not live in the past.

A fresh vision strikes a holy fear in our hearts; it makes us afraid to sin. When our eyes are opened, there is a new awareness of eternity—an awareness that eternal rewards can be lost by indiscreet actions, rash decisions, or laziness. Every believer needs a new understanding of what God desires to accomplish in and through his life. But revelation is granted only to worthy seekers (Prov. 2:1-5). Unless God shines His light upon our path, we cannot find our way into the holy of holies and into His highest (Psa. 43:3). Disdain for fresh truth and a clutching to the old traditions can disqualify a man from coming within the veil. Greater light is needed for self-knowledge and new cleansing. Let us not be content with the old wine and the old message (Lk. 5:38-39). Blindness is a blemish.

2. Lameness—(an injured walk; indecision). Scripture exhorts us not to “turn to the right hand or the left.” It is imperative to stay on God's path for our life in order to be blessed and to come into our inheritance (Prov. 4:25-27). When a believer strays from the path, he can easily fall into a snare that injures his walk and testimony. Sometimes the damage is permanent. Spiritual lameness usually can be healed (Heb.12:13), but often it takes time. It is so important to earnestly seek God (and the counsel of the godly) when we are at a crossroad in our life and we have to make a crucial decision. Unless we have a meeting with God and our spiritual lameness is corrected, we cannot come within the veil, for lameness is a blemish.

May we not have to hobble along because of injuries sustained by getting off God's path for our life. A wrong turn can cause a man or woman to limp for years. We should be especially careful on the subject of marriage. Once we have made a solemn vow, we cannot change our mind. We should know the rules first before we marry! Often young girls feel so lonely that they are willing to compromise and marry anyone in their haste to cure their loneliness. Then they end up even more lonely because of incompatibility. *Take your time* and do it honorably the first time! Build your life and home on a good foundation—the foundation of obedience. Have character on these matters and do not marry an unbeliever or someone who is divorced. Marriage is a lifelong vow. It is a covenant that cannot be broken except by death. God is a covenant-keeping God. He does not honor broken vows.

Lameness is also *indecision*. In 1 Kings 18:21, the people could not make up their minds. They were trying to serve two masters. Elijah came right to the point, saying: “How long [limp] ye between two opinions. If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him.” Elijah describes them as “limping between two opinions.” They were not fully committed to either side. Thus, their walk was indecisive and uncertain, and this is spiritual lameness.

3. A Flat Nose—(a lack of discernment). Spiritually, the nose is the instrument of discernment. A flat or deformed nose is a nose that has lost its sense of smell. While a flat nose has lost its sense of smell, an *overactive* nose always looks for something foul; it is overly suspicious of everything. May we not go to that extreme either. But for now, let us consider a flat sense of smell.

In the natural, a bad nose affects our sense of taste. Likewise, someone with a spiritually bad “nose” cannot discern what is tasteful or unsavory to the Lord. It is imperative to discern what God loves and what He abhors. In Ezekiel 22:26, the ministers had lost their sense of smell. No distinction was made between the clean and the unclean. No difference was made between the holy and the profane as they taught the congregation. Therefore, the people found no freedom from their bondages and uncleanness. The religious leaders had changed God's moral standards. Their mentality was: “anything is acceptable to God,” but God was displeased. In Ezekiel 44:10-14, all the leaders who relaxed God's standards were banned from the holy of holies. See Matthew 5:19. A bad nose is a blemish that prevents multitudes of men and women from coming within the veil. They are unable to discern what is offensive to God, thus permitting what is odious to continue in their lives.

The condition of our “nose” can mean the difference between life and death. If the pilot light in a gas stove went out and there was no shut-off valve, it could result in death if someone did not smell the gas. It is even more important that our sense of smell be keen when it concerns spiritual matters. We should ask God for a nose that discerns between good and evil. Some spiritual manifestations are Satanic, yet they are accepted as coming from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should test the *source* of all spiritual manifestations (1 Jn. 4:1).

In Ezekiel 44:23, the godly ministers who made a distinction between the clean and the unclean, the holy and the profane, were honored by God (cf. Mt. 5:19). These are the men and women who are welcomed into the holy of holies to minister unto the Lord and to see His face (Ezek. 44:15,16). On the other hand, the ministers who compromised the truth of God and led their generation into idolatry and kept them in spiritual bondage had a terrible judgment—they are not allowed to come nigh to God or see any of His holy things within the veil (Ezek. 44:13).

4. Anything Superfluous—(monstrosity, overemphasis of something). If an Old Testament priest had any physical monstrosities or anything out of proportion (long limbs, huge ears, or a large head), he was unable to perform his priestly duties. These *excesses* speak of overemphasis and imbalance. There are many spiritual monstrosities in the Body of Christ today. Certain truths are overemphasized while others are totally excluded. Some groups major on the minors, and minor on the things that are major to God. It is not uncommon at all for believers to take a fierce open stand against certain sins, yet excuse and endorse others. Jehu utterly destroyed Baal worship in Israel, yet he continued to worship the two golden calves and walk in his own ways - See 2 Kings 10:29-31.

God commands balance. The reason people fall is because they only emphasize their favorite truths but neglect other ones. Our safety is to preach the whole counsel of God (Ac.20:26,27). Monstrosity cannot come within the veil. Christ will not have a disproportionate Bride. He will be wedded only to those who are formed into His image. We must love every part of His Word, not just selected portions. Jesus Himself is the WORD. He is the TRUTH (Jn.14:6). If we only love certain parts of the Word and reject other parts, we are rejecting part of Him. The holy of holies is the inheritance of those who love the whole truth—the *whole Christ*.

5. Brokenfooted—(unreliable). “Brokenfooted” can represent several things. It can speak of jumping into things too hastily. It is dangerous to make decisions impulsively on important issues. To be brokenfooted also speaks of being *unreliable*. “Confidence in an unfaithful man is like ... a foot out of joint” (Prov. 25:19). Some people have feet that go out of joint at the most unexpected times and God likens this to a man who is unreliable. We must be people of our word. When we say, “I’ll be there at 8:00 in the morning,” we must be there. Even God puts His Word above His name (Psa.138:2).

Having a reputation for being *unreliable* is a serious flaw. No one can come within the veil with a foot out of joint. God will not choose a bride who is unreliable and untrustworthy. If we are not faithful to man (and in the natural things of life), we will not be faithful to God either.

6. Brokenhanded—(inability to grasp, lay hold of, or retain). To be brokenhanded is to have a poor spiritual grip. How good is your grasp of spiritual things? In Hebrews 2:1, we are warned to pay attention to the things we have heard, lest we allow them to *slip*. Many inspired sermons and exhortations are soon forgotten (Heb.12:5). The impact of life-changing messages is soon dissipated if we do not write them down, review them, memorize them, and take them to heart. We should underline the verses which God quickens to us and meditate upon them often. This way the Word of God becomes engrafted into our very being (Heb. 8:10, Ps. 51:6, Ja.1:21).

When we are in an anointed atmosphere, we should *linger* in the presence of God and muse over those things which God has said to us. Then His words will be sealed in our hearts. Christ said: “Let these sayings *sink down* into your ears” (Lk. 9:44), suggesting that time and meditation are required. The Proverbs urge us repeatedly to “keep” “remember” “retain” and “forget not” the laws and statutes of life. A continual exercise and review of God’s exhortations will help strengthen our grip.

Do not lose the power and impact of what God has already said to you. Retain it and guard it carefully. Peter lost an anointed word when the Lord beckoned him to “come” upon the water. As he looked at the boisterous winds and waves, he began to sink (Mt.14:28-31). Anointed words can be lost. We must lay hold of eternal life and all of the other promises which God has given to us or we will lose them (1 Tim. 6:12). Brokenhandedness must be overcome or we will be a blemished, ineffective priest who is unable to come within the veil. Above all, let us *cleave* to the Lord our God, for He is our life (Deut. 4:4, 30:20). How strong is your grip?

7. Crookbackt—(unable to bear burdens, a welfare mentality, also lack of moral uprightness). The backbone speaks of moral uprightness. Whenever we think of the spine, we think of character, courage, and hard work. Problems with the spine are always serious.

To be spiritually crookbackt means that someone is unable (or unwilling) to bear any burdens. They require other people to carry and support them. The crookbackt cannot bear any responsibilities or pressures. Yet God has said, “Every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:5). This *helpless* mentality cannot come within the veil. Slothfulness, idleness, and aimlessness are incompatible to the nature of Christ, for these are blemishes. The Bride of Christ is like the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31. She has vision! Therefore, she is alert, active, industrious, productive, and tidy.

Crookbacktness is also a lack of moral uprightness. Moral purity is extremely important for coming into the presence of God. Nothing that is unclean can come within the veil. Fornication and other forms of immorality not only keep a Christian from coming within the veil, they can also cause a person to lose his soul if there is no repentance (1 Cor. 6:9-10, Eph. 5:3-6, 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Understanding leaves a Christian because of moral impurity. Spiritual darkness settles in when there has been a moral breakdown in the life of a believer, for he has been overtaken by an evil spirit and deception (Prov. 7:13-27, Job 31:9-11). Then, he begins questioning and redefining the most basic fundamental truths. It is not until he is willing to turn from his iniquity that he is able, once again, to understand truth (Dan. 9:13).

- *Understanding* is an issue of the *heart* more than of logic.
- A man could have huge reasoning powers, but unless God gives light, he cannot see truth.
- God withholds light from those who practice sin (Deut. 29:2-4, Isa. 63:17, 66:3b-4).
- *Understanding* is God's gift to all who please Him.
- Only those who are “willing to do God's will” can understand (Jn. 7:17).
- Only the pure in heart are able to see God (Mt. 5:8), and see as God sees.
- Moral impurity always brings a stupor over the mind.
- Immorality leads to a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2, Prov. 30:20); people lose all sensitivity to sin.
- Until there is repentance and until God says, “Let there be light”, the darkness remains.

“*O how weak is thine heart*” (Ezek.16:30; 28-30). Immoral people sometimes say, “I just can't help myself!” But, we must ask them, “Are you willing to give your emotions to God? (Prov. 23:26). Are you willing to allow Him to change your affections?” Christ not only paid our debt, He has also made provision for a wayward, sinful nature. Therefore, we should seek Him earnestly for the experience of Romans 6:6—the experience of being “dead to sin.”

To remain free from sin, we should not feed or exercise a wrong habit or lifestyle (Col. 3:5-6). We must stay away from vulnerable situations, the wrong places, the wrong people, lustful reading material, and churches that have low moral standards. Stay anointed! If we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). And whatever you do, stay away from pornography on the internet. It is more addictive than heroin. If you do not turn it off, you will destroy your home, marriage, ministry, and your soul.

8. Dwarf—(one who never grows up). In 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul said: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: But when I became a man, I put away childish things.” God expects us to grow up and not be as children who are “tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). The Church has remained on a childish level because of a poor spiritual diet. Instead of being fed meat, she is still nourished on the milk of the Word. It is a grief to the heart of God when His people are satisfied only with the basics (Prov.1:22, 1 Cor. 3:1-3, Heb. 5:12-14). Spiritual dwarves cannot come within the veil. Only those who have come to “full stature” will participate in the wedding feast (Eph. 4:13, Rev.19:7-8).

Paul commands: “Flee youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22). This exhortation was directed to a thirty-five year old pastor named Timothy. Youthful lusts can be cars, clothes, sports, hobbies, bodybuilding programs, the need to be the center of attention and other vanities we may not have outgrown. Some people never grow up. They still compete, pout, and throw a fit of rage when they cannot have what they want! We see it all the time, even in the ministry. Sometimes ministers who are not invited to preach at a convention, or not asked to sit on the platform, are offended and go off in a huff. Unless they are the center of attention, they feel slighted.

When you take away a little boy's play toys, he pouts and has a tantrum. What if God were to take away some of our “toys” and He asked us to sit down for a while? What if He asked us to put aside our ministry for a season so that He could do a deeper work of grace in our heart? Would we “lose the victory” or be angry with God? A childish believer always has to be *doing something* or he is unhappy. Yet the mature saint of God can just sit down and wait for God's next move in his life. Let us not be spiritual dwarves, but true men and women of God (1 Cor.16:13).

9. Blemish in the Eye—(blind spots, distortion, hypocrisy). “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye [mete out], it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote [or speck of sawdust] that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam [of timber] that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the [speck of sawdust] out of thine eye; and behold, a beam [of timber] is in thine own eye? *Thou hypocrite*, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye” (Mt. 7:1-5, cf. Rom. 2:1).

Jesus always preached on the most important needs in man's heart, and one of them is the problem of hypocrisy or self-blindness. How harsh we can be with others and yet not realize that the same thing (often in another form) is in our own lives too, but even worse. Christ warns that when we judge others, we will be judged by our own measuring stick. It is better to deal mercifully with others (even in our thoughts), because God is going to judge us with the same standard we use on others. Do not set yourself up for an unnecessary trial. If you are severe with another, there will be a test coming to see how you measure up! Hypocrisy, blindness, hardness, and criticism of others will keep us out of the holy of holies. Never condemn, criticize, or judge anyone. Our problem is this—we do not see the unseen forces that are arrayed against others, and we do not feel their torments.

The Royal Law

Every one must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). The Father has appointed Christ to be the supreme Judge (Jn. 5:22). Matthew 7:22-23 is a preview of the day of judgment. For some, it will be terrible; for others it will be wonderful (Lk.14:14). Every one will be rewarded according to his deeds (Rev. 22:12), but there is *a particular standard* by which all will be judged! In each case, we are examined by the Royal Law of James 2:8, Mt. 5:7, 7:12, 25:40. As we have treated others *and* as we have treated God, so will God treat us.

- Matthew 7:1-5 - The same measuring rod that we have used on others, God will use on us.
- James 2:13 - He who has shown no mercy will receive no mercy (cf. Mt. 5:7, Judges 1:6-7).
God will treat us the same way we have treated Him.
- 1 Samuel 2:30 - Those who honor God, God will honor.
- Proverbs 8:17 - He loves those who love Him. He delights in those who delight in Him.
- James 4:8 - When we draw nigh to God, God will draw nigh to us.
- Psalm 18:25,26a - If we are honest with God, God will be honest with us.
- Psalm 18:26b - Those who are deceitful with God, God will deceive.
- Romans 1:18-32 - When man brings God down, God brings man down.
- Proverbs 1:20-33 - Those who ignore and mock God, God will ignore and mock.
- Numbers 14:3, cp. 14:28-29 - When Israel accused God of having evil intentions toward them,
God said, “All right, I will do exactly as you have said of me.”

God will judge men by the same standard they judge Him. Luke 19:20-22 is a perfect example of this. A fruitless, empty-handed servant accuses God of being “a harsh man who takes what is not his and who reaps what he has not sown.” But God replies, “*Out of your own mouth will I judge you.*” (I will judge you by the same standard you have used on Me.) “It is the other way around” God says, “You are the one who is harsh and abrasive; you are the one who grasps for all the benefits without ever rending anything in return.” The hypocrisy in man is great for it accuses God of those very things of which he is most guilty. Man is hypocritical and hasty to find fault with God (Isaiah 32:6). Man often accuses God of having no love when he himself is the one who shows no love.

We will be judged by the Royal Law (the Golden Rule):

- By the same measuring rod we have used on others
- By the same measuring rod we have used on God

One day a Sunday school teacher asked his class to list five things they valued most in a spouse (or prospective one). After giving them some time to think, the teacher said, “Now, *you* go and do those things.” Do you want sensitivity? then show sensitivity. Do you want a good listener? then be a good listener. If you want respect, then you give respect to your spouse. By practicing the golden rule, the royal law, we would all have fewer problems. Hypocrisy, blindness, and distortion are blemishes.

10. Scurvy—(poor spiritual diet). A Christian may have a voracious appetite for spiritual food. Yet he could be suffering from spiritual malnutrition if his “diet” contains little nourishment. What we feed upon is important. When a believer has no hunger for spiritual things or Christian fellowship, this is an indication that his appetite has been spoiled by the things of the world, lusts, wrong friendships, and other fleshly desires. *Fasting* from these will sharpen our spiritual appetite for the things of God. Holiness, in fact, depends upon what we assimilate. Christ will not choose us to be His bride if we are blemished with scurvy.

11. Scabbed—(overly sensitive, easily offended). Scabs are wounds which have not healed. Jesus asked; “Wilt thou be made whole?” (Jn. 5:6). Sometimes people cherish a hurt and they refuse to let it go. Other times people are *unable* to let go of a hurt. These sore spots must be overcome because they are blemishes that keep us from coming within the veil. An unhealed wound causes ungodly reactions when anyone touches it slightly. An old wound may need to be reopened before it can be healed. Christ will not be wedded to a bride who holds grudges against Him or is supersensitive and refuses to be healed. Let us allow God to heal us (Jer. 30:17, 33:6). Often we wound others by our *moods*. These moods also “quench the Spirit.”

12. Stones Broken—(inability to reproduce, unfruitful). God requires fruit. Branches that bear no fruit are cut off and cast into the fire (Jn.15:1-8). In order to produce fruit, we must abide in the Vine and draw our life from Christ. Doing the will of God (not our own), insures that we will have fruit that remains. Israel had to appear before the Lord three times a year, and they were not to come before Him *empty-handed* (Deut.16:16). At the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, the people had to bring in their hands the fruit of their labors and present them to God.

- Passover (unleavened bread) - represents salvation and those we bring to salvation.
- Pentecost (the feast of weeks) - represents the Spirit and those we have led into the Spirit-filled life.
- Tabernacles (feast of glory) - represents those we have brought to maturity and glory.

God wants us to present to Him those we have led to salvation, those we have brought into the Spirit-filled life, and those we have brought to maturity and glory. We cannot be spectators, but active participants in what God is doing today. We cannot sit on the sidelines watching. Let us get intricately involved with God's program, otherwise we will have no fruit to present to the King.

Birth Defects

Birth Defects—Many of these twelve blemishes are “birth defects.” Spiritually, we can be deformed by those who brought us to birth. The spiritual parents who brought us forth and influenced us in the early months and years of our Christian life are very significant. Our mother (the church who brought us forth) is very important. Our spiritual father is the pastor. We inherit the good and bad points of our spiritual parents. We may need to outgrow or be delivered from some of the maladies and concepts which our early spiritual parents gave us at birth.

CONCERNING UNITY

Consider for a moment the power of unity—“One shall chase a thousand, two shall put *ten* thousand to flight” (Deut. 32:30). There is tremendous power when two people are working together in harmony, rather than opposing each other. “If two of you shall agree . . . it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 18:19). In Genesis 11:6, the people had one language and one purpose. Therefore the Lord declared, “Now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.” God thoroughly understands the power of unity, and so does Satan. The intention of the adversary is to divide and conquer. Thus, his central target of attack is the home and marriage.

Unity in the Church begins with unity in the home—the Church is only a collection of homes. Unity is a message that is close to the heart of God (Mal. 4:5-6). Christ said, “Every house divided against itself shall not stand” (Mt. 12:25). All of today’s problems go back to the home. God wants to visit our homes. The movings of the Holy Spirit are limited in the Church because of the conditions that exist in its families. Hard feelings and personal problems stop up our wells, and faith does not flow because of it. How are things at home?

If we are not growing spiritually, we will not grow in our marriage either. To grow spiritually means we are becoming more and more like the One who created marriage. Growing spiritually means we are developing in grace, peace, love, joy, wisdom, longsuffering, gentleness, forbearance, faith, temperance, patience, and all of the other attributes of God. As these virtues are produced and flourishing in our lives, we will become a more desirable marriage partner, and it will be easier to get along with others. May I venture to say, therefore, that unity in the Church does not only begin at home or in a couple—unity begins in ME.

Christ prayed for unity among His brethren (Jn. 17:21-23). In verse 23, He prayed: “That they may be made perfect in one,” implying that perfection is only possible by coming to unity. Christian perfection is not possible without unity. Disunity reveals unresolved problems in our lives and these are the issues God wants to deal with. Remember, Christianity revolves around only two basic things in life—how we treat people and how we treat God. Thus, Christianity is *relationships*.

Four Levels of Unity

1. Unity Within Ourselves. (Psa. 86:11). King David prayed; “Unite my heart to [reverence] thy name.” David prayed for a united heart because the affections of his heart were divided. There was a controversy going on in his heart. Unity does not begin in a body of people. It does not even begin in a couple. Unity begins in each individual heart. How can we hope to get along with others when we are not even getting along with ourselves and when there is no unity in our own hearts? All strife must cease within ourselves and we must be at peace with ourselves before we can properly love and flow along with others. Thus, we should pray, “Unite my heart, Lord.”

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (Ja. 4:1). Wars, fightings, and arguments that go on among ourselves—where do they come from? They come from the struggles that exist in our flesh, in our own hearts. The question arises: “How do we get over these battles and come to unfeigned love for the brethren?” First Peter 1:22 gives us the answer. Each time we “obey the truth” there comes a gradual transformation in our lives. There can be no genuine love or unity until there has been a response to the light (or truth). Not every Christian is willing to fully respond to the light. This is the reason I believe that the Church at large will not come to unity, but only the Bride from within the Church.

2. Unity of the Spirit. (Eph. 4:1-3). After gaining a measure of victory in our own personal lives, we come to a second level of unity—the “unity of the Spirit.” To flow with a body of believers it requires lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance (Eph. 4:2-3), and this takes effort. Humility (lowliness) honors others before itself (Rom.12:10). Meekness shows no anger and accepts difficulties with a good attitude. Longsuffering is patience, and forbearance tolerates annoying flaws in others for a long period of time. Forbearance keeps marriages together.

In the charismatic movement of previous decades, many denominations came together to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, worship the Lord together, and demonstrate the gifts of the Spirit. People from every denomination joined together to thank God for the new visitation of His Spirit. This was progress. There were many who thought that this could never happen! This is an example of “the unity of the Spirit.” Even in this level of unity, there was (and is) something major still missing. Though their hearts were one and they could worship as one, their *minds* were far from being in one accord. If you mentioned doctrine or beliefs, there was little harmony. This is the reason we must come to the third unity—“the unity of the faith” (Eph. 4:11-13).

3. Unity of the Faith. (Eph. 4:11-13). The unity of the common faith requires a higher degree of maturity than the unity of the Spirit. It is one thing for all the denominations to be able to *worship together*, but quite another thing for them to *agree together* in their common beliefs (1 Cor.1:10). The unity of the faith is the ability to have the same views on all the major truths of Christianity. This requires the surrender of our *opinions*. The greatest enemy of unity is the natural mind. Walls that divide people are located in the mind and in the heart.

When it comes to the issues of the day, the Holy Spirit does not have a variety of opinions as we do. He only says one thing. Thus, we can see that our minds are getting in the way. Are we willing to allow God to change our minds, even if it goes against our traditions or the way we were taught? Sometimes men and women are willing to “die” for their beliefs, but we better be sure that we are suffering and dying for God's cause, *not our own*.

It will take the fivefold ministry to bring the Church to unity. God is restoring and giving these five ministries back to the Church ... “for the perfecting of the saints ... till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13). In particular, *the teaching ministry* will be instrumental in bringing oneness of mind to the Church in the last days. God will not use us in this last hour if we are going to assert our own ideas and opinions. He will only stand behind and confirm *His* message.

Truth brings division—it is supposed to! It separates the sheep from the goats, the holy from the unholy, and it divides soul and spirit. Some do not want to be holy. This is the reason not all Christians will come to unity. Unity and a clear mind belong uniquely to the holy (Mt. 5:8). Only those who are committed to doing the whole will of God possess understanding (Jn. 7:17).

4. Unity of the Brethren. (Psa.133:1-3). “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” This wonderful unity is likened unto the precious anointing oil that ran down Aaron's head and his garments. To appreciate the meaning of this special anointing oil, it is necessary to study out the ingredients that composed this anointing and their spiritual meanings. This is found in Exodus 30:22-25.

In Song of Solomon 4:13-14, there are nine herbs and these nine herbs correspond to the nine fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23:

Love pomegranates
Joy camphire
Peace spikenard
Longsuffering. . . saffron
Gentleness. calamus*
Goodness cinnamon*
Faith frankincense
Meekness myrrh*
Temperance. aloes

With this in mind, we may now find the interpretation of several key ingredients that made up this special anointing oil of Exodus 30:22-25. Myrrh speaks of *meekness*; sweet cinnamon represents *goodness*; and calamus is *gentleness*. Cassia represents tears, and olive oil speaks of peace. These are the components of that precious anointing oil that brings unity: meekness, goodness, gentleness, tears, and peace.

Brokenness, mellowness, compassion, understanding, and peace all go into the realization of unity. This is true Christianity and maturity—when the brethren of the Lord can flow together in this level of unity and compassion for one another. This is where the Lord commands the blessing, even life for evermore. This is the ultimate of Christianity. Love is the bond of perfectness (Col. 3:14).

Four Ways of Proving Our Love For God

1. By Waiting for Him—Isaiah tells us that God has wonderful things prepared for all those who *wait* for Him (Isa. 64:4). Paul says, “the wonderful things God has prepared for those who *love* Him” (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). What is the difference between loving God and waiting for God? There is no difference! Proof that we love God is demonstrated in waiting for His time and His schedule for our life. *Time* is the real proof of our commitment to Him.

2. By Feeding His Sheep—“Peter, if you love me, feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:15-17). In order to have sustenance to feed God’s people, we must be willing to pass through the necessary processes. “Peter, you can prove that you love Me by staying in the circumstances I have placed you in so that you can obtain a vital message to give to My people.”

3. By Keeping His Commandments—“If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15,21; 15:14). It is one thing to say that we love God, and even worship Him for hours. Yet, if we will not do what He tells us to do, this indicates that we do *not* love Him. *Actions*, not words, impress the Lord (Luke 6:46, Mt. 21:28-31).

4. By Loving Our Brethren—Most of the commandments in God’s Word involve our treatment of others. How we treat people is the way we treat God (Mt. 7:13; 25:34-45). We cannot possibly love God whom we have not seen if we do not love our brethren whom we do see (1 Jn. 4:20-21, Ja. 1:27).

CONCLUSION

Real Christianity Involves:

- **Obedience** Obedience has been the paramount issue of the universe since the beginning of time. Long before the world began, Lucifer and the inhabitants of heaven faced this one crucial question: “Am I going to do God's will or my own will?” What would you think of a man who could predict who our next president is going to be or the exact day when judgment is going to fall? There are men who can do this but at the same time they are not listening to what God is saying to them about the issues in their own personal lives. Jonah had this problem. Unusual gifts of the Spirit can never take the place of personal obedience to the will of God. Great men and women of God have fallen because they have relied on their ministry to save them instead of continual *obedience* to the cross.

For many, Christianity is viewed only as a convenience—“What is in this for me?” Many who are born again have not crowned Jesus *Lord* of their lives and show no evidence of true discipleship (Jn. 6:60,61,66; 8:31,32). Often there is a low level of commitment in the Church and a spirit of independence that reflects the attitude, “I will serve the Lord as long as He does not upset my plans or inconvenience me in any way!” How many saints diligently seek the will of God regarding the choice of a mate, vocation, or where to live? When we stand before God to give an account of our life, will we be able to say to Him, “I did it *Your* way?” or will we have to say, “I did it *my* way.”

There can be no pretending or “bluffing our way through” the Christian life. We are dealing with Someone who is more real than life itself. We are dealing with the God of Light and He knows if we are real or if we are evading the issues. There is only one way we can succeed in life. There is only one way we can come into the inheritance we have been promised by God, and that is by staying on God's path for our life *through obedience*.

We know what is right more than we are willing to admit. We can try to rationalize away what we know is right, and find sympathetic friends to agree with us and support us. We can even go to the ministers whom we know will prophesy to us what we want to hear. (Ahab had 400 prophecies confirming his direction but it was all wrong and he knew it in his heart). Although we may seem to prosper at first, we are straying from God's path and we will end up in obscurity. May we be *honest* and choose God's way at every juncture of our life.

- **Right Relationships** All of Scripture focuses upon our relationships with others and with God. A hardened heart is what destroys relationships. When our heart is hardened, we close people out of our lives, and we close God out too. Our greatest need is for a new and soft heart. God made provision for this in His New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34, Ezek. 36:25-27). If we fail in our relationships with others (especially at home), we have missed the point of Christianity.

- **Concentrating On What We Can Take Into Eternity** Be a wise economist! Invest your time, talent, and treasure into those things that last forever. What is deposited into our lives as we wait upon God and as we obey Him, endures forever (Lk.10:39,41). Also, those good things that we plant *in others* lasts for eternity. Therefore, we should invest in people, especially our own family. People are eternal, material things are not.

• **Knowing God** God wants to be known and understood (Jer. 9:24). We were created for this purpose. There are varying degrees of knowing God. Let us seek to know Him intimately. One reason we are not like Him is because we do not see Him as He really is (1 Jn. 3:2). We need a greater and greater revelation of *who* He is.

• **Having Character** Character is the most important thing in life. This is what we take into eternity. Our character (who we are) is the sum total of all our life's choices and decisions. Godly character is produced in us as we choose to do what is right while we are in pain or under pressure. God will give us grace (divine enablement) in our time of need, if we are willing to receive it. In spite of all the problems the young Corinthian believers had in their lives, Paul knew that if they continued to yield to the Lord, they could *become* blameless and without spot (1 Cor. 1:8, Jude. 1:24, Col. 1:22,23).

• **Becoming Christ's Bride** (Being conformed to the image of the Son - Romans 8:29). Our goal is to become like Christ, to be compatible to Him, to be His lover and friend, and to be one to whom He can open His heart. Our goal also is to come to unfeigned, genuine love (1 Pet. 1:22, Col. 3:14, Rom. 13:8-10). Our Lord longs for pure worship where every part of us loves every part of Him (Jn. 4:23). We are also called to share His glory.

• **Becoming a Deliverer** There are many preachers but few *deliverers*. You do not have to stand behind a pulpit to be a deliverer. A deliverer is one who knows God firsthand and is not living off the experience of someone else. He is rooted, grounded, and settled, and has experienced to some degree the above—he has experienced TRUE CHRISTIANITY. This is the man whose words and prayers carry authority before the throne. This is the man who brings deliverance to those to whom he ministers.

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The Wise Builder—One Who Hears and Obeys

Matthew 7:24-27

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, *and doeth them*, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, *and doeth them not*, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

“As we can see **in the illustration above**, the scriptures contain *a broad range* of ways and means which God used to direct His people in the past. The question is: *which* Bible example should we choose when we need direction?”

(Lorena, this statement was beneath an illustration. Now it is on the next page. Please leave out “in the illustration above”. Maybe we could just say “The scriptures contain *a broad range* of ways and means which God used to direct His people in the past.” etc.

Hell is for the offended. Hell is filled with offended people who rejected God's grace when they were hurt. They died holding bitterness against God and those they refused to forgive. Now they are tormented with the offenses they would never release others from.

“*Let my son go, that he may serve Me*”

Exodus 4:23

God sets us free from bondage and sickness
in order to serve *Him*, not ourselves.

Doing the will of God is even more important than feeling the presence of God. Jesus did not feel good as He went to the cross. He did not feel the anointing and the presence of God as He went to Calvary, but that was the will of God for Him, and that was far more important. Success cannot always be measured by feeling the presence of God. Success is when we do the will of God, for then our works *remain*.