

Introduction

Over a number of months certain scriptures left an impression with me that said relevance and importance were more than just a message for me. I started to journal these scriptures and I found order. Since God is not the author of confusion, order seemed to suggest that these scriptures were forming the basis for a Godly work. It took even longer to recognize the direction being shown, the path to follow and then the subject became clear. Considering all the religious books and training materials I have read over the years I could not recall one which addressed Walking in the Spirit. This has not been a study on the subject as much as an exercise in the subject. This work is about walking in the Spirit. This may well be a road map to walking in the Spirit. The route is laden with pitfalls. I will endeavor to point out some of those pitfalls. Hopefully as you make the journey yourselves, the warning signs may help prevent you from falling into one or more of these traps. All bible quotes will be from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Why

2 Corinthians 5

18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

The root word for reconcile is Strong's Number 2596 kata {kat-ah'} a primary particle; prep

AV - according to 107, after 61, against 58, in 36, by 27

1) down from, through out

2) according to, toward, along

The reason I begin with the root word is primary intent. The disclosure is that something is given from God and works throughout. It is not enough just to say God no longer holds our sins against us. In verse 18 above Paul writes that God has reconciled us to Himself, past tense, accomplished. Also note that He did not reconcile Himself to us, but the other way around, reconciling us to Him. God is unchanging, in Him there is no variance. (Malachi 3:6) Therefore it is we who are changed. In verse 20 Paul tells us to be reconciled to God, future tense, to be accomplished.

Vine's Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words has much to say about Reconcile – Reconciliation Strong's number 2644 but I want to concentrate for a moment

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on the very first note; 1) properly denotes "to change, exchange" (especially of money). The NIV gives the clearest rendering of 2 Corinthians 1:22. Where the KJV uses the word earnest rather than deposit, please understand that in relationship to reconcile, they are the same.

2 Corinthians 1:22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. NIV

As a deposit, and what does Vine's Dictionary say, to change, exchange, especially of money. The deposit that is given from God coming down and working throughout you is the Holy Spirit. He has deposited the Holy Spirit in our hearts. The process of change is ongoing. The Holy Spirit, who knows the will of God and is your guide, companion, and teacher, leads this process. This process I like to call walking in the Spirit for how does one advance, grow, and change, if they do not move.

Desire

Psalm 17:15 As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

Since the beginning of time, man has desired to be like God. Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden with that desire.

Genesis 3

1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Thus it began, with that first temptation to be like God. Why did Eve feel that way? The issue of the fruit is not in dispute. Verse 6 says, "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise". Satan did not utter those words; they are God's Holy writ. Whether the fruit was good or bad is not at issue. It did not accomplish what Satan promised, "ye shall be as gods". That is vanity, in the Greek; *mataiotes* "emptiness as to results". That is the difference between God's glory and Satan's vain glory; "emptiness as to results". There will be some who are quick to point out that Satan didn't lie because he

said she would know good from evil and she did, I would like to remind you that we have all looked upon our hearts desires and failed to hear the warning signs. It is possible that the words “knowing good and evil” might have fell on dull ears, just as many a warning shot do with us today. One of the reasons it does is not having a clear accurate understanding of the Word of God. Nowhere in the text does Eve get instruction directly from God. Genesis 2:17 was the instruction, Genesis 2:22 was the creation of Eve. Because of the order of precedence, I am led to believe that Eve’s knowledge of what God said about the tree came from Adam. Adam could have told Eve not to touch it when Adam instructed her about God’s Word. Eve might have misunderstood Adam, thinking it was God’s commandment. If the serpent touched the fruit and did not die, it could have brought doubt to Eve’s understanding and gave Satan occasion to lie to her. **Warning: husbands as spiritual head of the household it is your responsibility to ensure your wife and children have a proper understanding of God’s Word and to do so you must have one yourself.**

What was it that tempted Eve to be “as god”? Perhaps it is that being in the presence of God’s righteousness causes us to want to be righteous. In some circles it is said that Satan was responsible for safeguarding God’s righteousness. They say that Satan wanted it for himself and when he could not have it, he rebelled. Whether that is true or not is for others to debate. What I do know is that man has received the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. (Rom 3:22) Perhaps Satan hates mankind because he could not have God’s righteousness and God gave it to the lowest and most unworthy in all His creation. It is my personal opinion that Satan rebelled against God because salvation was never offered to angels but it was freely given to man by faith.

WARNING: opinion is just that, opinion. Opinion is not doctrine. Scripture will support doctrine. Do not mistake opinion for doctrine, search the scriptures.

There is an archangel, Satan, who hates us and is jealous of our relationship with God. He will do anything to hinder that relationship and any loving relationship between the brethren. Satan is the father of lies. (John 8:44) Lies are his chief weapon. Our defense is the Truth, the Word of God, which is the Sword of the Spirit. (Eph. 6:17) Eve failed to understand correctly what God had said. In Gen. 3:3 she altered the truth by interjecting the instruction “neither shall ye touch it”. That is not what God said.

Genesis 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Because Eve did not stand on the Word of God and offered up a different version, she gave a place for Satan to stand, on a lie. When we do not speak the whole truth we give occasion for Satan to stand. Eve misquoted God and Satan didn’t correct her, nor would he. When she touched the fruit which was not forbidden it led to a thought process that if one is not true, then the other might not be true either. Discovering our understanding of God’s Word is not true does not make God’s Word untrue. **Warning: do not rely completely upon your fallible memory, return often to scripture to strengthen your understanding of the truth.** What Satan offered up in response was a vain substitute for God’s promises in Romans 8.

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Romans 8

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Vine's Expository Dictionary on glory Strong's number 1391 "glory" (from *dokeo*, "to seem"), primarily signifies an opinion, estimate, and hence, the honor resulting from a good opinion. It is used (1) (a) of the nature and acts of God in self-manifestation, i.e., what He essentially is and does, as exhibited in whatever way he reveals Himself in these respects, and particularly in the person of Christ, in whom essentially His "glory" has ever shone forth and ever will do, John 17:5, 24.

God's design is for us to be conformed into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Make no mistake on this issue; being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ does not make you God. There is but one God and there is no other beside him. (Isaiah 45:5) What Satan did was pervert this godly desire, as he does with so many things of God. He told Eve that knowledge alone was enough to make her as god. The shortcut, the easy path, instant gratification, and in succumbing to that temptation, Eve lost the one thing that would have secured her change: a deep, intimate, personal relationship with God.

Knowledge is no substitute for relationship. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:1 knowledge puffs up (KJV), makes one arrogant (NASB), proud (AMP). Pursuing an intellectual knowledge of God is not the same as pursuing a relationship with God. Look what Jesus said to those who performed miracles in His name in Matthew 7:23 "I never knew you". Even though they were used of God, for only God can perform miracles, Jesus did not know them, hence no relationship. He called what they did iniquity.

1 Corinthians 6

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

We are bought with a price, we are not our own, and if we are going to glorify God in body and spirit we cannot do that by living a course of self-will and self-pleasing. Walking in the Spirit is the opposite of living a course of self-will and self-pleasing. Romans 8:1 says there is no condemnation for those who walk after the Spirit. Satan, our accuser, would have you believe that you are condemned. Satan is our enemy and he is out to try to destroy our relationship with God and lies are his weapons. It is my contention that the saved can hear the lies of the enemy. Even so, we do not have to be deceived on these issues.

How do you know you are not deceived?

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Romans 8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

I will refer to the flesh many times during this article, so I would like to take a moment to explain what I mean by “flesh”. My need to explain my use of the word stems from my own failure. If I could get it wrong, others might also. There have been times when I hated my own flesh, as if it were keeping me from being the man I wanted to be. Flesh, muscle and tissue is not sin or sinful. Jesus was made flesh yet He was without sin, so flesh itself cannot be sinful. The following is just a partial definition of flesh from Vine’s Expository Dictionary: Rom 7:5; 8:8,9; (h) “the seat of sin in man” (but this is not the same thing as in the body), 2 Peter 2:18, 1 John 2:16; (i) “the lower and temporary element in the Christian,” 2 Cr 7:1, Eph 6:5, Hbr 9:13; (l) by metonymy, “the outward and seeming,” as contrasted with the spirit, “the inward and real”.

Satan our accuser, (Rev. 12:10; Job 1:9-11) knows that we were alienated from God since Adam’s fall and his constant claim is that we are still alienated and condemned. If you have accepted Jesus Christ into your heart as Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit has been given as a down payment towards our hope to come, the redemption of our bodies and deliverance from this life into eternity with God. (2 Cor. 1:22)

Galatians 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

How do you know when you are walking in the spirit? If you were to ask this of many Christians you might receive answers such as these.

- By faith.
- I know that I know that I know.
- Because the spirit tells me so.

That does not answer the question; it does not tell you of the experience or how to obtain it.

John 3:5-8

Jesus answered, **Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.**

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You must be born again. How do you know for sure you are born again? If you are born again, the Holy Spirit is given.

1 John 4:13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

To rest assured that you have been born again the Holy Spirit must testify to you that He is in you and leave evidence, as Jesus attested to in John 3 above with the words “**thou hearest the sound thereof**”. Without this testimony how can you know you are walking in the Spirit? Or even saved?

God did this for us so that we can have a relationship with him. Not just the possibility, but the assurance of a relationship. He no longer wants to be hidden from you, He wants you to know Him intimately.

Romans 16:25-26

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

“For the obedience of faith” Some believers overlook these last words in the great joy that accompanies “now is made manifest”. **WARNING: that is our old sinful nature. The flesh will glory in one line and try to distract you from the whole truth. Do not allow yourselves to be distracted. Without obedience of faith we have dead works and God is not in it.**

So, where do we begin?

1 Timothy 1:5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. NIV

If the purpose of walking in the spirit is mature godly love, and it should be, then 1st Timothy 1:5 names our starting points.

- a pure heart
- a good conscience
- sincere faith

Let us deal with them one at a time.

The Pure Heart

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Ezekiel 11:19 And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:

“I will give them one heart” is a key in this passage. We may all look different, think different, have different gifts and callings, our doctrines vary so profoundly that we cannot even worship together comfortably, but the one common element in all of us is “one heart”. I am no better and no worse than my brother for we all have the same heart. We can have unity in disagreement because we have the same heart, His heart, the heart of Jesus Christ. Another key here is “stony heart” indicating judgment. In the ancient courts a white "stone" indicated acquittal, a black condemnation. We are instructed not to judge others. (MAT 7:1, Luke 6:37) John 12:47 “**And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.**” If we judge sinners we drive them away from Jesus and their only hope of salvation. How I accomplish this is in saying to myself, “I do not condemn the lion for killing the zebra, for that is his nature.” Likewise sinners behave according to their sinful nature until they come to Christ and are given a new heart.

God loves you and will not leave you in your present condition. Whether you are a new Christian or have been walking with the Lord for many years, He is cleaning house constantly. You will never be perfected until you receive your redeemed body, when this body is replaced with one incorruptible. (1 Corinthians 15:53) **WARNING: Never assume that just because the Holy Spirit has done a good job of changing you that He is through. He is not.**

Proverbs 23:26 My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

What better way to obtain a heart after God then to give it to Him and watch what He does with it? How does the apprentice silversmith learn his craft? He learns by observing His Master. We in like fashion learn to love by observing God and by reading the scriptures, come to know God’s ways and discover that we are changed by the very word itself.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

For the power of God is effectual, in that it changes the inner man, cleansing your heart. (EPH 3:7, EPH 4:16, 1 THES 2:13)

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

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A change of heart, to be willing, to choose the better thing, to love and take delight in His commandments, these are signs that one is following Jesus, walking in the spirit. We do not start out that way. We grow in grace as we walk in the spirit. (2 Peter 3:18) What we were lingers in our memories but we must be ever mindful that we are new creatures, born again believers, whose hearts are being changed by our experiences with God, by reading the Word and believing by faith. We are not the sum of our memories, we are much more.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life

Keep in this verse is rendered from the Hebrew, natsar {naw-tsar'} Strong's number 05341.

- 1) to guard, watch, watch over, keep
- 1a) (Qal)
- 1a1) to watch, guard, keep
- 1a2) to preserve, guard from dangers
- 1a3) to keep, observe, guard with fidelity
- 1a4) to guard, keep secret
- 1a5) to be kept close, be blockaded
- 1a6) watchman (participle)

While God goes about changing our heart through the power of the Holy Spirit, it is in our best interest to preserve and protect our hearts from the lies of the enemy. I've often said, "Why was Eve anywhere near that tree to begin with?" Proximity to sin gives the enemy occasion. A large part of keeping our hearts is in 1a3) above, to guard it with fidelity. While many may quote scriptures about what great liberty you have in Jesus, you should also remember Galatians 5:13 "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh,". Being free in Christ means that we are no longer slaves to sin. We are free to choose the better thing. If you chose to sin, it is because you chose to sin, not because you were enslaved by sin and had no choice. While God did not make it a law to touch or look on the fruit, He did say "do not eat". That's fidelity, not partaking. Guarding our hearts with fidelity becomes much easier if we do not give the flesh occasion to be tempted. I love what Job said to his friends.

Job 31:1 I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?

Job helped himself by not allowing his mind to ponder vain imaginations that lead to covetousness. He knew where temptation lay and chose to avoid it. Job's covenant with his eyes might have been, "***I will not lead you into temptation.***" This same covenant is in the Lord's Prayer. Believe and trust God, know that He will not lead you into temptation. We should do ourselves the same favor. Going places where you know you will be tempted is a form of tempting God. When Satan tempted Jesus to cast Himself down so that the angels would have to save Him, Jesus answered "**thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God**". (MAT 4:7 LUKE 4:12) The example here is that you should never

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deliberately put yourself in a position where God will have to pull you out.

The second part of Proverbs 4:23 is “for out of it are the issues of life”. John 7:38 **“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”** Belly here is Strong’s 2836 koilia, by virtue of use, definition 5) the innermost part of a man, the soul, heart as the seat of thought, feeling, choice. Choice; love is nothing if it is not a choice. Love prefers the object of its affection before self. Therefore the right choices you make in obedience of faith releases the power of the Holy Spirit to flow out of you.

Jeremiah 17

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Trying the reins is a process of discovery. The LORD knows your heart, but how are you going to discover what is in your heart if it is not tried? How will you know the fruits of your labors are dead works or unto righteousness? How will you know what to repent of unless shown? **WARNING: do not allow the flesh to choose what to repent.** Our sin nature opposes the spirit in all that it does. Here is an example from my own life.

During worship service one Sunday I had a vision. I was standing in a rowboat late at night at sea. The waves were furious and I could see the harbor far off in the distance. Ahead of me were towering cliffs with breakers crashing against the rocks. On top of the cliff was a lighthouse. Every time the light would sweep out over the ocean I would wave my hands wildly in the air. As I shared my vision my flesh jumped at the chance to interpret the vision. “I’m not supposed to be in the boat, I’m supposed to be in the lighthouse.” Sounds good, light of the world, hide not your candle under a basket; all the good connective scriptures came flooding to mind, but that was not what the Holy Spirit was telling me. The Holy Spirit was trying to show me that I desired attention, that I craved the approval of men, as if they could validate my faith. The flesh jumped at the opportunity to divert my attention from the truth. I suffered under that illusion for more than a year because of that mistake. If I had just delivered the vision and not jumped at offering an interpretation, perhaps someone with the gift of discernment would have taken me aside and shown me the truth. When I was delivered from that delusion someone I did not know and had not heard my prior vision said he saw a vision of me standing in a boat and God was calling me to get out of the boat and walk on the water. (MAT 14:29)

The illustration here is this. Do not take repentance lightly. It should be disturbing to the flesh. It can be gut wrenching. If the flesh likes it, it could be the flesh is willing to make a small concession to avoid being crucified on an important issue. Repent at the urging of the Holy Spirit; do not allow the flesh to repent of non-essentials.

2 Chronicles 16:9a For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.

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The Hebrew word here for perfect is shalam. The prime root is to be in a covenant of peace, be at peace. Some might read this verse and think that God only shows Himself on behalf of those who are perfect. As Jesus pointed out no one is good except God (Mat 19:17, Mar 10:18, Luke 18:19). If He would not allow Himself to be called good, then what chance do we stand? It is not about being perfect; it is about being at peace with God. (Rom 5:1) God is looking for ways to show Himself strong on your behalf, having both peace with God and the peace of God.

Exodus 14:14 The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

WARNING: Emotionalism is the allergy of walking in the spirit. Allergies are the immune system reacting to things that are not harmful. Every little speck of dust or pollen sends the allergy sufferer's immune system into overdrive. It reacts to things that are not harmful and wrecks havoc with the body, causing the body to suffer needlessly. As an extreme example, look at those who have murdered doctors and bombed abortion clinics as a means to end abortion. They let their emotions cloud their judgment. They violated God's Law in the name of God's Law. That is not God's way.

It is very difficult to convince people, who are extremely emotional about an issue, that God is not the author of their movement. God gave us emotions, so that we might have bowels of compassion. (1 John 3:17) He never intended for us to fall prey to our emotions.

John 14:27 **Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.**

The peace of God is a gift from God and dwells within your heart. It is given to temper your emotions, so that you should not labor in vain, wasting God's precious resource, you.

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

Vexation in the Hebrew is reh-ooth' (Strong's number 07469) longing, striving. When we allow our emotions to get the better of us, we strive with the spirit, longing for the spirit to be in agreement with us, to choose our will rather than God's. When we do this, we lose our peace because we are grieving the Holy Spirit.

Colossians 3:15a And let the peace of God rule in your hearts,

Try and stay in tune with that peace. If you lose your peace, stop and think about when you last felt it. What were you thinking? What choices did you make? Open

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yourself up to correction. Give room to the possibility that you might be wrong on a subject. Obedience of faith should not be burdensome.

Matthew 11:29-30 **Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**

Neither is it instant pudding. There is some effort involved.

Psalm 24

1 The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?

4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

5 He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

6 This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.

In line 3 of Psalm 24 the psalmist asks who shall ascend the hill of the LORD. It is a climb. Progress is made through obedience of faith. Who shall stand in the Holy place? Clean hands speaks to innocence of action, pure heart speaks to right motivation.

Matthew 5:8 **Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.**

OK, so how is your heart cleansed of all unrighteousness?

Psalm 10:17 LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear:

Romans 8: 11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

The Holy Spirit will cleanse you of all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Psalm 33:3-5 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

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Ezekiel 36:26-27 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall seek My judgments, and do them.

Confession of is a vital part of the process but it is not an end unto itself. Repentance is a turning away, from sin, back to God. Here in Ezekiel we read that God transforms the born again believer, changing his heart, and putting a new spirit within you. The result is obedience of faith, to “do them”. True repentance is a turning, one cannot continually ask forgiveness and continue to do those things. You cannot waiver back and forth from a particular sin to righteousness and back again.

James 1:6-8 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Instability is a condition of the heart. One can be determined, willful, strong minded, yet if ones heart is not properly conditioned to love the Lord, seeking to please Him and firm of conviction, another who is more persuasive may come along and convince you otherwise. When it comes to obedience of faith, you can count on receiving resistance, from your old sinful nature, or from the enemies of Christ. Only those with right heart motivations and are convicted by the Holy Spirit can stand firmly against the winds of opposition.

Psalm 139

1 O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.

2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

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15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.
17 How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!
18 If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.
19 Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.
20 For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.
21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?
22 I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Here in Psalm 139 the psalmist sings the praises of the all knowing God. He exalts God's ability to know his heart, no matter what condition it is in and no matter where he is in life. Then curiously he asks God to try him and see if there is any wickedness in him. What is the purpose of asking this all knowing God to try us? Surely it is not for God's sake. Remember Jeremiah 17: 9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Your new heart is not mature, it is not perfected and it still hears the lies of the enemy. It has to cope with the flesh until the flesh can be subdued. We cannot trust even ourselves when it comes to our own heart condition. "I shall be satisfied, when I wake with thy likeness." Psa 17:15 God is always about perfecting you. He will not allow you to become settled in your ways.

Zephaniah 1:12 And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.

From Easton's Bible Dictionary

Lees: (Hebrew - shemarim), from a word meaning to keep or preserve. It was applied to "lees" from the custom of allowing wine to stand on the lees that it might thereby be better preserved (Isaiah 25:6). "Men settled on their lees" (Zephaniah 1:12) are men "hardened or crusted." The image is derived from the crust formed at the bottom of wines long left undisturbed (Jeremiah 48:11). The effect of wealthy undisturbed ease on the ungodly is hardening. They become stupidly secure (Psalm 55:19; Amos 6:1). To drink the lees (Psalm 75:8) denotes severe suffering.

Psalm 55:19 God shall hear, and afflict them, even he that abideth of old. Selah. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.

God loves us too much to leave us as we are, no matter what state we are in, even if we have been walking in the way for many years. "even he that abideth of old" If we

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see no change, if we see no progress, we should be very fearful, for it questions the very essence of our salvation. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling is how Paul put it to the Philippians. Not to have others work it out for you, to rely on teachers and preachers to do all the work for you. They are nothing more than vessels of God to bring the Word to you. It is still up to you to allow it to work into your heart.

Psalm 7:9 Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.

Psalm 11:7 For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

On closing out this section, The Pure Heart, allow me to emphasize that there is nothing more important than the condition of the heart. Your flesh will try and reject this new heart just like a heart transplant patient. Like a heart transplant patient, one must continually take anti-rejection medication, the Word of God. It must not be left alone to withstand the attacks brought upon it by the lies of the enemy. Combat infection with the Sword of the Spirit. Know the difference between the desires of your new heart and desires of your old sin nature. Understand your own tendencies, observe first instincts and then compare them with the word of God. As your first instincts begin to align themselves with God's character, you can be assured your heart is changing.

A Good Conscience

According to the Merriam-Webster On-Line dictionary, conscience is defined as:
1 a : the sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good

1 b : a faculty, power, or principle enjoining good acts

1 c : the part of the superego in psychoanalysis that transmits commands and admonitions to the ego

That is the conscience as the world sees it, but what does the Word of God say about conscience?

Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

The Word of God ties the conscience to the condition of our heart. On September 11th, 2001, terrorist boarded American Airlines Flight 11, United Airlines Flight 175, crashing into the World Trade Center towers and American Airlines Flight 77, which crashed into the Pentagon. These were acts of an evil conscience. These are extreme examples but reflect the principle that serves to prove a point. The conscience is nothing

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more than a reflection of the heart. If one's heart is evil, the conscience is also evil and will not exhort you to good deeds.

Luke 11:34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.

Do you think those men saw what they were doing as being an evil thing? Their conscience told them what they were doing was good and right, and that they would be rewarded for giving their lives in their cause. A conscience does evil if the heart is evil. That is why I began with a pure heart and you must always guard your heart and protect it from hardening.

The conscience is a function of the mind. It is a reasoning power which weighs character against desire. All healthy humans have this power of reasoning. It is developed, learned through training and practical exercise. One who learns there are consequences for actions will weigh the penalty against the desire. Christians do not own the corner on a good conscience. Non-believers can be just as law abiding as Christians.

Romans 2:14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

The conscience we are seeking to discover here goes above and beyond the natural, beyond developmental training, beyond historical insight. The conscience we seek to develop is one which is a reflection of the changed heart, the new creature, the new man in Christ. It will serve you to stay out of areas where the law allows access.

1 Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

1 Corinthians 10:23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul was telling them that there was a better way than the natural law. Believers in Corinth were taking their problems to court to be settled by unbelievers. In verse 7 Paul wrote "Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" The old man, the old nature, said I've been wronged; I have a right, maybe even an obligation to redress this wrong. The old man's conscience would allow judgment, retribution, an accounting. The new man with a new heart, with a new conscience seeks God's will and abides in His commandments. What was at stake in Corinth was more than material goods, money or a good name. What was at stake was their relationship with their brethren, their relationship with God, the condition of their hearts and perhaps even someone's salvation.

"Will we bind God by our judgments, or will we free God to transform our enemies—even ourselves—by grace?" James Edwards – *The Divine Intruder*

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What does judgment have to do with conscience? Given that it is a function of the mind, the power of reasoning, then we must judge rightly if these conscious thoughts be based on your new heart condition or the lingering memory of the old man's nature which, while having received its death blow, is not yet dead.

Romans 8:3 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

On one hand "deeds of the body" speaks to sin, while on the other it is about responding to the Spirit, choosing to respond to your new heart, your new conscience, and if that be so, then mortification of the old man's conscience must by needs become part of this process. That is not easy. Sin is sin but the chains of bondage that sin had over our lives have been broken. **Note the use of the word "had", for once you are born again, sin no longer holds you in bondage; you are free to go.** A good earthly conscience, while it has served us well, is still of the flesh and as Paul pointed out to us in 1st Corinthians 12, God has a better way. That's not to say you trash all you have in the way of a conscience. All that was good and true; you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness are still godly things that must not be put aside. You will find however that some things the old man's conscience would allow are no longer desirable.

It is difficult to cover specifics. Each of us is different and God deals with each of us according to His plan. What He does in me and how He goes about accomplishing it might not be the same for you. We have the same problems but God knows your heart, mind and will. He knows your innermost thoughts and desires. He also knows the best way to go about making effective permanent change.

When I was younger, I had a clever cutting sense of humor. I was known for my quick wit. I recognized humor in the oddest things and shared my humor freely. It was part of my personality. My upbringing and emotional needs cultivated a humorist. Some people admired my ability to think on my feet. Not everyone enjoyed it. When I came to Christ this was not the first thing God worked on, but He got around to dealing with it eventually. What I discovered as my heart changed was that I had a new sensitivity towards people. I would regret having said things. I was not being mean or spiteful; I just realized that it was not necessary. Then I found it to be distasteful. I did not enjoy how it made me feel. This was not who I wanted to be in Christ. It is not who God wanted me to be in Christ. A new heart, a new mind, a new conscience and suddenly I found myself saying, "Resist at every opportunity the urge to be yourself." Surprisingly I found that the hardest time I had resisting "being myself" was not when I was tired, under attack or even tempted, it was when I was feeling good. Perhaps it is because God helps the weak and resists the proud. (2 Cor 12:10 and James 4:6) Who is on guard when everything seems right? Who does not keep a close watch when under attack?

Romans 14:22-23 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

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While these verses from Romans 14 might be more appropriately included in my sincere faith section, I include it here in the good conscience section specifically because of “that thing which he alloweth”. What we did in good conscience in our past life may alter, it may become restricted behavior in the new man. A convicting force in our new life is our new conscience. One of my elders began saying “let your conscience be your guide” knowing full well that the Holy Spirit was convicting me over issues that were never an issue before. **Warning: Conviction is not condemnation. The enemy would have you believe they are the same, they are not. In conviction, you are found guilty, but no sentence has been imposed. If you are condemned the sentence has been imposed. John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

In the born again Christian, the conscience not only leads to confession and forgiveness, it is a force of resistance to temptation. How useful the conscience can be is dependent upon your skills at discerning the Word of God.

Hebrews 5:13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

Romans 14:2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The babe in Christ has a difficult time digesting anything but the milk of the word of God, the gospel itself, the Good News. When they come to Christ that is about all they need to know. Their conscience is still carnal, in that it has not changed. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul spoke to carnal Christians. Sadly some Christians stay carnal for long periods of time, but if they are truly born again and have received the Holy Spirit then God will chasten them, for He chastens those He loves. (Hebrews 12:6) So the carnal conscience does little to edify the body of Christ.

Now the weak in Christ eat herbs. They have a rudimentary understanding of the word of God. The word is effecting change, bringing about a newness of life, renewing the mind through the washing of the word. The conscience is now a convicting factor as the chastening of God leads you to remorse, repentance and forgiveness. As you grow in Christ, your conscience will even warn you to avoid temptation. “You’ve been there before, do not go back.” Do Christians repeat sins? Unfortunately yes. Are they always the result of backsliding? No. This is a mystery of Christ for which I do not have a good answer, at least not one that satisfies all circumstances. It might, in part, indicate that there is no forward progress. I went to the Bible Gateway and searched the Word of God and was led to Exodus 32 by searching “overcome + sin”. Take a moment now, go and read all of Exodus 32

Here the people who were freed from bondage in Egypt were waiting on Moses. Moses is a foreshadowing of Christ, a tupos, a type. God said in verse 8 that they quickly turned away, returning to mischief (Aaron’s word in verse 22). Psalm 40:1 says “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.” Obviously they did

not patiently wait upon the Lord. Their impatience exposed their true heart condition. It is also noteworthy to see Aaron, the first chief priest appeasing the masses, giving them what they wanted without standing firmly against their unbelief. This being the first example of 2 Timothy 4:3, the people went to one who would give them what they wanted. You cannot depend on anyone to help pull you out of this present condition. This is your relationship with Jesus, trust Him and Him alone. In Romans 7 Paul declared that he could not find within himself the strength of will to do what was right. He thanked God for Jesus Christ in whom he could do all things.

Once the present heart condition was exposed, see what Moses did. He called for a re-dedication. The Holy Spirit works the same way in our lives. There will come a time when certain sins are being dealt with and no forward progress will be made without dealing with that sin. Which is better for your relationship with God, to patiently wait on the Lord and cry out to Him from your circumstances or to be impatient, sin and then have it exposed? Either way sin has to be dealt with before progress can be made.

Were they perfected before moving forward? No. God led them through the wilderness for forty years dealing with their unbelief before leading them into the promise. He stopped along the way and dealt with different issues from time to time, but He did not allow their imperfections to totally halt progress. It's a journey and there will be pauses in the journey that require us to deal with our unbelief. Expect it, look for it, recognize it and deal with it.

Now the strong conscience that belongs to the mature Christian is said to have his senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Exercise implies experience. Earlier I alluded to the conscience as being developed, learned through training and practical exercise. The new strong conscience is renewed much like the old conscience, it has not changed in function and performance for it still reflects the true heart condition. If it were just a function of discernment, then I could stop here.

Job 31:1 I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?

The strong conscience is a covenant keeper. Job did not allow himself to even think about a maid. There is a lot to be said about covenant keeping. Studying the meaning of covenant, I discovered that the noun form of the Greek word *diatheke* primarily signifies "a disposition of property by will or otherwise." In its use in the Septuagint it is the rendering of a Hebrew word meaning a "covenant" or agreement (from a verb signifying "to cut or divide," in allusion to a sacrificial custom in connection with "covenant-making," e.g., Gen 15:10, "divided" Jer 34:18,19). In contradistinction to the English word "covenant" (lit., "a coming together"), which signifies a mutual undertaking between two parties or more, each binding himself to fulfill obligations, it does not in itself contain the idea of joint obligation, it mostly signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words)

When you make a covenant the obligation is on your part and God is not bound to it. The dividing, separation, is a giving away, much like a last will and testament, which happens to be a root source for the meaning of the word *diatheke*. From the Blue Letter Bible Lexicon: a disposition, arrangement, of any sort, which one wishes to be valid, the

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last disposition which one makes of his earthly possessions after his death, a testament or will.

I do not want to wander too far a field from the strong conscience, but I find myself so intrigued by the subject at hand, that I must look down this bunny trail at least a short measure.

Romans 6

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.

I do not expect a babe in Christ to have made a last will and testament for the old man who is being, or about to be crucified with Christ. They are barely able to comprehend the gospel, the Good News. Those who are on herbs surely must have at least a rudimentary understanding of the necessity for leaving a sinful life and attaining unto righteousness. Mature Christians, at least those who mix herbs with some meat, should have already begun the process of giving up the ways of the old man. Paul exhorts us to walk in newness of life, not the old life, but the new Christ like life. Giving it up as one would in making out a will. Leaving the old life behind is a good picture for us to examine it in this way. Imagine if you would a man in his casket who has willed his watch to his grandson. As the grandson views the remains, the corpse reaches out from his casket and grabs the watch. What is to be said of this man? He is not dead enough! In the same way, recognize that we are still being crucified and we are not yet quite dead enough if we reach out for our past life and the things thereof.

Matthew 10:38-39 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

The strong conscience of the mature Christian will warn you not to reach back from the Cross of Christ to grab the things of your old life. I wish that I could tell you that it is just that simple, but it is an effort. The conscience only warns you, you still have to make a choice. Sadly the human condition has a tendency to block out bad memories and hold on to good ones. Past sins will appear to be attractive, you will remember the thrill, your body might even betray you and crave it as if you are still addicted to sin, but you are not. Somewhere along your life you made a decision that you no longer wanted to be in

bondage to sin and you screamed out to God for help, and that in the form of salvation and grace through the Cross of Christ. Your memories of the old life are there for empathy, compassion and understanding for sinners. You've been there, you know the way out, and you can show them the way. **WARNING: Do not allow the enemy to use your memories of the old life to undermine your security as a believer. You are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ; your worthiness is no longer an issue before God. He has reconciled you to Himself. Remember the enemy is always trying to interfere with your relationship with God and the brethren, do not allow memories to undermine your belief system.**

Hosea 10:4 They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.

Covenants have to be taken seriously. Understand that you will be held accountable for your words. Integrity and accountability are important issues in the Christian walk. I will not tell you to avoid making covenants, but if you make covenants, you need to be a covenant keeper. Those things you swear to, you need to swear honestly, with a sincere heart and a full knowledge of the commitment you are undertaking and all the consequences that can occur if you do not keep your word. Works are polluted by breaking covenant. Ministries have floundered and folded. Good works have been tainted because leaders broke covenant. It is not that forgiveness cannot be obtained before God. It is that a lost and dying world will see a liar and a hypocrite. We are ministers of reconciliation and as such, be aware of how those you are trying to reach perceive your ministry.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

This is what the strong conscience busies itself pondering; things of virtue. It does not chase after vain imaginations. In 2 Peter 3, Peter writes, "I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance." The implication here is that the strong conscience, busying itself with virtuous thoughts, keeps the mind pure. The pure mind is open to stirrings by the Holy Spirit. The way of remembrance is not cluttered with the things of this world. It is important to be able to remember under times of stress for the best weapon against the enemy is the Word of God. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness He defeated Satan with accurate and appropriate scripture. Satan's lies cannot stand in the light of truth.

Sincere Faith

Arthur W. Pink from *The Sovereignty of God*

Ah, it all depends upon whether we are walking by faith, or walking by sight. Are your thoughts, my reader, concerning this world and God's relation to it, based upon what

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you see? Face this question seriously and honestly. And if you are a Christian, you will, most probably, have cause to bow your head with shame and sorrow, and to acknowledge that it is so. Alas, in reality, we walk very little "by faith". But what does "walking by faith" signify? It means that our thoughts are formed, our actions regulated, our lives molded by the Holy Scriptures, for, "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). It is from the Word of Truth, and that alone, that we can learn what is God's relation to this world.

End Quote

God will never tell you something that is not in His character. If you believe you are hearing God, it will be consistent with the Word of God, identifiable and verifiable. Walking in the Spirit and living a life of faith cannot be independent of bible study and an understanding of who God is and how He works in our lives. Satan is a liar and a cheap imitator. Satan takes God's Word and misquotes it, misapplies it, rendering it ineffective, vain. You will know if you are hearing the Holy Spirit or lies of the enemy only if you are deeply rooted in the Word.

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Rightly dividing in the Greek is *orthotomeo* {or-thot-om-eh'-o} which means

1) to cut straight, to cut straight ways

a) to proceed on straight paths, hold a straight course, equiv. to doing right

2) to make straight and smooth, to handle aright, to teach the truth directly and correctly

Rightly dividing implies direction, to know what course of action to follow, to follow God's will in choosing our actions. Who among us has not sought God in making difficult choices? But who among us has sought God's counsel in the small things, our everyday course, in the most mundane actions of each day? Who among us while walking back to the office from a meeting has felt the presence of the Holy Spirit pulling you down another hallway, caused you stop suddenly at someone's workspace, only to be caught up in a conversation where God joins you in the moment and blesses someone's life?

Isaiah 30:21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

I once asked Dr. Keith Lamb about bunny trails. He would be giving a teaching and suddenly he would turn from his outline and start discussing matters that stirred him at that moment. These little detours he called bunny trails. It was never his intention to follow a trail so far as to lose sight of his objective, for bunnies are famous for running in circles and confusing the hounds so that when the bunny does suddenly jump off track the hound has a scent to follow and ends up running in circles. I asked him if perhaps the

bunny trail is sometimes where God is calling us. His answer seemed profound to me. He quoted Isaiah 30:21 and then said, “First, one has to be in motion.”

Abraham, while he was still yet Abram, did not know where he was going when God asked him to move. God said go “unto a land that I will shew thee”. (Gen 12:1) He did not give Abram the whole story in great detail and then let Abram choose to obey or disobey. The sequence of events is what is important to notice here. They occurred in order and I believe that these are the sequence of events in obedience of faith.

- 1.Abram heard God.
- 2.Abram believed God.
- 3.Abram obeyed God.

Faith comes by hearing. You should have an expectation that God is communicating with you. An excellent exercise in developing an ear for God can be found in Henry T. Blackaby’s *Experiencing God*. Reality number four of Blackaby’s seven realities of experiencing God is: “God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.”

When Paul met the Lord on the road to he cried out “Who art thou Lord?” The one thing that always struck me odd about Acts 9:5 was that Paul knew it was the Lord, even though he did not recognize that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. He heard His voice and knew it was the Lord. Oh, if only it were that simple for us to know that we are hearing Him when He speaks to us. If He would just make Himself plain in speech, be direct and tell us exactly and precisely what He wants done and how it is to be accomplished. If only indeed. He is not perfectly clear in all matters. For whatever reason God has chosen, and I have often pondered why, He whispers, He is cryptic and sometimes even silent on matters. I’ve convinced myself that part of the answer to this lies in our very nature. Humans can be presumptuous and lazy, but give them a mystery to solve and they can be tenacious in their search for the answer. It would seem, from reading Psalm 24, that it pleases God when we seek Him.

WARNING: convincing ourselves on spiritual matters is giving into the flesh. My use of the words “I’ve convinced myself” fits me, my case, my needs, directly related to my experience, teachings, and observations. God may allow us to be wrong on trivial matters. When it comes to important issues, God will not allow error. He will chasten you, because He loves you. Just because God has not chastened you on trivial matters does not mean that you are right. Know the difference between convinced and convicted. Do not hold fast to your own opinion as if it were the same as being convicted by the Holy Spirit.

Understanding your nature, tendencies, and preferences is vital when it comes to communicating with God. *Isaiah 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.* There came a time in my life that I repented of the life I had chosen to live. When I did God spoke into my mind as if they were my very own thoughts, but because they were so out of character with who I was I realized they were not my own thoughts. I do not advise anyone to get comfortable with that method of hearing God. It is fraught with danger. It is presumptuous, if not proud, to expect that God should choose to communicate with you in that manner all the time. The closer you

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come to Him in relationship, the more Christ's character is built into you, and it becomes more difficult to distinguish His voice from your own because your very character has changed.

The issue of hearing God changes as we grow closer in our relationship with Him. I wish that I could tell you that there is a set order and well defined steps that you will find as you grow in grace. I know what happened to me. I've witnessed what has happened in others. You can have an expectation but whether that expectation becomes a reality in your experience is totally up to God. He does not treat us all alike. He treats us as individuals and as such, what worked for me might not work for you. He knows how to solicit the proper response from each of us. Do not expect that God will always communicate to you in the same manner all the time. One time it may be a long search of scriptures where you only got one word without meaning, substance or relevance. The next time He might fill your mind with understand all in one instant, so fast and far reaching that it takes days or weeks to sort it all out. He may give a word to a brother in prophecy for you. He might deliver a vision. It might not be verbal or visual. Sometimes His peace just warms over you like warm oil. What ever method He chooses to communicate with you will be with meaningful purpose.

One of the real dangers lies in re-creation. You cannot make it happen. It has to come by His initiation. Availability is not the same thing as accessibility. Remember Psalm 24:3-4 ***Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.*** Those who try and re-create the moment do not have a pure heart motivation. They are motivated by emotional needs. The pure heart goes to His Master out of love and a desire to fellowship with his God, an empty vessel to be filled, not to pore out.

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

OK, so now you have heard God. You've checked the scriptures, you've tested the spirits, you've humbled your soul, and now you are ready to obey God. Or are you? Belief as an adjective is actually translated as faith in some verses. Faith and belief are so intrinsically related that for the most part they are inseparable or interchangeable. In order not to use a word to define itself, let us keep the two separate and assert that faith cannot be sincere without belief.

Matthew 14:25-31

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was

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afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

Was it Peter's doubt that caused him to sink? Obviously Peter walked on water in response to Jesus calling for him to walk upon the water. Did his actions demonstrate faith, a sincere faith? Jesus said that his doubt or unbelief caused him to falter. Was Peter determined to obey the command to prove to himself and to everyone else that this was truly Jesus? Was that willingness to obey enough to allow Peter to walk on the water? Can one determine or will themselves to do a thing, yet do not believe? Why could Peter walk on the water and then suddenly sink? Upon looking over reference materials about belief and believe in the gospels I find that Jesus often healed people in conjunction with, if not directly related to, "if you will believe". Is belief the key to unlocking the power of the Holy Spirit? If it is, is it the kind of belief that is a conscious decision based on examination of evidence and elimination of other possibilities?

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

I hope to win the lottery. Should I have faith in that hope? Obviously not, so the substance of things hoped for must mean something beyond desire. The hope that the writer of Hebrews was talking about are God's promises to us. God is not a liar, so you can stand assured that His promises are real.

"If I were dealing with a man's promise, I should carefully consider the ability and the character of the man who had covenanted with me. So with the promise of God; my eye must not be so much fixed upon the greatness of the mercy-that may stagger me; as upon the greatness of the promiser-that will cheer me. My soul, it is God, even thy God, God that cannot lie, who speaks to thee. This word of his which thou art now considering is as true as his own existence. He is a God unchangeable. He has not altered the thing which has gone out of his mouth, nor called back one single consolatory sentence. Nor doth he lack any power; it is the God that made the heavens and the earth who has spoken thus. Nor can he fail in wisdom as to the time when he will bestow the favours, for he knoweth when it is best to give and when better to withhold. Therefore, seeing that it is the word of a God so true, so immutable, so powerful, so wise, I will and must believe the promise." Charles Spurgeon

If we have not yet seen those promises come true in our lives, they will happen. Where those promises have been filled, then He has given you evidence of His existence, even though you do not see Him physically. Every step of faith that is met with an answer from God is a faith builder. Your belief system is strengthened and you become more confident in God's promises. Obedience of faith fuels itself. Belief, more than a decision, is an experience. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is an experience based on being a doer of the word.

Faith was once described to me in this way. You have a chair in front of you that you believe will support your weight, but you have not demonstrated faith until you actually sit in it. That is an over simplification of faith and belief. What if you could not

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see the chair? What if you were blindfolded and were told to sit in the chair? Would you believe that a chair even existed? You would have to trust in your relationship with the person who is asking you to sit down. Do you know Him? Do you trust Him? Do you believe Him? If you do, you will sit down. Now go one step further. What if you were not blindfolded and you did not see a chair? If He said sit, would you believe your sense of sight or would you believe Him when He said there is a chair? It is difficult to ignore the flesh. There will be times when every natural sense, every ounce of understanding, even the fundamental laws of reasoning say, "No, this thing cannot be done." Yet God may ask you to ignore all that and believe Him. It does not happen to all Christians, but if and when it does, understand that it serves a purpose.

Even if you should say no, it still serves a purpose. Why would God ask you to do a thing when He already knows you will say no? Because you did not know how you would respond until He asked, and in saying no, He has revealed your true heart condition to you. John 3:20 "**For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.**" God will shed His light, truth, into your heart, correcting that condition.

Romans 15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Joy and peace are fruits of the Spirit. Your belief should be fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit, the abounding hope. It is much easier to respond in obedience of faith if you are encouraged by the hope that stems from the flow of the Holy Spirit out of belief. It will allow you to be bold while you are humble. It will allow you to be brave when you are meek. It will allow you to be strong when you are weak. It will allow you to believe when your eyes and ears tell you otherwise.

Who wants to be a slothful servant? (Matt 25:26) Surely each of us, upon the Master's return, want to have been found faithful, and return unto our Master according to the talents we have been given. One thing I have learned from the parable of the talents is that God has an expectation of a return on investment. He has placed the Holy Spirit in you, a deposit which will assure success and a 100% return on investment. Why else would the parable of the talents have yielded five for five and two for two, if it had not been to indicate 100% assurance? Looking to the parable as it relates to faithfulness, the Master said of both servants, "you have been faithful in a few things". They were not 100% faithful, not mostly faithful, nor unfaithful because it was in only a few things. So His 100% return on investment is not based on what you do, it is based on God's character, His promises, and His faithfulness. It is totally based on the workings of the Holy Spirit within you.

Isaiah 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

So why should we strive to be faithful if our good works are not dependant upon our own efforts? Faithfulness is more about relationship that it is about works. Jesus said

“if you love me, keep my commandments.” John 14:15 and to go even further, He said in John 14:21 that if we did He would manifest Himself in us. Remember one of the definitions of glory is God’s self-manifestation. This is more than revealing Himself to us; it is revealing Himself through us. Others will see Jesus in us and in doing so; they will come to know Jesus. While it sounds like an awesome responsibility, it really is not. Do not fret about trying to hold up the image of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. The harder you try, the more you will fail.

Ever been around a fruit tree and heard it grunt and groan as it puts forth its blossoms, and cry out in pain as fruit issues forth upon its branches? No? Well that’s because a tree produces fruit by its nature not effort. That is why God is going about changing your character. Fruits of the spirit are based in character relationship with God. The better your relationship with God, the more natural the release of fruits of the spirit.

“My vision of God is dependent upon the condition of my character. My character determines whether or not truth can even be revealed to me. Before I can say, ‘I saw the Lord,’ there must be something in my character that conforms to the likeness of God. Until I am born again and really begin to see the kingdom of God, I only see from the perspective of my own biases. What I need is God’s surgical procedure—His use of external circumstances to bring about internal purification.”

Oswald Chambers from My Utmost for His Highest © 1935

Daniel 11:32 And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.

“Corrupted by flatteries”, that sounds like Satan’s vain glory! While these verses from Daniel are part of a prophecy, it must be noted that the ways of the enemy do not vary from age to age. What worked in man’s heart thousands of years ago, still works today. In some ways it is even more affective because times have changed so that the fame of a man can rise from obscurity to world wide notoriety overnight through the power of the media. I dare say that temptations are even more tempting today with a greater variety of design. If the plague of humanity has not varied in his ways, then the cure which guarantees success against Satan has not varied either. People of a sincere faith seek God, know Him and share in His unsearchable wisdom will "do exploits".

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The word created in Ephesians 2:10 caught my eye and I looked up the usage of the word and found ktizo {ktid'-zo}. Root: probably akin to 2932 (through the idea of proprietor-ship of the manufacturer)

- 1) to make habitable, to people, a place, region, island
 - a) to found a city, colony, state
- 2) to create
 - a) of God creating the worlds

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b) to form, shape, i.e. to completely change or transform

Strong's number 2932 renders even more interesting text.

1) to acquire, get, or procure a thing for one's self, to possess

a) to marry a wife.

He molds us into the image of His Son Jesus Christ, with purpose and design. In essence He is preparing His bride. When God created Eve for Adam in Genesis 2:18, it was for Adam to have a proper help mate. God so chooses to include us in His works because it is in line with His character. One who is loved is not excluded, they are included. Having seen the whole of creation from the beginning, He knows best how to direct our steps, so that at the appointed time we are walking in His good works. We walk by faith not by sight. (2 Cor. 5:7)

Ecclesiastes 7:24-26

That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness: And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

I wish that I could tell you that it gets easier. My assumption was that in coming to a knowledge of God, His ways, and His unsearchable mysteries, would make things easier for me to respond in obedience of faith. It has done just the opposite. It has caused me to be even more dependant upon God as I realize my own limitations. (Rom. 7:18) As I watch those around me and discover foolishness and madness, it is only through God's grace that I can stand still and trust Him and His plan. Our very nature is to reason things, solve problems and fix what is wrong. This generation is the instant generation. We discard callously those things which do not produce instant results. Praise God that He does not operate that way, or we all would have been cast aside long ago.

Snares, nets and bonds are tactics of the enemy. Woman is representative of the church. It is not the bride of Christ, as the bride is comprised of many members of many churches. If you believe that we are in the latter days of the church age, then these words take on urgency, a relevant warning particular to the structure and behavior of present day churches. Does it take much imagination to see the fowls of the air occupying lofty positions in large denominational churches today? (Luke 13:19) Is their doctrine sound? (2 Timothy 4:3) Do they hold fast the profession of faith in Jesus Christ? (Hebrews 4:14) Do they forsake righteousness in favor of gain? (2 Peter 2:15) Do they turn a blind eye to sin in the name of tolerance? (Leviticus 19:15) All these and more are tactics of the enemy. Do not deceive yourselves that just because you do not belong to one of these large denominational churches that tares do not abide in your midst. (Matthew 13:30)

Apostasy follows close behind us, if it is not already upon us. The only way we can guard ourselves in these last days is a deep personal relationship with God. No one is responsible for maintaining that relationship except you. You cannot leave it in the hands of teachers and preachers. We are meant to be God followers, not man followers.

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Philippians 2

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

Romans 14.

16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

The Walk

First and foremost remember this; it is always about your relationship with God.

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

I have discovered over the years that God is more interested in me than anything I can do for Him. Once you realize that all good works belong to the Lord; (Psalms 40:5, Psalms 71:17) you come to an understanding it is God that has done those good works. All our secular efforts get burned away in the refiner's fire. (Malachi 3:3) All that is left is pure gold. One of the positive aspects of accepting that God does the work is relief from performance anxiety. You need not fear failing since it is God who does the work and He never fails. Nor will you become puffed up with pride. Relax and concentrate on the one and only thing that ensures success in everything you do, your relationship with God. Everything flows from this relationship.

Mistletoe is a fungus that grows on trees. While the rest of the branches respond to the nature of the tree, turning leaves, and shedding foliage, the mistletoe remains green. You can see clearly that it is what it is, a fungus that was hard to spot just a few months earlier. Mistletoe produces its own fruit, a white berry that stands out in sharp contrast to the fruit of the tree. But does the mistletoe know it is mistletoe? It does not care; it lives unto itself, sucking life from the tree. So, how do you know you are a branch of the vine or mistletoe? The nature of mistletoe is not the nature of the vine, the fruit is not the same as the vine, and mistletoe will not respond in unison with the other branches of the vine. There are no lone wolves in the Kingdom of God. Do not isolate yourself from fellowship with your brethren. Make yourself accountable to someone who has the experience and

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authority to mentor your walk, discipleship. Open up your life to exhortation and correction.

Sin

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

There is no avoiding the issue of sin. Not in this lifetime at least. Reconcile yourself that you will not be perfected until redemption comes. I could go into a lengthy teaching about the purpose of sin in our lives, but I think our time would be better served if I just make a summary statement here. We need Jesus in our lives, just as a drowning man clings to a log, knowledge of our condition should cause us to cling to Jesus. If we were instantly perfected, in the exact same condition as promised, into our redemptive state, this world could not hold us, nor would we find anything desirable in it. Our witness would be ruined to a lost and dying world because they would not see that we are just like they are in this world, yet somehow different.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

The battlefield of the soul is the flesh. Who shall have control, the carnal mind or the Spirit? As Paul proclaimed in Romans 7 thank God for Jesus Christ. Immediately Paul follows up with Romans 8 where he begins talking about following the Spirit. In verse 8:5 he tells us to set our minds on things of the Spirit, to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Yet the mind is flesh, weak and unreliable. Jesus asked His disciples to wait for Him in the garden at Gethsemane the night He was taken and they fell asleep, not once but twice. While it is true that the Spirit had not yet been given in full measure, it does illustrate the weakness of relying on our human minds.

Sadly many Christians do not have the vaguest idea what being spiritually minded means. Dr. Keith Lamb in his teachings warned us about being so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. When I first heard this I was not sure exactly how this related to walking in the spirit until I received some practical experience. It happened at a time in my life when I needed help and had not identified the source of the problem. Not knowing, not having been in the church very long, I would listen to pretty much anyone. Person after person would quote memorized verses, speak in the same repetitive tongue, pray over me as if they were giving a sermon, or offer up empty platitudes of secular wisdom. Then I received an e-mail from a total stranger. In the e-mail he said, "Go to an elder, God has a gift for you." That is all he said. He would not clarify it any further.

I went to a trusted elder and told him about this strange message. He took me into a room away from the congregation, sat me down, then did and said nothing. He waited on God to do something. Suddenly my mouth opened up and deep emotional pain and confession started pouring out of my mouth. Issues I had never spoken about to anyone, things so painful that I would not and could not confront them myself, began to give voice and in uttering those words I was cleansed from years of pain and bitterness.

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So why did God not move on me when I was seeking help from all the others? It was because they were not looking to God for the answers. They were relying on their own understanding, their own strengths, their own memories, perhaps even on what worked for them in their own experiences, rather than seeking God and allowing God to be God. This elder recognized that God had spoken prophetically through a stranger and he waited on God rather than trying to fix things himself. In doing nothing my elder opened the door for God to work in me what He had prepared for days to do.

Being spiritually minded is not about having memorized scripture at your beck and call, speaking in Christianese, or having the answer to everyone's problems. Being spiritually minded is more about being open to the possibility that God is at work around you and seeking His will rather than interjecting your own. Do not allow yourself to become bogged down in things of this world. Be aware that the flesh rebels against God and to resist it. "...abstain from fleshly lusts, that war against the soul." 1 Peter 2:11b

In Galatians 6:1a "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault," we see that a Christian can be overtaken by sin. When I looked at this, God showed me a fearful man running from sin. You cannot outrun sin. If you fear sin, you suffer from unbelief. John tells us in 1 John 5:4 "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, [even] our faith." The helmet of salvation will protect your mind, the breastplate of righteousness will protect your heart, the shield of faith staves off attacks from the enemy, but the sword of the spirit is the weapon of warriors. Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Do not fear sin, take up the Sword of the Spirit and fight the battle that is already won. Believe it!

Then there is the occasional snake bite. It is when Satan catches you off guard. You can be busy in the most mundane of efforts and have the enemy sneak up and bite you. Acts 28:3 and 5 "And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm." It isn't like you gave thought to sin but rather circumstances led to opportunity unexpectedly. Be like Paul, shake it off, send him back to "the fire" and know that no harm has been done to you. The cause is being human, living, having sin, yet not being enslaved by it.

Arthur Wellington Pink wrote in Practical Christianity, in a section on Mortification, "The principle of sin as a foreign element, as a thing *ab extra*, as an invading agent, entered into him, vitiating the whole of his natural being—as frost enters into and ruins vegetables, and as blight seizes and mars fruit." The issue here being that sin is no longer your nature because you are a new creature in Christ, but it still has its affects. The doctrine of mortification is vital but complex. While there is little written or taught on the matter, a simple view of the issue will show you to stop doing the deeds of the flesh. A more complex view would warn you that the priestly robes and piety of the priests that Jesus called vipers and hypocrites had all the external trappings that might lead one to believe that mortification of sin was present. We know that it was not. So mortification is more complex than just the outward appearance of holiness. Not sinning does not imply you are sinless. The principle of sin still exists; the capacity to sin is still present. Yet knowing that and seeing that does not mean you are lost. Your life is not a

lie. Paul told us to consider ourselves dead to sin, meaning that as we walk, we can pass temptation by without turning our heads. Always look forward to the Light, bask yourself in His glory and warm your soul, fending off the frost of the coldness of sin. What your mind is set upon, you follow, for you go where your eye leads you.

Having sin and being caught up in sin are two distinctively different things. Christians can fall into the snare that once held them slave or into a new snare that has not been a problem before in their lives. Being aware that it can happen should not put you in fear that it will happen but you should be aware of the warning signs, so that when it does come you will recognize what is happening around you and resist sinning.

A classic study of getting caught up in sin once you already have a relationship with God can be found in a study on King David. From the second book of Samuel chapter 11 verse 1 “And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.”

The very first thing I noticed here was that David was not taking care of Kingdom business, he stayed home. While doing the will of God there is an expectation of protection from attacks by the enemy. This is not to say that we are to bury our heads into God’s work and forge blindly onward. There is a time and a season for everything under the sun. Being in God’s will is not always about work. If it is God’s will to rest your body, then you can be in His will doing nothing but relaxing. You would be afforded the same level of protection as if you were in the mission field or other active ministries.

What is “that good, acceptable and perfect will of God”? What I have discovered over the years is that His will is not one thing, nor is it many things. It is hard to describe specifically by example so I ask you to look at it in this manner. You are standing in a high place and God says, “Look!” and you see before you a wonderful scene, of mountains and plains, streams and forests. Then God says, “Look closer!” and your focus falls upon the forest and you see a multitude of varied flora and fauna. God speaks yet again, “Look closer!” and you see one single white dove nestled in the branches of a tree.

God’s will did not change. Your perspective of His will did not change. His will was there all the time and in plain view. So what did change? Your focus changed. You were no longer content with drinking in the whole picture, marveling at the grand scale of His creation. You became aware of detail and substance. Finally in His perfect will your eyes rest upon the singular object of God’s will. None of the views are wrong; they all fit into the same aspect of God’s will.

Something that helps determine God’s perfect will is knowing who you are in Christ. David was King of Israel. His responsibilities were clear. It is not always that clear for us. You may have a fair idea of your identity in Christ but are not fitted jointly into a church body. Does that mean you are not meant to be in that church or that you still have not found your identity? The answer is maybe both, maybe neither or maybe one or the other. Delicate issues such as these should not be determined on a single event or on your own. The fact that you desire to do something does not imply that God put it on your heart. I’m more inclined to believe that God pushes you in areas you do not want to go. Look at some of the Old Testament characters like Gideon and Jonah. They were reluctant and had to be persuaded, if not forced to do God’s bidding.

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Continuing on in 2 Samuel 11:2 “And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.” There are three issues in this verse that I’d like to address; eveningtide, the roof, and look upon. While these terms seem rather mundane, look to the spiritual implications that surround events.

Eveningtide; a period of darkness, solitude, quiet time, a time when restlessness can invade your sleep because you are not right with God. We have already established that David was not fulfilling his duties in that he left warfare in the hands of others. One of the first things that happens as a result of being outside God’s will is loss of peace. It can be subtle, so subtle it is often overlooked. God is not a hard task master, He does not beat His servants because they make bad choices, nor does He leave them alone. Exodus 14:14 “The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” This period of darkness is not spiritual darkness. David has not yet done anything which warrants being “cut off” in his relationship with God. When we find ourselves at the beginning period of unrest, in the eveningtides of our lives, do not assume that God has cut you off. He is still speaking to you and the quiet should serve as a warning that you have moved away from His whispering lips and that you need to incline you ear once again toward God.

The roof is both an elevated place, above where David should have been and a place of advantage. These two issues may or may not exist jointly in the natural. One is pride and the other is a position of authority. Paul warns us in Romans 12:3 not to think too highly of ourselves. While I can name a few televangelists who allowed themselves to think that they were “above it all” and ruined their ministries and reputations via adultery and pilferage, one does not have to be in a position of authority to be found proud. The same dangers exist for both laymen and elder. People who disciple babes in Christ have an awesome responsibility. They need to be aware of these risks. Remaining humble and rooted in Christ is vital in discipleship. It is an awesome responsibility. Salvation is at stake and your responsibilities must not be taken lightly.

David saw the woman bathing but did not divert his eyes, did not remove himself from the roof, he observed her long enough to allow the flesh to lust after her. Even the secular world understands clearly the influence that the eye has upon human judgment. The author of “Silence of the Lambs” penned these words, “we lust after that which we see”. The reason television advertising is so effective is because it is visual. Pornography is a strong addictive force because it is visual. Foods that are unhealthy are packaged in the most attractive containers possible and displayed where they can be conveniently seen. Have you ever compared your fast food order with the picture on the menu board? It does not look the same does it? Such is the appetite of the eye, making things more attractive in the mind than in reality. Part of the nature of addiction is leaving the victim unsatisfied. The eye is independent and unrelated to reality. It goes from one vision to the next always seeking more and better, regardless of how full your belly is at the moment. Ever heard or uttered the words, “My eyes were bigger than my stomach.”

Returning once again the 2 Samuel 11:3 “And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” This part is pretty simple but often overlooked. We are stupid when it comes to sin. Perhaps this is God’s will that we are seen in the natural to be sinners so that others

can intercede on our behalf. It never ceases to amaze me how some people are oblivious to the eyes of others while they sin. We do not stop to think that we are ruining an opportunity to witness Christ to others. Should others believe our testimony of Christ when they see unrepentant sin? Russians are famous for not listening to Christians, they watch how we act. Missionaries have come back from the youth camps outside St. Petersburg reporting better success this year than last because the same people returned to the camps and did not waiver in their behavior. If their behavior was not above reproach, they would not have received an invitation to return.

Another subtle issue in this verse is the dehumanization of the object of sin. The object of sin in this case was a person, someone's daughter, someone's wife. Sin does not care about anything but itself. One FBI tactic in kidnap cases is to speak to the perpetrator in terms that humanizes the victim. They call the victim by their first name, show pictures of them in family settings, relating to the victim in ways that establishes a foothold for sympathetic feelings to emerge. It is harder to hurt someone if you feel like you know them. Sin can occur in this world because the victim is faceless in the sinners mind. An unkind word, a bad joke, may seem victimless, unless you've been on the receiving end. A sad truth is that there is no such thing as a victimless sin. If you can think of one then there is a real possibility that you are the victim. If we would put a victim's face on our sins, perhaps we might avoid sinning in the first place.

2 Samuel 11:4 "And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house." Here we have complicity. David dragged others into his mess. You do not necessarily have to have authority over someone else to make them complicit in your sin. Ever told a lie and then asked someone to hold their tongue? When you do this you compromise your relationship with that person and cause them to stumble. Paul tells us in Romans 14:13 "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." Avoiding sin is difficult enough. Do not make it more difficult for others by involving them in your sin.

An editorial note here: notice how the line "for she was purified from her uncleanness:" could have been left out of this verse and would not have changed the meaning of the sentence and its inclusion almost distracts from the rest of the lesson. The bible is full of such inclusions and often times they are meaningless, at that moment. At another time, in reference to another lesson, these words may speak volumes to you as it relates to your present circumstance. You do not have to make everything fit your understanding over every little issue. Take what God shows you and do not allow the flesh to be distracted in that which He does not illuminate.

Returning to the last line of 2 Samuel 11:4 we see that David has discharged Bathsheba as soon as he is through with her to return to her home. Standing alone this line has little to reveal. Link it to the passage that follows and there is something to be found here. Often the object of sin is looked upon with disdain. Rather than "owning" his mistake, the sinner will often blame the object of his sin. If he can distance himself from the object of his sin he won't have to be reminded of the sin continually.

Moving on to 2 Samuel 11:5 we discover that sin does not just go away. Worse than that, it is prolific, spawning its own set of troubles. "And the woman conceived, and

sent and told David, and said, I am with child.” Sin that isn’t dealt with does not just quietly sit in a corner and wish to be ignored. It festers and tries to spread its poison. Like a little yeast causes the whole loaf to rise, sin has its affect on the body. Fear of discovery, fear of loss, fear of retribution, and fear of punishment cause the sinner to try and hide the sin, not to remove it, but to try and get away with sin.

The next sequence of events that transpire are all the result of fear. David gave Uriah an opportunity to sleep with Bathsheba in hopes of making a case for the baby being Uriah’s. Uriah, being the honorable man that he was, would not sleep with his wife, while his men were still in the field. David then got him drunk hoping perhaps in his weakened condition Uriah might give in to the flesh. Uriah remained unchanged in his devotion to duty, which is a strong witness of his character. Having failed that, David had Uriah killed. With Uriah gone, who would now raise a charge against Bathsheba?

Who indeed! We see in the closing verses in 2 Samuel 11 that the LORD was displeased with David’s actions. Nathan the prophet was sent to pronounce judgment upon David. 2 Samuel 12:

11 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.

12 For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

Regardless of your relationship with God, there are consequences for sin, and that is an inescapable fact. Before a spirit of legalism jumps up, allow me to point out one thing quickly. Consequence is not the same thing as condemnation. In verse 13 the LORD put away David’s sin and no death sentence was imposed. The security of the believer in relationship with God is not based on your actions; it is based solely on the redemptive works of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The consequences for sin are real and manifest themselves in this world. Verse 14 conveys the two real dangers. You wounded your ministry of reconciliation having given the enemy a strong foothold to wage war against God and His children. The second issue is that it is the innocent that suffer the most. If we would stop and think for a moment about how our children would be hurt by our sins, perhaps we would find it easier to turn aside from sin and let the opportunity slide on by without our falling into that trap.

A summation of the root cause can be found in Nathan’s prophetic words to David in 2 Samuel 12:7-8 where God points out all that He has done for David. If David was dissatisfied, all he had to do was ask God for an increase. God would have gladly added blessing upon blessing. If we look for anything beyond God to be the source of our satisfaction, we open the door to vain imaginations and covetousness. When we look to satisfy ourselves we sin, for it is a sign of loss of gratitude.

^ Psalm 100

1 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.

2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Gratitude

Exodus 11

4 And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

Israel lost her gratitude. This displeased God. It displeased God so much that those who lusted after the flesh died of a plague. If you look to the first line of verse 4 you will see that it was the mixed multitude that began lusting. These were not all Israelites. There were also slaves that were freed at the same time Israel was set free. They afflicted Israel in much the same way that our old sin nature afflicts our souls. The desires of the flesh, the natural lusting of the flesh oppose the mind that delights in God. Rom. 7:21-23 It is not easy to stay grateful in God's meagerness when His promise is the abundant life. If we can stay focused on the promises of God during these times, and realize we are going through them with purpose, perhaps we can sustain gratitude.

Deut. 8:16 Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good in the later end:

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. Psalm 100 tells us what attitudes are acceptable towards entering into His presence. Those who grumble, whine and are disrespectful will be held at the gate, they are not allowed to enter in. Dry times come as a result of two issues. One is because God is doing a work in you. The second is because of bad attitude. You have

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to examine yourself closely and be open to correction to know the difference between the two. Attitude can be corrected instantly through confession and forgiveness. Character building, “to do thee good at thy latter end” is a process that has to evolve by going through the valley. Looking for shortcuts will only get you lost causing the experience to last longer and become more exasperating.

I am not saying it is easy to maintain an attitude of gratitude, I am saying it is not impossible. The flesh will grumble, praise God, for if the flesh rebels God is doing something in you. The flesh will whine, praise God, it is being crucified. Keeping a proper attitude in your mind does not negate the reactions of the flesh. You can keep your peace in mind and soul while your body is stressed out to the max. The issue isn't what the flesh is doing so much as not giving into it. Hold fast to the promises of God and believe that “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28 NAS

Interjection: At this writing, God has made this lesson real for me. He caused me to experience something that goes beyond this issue of gratitude and I would be wrong if I did not share it here. Not everything you have to deal with in this life has spiritual implications. There are things that will happen in the natural that must be dealt with in the natural. My circumstance was directly related to stress, caused by people who failed do their job and in doing so, failed to serve me. I looked first to my heart and examined it. I had to know that my heart condition was right. I did not trust myself, I relied on my faith and waited on God, yet the situation did not change. I remained stressed, my natural man continued to be taxed by the stress that others had placed upon me. I discussed the matter with a trusted brother and sister in Christ and listened to what they had to say. Then I cried out to God in my quiet time and pleaded my case before Him. He confirmed in me what I had heard from my advisors. I was to stand against this disservice in the natural and deal with it myself. I stated my case before the proper authority, leaving judgment to those who had oversight responsibility. I was not bitter, nor spiteful. I spoke the truth and nothing more than needed to be said. I was as kind as I could be, but firm in my conviction. The problem was resolved within a few hours and correction was made, service was restored and a heartfelt apology was given. The reaction by my body was instant and confirming, the stress left me.

Knowing exactly what to do instantly in every circumstance is virtually impossible. I believe that giving God first counsel and searching the scriptures for an answer is always preferred above over reacting in the flesh. If the will of God is that you need to act in the natural, do so in character of your new creature in Christ and not by your old nature.

H.A.L.T.

H.A.L.T. stands for hungry, angry, lonely and tired. It is secular wisdom, but it must be pointed out that much of what is generated in the arena of secular wisdom is based in a study of the human condition, stimuli and reaction. There is nothing wrong with a sound understanding of how the human psyche works, how it is affected or influenced by physical conditions, and where it can be a benefit to your spiritual walk. Your background, training, and interests will dictate how much and what kind of secular

wisdom has been imparted into your life. Some of it is paraphrased from the Holy Bible's books of wisdom.

I include H.A.L.T. only as an example to provide a base of understanding and not to be a complete work. Other secular wisdom must be judged rightly to instill a proper perspective and direction in application according to its own merits and your personal understanding of those teachings. I cannot cover them all, nor would I choose to include many as it would eventually distract us away from the primary purpose of this work.

H.A.L.T. is something my late wife would say to our son to remind him to take care of himself. The essential truth in this matter is that the body reacts adversely to neglect and becomes a hindrance in our spiritual walk as it rebels naturally. A proper and effective understanding of what is really happening in your life will tell you how to best deal with the moment.

HUNGER: While it is true that man does not live on bread alone, Jesus did not imply that man should live without it either. It sounds so simple, you are hungry, so you must eat, but have you really looked at your hunger from a proper perspective? When is the last time you ate? How much did you eat? How active have you been since you ate? What kind of food did you eat? Are you an emotional eater? Do you eat for satisfaction or nourishment? Did you know that the body can send false hunger signals? Have you ever fasted? Is fasting a part of your spiritual walk? Have you subdued your lust for food, replacing food lust with proper healthy routines? Secular wisdom would only encourage you to eat. Spiritual wisdom asks you to consider God's instrument and the carefully planned out maintenance of that instrument. Consider Daniel's denial of the fruits of Babylon in favor of God's plan for him. I am not suggesting that you eat only grasshoppers and honey like John the Baptist, only that you should not allow yourself to become enslaved to bad habits. Beyond that, do you hunger after God with the same kind of desire that you have to satisfy your body? Is your soul starving? Are you nourishing it with the Word of God? Do you eat the Bread of Life?

ANGRY: Secular wisdom says count to ten, giving yourself time to calm down. Spiritual wisdom asks you to took back and ask yourself honestly where you lost your peace. It is not enough to just calm your anger, it is your responsibility to know the source of your anger. Whatever happened is momentary. Events come and go daily that offer opportunities for anger, but are you going to allow them to rob you of your relationship with God? Your neighbor? Your friend? Your family? Is your anger fueled by a spirit of unforgiveness? Whatever happened is it worth loss of peace? Most anger stems from a seed much deeper than the event preceding the outburst of anger. Dealing with the event does nothing to help identify and remove the seed. Until you root out that seed you will continue to fall victim to bouts of anger.

LONELY: Secular wisdom says seek out anyone to fill the void. Spiritual wisdom says you are never alone. Loneliness is not that same thing as being alone. You can feel lonely in a crowd. Loneliness is the awareness of something missing in your life. After my wife died I was very lonely. No matter how many people I was around or how much they loved me, I remained lonely. Something that was a vital part of me was gone. The same can be said of anyone who has not come to a fulfilling relationship with God. What God wants you to be, in this life, is complete in Him. He wants you to know who you are in Christ. He wants you to receive the fullness of His grace. Let your times of loneliness

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be a time of discovery. Turn to God and seek His counsel, seek God to fill what is lacking.

TIRED: When I started this section, I wasn't sure where I was going with tired. The natural is all to clear. What makes you tired in the natural is easily analyzed by examining your life. Hours worked, activity involvement, eating habits, illness, can all be contributors to exhaustion. But what was I going to say about the spiritual aspects of being tired? Then circumstances showed me what God had to say on this subject. Are you tired of hurting people? The indwelling love of God will tire you of the pain and misery you lay at the feet of people you live with and work with. The indwelling love of God changes your character by making it painful to be who you are by being tired of hurting yourself by hurting others. Are things in your life no longer pleasant to do but you do them out of habit, or because of your character? Perhaps God is changing your character by making them unpleasant. Accept God's leading and allow the change to happen before it becomes painfully clear that you cannot go on like this any longer.

Character

The more your character takes on Christ's, the more that God is glorified in you, the easier it is to hear from God, and to know His will. Walking in the Spirit stops being an effort and becomes second nature, because it is who you are now. With ease comes the danger of pride. The only way to avoid that is to do what Jesus did when He walked this earth. Dedicate quiet time to confer with the Father. Set aside time to be personal with God. Spend that time just telling Him what you are doing, your concerns, your desires, and asking for His guidance, but a portion of your quiet time must be spent being still and waiting on God. Learn to shut up in your mind and stop thinking, listen.

Psalms 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

Here is a list of the characteristics of the renewed man and references to some verses in support of his character.

Prepared to seek God; 2 Chronicles 19:3, Ezra 7:10 and Psalms 10:17

Fixed on God; Psalms 57:7 and 112:7

Joyful in God; 1 Samuel 2:1 and Zechariah 10:7

Perfect with God; 1 Kings 8:61 and Psalms 101:2

Upright; Psalms 97:11 and 125:4

Clean; Psalms 73:1

Pure; Psalms 24:4 and Matthew 5:8

Tender; 1 Samuel 24:5 and 2 Kings 22:19

Single and sincere; Acts 2:46 and Hebrews 10:22

Honest and good; Luke 8:15

Broken, contrite; Psalms 34:18 and 51:17

Obedient; Psalms 119:112 and Romans 6:17

Filled with the law of God; Psalms 40:8 and 119:11

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Awed by the word of God; Psalms 119:161
Filled with the fear of God; Jeremiah 32:40
Meditative; Psalms 4:4 and 77:6
Circumcised; Deuteronomy 30:6 and Romans 2:29
Void of fear; Psalms 27:3
Desirous of God; Psalms 84:2
Enlarged; Psalms 119:32 and 2 Corinthians 6:11
Faithful to God; Nehemiah 9:8
Confident in God; Psalms 112:7
Sympathizing; Jeremiah 4:19 and Lamentations 3:51
Prayerful; 1 Samuel 1:13 and Psalms 27:8
Inclined to obedience; Psalms 119:112
Wholly devoted to God; Psalms 9:1, 119:10,59,145
Zealous; 2 Chronicles 17:6 and Jeremiah 20:9
Wise; Proverbs 10:8, 14:33, 23:15
A treasury of good; Matthew 12:35

I know this is quite a list and the last thing I want is for you to examine this list and be discouraged because you do not think you measure up to the list. Remember Hebrews 12:2 where He declares that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. That He distributes our talents according to our abilities in Matthew 25:15 and that we are not all called to be preachers, or ministers, or evangelist. What is important is that we strive for a deeper, closer and more personal relationship with Him. God does not discourage us from that. If you feel that at any time that it is not worth the time and trouble, remember my earlier warnings that Satan wants to keep us from fellowship with God and one another. Do not give in to the lies of the enemy, our relationship is worth any amount of time and effort required to improve that relationship and draw closer to God. God, being the good carpenter, will never break a tool, wear in down, make it useless, or cast it aside. He takes care of his tools and sharpens them. Proverbs 27:17 "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." How can you do that if you break fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Rather than be discouraged by this long list, be encouraged. As layer upon layer of your old sin nature is cast off like layers of clothing, these attributes will be revealed in your innermost being as His character is built in you. They should not be put on, as the Pharisees put on their robes, but allow God to work into your very being, into your heart of hearts, by means of circumstances, by revelation, by the very Word of God, by confession and repentance; with every step you take Walking in the Spirit through obedience of faith.

Comfortable Christianity

Galatians 1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

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We have learned certain Christian Jews came down from Jerusalem and entered into fellowship with the people of Galatia. Given that their conversion was true, then one is lead to believe that the actions which resulted in Paul's chastening, where acts of ignorance rather than malice. Paul didn't care about the motives, as indicated in 2:6 with "it maketh no matter to me", he only wanted to deal with the effect. Let us explore verse 1:10 with an understanding that there are those who will and do seek to please man rather than obey God, not out of malice but out of ignorance or fear. (ref 2:12)

Now these Jews held observance of days, ceremony, ritual, and custom according to their heritage. According to 2:10 the establishment of the church in Jerusalem was the responsibility of Peter. Peter for whatever reason did not instruct these Jewish converts that these observances where no longer required. He did not demand that these observances be done away with and they continued in that practice.

Now these converts come to Galatia, carrying with them the execution of religion which they were accustomed to exercising. Being devoted in their beliefs, having not been fully persuaded of the gospel of truth, they enter in and see that these pagan converts do not observe these religious ceremonies. Now you have a division of exercise of religion within a church body. Heaven forbid the Jews are wrong or lacking, after all they are the chosen people of God and have been worshiping the one true God much longer. It is no wonder that they would desire to help these fledgling Christians learn how to worship God.

The history of the church is filled with examples of conquered peoples being forced into Christianity and to make Christianity more palpable and comfortable for these new converts, celebration of days which were custom to their pagan history were folded into a new Christian religion. For the most part as long as those observances do not alter the gospel or cause Christians to falter in their walk, they are harmless, but unnecessary.

Once again I remind you that I address this issue to those whom I assume are born again believers. That if you are reading this, you have already accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. This issue of comfortable Christianity isn't about having been born into a family that attended a certain denomination and you have continued to be of that same denomination because it is what you have always done. The issue is over conviction of the Holy Spirit vs. being persuaded by those you esteem to be more learned, wiser, or more gracious than yourself. You can allow self esteem to convict you. Worse yet, you can allow pride to forsake conviction. Comfortable Christianity is settling into a stagnant mold, never changing, never growing, and never coming any closer to a deeper and more personal relationship with God. Once you get to a point in your walk with the Lord where you feel that you have arrived and that no more growth is going to happen, you are in real danger of hurting what little relationship you have left with God for God resists the proud.

Over the years I have witnessed countless worshipers come and go in churches I have attended. Some left because they weren't comfortable with the fellowship, pastor, teacher, ministries, music or doctrine. Some left announcing they were being called elsewhere and asked the blessing of the church. When I left a certain church I agonized over it for months. I didn't want to leave. I wasn't a quitter; I wanted things to work out. By signs and wonders God showed me I was to leave, but did not tell me anything more. I rebelled but finally He told me in a message from a visiting Irish Evangelist, "You can

stay here and be miserable, or obey Me and be happy.” I purposed in my heart to obey God and the moment I did, this huge weight that had been hanging over my disobedience was lifted.

When it came time to find another church, I listened for God’s calling. When I heard it, I tested it. I did not rest on my own understanding, I asked God to prove Himself to me, that this church was where He wanted me. God answered that challenge with a resounding YES. This new church was challenging. Not from a standpoint of starting over and trying to develop new relationships, but from the administration of the church. What I had was comforting, the structure reassuring, and controls were in place with established and recognized oversight. No one person had absolute say and I didn’t have to trust and rely on a man, I could focus on God. In a real sense God took me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to learn and grow in a new environment, with a new administration of church government. I did not enter into this new church with an attitude that I would change the church to fit my understanding, to make it comfortable for me. I entered in to see where God could use me, to be of service, to grow in the Lord and learn how to deal with my own understanding and correct error. I have had to accept that my comfort isn’t paramount in worship. There is a difference between the peace of God and comfort. You will need to know that and trust it when God calls you to do something uncomfortable. Where I have been wrong God has blocked the way, but with patience in seeking His will, doors will open up and I will find my place, not of my own choosing, not of my own desire, but by the will of God.

So it is more important that you worship God in a place of His choosing and not your own. Knowing that He does and wills of His own good pleasure for His own names sake, we need to except that where He leads us will be both to His glory and to our growth. Comfort for Christians is in seeing and knowing that God is drawing us closer to Him through revelation of our true condition, our confession of that condition, repentance and then being drawn closer to God.

Truth

John 14:6 **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

This is the first definition found in the Merriam Webster dictionary on truth.

Main Entry: **truth**

Pronunciation: 'trüth

Function: *noun*

Inflected Form(s): *plural truths* /'trü[th]z, 'trüths/

Etymology: Middle English *trewthe*, from Old English *trEowth* fidelity; akin to Old English *trEowe* faithful -- more at TRUE

1 a *archaic* : **Fidelity, Constancy** **b** : sincerity in action, character, and utterance

John 14 10-11 **“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the**

Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”

Fidelity and consistency is something you will find to exist in the Godhead, in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God can only swear by Himself because He is the only God and there is none other beside Him. Jesus testifies of the Father, does the will of the Father, and does not initiate anything on His own. The same is true of the Holy Spirit, He knows the will of God, testifies only of Jesus Christ and their wills are One because they are One.

The current use of truth in this world is applicable to Merriam Webster’s definition 2b, a judgment, proposition, or idea that is true or accepted as true. This judgment and acceptance of truth is personal and varies between individuals. Information changes and people accept new truths based on emotions or rational evaluation of evidence, but it is all based on perception. Simply put truth stands alone, independent of perception and understanding. The truth exist whether you understand it or believe it. It is what it is, with or without us. Perhaps that is in part what God was telling Moses when He said “I am that I am.” Our finite minds cannot grasp the infinite. If we are to know the truth, then we must rely on the truth and nothing but the truth to reveal itself. Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, then only what is revealed by the Holy Spirit can be deemed truth.

John 15:26

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

John 16:13

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

Matthew 13

11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear

with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

You are blessed above all the people in the earth because the Lord has given you eyes to see and ears to hear. The issue of truth will stand for itself. God calls you to speak the truth, not to defend it. You cannot make a lost and dying world see and hear the truth, but if God is at work in unbelievers the Spirit of Truth will be at work revealing Jesus Christ to them. And more importantly as Jesus told us the Holy Spirit will show us things. He will even speak through us.

Psalm 81:10 I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

I know that this passage speaks about a blessing from the Lord and refers back to Numbers 20 in reference to testing them at the waters of Meribah (Ps 81:7), but if you will read Numbers 20, you will see God told Aaron and Moses to speak to the Rock and then they struck it twice. For this Aaron was stripped of his priesthood, his office given to his son, and then died. Note that Psalm 81:7 ends with the word Selah, a meaningful pause. Given everything that is said in Numbers 20 and Psalm 81, I am given pause to believe that it is a greater blessing to be given the Word of the Lord to speak than to do anything else.

So how do you know what you have heard, read or seen is the truth? The Holy Spirit will confirm in the Spirit with a “Yes and Amen” for He is the Spirit of Truth and will confirm truth. (2 Corinthians 1:20) In like fashion when the truth is not spoken, written, or seen, the truth will be shown to you as correction. I’ve spoken to Christian and uttered falsely and instantly received correction and had to say, “No wait a minute, that isn’t correct.” Then I revealed what the Holy Spirit showed me. Do not be afraid to admit you were wrong. People need to see your ability to accept correction easily. They need to understand that we are just as they are only we have help they do not have, a comfort and security they lack, a peace they want, a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Discernment

Discernment is a powerful gift of God that carries with it awesome responsibility. Some people claim to possess the gift but are nothing more than judgmental and do great harm in the body of Christ. I do not believe that God bestows this gift upon any person who has not first acquired true wisdom. Wisdom is not knowledge; it is experience and a proper godly perspective of actions and results. Discernment, knowing the truth about a thing through divine revelation, does not in and of itself tell you what to do with that knowledge. It is wisdom that tells you what to do with that special knowledge.

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As with all gifts, it is of God and answers to His will because it comes through the power of the Holy Spirit, Who answers to no man but to the will of God. If you should be so blessed to be honored with this gift, treat it as God's will and a thing set apart from yourself. God is at work, active in the heart of that person whom you are involved with at that moment. They may not be aware that God is reaching out to them and you are that vehicle of reconciliation, otherwise God would not show it to you.

In the beginning of this work, the very first line of scripture tells us that we have a ministry of reconciliation. It is the only ministry identified in the bible where each and every believer is a participant in that ministry. We all are ministers of reconciliation and as such will be called of God to help the lost and speak the truth. Reconciliation does not end with acceptance by faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wisdom would dictate that we must understand the process. What worked in our hearts might not be exactly what is working in the hearts of others, but the process of reconciliation does not change. If we examine the process and apply it to the circumstances in front of us, we might better understand what is required of us, for the will of God is unchanging where salvation is at stake.

Let us begin with the first work of the Holy Spirit in calling believers out of a life of sin into a relationship with Jesus Christ. The label I choose to use is dissatisfaction. Sin no longer provides the lasting satisfaction which the called of God seek. Just as a drug addict hates himself but continues to do the drugs that ruin his life, a sinner will loathe his life and seek change. Just as there is more than one way to end a life of dependency on drugs, there is more than one way to regain self satisfaction. Which program the sinner works determines eternal salvation and a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 6:33 Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.

Here is a promise of God, unchanged and unchangeable. If you will I will, says the God of heaven and earth. Do and it shall be well with you. Do and I will prolong your days in this land which you shall possess. Nothing makes a man feel like he is on the right path more than success. The promises of God to prosper because you do and obey are unchangeable, but they do not identify relationship, nor do they promise eternal salvation. They work the program and reap the results with absolutely no guarantee of entering into God's rest. They have not received the indwelling Spirit if they have not been born again.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, **Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**

1 John 2:15-17 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

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Lust of the flesh (sexual immorality), lust of the eye (covetousness), and pride of life are three different things. Pride of life is doing well, justifying yourself through your actions, doing good because it makes you feel good. Those who do well, who are good people, who don't lust or covet, are some of the most difficult to witness to because they are not depraved, degenerate and don't feel bad about their behavior. Yet they are just as lost as the most hardened criminal because they have not repented of their sin of pride. It makes it even more difficult if they have already received the gospel but took no care for the condition of their hearts.

Matthew 13

18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Having an understanding about this unfruitfulness, do we judge and become fruit inspectors? Or do we take the whole counsel of God to understand the total workings of the Holy Spirit who prepares the soil.

Luke 13

6 He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

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It is not for us to say that the Holy Spirit cannot and does not work the ground once the seed has been planted. If there be tares among the wheat, is not He who is able to raise up stones to worship God also able to convert the tare to wheat? (Luke 3:8) How long that tree (man) may stay in the ground before being torn out, fruitless, isn't for us to declare, that is between God and the Holy Spirit. Our role is to be the tools of the Holy Spirit, to dig and to dung. It is not our work, it is His work, we are but mere tools, and as such are used. This can be difficult to discern because we are the tool and not the hand which exerts the will. Place every thought captive, examine your own heart, make every attempt to place your own desires, opinions and judgments aside and allow God to step forward through the power of the Holy Spirit. I like to see it as getting out of God's way. Knowing what not to do is as important, if not more important than knowing what to do. Be sensitive, understanding, and listen. If you have the gift of discernment it will come in the quiet mind, not the busy mind, and never to the offended mind. Resist thinking about what to say when you should be listening to people and listening for God.

There is a subtle trap that exists in observing fellow Christians witness to the lost. The assumption being that if it looks easy, "I can do that too." We may look on the gifting of another and admire the talent God has placed within them desiring to have that gift and do good. That does not mean God has granted those gifts. We are individuals and we must discover who we are in Christ and be true to that calling; ever mindful that God is the author of our faith and the initiator of all good works. To qualify for the granting of a new gift one must use their current gift appropriately and not abuse them or neglect them.

Discernment is knowing the truth about a situation. Knowing the truth about yourself is vital in confession and repentance. How can you expect God to grant you discernment to help others if you ignore the truth about your own condition? You shouldn't. If the effectual fervent prayers of a righteous man availeth much, (Jas. 5:16) how can you expect answers to your prayers if your actions and motives are not righteous? You shouldn't. ["Ye ask, and receive not; because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts," (Jas. 4:3). We "ask amiss" when natural feelings sway us, when carnal motives move us, when selfish considerations actuate us.] A.W. Pink from *The Life of Elijah*.

Proof in the Pudding

The phrase originated as "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." It means that the true value or quality of something can only be judged when it's put to use. Walking in the Spirit is much the same and it is in our obedience of faith that God proves Himself to us. It is in obedience of faith that God is glorified. How can we say with all confidence that God is our portion if we have never trusted in God to be our all in all? How can we say that He is our shield and buckler if we trust only in our own strength? God's Word says not to be merely a hearer of the Word but to be a doer of the Word.

A friend of mine was seeking advice about her aging aunt who couldn't take care of herself any longer and was wanting someone to come live with her. I received a Word from the Lord and delivered this message. "The Lord has a blessing for you if you will do this." Her response was immediate and rather emotional. "I don't know why I even bother to ask you? You don't tell me what I want to hear, you keep telling me the same thing

God does.” Here was an opportunity for God to be glorified. God confirmed through me that she was hearing correctly from God, but she had already made up her mind there was no way she would do this. She was overlooking her faith in God to perform the work in her. She wasn’t willing to trust God to perfect her faith, to do in her what He will do in any of us if we will obey and endure. She measured the cost and told herself she could not afford it. In doing that she left no place for God to perform a miracle because she was not willing to take that leap of faith.

We have God’s promises. We know what God wants to do in us and yet we remain resistant and unsure. We allow our lack of faith in ourselves to overwhelm our faith in God. It is our faith in God and obedience of faith that overcomes our weakness and allows God to be glorified. The fact that we cannot do something does not negate God’s ability. Your life is the stage where His will to be played out.

The direct opposite is also equally true. There are those who refuse to do what is right and see worldly effort as a miracle from God. Again, a co-worker was telling me about her circumstances. She had her rent money and decided to buy new clothes. When the rent came due she didn’t have the money and they told her they were evicting her for failure to abide by the contract she had signed. She went to her pastor and pleaded with him for help and he took money for the benevolence fund and paid her rent. She declared this a miracle from God. My reaction, I confess, may not have been the most gracious answer, but I had to stand with the truth in this matter. I told her, “This is no miracle of God. God provided and you squandered His resource to your own selfish end. You manipulated your pastor’s emotions and you would have been better off if he had said no. Then you might have learned your heart wasn’t right before God.”

Those in authority within a church to administer benevolence funds should require counseling for those who seek help. Throwing money at a situation does not fix the problem. It is not until there is a fair and reasonable examination of our hearts and minds that an understanding of what God is working in us is revealed. We are often placed in situations to develop characteristics of our risen savior. In order for this to accomplish its intent, we must allow our hearts and minds to be changed. Understanding our circumstances and allowing God to reveal His intent towards us can only be found through searching the scriptures, prayerful consideration, and seeking the truth from the Spirit of Truth. There has to be a willingness to accept change. You cannot expect God to conform you to the image of His Son if you rebel against His chastening.

A friend of mine used to pray, “God take me kicking and screaming.” It was a confession of his condition, an admission of stubbornness. Our Christian walk would be less painful if we stood on our own two feet and walked upright upon the path chosen for us rather than being dragged through the thistles and thorns back to the path. That unwillingness is inherent in our old nature and it is a new creature who accepts a new nature and is happy to walk in whatever God places before them, resisting the old man, mortifying the deeds of the flesh and being an overcomer.

1John 5:3-5 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

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This overcoming of the world isn't a conquering of territories, people or possessions as in days of old but rather conquering the temptations of this world, resisting self satisfaction, forsaking ones own desires in favor of what God is calling you to be as His son or daughter. Your proof in the pudding is God being glorified in you and that cannot happen if you remain resistant to the recipe for a new life in Christ. This is not a recipe for a souffle where everything is within control of the baker's hands and in spite of all good effort the souffle falls flat. You are an integrated part of the process. Nothing proceeds on to the next step, the next phase without your involvement. We do it together and He won't do it without you. Your cooperation is vital. Remain resistant and there is no growth and without growth you will not achieve what should be your hearts desire, for God to be glorified in you.

LOVE

"I love you with the love of God.", she said. Really I thought, God loved me so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for my sins. What has she sacrificed for me? Not her time, not her money, not anything that I could measure or feel, so what is this "love" she loves me with?

I've come to understand that love is placing the object of your affection before yourself. It is true that the objects of your affections do not always see it that way. When you tell your children no, they do not look at it as love, but you say no for their own good, protecting them from harm as best you can. All they see is that they didn't get what they want.

God's love for us is more than that. It is more than some platitude and greater than just knowing what is best for us. All you have to do is look at His promises to us to realize that His plans for us far exceed anything we are capable of obtaining for ourselves. We cannot love one another with the love of God. We are not able to contain that much love. At the same time we are not able to love one another without it. His grace passes through us like a garden hose. Rivers of living waters He calls us. We are not the source of the water, we are not the water, we are His vessels.

At one time in my life I ministered on the internet. In that effort God said He would bless me if I used the handle HisCup. I understood perfectly what He meant by that. A cup cannot fill itself, it cannot pour itself out, it cannot clean itself. A cup can do nothing until the Master's hand is applied to it.

Romans 16:25-26 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

Obedience of faith can be thought of as the nozzle to that hose. Without it no water can be released. God calls us to do His will, to be the vessels of His love and grace, to walk in the work set before us, by obedience of faith. There are times when we want to do for others and nothing happens. We get frustrated and disappointed because we try to turn on that hose and nothing comes out. That is because God didn't authorize that work. Our wants and desires must be set aside and we must look to God who is the author of

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our faith to initiate the action. It is pride to think we know what is best for others. Only God knows what is best. If we are to serve people we need to look to God. If we are to love one another, we need to love God. If we are to love God we are to love one another. We cannot do it without God and He chooses to use us to be His vessels of love and grace.

1 John 4

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 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.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

In every relationship one of the parties reaches out first. Affection cannot be returned until it is first given. I do not find it strange that the issue of fear is placed in context with these strong verses on love. It seems the only reason we are kept apart from one another is fear. Fear of rejection. Fear of worthiness. Fear of loss. Fear of commitment. Fear of intimacy. Fear of exposure. Fear of change. Do not allow fear to keep you from reaching out to a lost and dying world and showing them the love which is Christ in you. Most have come to know Christ because someone has reached out and loved them first, got involved in their life and accepted them into their family. That is how I came to know Christ.

God reached out to us in the person of Jesus Christ, demonstrating perfect love. We have come to accept that free gift, that love offering and accepted Him as our Lord and Savior. But what are we in this relationship? We are called “prisoners in Christ” Romans 16:7, Ephesians 3:1 Philemon 1:9, friend John 15:15, servant Psalms 134, 135, 136, and Mark 10:44. But who exactly are we?

Revelation 21

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

We are a bride prepared. Exodus 21:8 states “And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters.” We are betrothed to Jesus Christ and as such we gain the right to call God Abba Father. God now entreats us as His daughter. While these traditions of men are not binding unto the living God it is interesting how closely they fall in line with biblical verses on our relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

In the tradition of men the Hebrew father could buy a wife for his son without regard to the son’s wishes, but the girl could not be coerced into marrying the son. She would be asked if she accepted this man. The bible clearly points out that we were bought with a price, but we have to accept the Father’s offer, we have to say yes without coercion. Our yes has to be heart felt. We have to give our hearts over to Him sincerely.

In the tradition of men there was no inheritance for the daughter. Everything fell to the son. God’s only begotten Son Jesus Christ has had everything given over into His hands. While on the face of it that would seem the father had left the daughter penniless, but it is the responsibility of the son to provide for all the needs of the woman. Society in general has gotten away from that tradition to the detriment of all. In God’s economy He has not forsaken us. His promises are true. God takes care of all our needs.

Our role and responsibility in this relationship is exactly that as identified in the original relationship identified by God in creating Eve for Adam. We were created to be a proper helpmate. Our betrothed trains us, prepares us and asks us to help in achieving His ultimate goal, to complete the body of Christ. The way we can do that is to share the love that He has placed in us, to show love first. But how can we do that if we are just like those who told me before, “I love you with the love of God.” How can we be that bride of Christ, perfect in weakness? We do it by submission, by laying down every pretense that there is any good thing in you except God.

SUBMISSION

Have you ever heard the song “I surrender all!” I have and I took the meaning of those words for granted. I didn’t understand the depth of all. Nor did I understand what it took to surrender. Love casts our fear, the absence of fear is trust and the end result of trust is submission to the One who loves us. How else can you place every thought into captivity if you cannot trust God to lead you rightly? How else can you follow God by faith, not knowing where He might lead you if you do not trust Him? How can you love God with all your heart without trusting Him? Then how can you demonstrate that you love and trust God without submitting your whole life to Him?

We are a needy people. I admit that I am. I also admit that everything that I have done to obtain or satisfy my own desire has left me empty, unsatisfied, disappointed, hungry for more and feeling inadequate. My father failed to raise me as a man of God, my

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mother failed to love me as a woman of God, my siblings failed to encourage me as children of God, and I failed to understand what was lacking in my childhood for the longest time. I was a child afraid of not being worthy of love for a very long time.

Even after I overcame this insecurity I failed to understand fear properly. In Vietnam I learned to fear loss of life. I came to understand that fear itself caused me to be a danger to myself and a danger to others. Rather than trusting in God and submitting myself to His trust and protection I learned to eat fear. I quelled my fear rather than give into it, but it was still in me, eating at my very soul. I did not conquer my fear, I simply ignored it. I lived my life in fear ignoring it. I lied to myself about it in fear that it would once again dominate my every waking moment.

Have you seen the correlation of love, fear, trust and submission in you life? The scriptures exist that tell us, but they are scattered about the bible. They are not laid out line upon line where you can relate them together. It takes a searching of your heart to understand that relationship. It takes a searching of your heart to understand how the Word is made real to you.

We are instructed not only to submit ourselves to God but to one another. We do not submit ourselves to each other to the same degree that we submit our lives to Christ, but we need to accept correction when needed. We should place ourselves in a position to be helped. One of the reasons is because we are not always willing to accept what God is asking of us. If we have someone we have let into our lives, developed a close personal relationship, we can depend on that friend because we know they love us and have our best interest at heart. Whenever you have a problem with accepting what God is telling you, it will leak out into your personality. Just as a wife knows when her husband has something on his mind that is troubling him, a dear friend will sense that all is not right with you. He should ask, "Is there something troubling you?" If that trusted friend asks, then you should be honest with yourself and talk about it. "Wherever two or more are gathered in My name, I am there." Let the Holy Spirit guide you. Do not try to "fix it" yourself.

Although I have not counted them, it is said that "fear not" is used 365 times in the bible. It is also taught that in Proverbs "Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." means reverence for God. My experience is that fear of God means God is unchanging and in Him there is no variance. He means what He says and He does what He says. He chastens those He loves. He accepted your word that you would make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life and He is going to hold you to your word. You gave Him the right when you accepted Christ's free will offering. That is why it is important to have a clear understanding of God's word. When He says He chastens those He loves, He isn't kidding. He will do whatever He has to do to draw you back to Him. Yes He is patient and kind. Yes He is loving and forgiving. He is also a jealous God and He will not lose one child of His. We are the body of Christ and to lose one member would be to allow an incomplete imperfect crippled Christ to sit at the right hand throne of God and that is unacceptable.

The point to that statement is to understand that we are all human and we are all subject to the same frailty and the same hope. That hope is that God is always attempting to draw us closer to Him not distance Himself. If we hear or speak words that imply that anything else is being experienced in our walk then we have a problem. We are to exhort

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each other and at times need correction, an adjustment to our vision. God is not a mean God who is standing over your head with a “rod of correction”. He is not punishing you for your failures. He wants you to the point in your walk where you can hear the truth in the spirit when you hear a lie in the natural. Not only to hear the truth but to speak it in love. There will always be another way to correct a brother or sister in Christ rather than to attack them. A gentle word rather than a harsh rebuke will turn away wrath. If nothing else you can always say, “Let’s explore that thought a little deeper.” Open up dialogue and allow the Holy Spirit room to work.

What’s Next?

Hebrews 6:1-3 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.

I am a fan of the television series *West Wing*. President Bartlet would hold daily senior staff meetings to discuss issues. Whenever he was through and wanted to get on with the days business, he would say “What’s next?” Often times one of the staff would feel like his issues weren’t addressed adequately, that the President had not given him justification for his decision, or that the President was wrong. The President had moved on to more pressing matters and he had no intention of going backward, he needed to move forward. If that staffer continued to talk about settled issues the President would get frustrated and sometimes lash out with a phrase like, “Why are we still talking about this?” We as Christians sometimes do that to the Holy Spirit and frustrate the will of God because we just didn’t get it, that an issue had been settled, but we keep on talking about it anyway.

Galatians 5:4-5 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

Philippians 3:13-16 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Christ put an end to the law as the way to righteousness, replacing it with faith. You cannot mix law and grace. Christ has moved on, He isn’t turning back, He has said “What’s next?” He is pressing on to what needs to be done. We are not supposed to stop and question God about settled issues. You are not supposed to stop and fret over missed

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opportunities. They are gone, over, and pressing God for answers on settled issues and missed opportunities takes our eyes off the next thing that God is calling us to do by faith. Those opportunities are timed events; they have a specific window of opportunity. Often God will prepare you long in advance to make that appointment, not only to be at that place at the appointed time but to also be prepared to do the right thing. It is OK to doubt yourself, God knows what is going on inside you and can make corrections on the way, but you have to keep moving, press on.

These appointments have a narrow window of opportunity and for us to walk in the Spirit, to be obedient by faith, requires that we don't stop and question God on every issue just because we do not have a complete understanding. It is not necessary. If it were then it wouldn't be faith. Waiting in hope is something you can do on the move. Faith is a verb, it causes a reaction, it asks to be used, it requires a step, then another, and another. When God is done and ready to move on faith asks, "What's next?" When it does it is time to move on.

Another West Wing quote is "I serve at the pleasure of the President." I cannot think of a more appropriate quote for a mature Christian who is walking by faith than to say "I serve at the pleasure of my God." At this writing I am nine weeks into a time of turmoil after suffering a stroke. I am no longer working for the company I have been with for thirty-one years. I have not received the final prognosis from my doctors. There are many unsettled issues about health insurance, disability pay, and I have been praying and meditating on these issues, trusting God for answers. This morning I received the Word of the Lord to help with other people's problems. Specific verses spoke deep within my meetings with a group of men at church that may help them deal with their concerns, their problems, and perhaps even bringing one to the knowledge of a saving grace faith in Jesus Christ. If it so pleases Him to use me to answer other men's doubts and fears, is that not an answer to my prayers? I serve at the pleasure of my God.

How can I?

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

At my first wife's funeral my son and I sat together weeping uncontrollably in grief. I had my arms around him when the power of the Holy Spirit blew thru us like a cool soothing breeze and our pain was removed. We still missed her but the pain was gone. In light of that and 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, how can I comfort anyone in that way? God tells us to do that, but how?

Assuming that because the Holy Spirit abides in you, that He always gives you the power of the Holy Spirit to be released as you deem fit is presumptuous and proud. It is not biblical. Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into His disciples on the Monday night after His resurrection but the power of the Holy Spirit did not fall upon them until the day of Pentecost. This is evidenced by Acts 2:2 description of a sound coming down from heaven and Acts 2:3 the fiery tongues set upon their heads. The power does not reside internal even though the Holy Spirit does. The reason is this; honor, power and glory

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belong to Jesus who sits upon the throne. Ref Revelations 4:11, 5:12, 5:13, 7:12, and 9:1. When God placed all things in Jesus hands, John 13:3, that included the power. We speak of the power of the Holy Spirit but often fail to remember that God is One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and in the role revealed by Jesus, the Holy Spirit is to do the will of the Father and to testify of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit does not take direction from us and He is not at our beck and call.

So how can we comfort others as we are comforted? That secret lies in availability. The Holy Spirit abides and is available to God's will and the testimony of Christ by the Holy Spirit is the release of power from Christ in whom is all honor, power and glory resides. We can only make ourselves available and pray that God will show comfort to those people who touch our hearts. Recognize where the real power resides and just let God be God. Your job is to love them.

Godly Sorrows

I find myself now faced with what I perceive to be a difficult topic, not because I do not understand it but because I do not know right now if I can properly communicate it. While it flies in the face of some of the things I have already written, I do not find any contradiction in it. The source of my leaning I find in the first epistle of John, a man who was well acquainted with Jesus Christ, who loved deeply and was entrusted with some awesome responsibilities in a time where truth and actions were vital to the growth of the church.

1 John 2:18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

Looking at these words some nineteen hundred years later you might rightly say that John had it wrong. Some might hold a valid argument that the church, preachers, teachers and sincere believers have gotten this wrong at various times throughout church history. Considering today's circumstances and how they fit prophecy one might argue strong justification for our own times to be the end of the church age.

I myself find no error in contradiction to truth in what John wrote. I see an honest expression of Godly sorrow. The motivation to write one of my favorite epistles, full of wisdom and love, was a deep abiding love for God and His children. The length of the church age is a deep mystery hidden from all of us, including Jesus Christ. Jesus who on the Mount of Transfiguration stepped into eternity where all things had been completed, stepped back into time to complete His work without the knowledge of the length of the church age, because it so pleased God's will.

How many souls have been won to Christ because a sense of urgency had been placed on the heart of a believer to press unbelievers sincerely with a heart of love and concern for their salvation to come to Christ now, while they still have time? I don't know, but I can imagine it has happened over and over again throughout church history. Each and every age felt exactly like we do today, that we have seen the signs and that there is not one prophecy left unfulfilled that prevents Christ from calling out His church at any moment. We may be just as wrong as they were in their assumptions but are we

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just as right as they were in their Godly sorrows? Are our affections turned to the last few souls required to complete the body of Christ? Is it possible that the last soul left to be won for Christ is alive today? I tell you with a certainty, we are much closer today than when John wrote his first epistle and he was convinced he was right at that moment.

What compels you? Earlier I said that we are not to fall victim to our emotions and now I tell you to respond to Godly sorrows. Is that a contradiction? Not from my viewpoint, but can I communicate that properly to you any better than John did? I do not want it to be perceived in error any more than John did, for he was sincere in his belief which formed a prophetic viewpoint that missed the mark. Yet his desire was spot on truth. Our desire to be error free is an illusion. We will not always get it right, nor do we have to be right to be used of God. The source of our motivations does matter. Are we motivated by fear or love? Are we motivated by courage or compassion? Are we motivated by knowledge or relationship? Those issues define, in part, whether you are walking in the spirit or not.

The Soul

Much has been written about the soul and there exists opposing thoughts as to the character of soul and what happens to the soul. I will not address those differences and if those varied opinions interest you, I ask you to search them out for yourself. What I will do is address scripture in respect to cause and effect. I will begin with a miracle event which happened to me from 1st Peter 2:11.

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;”

When I read this for the first time in church I was healed from a life of sexual addiction. Do I still have sexual feelings? Sure I do, but they are now in line with the Word, appropriate to God’s eternal design, and no longer obsessive compulsive behavior. Do I still have the capacity to lust? Yes, but I no longer have the inclination to allow it to rule my actions. My understanding is that this is where the battle exists because Peter used the word war. What is this battle and why are we at war?

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Romans 8:5-6 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

The battle is in the mind. Who is going to control the mind? Will the mind follow its old weak nature or the spirit? Your mind is more than your brain. It is more than a collection of memories. It is more than an ability to calculate. It is more than the sum of its parts. The soul is not the mind, yet the soul is subject to and connected to the mind. A soulish person is one who feels and responds to physical and emotional stimuli in an

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active or hypersensitive manner. It would seem that the soul, like the mind, is more than the sum of its parts. It would seem that the soul is comprised of the mind, will and emotions of a person. I say seems because it is not something that can be examined as you would bodily parts. If the mind is the collective process of the brain, then the soul could be considered the collective processes of the mind, will and emotions that would not exist without the body.

1st Corinthians 15:51-53 “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

This is why our bodies must be risen from the grave and changed to an incorruptible body. The soul does not exist without the body and it is what makes us individuals. The spirit however is eternal and does exist without the body; it is not subject to the influences of the body and is subject to God and God alone. It is God's breath of life. We can rest assured that if the spirit is testifying then we are following God, walking in the spirit. Here is the problem, if the soul is tenuous and the spirit is tenuous, how do we know with any certainty that we are following the spirit or the soul? If we are renewing our minds by the washing of the Word, isn't our soul coming into line with the mind of Christ? If we are being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ, won't our souls also be conformed? Yes it will but it still has the capacity to satisfy itself, even if your mind has no inclination to look to selfish interests. This is why we must stay in the Word and use the Word to validate God's will in our lives.

It is vital to know God's character and inclinations to move about your day. You cannot stop at every opportunity to make a decision and read your bible to seek His will, but you can put off making major changes or decisions until you have had a chance to do that. Don't let people press you for answers to major decisions. Do not press others either, allow God to work in them as He does in you.

Practice doesn't make perfect. Things may become easier for you as you walk in the spirit. You may find that sensitivity to loss of peace will keep you walking in the spirit but confidence is the first cousin to pride. You are human and you will not get it right every time. Your knowledge of your own humanity should not be an excuse for doubting God. God is perfect and understands our weaknesses. He doesn't expect perfection, He expects movement. He who does not stumble is not walking.

Spiritual Death

Romans 6:3 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Getting back to the garden for a moment, God told Adam that the day he disobeyed God, he would die. Adam ate, Adam was removed from the garden, and then went on to live until he was nine hundred and thirty years old. Obviously if Adam died that day in which he ate, then the death he experienced was not physical, so it must have been spiritual.

Walking in the Spirit

This is arguably one of the most controversial issues in all of Christianity. It has caused a rift in many relationships and divided churches. I do not take it lightly and I fully expect there will be some who do not agree with my views. The issue is confusion over terminology. Many see spiritual death as lost of salvation, I do not. Without a doubt there are many warning in the bible related to apostasy, which is a falling away. None are as outspoken as the warnings in Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:4-6 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Renew them again to repentance; that is the impossible at this point of falling away. Here are all the different listings from Vine's Expository of Bible Definitions for repentance. To perceive, to care for, without change of purpose (the negative tense) and lastly a change of mind, in which not one word or implication is listed in connection with salvation.

Repentance is required for forgiveness of sins on a daily basis but this issue is about relationship not eternal salvation. God wants us to feel good about ourselves so He made a way that we could ease our conscience over sins we still commit. I see this issue in the sixth chapter of Hebrews as being one of falling away in relationship, not loving God as we are commanded. The failing is on our part and does not change God's plan.

2 Timothy 2:13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

When I make my wife mad, she stops talking to me. God is bigger than that but the issue of spiritual death is exactly like that. If the "wages of sin" is spiritual death for a born again believer, then he has bought into the lie, he is a hireling of the enemy. Since God cannot "renew them again to repentance" then communication stops. This is also evidence in 1 Corinthians 5:5 "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

I would encourage all the warnings to be heeded but not for fear of loss of salvation but for fear of loss in relationship. The whole purpose for our existence is to love and be loved by God. My experience with God is much like a good marriage. You get to know the object of your affection more and more over time which causes you to love them more intimately. When clarity is needed you talk, discover each others minds and hearts which only draws you into a deeper and more personal relationship. When communication stops, relationship suffers.

The closer you become to God the more your mind becomes Christ like. The danger in that is in believing that because of that you know the mind of God. When two people begin to think alike communication slows down. It might not stop but you get in the bad habit of answering questions without ever actually asking them. It is a subtle form of pride and we know how God feels about pride. Be on guard not to neglect prayers and reading of the word. You may not feel like doing it with the same fervor that you once

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had and God is not an evil task master. He wants you to want to communicate and communication is the only thing that will stave off apostasy.