

How Can I Know God?

By Terry Tiberio

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Author’s Note: The following was a result of e-mails sent out to members of our ISF Bible Studies over the period of August thru November, 2005. They were written to help our International friends understand the wonderful truth that they can know God in a personal way. The thought of putting everything into one document was not our original intent. Therefore, we have attempted to reformat 16 or so e-mails into chapters and hopefully make the reading clearer. This is not meant to be a research or technical discussion, but rather a simple explanation of the wonderful subject of how to know God in a personal way. All English Bible references are from the New King James Version. We realize our limits in trying to put this together. However, we can never apologize for the truth God has taught us over the years. If any are helped in coming into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we humbly give God all the credit. If any Christians are encouraged to progress into a deeper experience with the Holy Spirit without fear, we would rejoice. If any who were once a Christian are led back into a wonderful fellowship with Jesus, we would praise God, who alone is worthy. Any errors are purely are own. Any good belongs only to God. Our one desire, “That you might know God!”

How Can I Know God?

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Introduction

Did you ever stop to think about God's purpose for your life? Many of our friends seem to wonder how they can know God and know His purpose for their lives. The following is a quote that I read recently. I hope you will read it slowly and read it over several times until it sinks deep into your heart.

"The sovereign purpose of God is to save the soul and impart the nature of Himself within the soul of every individual through the blood of Jesus Christ. God has designed you and me to be empty without Him. Before we can find real joy, fulfillment and the resiliency to meet the challenges of life, we must come to the cross. Faith in the finished work of Christ and a sincere submission to the instruction of the Word of God is necessary to lift us above life's bewilderments, uncertainties, brokenness and unanswered questions." - *Don Englund*

In this paper, I would like to deal with the subject of "Knowing God" or "How can I know God." I hope you will find time to read through this even if you read only a small portion at a time. Knowing God is the most important thing you and I can ever experience. The question of how to know God is the greatest question we can ever deal with. In the following pages, we look forward to sharing this wonderful truth with you.

John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Chapter 1 – The Why, What And How Of Knowing God

1. The Why - The Great Benefit in Knowing God.

Perhaps the first thing to do is get a definition of the phrase "knowing God." At first glance some might interpret this as "knowing about God." For years I knew about God and believed in His existence. However, I did not really know God. If you studied the word "know," you would find that one of the original meanings had to do with a relationship between a husband and his wife. So when we talk of knowing God, we are speaking of a very close and intimate relationship with God. Yes this includes understanding some facts about Him, but it goes much deeper. It means to have a friendship and fellowship with God. In fact, if you do ever get to know God, you will find His personality to be sweeter and more enjoyable than even your closest human loved one.

I really want to impress that on your heart if I could. God's friendship is the most satisfying, blessed, rewarding relationship you could ever know. If you could see this in its clear spiritual implication, you would conclude that having God as your friend would be worth any effort and any price. Please, however, don't feel that the price and effort are extreme, since they are anything but that. In fact, the joy, love and peace that comes into our lives from knowing God, makes the effort look small and the price as if it was nothing.

To further impress this on you, I want to quote a song that was written a number of years ago. This song has touched my life very much. It was the result of a decision made by a young man who was confronted with an opportunity to have something great in this world versus having Jesus as his best friend. I hope it will touch your heart and give you a deep impression about the great benefit there is in knowing God.

I'D RATHER HAVE JESUS

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold
I'd rather be His than have riches untold
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land
I'd rather be led by his nail scared hand.

Chorus

Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.

I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause
I'd rather have Jesus than world wide fame
I'd rather be true to his Holy name.

Chorus

Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.

He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom

He's sweeter than honey from out the comb
He's all that my hungering spirit needs
I'd rather have Jesus and let him lead.

Chorus

Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.

Words by Rhea F Miller

Music by George Beverly Shea

At the age of 23 George Beverly Shea (1909 -) had a hard decision to make. He could accept a job offer in a secular singing position in New York City with a great salary and wide respect; or he could continue singing in churches and for Christian radio programs. While sitting at the family piano, he started to prepare a special hymn for the Sunday service. On the piano he found a poem by Mr. Rhea F. Miller. He immediately began to compose the music for the poem and used the song that same morning in his father's church service. He also used those words to direct his life and has shared his song, "*I'd Rather Have Jesus*" with audiences around the world.

Proverbs 18:24 "A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

James 2:23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

We can have an intimate relationship with God. We can have friendship with God. However, we must make the choice whether we want to know God and have a deep satisfying relationship with Him. To make that choice we must appreciate the wonderful benefits of such a relationship. God has already made His choice and He desires to have friendship with us. We must make our choice.

2. The What - That Part of Man That Can Know God.

Perhaps the first thing we need to discuss is how a relationship with God takes place. What is it in our nature that makes it possible to have a knowledge of and relationship with God?

To understand how we can have a relationship with God, we need to look back to how God created us. Some of you may have a problem with the concept of creation. Please, for the moment, put those problems aside and just follow the logical thought pattern here.

In **Genesis 1:26-27** we read, **Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.**

Notice how the plurality of expressions seem to change in these verses. God said (singular), Let Us make (plural). Here we have one of the earliest indications of the Trinity. This means there is

one God, but more than one person. Actually, there are three persons in one God - the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. These act in such a unity of purpose, love and desire that there is absolutely no independence between them. They act and speak and decide as One.

God indicated that it was His intention to create man in His own image and likeness. Understand that man has never been like God in His eternal, absolute, and infinite nature. Therefore, the likeness must mean something else. What is God like? God is Holy, Pure and God is Love. So when God created the first man and woman, He created them holy, pure and filled their hearts with His love. However, the image of God is also the pattern of three in one (Trinity). So it would be expected that man would also have this pattern. Sure enough man has a physical nature (the human body). Also, man has a soul (the heart, personality, emotions, and human will). But thirdly, man has a spirit (that part of his nature that has the ability to communicate with God). The intent was that each human being would have this three-fold nature. We find a hint of this in **I Thessalonians 5:23** “**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

Many feel that it is impossible to have an intimate relationship with God. They feel that it is not feasible to talk to God or hear God talk to us. That is correct if we only think in terms of man's physical nature. Each part of man's being is suited for a certain function. The problem is not that it is impossible to know God, but it is impossible to know God simply through our physical nature. We see this even in the various organs of our human body. We can not see with our ears. Yet, that does not mean it's impossible to see, just impossible to see with the organ of the ear. Utilizing the correct organ (the eye), man can see. We could go through a list of such things like the impossibility of hearing with our nose or smelling with our eyes. Likewise, the issue is not whether we can know God or not, but through which of the three parts of man can we know Him.

Through the five senses of the human body we can know the world around us. Through the soul we can have a relationship with another human being. However, we can only know God and have a relationship with Him only through the spirit.

John 15:11-15 **These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.**

3. The How – Understanding What Hinders Our Relationship With God

Now we want to look at what hinders man from knowing God and having a personal relationship with Him. It's interesting how the book of Genesis gives us answers to many of these questions. Genesis is the "Book of Beginnings" and really every major truth of the Bible has its origin in the book of Genesis. Looking back at the first human beings God created, Adam and Eve, we know they had a wonderful relationship with God. God spoke to them giving them instructions and commands. Evidently they could also speak to God. Adam and Eve lived in a beautiful garden called Eden. There was a special time that God came to them in the cool of the day to have

fellowship. Here we have a picture of a perfect and wonderful love relationship between God and Adam and Eve.

Something awful happened, however, for in **Genesis 3:8-9** we read: **And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where *are* you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."**

What happened such that instead of love and trust, Adam and Eve now felt afraid of God and also ashamed of themselves? The answer is both complex and yet simple. They simply disobeyed God. They sinned. How much sorrow, how many tears, how many broken relationships can be attributed to that one little word, "sin?" How did Adam and Eve disobey God? God had given them just one command. Isn't that interesting? God usually keeps His revealed will rather simple.

We find God's instruction given in **Genesis 2:16-17**, **And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."**

To make a long story short, they ate the fruit against God's command. It was not a mistake nor an accident. To do what they did, they had to actually first make another choice. They first made a choice to distrust God's Word and to trust the word of Satan. That has been a type of battle line all down through the ages. Every man and woman must choose whether they will believe God and trust His Word or trust the word of Satan, the devil.

Look at the Word of God beside the lie of the devil. God said, ***"In the day you eat of it you shall surely die."*** Many have debated what exactly was the death referred to here. If we expected Adam and Eve to just fall down dead after they disobeyed God, it didn't really happen that way. Actually, the real meaning of the phrase ***"you shall surely die"*** in Genesis 2:17 could be translated ***"in dying you shall die."*** The disobedience of Adam and Eve actually produced three types of death. (1) There was an immediate spiritual death. That wonderful relationship they had with God ended and instead of love, they felt fear and shame. Instead of desiring God's presence, they wanted to run and hide from God. This is because a spiritual death occurred. Remember it is through our spirits, that we can have a relationship with God. However, that part of man died the moment he sinned. (2) The process of physical death began in the human race. Therefore, every human being will die and their physical body will go back to dust. (3) Most serious of all, however, was eternal death or what the Bible calls the "second death." This death does not mean we cease to exist, but we go into an eternal existence of being separated from God. That's what hell is. Hell is to be eternally separated from God.

Hell was not created by God just to be a place where He could torment man. Hell was created by God when He simply designated a place in the universe where He withdrew His Manifest Presence. That would have to be a place of such darkness and misery that it is beyond our ability to understand. Everything good and lovely, everything peaceful and full of hope, and everything of lasting joy and comfort comes from God. When we are separated from God in eternity, we go into an existence completely opposite everything that God is. Instead of goodness there is progressive evil. Instead of loveliness there is extreme gloom and ugliness. Instead of peace and hope, there is despair and no peace. Without God, it's just a horrible nightmare.

Look at the lie of Satan in **Genesis 3:4-5**, **Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**

Notice that Satan is actually calling God a liar. Also Satan suggests a reason why God would lie. God knows that eating the fruit will give you something more than you have. You will have knowledge and you will be your own God. He was telling Eve that she would be free and able to make her own choices in life. She would not have to depend on God for every little thing. Unfortunately, Eve and then Adam believed the devil. They concluded God was not so good and it would be better to be independent of Him and His commands. That was the tragedy. That's when sin began in the human race and caused man to break fellowship with God.

That is also the answer to the question, "What hinders our relationship with God?" The answer is simply "sin." It is a distrust of God and His Word that results in disobedience to His will. This always produces broken fellowship with God and then death. But there's good news! God still loves us and has an amazing plan such that we can come back into fellowship with Him.

Chapter 2 – God’s Great Plan (Understanding the Problem)

Specifically, I want to consider God's Plan to renew fellowship with man. In this whole discussion, it's important to remember that God really wants us to know Him. Sin is the main source of broken fellowship with God. Therefore, it would be logical that God's plan to renew fellowship with man would need to deal with the main source of the problem.

Perhaps you might ask why this is such a big problem. If two people have a broken relationship, why can't they just choose to come and renew or "patch-up" the friendship they once had? We have all had experiences when something happened to a friendship with someone and that friendship seemed to turn cold. Sometimes, it only takes a small thing to renew friendships between two human beings. I remember one time there was some misunderstanding I had with someone I worked with. As a Christian, I felt very bad about this and prayed that God would help me renew that friendship. Then one day it happened in a very simple way. I heard that this man's wife had experienced some illness. When I saw him, I asked about his wife and told him I would pray for his family. It was such a simple act, but it was enough to renew the friendship. So we come to the question as to why it can't be that simple with God?

Actually, God wants to keep it very simple, but sin makes it very complex. Sin produces some very complex aspects in our lives. There is a legal aspect and a personal aspect.

1. The Legal Aspect of Sin

- a. **God is Holy** - Sin involves a violation or breaking of God's law. It's really a rebellion against God's law or what we call lawlessness. Lawlessness is a rejection of God's law and a rejection of God's authority to make laws. (**1 John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.**) Laws involve serious legal consequences. I'm sure we all realize that even in our ordinary lives. We live in a world of man-made laws that have consequences to them. I don't seriously recommend this, but to eliminate your doubts about consequences try driving at 85 mph on a road posted for 45 mph and your doubts will be removed. With God's law the situation is far more critical. God is Holy (**1 Peter 1:16 Because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”**) . The very foundation of the moral universe depends on God's faithfulness to justice and truth and to His own holiness. So He must be absolutely impartial when it comes to punishing sin. If He were to tolerate even the smallest sin, He would cease to be holy and the moral universe would become chaos. Thankfully, that will never happen. However, it does put we human beings in a serious bind. For you see we have all sinned. Therefore, there is a sense that we are all under the just sentence of a Holy God for punishment. (**Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**)
- b. **God is Love** - The Bible reveals that God is love (**1 John 4:16**). God's love is His holiness in action. He loves us with a perfect love that can never be measured or exhausted. He loves us because He created us and because His very nature is Holy Love. Some have the idea that God's love is premised on the worthiness or goodness of the one He loves. That is not the case, however, because God loved us even before we loved Him or even believed in Him. I know it might seem very unusual to many of you, but God loves you even if you don't believe He exists. In **1 John 4:9-10** we read, **“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God,**

but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Even as you read these words, His love is reaching out to you. His love is always active.

- c. **The Resolution** – There does seem to be a conflict in this. How can a Holy God, who must punish sin if He is to remain Holy, forgive those He loves? He loves those who have sinned (you and I), yet, His holiness demands we be eternally punished. Here is where God's amazing plan comes in. To deal with this legal aspect of sin God's plan provided that sin would indeed be punished, but the punishment would be taken by another for us. A substitute would be provided. This substitute had to meet three criteria to be effective:
- The substitute had to be one of us to be able to take our place.
 - The substitute had to be sinless to be able to take the punishment for another's sin.
 - The substitute had to have the power to overcome death so that there would be victory over sin (the cause of death). Then the victory of the substitute would become our victory.
- d. **The Legal Substitute** - There was one and only one in the entire universe who could meet this threefold criterion and that was Jesus Christ.
- He willingly became one of us when He was born in a humble stable in Bethlehem (**John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**) Therefore, he could legally take our place.
 - He was absolutely sinless and therefore could legally take the punishment of others upon Himself. (**2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**)
 - Finally, since He was the Son of God He had power over death - death could not hold Him. (**Acts 2:23-24 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. Acts 2:32-33 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. 1 Corinthians 15:56-57 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**) Therefore, His victory becomes our victory. Not only did God find a way to transfer our sins onto Him, but He found a way to transfer His victory onto us.

Now God's plan to remedy the "legal aspects" of sin means that we can be forgiven of all our sins. All the threat of punishment can be removed and we can be set free. In **Romans 8:1** we read, **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.** We no longer need to run in fear from God and hide like Adam and Eve did in the garden. Because Jesus made full satisfaction for the Holy Justice of God, we can run to God who waits for us with open arms.

The great and most beautiful invitation comes from the lips of Jesus Himself in **Matthew 11:28-30**, "**Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**"

2. The Personal Aspect of Sin

- a. **Sin's Personal Tragedy** - Sin not only involves a violation of God's law, it has done something to each one of us personally. That's one of the major reasons God hates sin so much. He hates sin because sin is contrary to His Holy Nature. Even more, God hates sin because of what it has done to each and every person that He loves. God loves you dearly, therefore He hates sin. To you who are doctors I've mentioned this illustration many times in our Bible studies. If you found out you had cancer, would you not be glad for a doctor who hated cancer and wanted to see it destroyed. Would you want a doctor who said, "*Look you have cancer, but it's not your fault and really it's not a big deal. As a doctor, cancer doesn't bother me so much and it shouldn't bother you. After all many people in the world have cancer. You should feel good that your cancer is not as bad as what some others have.*" If a doctor told me that, I would be out of his office just as fast as my two legs would carry me. Good doctors hate cancer and want to do everything they can to destroy it, not compromise with it. Why? Because they love and care about their patients. So it is with God. Sin is the worst type of spiritually destroying power in the universe. Sin always destroys. Sin will destroy you and God loves you. So each of us ought to be extremely grateful that God hates sin and will not tolerate it in our lives.

- b. **Sin's Horrible Deception** - The most dangerous things in life are those that don't appear so dangerous. Satan (the devil) does his best to disguise the truth about sin. Sin usually puts on a show of being pleasurable, desirable, and attractive. Also, sin is projected as being controllable. The most deadly tactic Satan uses to get people to commit a sin that obviously would be personally destructive is to convince them that they are really only trying this once. He says that we can't really be harmed if we just try it once. Then we won't have to be curious about it any more. We can be satisfied we know what it feels like and so go on with our lives without any hurt. One of the clearest pictures of the horrible destructive power of sin is found in Proverbs 7. It gives a somewhat graphic picture of a young man who is being tempted to commit sin with another man's wife. The woman tempts the young man with promises of pleasure without consequences. You can read the entire chapter, but let me quote just a part of it. **Proverbs 7:16-23** "**I have spread my bed with tapestry, Colored coverings of Egyptian linen. I have perfumed my bed With myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home; He has gone on a long journey; He has taken a bag of money with him, And will come home on the appointed day.**" **With her enticing speech she caused him to yield. With her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost his life.**

Do you see the deception in all this? A seemingly desirable picture until the consequences take place. The young man never suspected his very life would be jeopardized by death from one act of pleasure. Of course today the devil has a new device to counter this. They call it "safe sex." But even if there was such a thing, what "safe sex"

doesn't address is the horrible mutilation of the human soul that takes place from such sinful pleasure. Man might seem to escape the immediate physical consequences of sin, but if we could see what sin does to the soul we would be horrified. This is stated clearly in **Proverbs 14:12**, **“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”**

Let me give you another illustration of this. Back in the 1960's as a boy I remember a cigarette advertisement which had this big strong cowboy named the "Marlboro Man" in it. He had this look of utter fearlessness and strength that made any young boy feel like this is what he would want to grow up to be. The point of the advertisement, however, was that the man had a Marlboro cigarette in his mouth and the implication is that real men smoke Marlboro cigarettes. Not too long ago, however, I remember reading how that big strong Marlboro man died of debilitating lung cancer. I know a number of men who have come to Pittsburgh from different countries smoke and it's not my intent to humiliate anyone. However, the idea that smoking cigarettes can make you more of a man, is utterly false. If we could look at a picture of the Marlboro man's lungs, we would have seen a horrifying glimpse of disease and deterioration that would shock us all out of thinking that cigarettes make us more of a man. That gives a pretty graphic picture of the way sin is. The devil tempts people to do a lot of things with the promise that sin will make them more attractive, more desirable and able to enjoy more in life. But it's a lie and the horrible deception of sin.

c. **Sin Destroys Us** - Let's summarize what sin does to us personally:

- Sin produces a sense of guilt and shame. Some deal with this by simply ignoring their conscience until they no longer feel the shame. Also some deal with guilt by blaming their sins on others. It was not my fault, the devil made me do it. People are blaming the sinful things they do on everything from the DNA they got from their parents to the neighborhood they were raised in. Some even blame it on God saying this is just the way God made me. But all these efforts will never produce a real remedy for the guilt and shame of sin.
- Sin breaks fellowship with God. God is the kindest, most loving, most caring Being in the entire universe. He loves you. However, sin always separates us from fellowship with God, because sin makes us afraid of God. Sin causes us to run from God instead of running to Him. After Adam and Eve sinned we read some of the saddest verses in the Bible, **Genesis 3:8-10 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."**
- Sin is never satisfied - As I said, the devil wants to tempt us to just try it once. But it never happens that way. Sin is a power that never wants to let go of us. I've never tried to use drugs, but sin is like cocaine. I've read that cocaine gives its greatest rush and exhilaration on the first attempt. Then the captive must come back for more, but finds a little more is needed than before. Without noticing it, the user is trapped in a vicious net of a drug habit that he can not live without and yet can not afford to continue.

- Sin scars our souls and personalities. Sin takes everything that is beautiful and destroys that beauty. It takes away all the kindness and love and even the more human elements of a person's character. This progresses until the sinner cares for no one but himself and seems willing to hurt anyone to get what he wants. Life progresses in the mode of reverse evolution until the man becomes actually more like the animal. This is not a pretty picture, but it is an accurate picture of what sin produces.

- d. **Jesus the Victor Over Sin** - If you look at each of the ways sin destroys us above, Jesus provides a remedy. This is because Jesus is indeed God's one and only remedy for sin. Through His blood we can be cleansed and washed clean of the guilt and shame of sin. Through His Holy Spirit we can have fellowship with God. By His sweet Presence in our hearts and lives we can experience a lasting satisfaction that sin could never give. Finally, as the Great Physician He can heal us and renew us so that we can become new inside. **1 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.***

God wants to have fellowship with you. Therefore, He provided a wonderful remedy for the personal aspect of sin in our lives through Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3 – God’s Great Plan (Jesus is Our Victory)

So far we have looked at the complexity of sin and how it has had both a legal and personal influence on each of us. The greatest tragedy is that sin separates us from God. However, we concluded the last chapter with the thought that Jesus is the Victor over sin. We must understand and experience this victory if we are to have fellowship with God.

Perhaps the most comprehensive expression of what Jesus did on the Cross for us is given in **Titus 2:11-14**, “**For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”**

Notice two reasons Jesus gave Himself to die on the cross. First, to redeem us and second, to purify us. The word "redeem" is a legal term meaning to buy back something or to pay the price to rescue someone from captivity. You may have heard of someone being kidnapped. Many times the kidnappers would then demand that a ransom be paid before the person would be returned. The act of paying such a ransom is related to redeeming someone. On the cross of Calvary Jesus addressed the legal aspect of sin by making satisfaction for our sins and so bought us back by paying the ransom with His own blood. However, He died to do more than that. He also seeks to purify us. Because He dealt with the legal aspect of sin you and I can be forgiven. However, He also dealt with the personal aspect of sin so that we could also be purified or what the Bible calls sanctified. Sanctification is God's work of purifying us. It is possible only through the cleansing power of the Blood of Jesus Christ. His blood has the power to cleanse us and purify us from all sin.

Let me give you some Scriptures dealing with God's work of purifying or sanctifying us.

Acts 15:8-9 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*.

Hebrews 9:13-14 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 13:12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

It seems pretty clear that the victory Jesus won for us on the cross provides a way for us to experience both forgiveness and sanctification.

Chapter 4 – Communication With God

Sin is the main reason people do not have fellowship with God. We have talked about the "legal" and "personal" aspects of sin. We saw how Jesus became our substitute and so satisfied God's righteous judgment against all sin. The innocent (Jesus) died for the guilty (all sinners like you and me) so that we could be forgiven of our sins.

Yet, the fact that Jesus died on the cross doesn't automatically make us forgiven. God has given us a free will and we must choose to humble our hearts, confess and turn from our sins with deep sorrow that we have hurt the God who loves us. That is only logical. It would contradict all logic if God would forgive people who were not truly sorry. It is true that God does at times forgive when someone is not aware of doing wrong or when someone is not capable of knowing right from wrong such as a child. But known sin can never be forgiven unless we are sorry and are willing to confess and forsake the wrong. The Bible uses the term "repent" to describe the change in heart attitude toward sin. Repent means "to turn from." If we are truly sorry for our sins, the natural result will be that we repent or turn from those sins.

For forgiveness to take place in our lives, we must be able to communicate with God. We need to be able to speak to God and hopefully we would be able to hear from God.

1. Prayer - We can speak to God!

Prayer is simply talking to God. God is a person and therefore we can communicate with Him. In fact, we can talk to God easier than we can talk to some people. This is because God is not limited by merely interpreting our words. He can read our hearts. So in talking to God, don't get hung up on a lot of words. He knows you and knows what's on your heart even before you speak. Yet He does love to hear us speak to Him.

The only way we can experience God's forgiveness and cleansing for our sins is by prayer. We must communicate with Him. We must be honest and open in talking to Him, however, because nothing is hidden from him. Every one who has ever become a Christian has done so through praying and talking to God. Yes, there must be a turning of our attitude toward sin and a willingness to confess and turn from sin. However, that all means nothing until we actually tell God about it. Obviously this is a very personal matter, but God is nearer than you realize. He's waiting to hear from you and when He does, wonderful forgiveness and salvation is the result. We see this in **Romans 10:9-13**, **That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."**

Then the question comes as to how I can experience victory over sin in my life. It is one thing to have an experience of salvation such that I receive God's peace because my sins are forgiven, but how do I practically live my life? The first thought that comes to mind is that we are all human and we all seem prone to sin and error. Go back to the original topic of this paper, "How Can I Know God or How Can I Have Fellowship with God?" Once we properly allow God to deal with the sin in our lives, we automatically have a new freedom. It is a freedom to now know God in a personal way.

Never forget that God wants to communicate with us and He wants us to communicate with Him. Sin prevented that open channel of communication. We needed to communicate with God to become a Christian. After we become a Christian, we now can talk to God in a new and very satisfying way. Again this is what prayer is all about. Prayer is simply talking to God. Don't make it more complicated than that. Keep your words honest and simple.

Some might question how can we talk to someone we can't see. But if you think about it, you do it every day with that cell phone in your hand. Think of it now as having a spiritual communication line to God. Specifically I am referring to the Holy Spirit. He is God's communication line. He takes our thoughts and desires and makes them known to God. In fact, communication with God is a lot more efficient than communicating with our fellow human beings. Why? God not only hears our words, He knows our heart and the real meaning behind what we are saying. No other human being can do that. This is the power of the Holy Spirit whom we receive when we are saved. Let me share some Scriptures on this:

Romans 8:9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Ephesians 2:13-18 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

2. The Bible - God speaks to us!

Not only can we talk to God, but He wants to talk and communicate with us. How does this happen? It's through the Holy Spirit and the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible and the Holy Spirit is essential to being able to understand the Bible. God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. The Bible is also referred to as the Scriptures. It is more than words on paper. It is more than merely intellectual ideas. The Holy Spirit opens the deep meaning of the Bible to us and applies it to us until we can actually sense it has a personal message for us. It is actually God's personal message to our hearts.

2 Timothy 3:14-16 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

3. Living a Life in Fellowship with God!

How can I have personal victory over sin in my life? It begins with a life in communication with and fellowship with God. That is the very heart of the Christian life. Without this, there is no spiritual life and no victory.

You and I can not win victory over sin. Jesus already defeated sin and so we can experience His victory only as we live in fellowship with Him. This happens through the Holy Spirit and by relying on the Holy Spirit as our communication line to and from God. Again, this is really the heart and secret of the Christian life. Christians aren't people who have learned to be super human. They are simply humble people who have learned to love to communicate with God. The simplicity of this should not amaze us. Two human beings love each other. How? They have learned to love to communicate. I want to focus on this idea of communication with God. Some mistake this as being just part of the Christian life or just an extra duty Christians are to perform. That is totally wrong. Two people in love do not view communication with each other as a duty to perform. It is the very heart of their relationship. So it is with God and us.

Chapter 5 – The Holy Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit - The Secret of the Christian's life.

In the last chapter we stated that the Holy Spirit is our communication line to and from God. He is really the heart and secret of the Christian's life. Everything in our practical relationship with God depends on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a real person, but His nature is spiritual not physical.

As mentioned before, the Trinity consists of three Divine Persons: The Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. Three Persons, yet, they have one desire, one will, one passion and love so that there are not three Gods but One. They act in perfect unity as One. The picture we have in the Bible of the Trinity is the most sublime and beautiful picture of perfect humility, perfect unselfishness, perfect Divine love, and therefore perfect unity. In fact, there is such a oneness that some find it difficult to separate the Three and some in error deny the Three. But all Three act together with one plan and one desire for our salvation.

The Father planned our salvation. The Son (Jesus) carried out that plan by dying on the cross, shedding His blood and rising from the dead. The Holy Spirit is the one that makes all this real to us and practical. He works God's salvation inside of us. He is like the Divine Administrator of salvation. When we become a Christian we receive the Holy Spirit as our companion and guide. Really, He is the best Friend we can have. His personality is very humble, gentle and sweet. He is pure and holy. He is the Spirit of truth. He does not seek to draw attention to Himself, but seeks rather to magnify the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit wants to focus us on the Father and the Son. You can always tell if a person has the Holy Spirit working in their lives because the focus of that person's life will be the Father and the Son. I fear many have tried to figure out how to be a Christian, but without considering the Holy Spirit.

2. Flying Without Wings.

To try to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit is like a human being trying to fly by flapping his arms and hands. As you can imagine, that will result in many falls and frustration. Some have erroneously concluded that this is all we can expect as Christians. They teach that we are all merely human beings and are weak and doomed to keep falling, keep sinning and keep failing.

Picture in your mind a group of people standing on a ledge and as you watch you see they start moving their arms up and down as hard as they can. Then they take a jump. You know what's about to happen. Down they go. Yet, the amazing thing is they go right back up to the top of the ledge and start to do the same thing again. You can hardly believe your eyes for they again start flapping their arms and hands and take another jump. You go up to them and ask, "*What are you doing?*" They answer, "*Can't you see that we are Christians and this is how we live the Christian life?*" You ask if they don't get tired of always falling. They say they do, but God always forgives them and really there is nothing better to expect. Sounds ridiculous, but that's just how ridiculous it is to try to live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit.

3. The Holy Spirit Brings the Life of Jesus Inside of Us.

There is a wonderful verse in the Bible that I want to share with you. **Colossians 1:27** "**To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."**

The word "mystery" can also be translated as "secret." The secret of the Christian is that he or she has Jesus Christ living within their hearts. How is that possible? When we say that Jesus can come in and live in our hearts, do we mean that in the sense of His physical presence? **Romans 8:9-11** seems to explain this: **But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**

You notice it talks about these Christians not being in the flesh. "Flesh" is another word for "human nature" or the "strength and power of our human nature." So this is not saying that these Christians had died physically, but that there has been a death to living according to the mere power of their human nature. They are now living by the power of the life of Jesus Christ, who is in them. Then it makes clear how it is that Christ can be in us. The Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) dwells or lives within us.

So you see the Holy Spirit in us is literally Jesus living within. The Christian was never meant to live his life by his human strength and ability. Again that's like trying to fly by flapping our arms. We are to live by the power and strength of the life of Jesus - the Holy Spirit within us.

Chapter 6 – The Secret Of Spiritual Flight

In this chapter I would like to show you how you can really fly without flapping your arms. I am trying to be humorous, but there is a serious truth I want you to see. There is a secret to being able to live above or to fly above the power of sin in our lives. Now let me warn you, the vast majority of even professing Christians today have been taught that you can never have victory over sin. They teach that as long as we are in these imperfect human bodies, we can never be perfect enough to live above sin. If the focus is only on our human strength and ability or our human perfection, then that is right. We can never be perfect in the human definition. However, the error here is in focusing on human strength and not on something else. When we focus only on human strength, it is like focusing only on our hands and arms as giving us the ability to fly.

1. Three Laws.

Let me take you to a passage of Scripture that shows us the secret of victory. It also shows us the source of victory. I want you to see that there are a number of different laws mentioned here. It is important that we differentiate between them.

In **Romans 8:1-6** we read: ***There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.***

There are actually three different types of laws in these verses. I tried to underline them to help you see.

- The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus
- The law of sin and death
- The law ... that is weak through the flesh.

Let me take these in reverse order.

- a. **The law that is weak** is referring to the commands given in the Bible and usually to the law of Moses (see Exodus 20:1-17). This law was written down on tablets of stone. They are something we are commanded to follow. They show us what is right and what is wrong. To disobey these commands of God given in the law is to commit sin. Sin is to break God's law by the way we live. Although the law is good and perfect in telling us what we should do and what we should not do, it is weak or lacks the power to help us do it. Why? Because the law in and of itself expects us to do what it says by our human strength and ability. Remember the word "flesh" means human nature or human strength. Therefore, the law is weak because it can only operate through our human nature and strength. To be able to keep the law like this takes us back to our illustration of trying to fly by flapping our hands and arms. It just doesn't work. So in a sense, those who teach that we can never live above sin because of the weakness of our human nature are

correct. But they just haven't stepped back to see the rest of the story. There are other types of laws that operate on different principles than just our human nature.

- b. **The law of sin and death** is a different type of law. It is more like a principle or power that operates within the heart of every human being. Sometimes it is referred to as the "sin nature" and it is a nature that each of us was born with. Actually it is not exactly our human nature, but is an intruder. When God originally created man, he was 100% human but he had no sinful nature and he had no death. Something happened to bring this intruding power into the human race. That was due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve (the first man and women). They were created with a pure and holy nature and no death. But when they disobeyed God, the power of sin and death began operating within them and they passed this intruder down to each succeeding generation. Therefore, each of us were born with a sinful nature that is like an intruder. As the Scripture above says, it is sinful flesh or sin in the flesh (human nature).

Let me show you what this is as simply as I can. This sinful nature (the law of sin and death) is like a controlling power within us that pulls our life down to the level of selfishness and pride. It is a power that always pulls us away from God and from doing good. I find most all human beings like to do good things at least periodically. Typically it is enjoyable to be loving and kind to other people. It is very satisfying to know that we have been honest in what we have said and done. There are times we want to be pure and say no to the impurity and immorality that would tempt us. Yet, we all know that even though we may desire to be loving, kind, honest and pure, there seems to be a natural drawing away from these things. Now we can try hard to fight against this sinful nature and discipline our lives through prayer, meditation and self denial with the hope of conquering or controlling it. However, to be honest no one has ever been successful. This reminds me of gravity. No matter how hard we try we can't seem to escape its pull. Take a ball and throw it as hard as you can and watch as it goes way up in the sky. No matter how high it goes, it always comes down. Also to go back to flying, we can try to overcome it with flapping our hands and arms, but it is just as hopeless. We have a saying in English, *"It's like trying to pull oneself up by his own boot straps."* It's a physical impossibility. Now as I have said, most Christians have been taught that this is the whole picture. We have a sinful nature. This nature always pulls us toward sin. We can never conquer it. Therefore, even if we become a Christian, we should never expect to have real victory over sin. What makes this view so deceiving is that all of those statements have an element of truth. The problem is that this view point leaves out something. Someone has said nothing is more harmful than a half truth or partial truth. The whole truth is that there is a third and most important law.

- c. **The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus** is the greatest and most important law of all. It is the principle or power that belongs to another. The one I'm referring to is the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Life). You can choose to focus on your human weakness and your sinful nature, but in doing so, you'll never fly. If however, you begin to see that there is a greater power available to you, the whole picture changes. There is one who can come into your life and do the most amazing thing. He can make us free from the law of sin and death. That's not my claim, that's what the Bible declares. **Romans 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.**

2. How Planes Fly

Perhaps at this point you are asking how these things could be. Let me give you an illustration that in some ways might give you a partial insight.

Most all of you have experienced a very amazing principle when you flew on a plane to come to this country. First, there is the law of gravity. I don't need to go into the impossibility of flapping your hands and arms again in speaking of gravity. However, did you ever stop to think how planes fly? Most of you know I'm a structural engineer. I design bridges. In general engineering we study physics, hydraulics, fluid mechanics, thermal dynamics and chemistry. Some of you might find it amusing that my worst subject was chemistry. Maybe my brain is too small for all the memorization involved. I do, however, remember the principle of force and the relationship of force to mass and acceleration and also to velocity (speed). The important fact is that a force causes a change in velocity and likewise, a change in velocity generates a force. I won't bore you with the mathematics, but the equation works both ways. A velocity has both a magnitude called the speed and a direction associated with it. Scientists and mathematicians call this a vector quantity. So, to change either the speed or the direction of a flow, you must impose a force. If either the speed or the direction of a flow is changed, a force is generated. That in simple terms is the whole theory upon which the principle called "lift" is based. How do planes fly? It's very simple! By tilting the wing, the velocity above and below the wing is changed creating a differential pressure so that the net force (difference between force above and below) on the wing is up. The plane's overall velocity is generated by its engines, but the most powerful jet engine would only make a plane a fast racing car. The way it gets off the ground is simply by tilting the wings (or fins on the wings) to create differential velocity and thus differential pressure. That law of lift overcomes the law of gravity and suddenly we are up in the sky and we didn't even have to flap our hands or arms. We just needed to get into the plane and sit back in our seat. The only thing we used our hands for was to fasten our seat belts and maybe hold a magazine. Yet, we were able to fly. This happened because we trusted a principle that was greater than the law of gravity. Actually, most who fly on planes don't know the physics or mathematics behind it all. You don't really have to know all the physics to fly, just trust your pilot and get on board.

The parallel between this and what we read of the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus is amazing. It makes us seriously question the insight of those who claim we can never in this life live victoriously over sin. While our human nature does not have the capability to fly over sin and be free from it, God provided a greater power. So through the power of the Holy Spirit we can be freed from the power of sin and death. We can stop flapping our hands and arms, and just get in and trust our Pilot, Jesus. He provided through His blood everything we would need for victory. The Holy Spirit is more than able to make that victory a reality in our lives.

The question in spiritual flight is not how strong your human nature is. The question is what law is operating in your life?

Chapter 7 – The Practical Aspect Of Knowing God.

In the last chapter, I guess I had us all flying. Perhaps you felt like I was taking you up in the clouds and wondered how practical this all is when standing on earth. Many times it seems like someone can teach about the Bible or give a lecture either in a Bible Study or at a church and you wonder how it all translates into practical living. This reminds me of a Physics IV class I took in college, which was termed "Theoretical Physics." After one particular lecture when the professor had showed us derivations of energy quanta and how a photon is a quantum of an electromagnetic field and he had the whole overhead filled with equations and graphs, the thought hit me: *"What does any of this have to do with changing a headlight in an automobile?"* I took that course 33 years ago and to this day I have never had to use one of that professor's derivations. I surely hope that what I am sharing will benefit you more than theoretical physics.

With this in mind, I want to change directions and deal with more practical aspects of what I have been sharing with you so far about knowing God. Don't think, however, that what I have already shared is not practical. I would encourage you to review what we have shared in previous chapters. It is all extremely important and gives the basis of the practical. Otherwise, you will end up just trying to do everything in your own strength or you will listen to people who will tell you it is not practical to live the Christian life with victory in your heart.

In the next several chapters I will attempt, with the help of the Lord, to answer five practical issues relating to how we can know God personally.

1. **What to do to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ**
2. **How to grow and develop in that relationship**
3. **How to practically deal with temptation to sin**
4. **What to do if I'm a Christian and I fall into sin**
5. **How to practically live a holy life**

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, **"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."**

John 12:35 Then Jesus said to them, **"A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going."**

Chapter 8 – What To Do To Enter Into A Personal Relationship With Jesus Christ

Another way of asking this question is simply, "**What must I do to be saved?**" Do you know a man in the Bible asked that exact question over 2000 years ago? He was a man who was in charge of a prison or jail in which some Christians were locked up. These Christians were named Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas had been beaten and treated very cruelly for sharing the Gospel with people in a city named Philippi, in present day Greece. They were then thrown into prison without any kindness or relief from their wounds.

Instead of complaining about their situation, they sang praises to God and thanked God for the privilege to suffer for Him. Then a most amazing thing happened. God sent an earthquake and all the doors of the jail were broken open. When the keeper of the jail saw it, he thought all the prisoners had escaped and so he was going to kill himself. Paul told him not to do it, since all the prisoners were still there.

Listen to what happened next. **Acts 16:29-34 Then he (*the jail keeper*) called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.**

In this story and the response of the jailor, we get an insight into the steps involved for a person to get saved. This is really an answer to the question, "What do I have to do to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?"

1. The Attitude Behind the Question

Before we look at the answer given to the jailor, I want you to notice the question and how it was asked. Previously, the jailor had not been interested in God or salvation, only in the security of his position. When he thought the prisoners had escaped during the earthquake, he thought he lost that position and also all reason for living. So he was ready to kill himself.

Now he comes running and falls down trembling before Paul and Silas. There was a definite change in the man's attitude brought about not by the earthquake, but by the Holy Spirit. Yes, the earthquake awakened him and let him see how helpless he was, but the Holy Spirit awakened him to his need of salvation from sin. It is important to realize that before we can ever come to Jesus for salvation, we must first experience the dealings of the Holy Spirit in our life. We call this conviction for sin or a revelation of what a helpless and guilty sinner we are. Also, it is awareness that what I need more than anything is salvation. I am no longer looking simply for a new job, an improved environment, or a better material future. No, I now realize above everything I need to be saved!

That's where the Holy Spirit needs to bring you or you will never enter into a personal relationship with Jesus. In fact, you'll have little desire for, nor sense of need of, such a relationship.

The problem most people have in not becoming true Christians is because they have never been convicted by the Holy Spirit that they need to be saved. It's amazing what many people are looking for in becoming a Christian. Some are looking for a social life in a church. Some are trying to win a Christian companion to be their husband or wife. Some think they will get God's blessing and with it a better job or better health. All this is an indication of a lack of Holy Spirit conviction that makes a man or women tremble and fall down and ask, "What must I do to be saved?"

Notice also the humility involved in this man's attitude. He had previously persecuted these Christians and had cruelly thrown them into prison. His proud heart had no sympathy or compassion on them. Now see him run and fall down at the feet of the very men he hurt. No doubt he is in a position of deep humility seeking forgiveness from these men for what he had done to them and now asking their advice on how to be saved. He gives them a title of respect, "Sirs, What must I do to be saved?" Before he had called them ugly names, but now they are "Sirs" and he is the beggar.

Even more there is something now that indicates this man is willing to do whatever it took to be saved. He wanted to be saved more than anything else he ever wanted. The question he asked could be interpreted like this, "*Sirs, tell me what I must do to be saved and I will do it. No matter what is required of me, I am willing. I am willing to confess my sins, turn from my sins, humble my heart before those who I have injured. Just tell me anything else and I have already made a choice, that I will do it.*"

2. The Answer - Simple & Powerful

Now I want you to notice especially the answer given. It is interesting not only for what it says, but also what it doesn't say. Paul didn't tell the man to go and join a church to be saved. He didn't tell him to be baptized to be saved. He didn't tell the man he needed to wash their wounds and feed them to be saved. No, he said "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.**" That was so simple and, yet, so powerful.

I really want to emphasize that the answer to the question of what we must do to be saved, to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, is not complex. Also it is not meant to put a high wall to keep people away from becoming a Christian. Perhaps, it will help you to understand what God's position is on this whole matter of your salvation.

In **John 3:16-17** we read, **For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**

Never forget, God is not trying to erect walls between you and Him, but to break them down. He wants you to come to Him. He wants you to know Him personally.

Yet, as simple as the answer is, it is also very powerful. For example, he did not say, "Believe in the existence of the Lord Jesus Christ", but "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." I know some translations simply say "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," but the expression is such a powerful one that many translators use the word "on." This has a point to it. What the man is being told is far more than an intellectual belief. It is an instruction that if he is to be saved, he needs to place something on someone else. Let me give you the Amplified Bible translation on this, "**Believe in and on the Lord Jesus Christ - that is, give yourself up to Him. Take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping, and you will be saved.**" The basis of our personal salvation is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ whereby we put our souls completely into His hands and say, "*Here I am Lord. I am a spiritually poor, lost and helpless sinner. I place myself on you and trust you, who alone, can save me.*" This is a definite step or choice one must make. No one can do it for you, although your choice will no doubt influence the choice of others.

3. Trusting to Be Saved

Some might be confused about what we are trusting. If it is more than trusting in the existence of God, then what am I exactly trusting in? I hesitate to give a list, because no list is perfect. Yet, I feel confident that when you trust and believe God on the following eight things, you will not be disappointed if you desire to be saved:

- a. You must believe that God is and that He will reward anyone who seeks Him.
- b. You must believe that God loves you even before you love Him.
- c. You must believe that God's love expressed itself in giving His only Son, Jesus, to die for you.
- d. You must believe that you are a sinner and be willing to admit and confess your sins.
- e. You must believe that you need to be sorry for your sins.
- f. You must be sorry, because your sins hurt God and continues to hurt Him. So you are sorry enough to not only confess, but turn from your sins (repent).
- g. You must believe that Jesus died as your personal "Substitute." He took the punishment of you sins. You can be forgiven and cleansed from you sins only because God accepted the sacrifice of the life and blood of Jesus on the cross for you. You must trust that the only way God could show He accepted the sacrifice of Jesus, was by raising Him from the dead.
- h. You must believe that if you ask Jesus to forgive and cleanse you of your sins and to come into you heart to live, then Jesus will do exactly what you ask. He promised to do so in the Bible.

At the moment a person trusts Jesus as described above, the Holy Spirit will come in and confirm that the person is saved. Each person is unique and so each will experience this inward assurance a little different. However, it is generally described as an inward peace and assurance. God does not leave us in the dark, but is faithful to let us know that we have become His child. This inward peace and assurance we call "The Witness of the Spirit." This is seen in **Romans 8:16** "**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.**"

4. Baptism

One final note might be in order. Some might ask if and when they should be baptized. I don't have time to give you a full discussion on the subject of Christian baptism, but let me quickly say this. No where in the Bible do I find that it teaches that a baptism ceremony saves us. In fact, the thief on the cross was saved without being baptized. A baptism ceremony does not make anyone a Christian. You can be baptized a hundred times and still not be a Christian. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone. We should not be baptized until after we have been saved and received Jesus into our hearts as our personal Savior. The Holy Spirit is faithful to give every sincere heart, who trusts in Jesus, an assurance of sins forgiven and a new cleansed life within. He gives an inward peace that is real. Only then can baptism have meaning.

The baptism ceremony usually involves a person being immersed in water as a symbol of the death experienced to the old life of sin (going down into the water) and a symbol of resurrection to a new life that has broken with sin (coming up out of the water). While baptism will not make you a Christian, it is an important step in your open identification and witness to what Jesus has already done in your heart and life. If you have truly prayed and asked Jesus to forgive your sins and trusted Him to cleanse you and come into your heart, then at some time you should be baptized. Baptism will indeed strengthen the faith you already have in Jesus. It should be a very special time in your spiritual life and your personal relationship with Jesus.

Chapter 9 – How To Grow And Develop In A Personal Relationship With Jesus Christ

First, I should remind you that only living things grow. Before we can grow in a relationship with Jesus, that relationship must be born or have a beginning. Look at what is said in **John 1:12-13**, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Also we read the following in **John 3:3**, **Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."**

Finally let me share **2 Corinthians 5:17**, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**

Before we experience this spiritual birth, there is that preparation time when the Holy Spirit is dealing with us and guiding us. Some of you may presently be in this preparation period. However, the Holy Spirit will very patiently lead you to the place where you can take that step of faith and trust Jesus as your personal Savior. You will then experience a new birth and true spiritual life begins. And with this the growing begins.

1. From Infant to Adulthood

I've had an interesting time observing how our first grandson has grown and developed. Really there is some parallel between our physical development and how we grow in our relationship with Jesus. In each case we start off as infants. We need a lot of help at the beginning and God in His love provides that help through His Holy Spirit, through His Word (the Bible) and through other Christians. Just like an infant, we need food, proper rest, spiritual baths and just love. We especially need these each and every day. It's not an option and hopefully it will become a delight for you. I remember one evening that we had our little grandson with us and my wife said to him, "It's bath time." And immediately he jumped up and down and shouted, "Bath time! Yeah!" Well our spiritual development doesn't have to be gloomy and it might even get you to jumping up and down and shouting with joy.

Also, I've observed that spiritual growth like physical growth is a byproduct of proper health. Growth is not something we do, it is a process we experience naturally when the conditions are right. If an infant has an infectious disease, there is no loving parent that says, "I'll just let it go on as being normal." A loving parent would never deal with an illness that way. Sometimes it requires the care of a doctor and medicine or even surgery. Whatever it takes, the parent is not content until the baby is healthy. This is how God feels about us. Sin is the spiritual disease that God can not tolerate to leave unattended in our life. He will do everything He can to remove it. We must also cooperate with God and allow Him to remove all sin from our lives. That is His love in action. We call this cooperation, "Walking in the light."

Observing an infant's development provides many other interesting spiritual lessons. The baby's eyes begin to focus so things become visible. When we first become a Christian, we can see spiritual things, but our insight into truth increases with time. Likewise, just like a baby learns to eat solid food, walks and talks; so our Christian life progresses. It's really a dynamic process. We learn to digest the solid food of God's Word, the Bible, into our life. We learn how to talk

and pray and express ourselves to our Heavenly Father. As we grow, our spiritual walk becomes more stable and strong. Nothing is more precious to a parent than to see their child take those first steps on their own. If the child stumbles and falls, does the parent get upset and yell at the child in anger? Never! That parent with sweet love, helps the child to its feet and says, "Come on, you can do it." That's how God wants to help us and encourage us in our Christian walk.

One of the most important things for us to have hidden in our hearts is that our kind, loving heavenly Father is not looking for ways to abandon us. He doesn't just scrutinize us and hit us over the head for every single fault or failure. On the contrary, He is there to help us and encourage us and lift us up if we fall into sin. He is really our greatest and most loving Friend. No one in the entire universe is as interested in your spiritual development and growth and spiritual success as God. Let that encourage you!

2. A Daily Dependence on God

Let me ask you another question. What would happen to that little child's development if for one week he decided he would not eat? An important concept that I had to learn in growing as a Christian is that it is a "daily process." Before I was a Christian, I equated spiritual development to a one day a week trip to church. After I started to follow Jesus, I came to realize that God would help me and provide all that I needed to grow spiritually. However, He does this only on a daily basis.

You see this in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray in **Matthew 6:11, "Give us this day our daily bread."** The term "bread" is not referring to simply physical food, but rather the essentials of life. This includes both physical and spiritual. The thought is that once I become a Christian, my life becomes a daily and joyful seeking after God. In fact, this is the center of our Christian life. I depend on Him daily for all the spiritual things I need to grow in my relationship with Jesus. One of the greatest and most harmful errors a Christian can make is to become careless in this daily development.

Let me share an experience of a young Christian. She was attending a university here in the United States and joined a church that was on the campus. She wanted to be the best Christian she could be, so she got involved in all the activities of the church. It wasn't long, however, that she was feeling tired and frustrated. She had a full load of courses plus was involved in church activities 5 to 6 days a week. One would think that this would be ideal, but it wasn't. For you see with all her busyness, she failed to take time each day for prayer and reading the Bible. She thought her church activities would make up for her lack of prayer and Bible reading. We talked to her and counseled that she needed to eliminate a lot of the extra church activities except Sunday worship and prayer meeting. She needed to make that daily quiet time alone with Jesus the center of her life. Only then could she be effective in helping others and being the blessing God wanted her to be. With tears of brokenness, she prayed and asked Jesus to forgive her. She recommitted herself to this daily dependence on God. Surely this was an important lesson to learn.

3. A Healthy Formula

Some time ago I heard a very simple formula that would promote a healthy Christian life. It recognizes that spiritual health requires both a taking in and a going out process in our life. Look at this simple formula for new Christians.

Every day practice these three things:

(a) **Spend at least 5 minutes each day listening to God talk to you.** This you do by simply reading the Bible with an open heart. Again, the key is not trying to do this for 2 hours once a week. Rather do a little each day and this will have a powerful effect on your Christian life. Honestly five minutes is only for starters. It's important to start out like this and let it become a delight and it will grow. Also, you keep your heart open by realizing that all God desires you to do is because He loves you. Every command He gives is really a promise of what He can do in your life if you allow Him.

(b) **Spend at least 5 minutes each day talking to God.** As stated before, we call this praying. Praying is simply talking to God. Why is talking to God so important? Well, if you had a new friend and really liked that person and wanted to see your friendship grow, what would you do? You would spend quality time talking to them and listening to them. That's how relationships develop, through communication. God is a real person who loves you. However, to really get to know Him you need to cultivate your relationship with Him. That comes by daily and loving communication with God. These ought to be special times when you talk to God alone about everything that interests you. God wants you to share with Him all your cares and all your joys and even sorrows. That's what friends are for. You don't have to worry about the proper wording, just express your heart. In fact, in true prayer God already knows your heart. Sometimes the most precious times I've had in prayer involved only a whisper between my heart and His. While it is good to have a daily time and place to talk to God alone, never forget you can talk to God throughout the day, also. It doesn't matter where you are and it doesn't even require you to move your lips. God knows your heart. Prayer is actually a heart communication between you and God. As you grow spiritually, you will find this to be the sweetest part of your whole Christian life.

(c) **Spend at least 5 minutes each day talking to others about God.** I realize that a little training might help in this. However, I'm afraid that many have gotten training about sharing Jesus with others without getting to the very heart of the matter. Some share truth about the Bible with others as if they were trying to sell insurance. They have this well practiced sales pitch that they think will be effective. They quote all the correct verses of Scripture and have been trained in all the right moves to try to close a sale. They look at people as being prospects - prospects for their church and for some statistical goal they are trying to reach. There's only one problem with all of that. It typically turns people off. It's just that nothing is worse than to see people try to share the love of Jesus with others through a programmed sales pitch. It just doesn't work.

Here's the heart of the matter. When we listen to God speak to us through His Word and when we talk to God and cultivate our relationship with Him; we will love Him better every day. The heart of the matter is that true Christians are in love with the sweetest, most kind and loving person in the entire universe - Jesus Christ. What then will we desire to communicate more than anything with those around us? His love.

Don't try to speak to others about God in any other way than to share His love with them. That means your words are far less important than the love you show and express. How should you talk to others about God? First, by simply loving them! Love them with the unconditional love that you have experienced in your own life. Don't look at people as statistics, but as precious souls that God loves and that Jesus died for. Three words spoken after people have sensed our love and felt our warmth, is a thousand times more powerful than speaking a thousand-word Bible sales pitch with a cold heart. It might be best not to speak any words at first. Just love people and build up a friendship, which is unconditional in its love. In other words, you care for people even if they don't ever step foot into your church or ever become a statistic on your church attendance board.

Chapter 10 – How To Practically Deal With Temptation To Sin

1. A Changed Attitude Toward Sin

In discussing this, I need to make sure you understand that until you become a true Christian by faith in Jesus Christ, you have no real basis for victory over sin in your life. In all honesty, you are captivated by sin and need to be freed by our wonderful Savior, Jesus Christ. Once that happens, you can begin experiencing the wonderful victory we describe below. In addition, I feel strongly that our whole attitude toward sin must change. Some people view sin as just a harmless human mistake or something that is unavoidable. For many others, sin is something they do that might hurt them, or put them at risk of getting punished for in hell someday. As long as either of these represent your attitude toward sin, you'll probably not have real victory over temptation. You see if that is your attitude, you can rationalize all types of excuses for giving into temptation. Some even think that if they do what they know they shouldn't, it will be alright, because they can immediately ask God to forgive them. The whole focus is how to escape the consequences of what they do wrong.

The Biblical attitude toward sin, however, is quite different. Listen to what King David wrote in **Psalm 51:4** when he was seeking God's mercy and forgiveness for sin that had come into his life: **"Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight — That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge."** Now the sin of David did involve other people and of course himself. Yet, David realized his sin was first of all against God. His sin hurt God. That's a very important concept. We feel God's love and goodness toward us. As Christians, we begin a love relationship with Jesus. But when we sin, it is like slapping that precious person in the face. Sin is like slapping and spitting into the face of Jesus. Sin is what nailed Jesus to the cross. It was not the Jews or the Romans, but my sins that nailed Jesus to the cross and broke His heart. With this attitude, we are suddenly confronted with a whole new concept of what sin is. I now come to hate sin, because sin hurts the God I love. When I am tempted the question is not whether I will be punished or not, nor even if I will hurt myself or not. The question is, ***"How can I hurt this blessed Savior, Jesus? How can I spit in His face and hurt Him by giving in to this sin?"***

A young man named Joseph in the Old Testament was tempted to sin by a beautiful woman, the wife of his master. In **Genesis 39:8-9** we read: **"But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"** Notice how victory over temptation came because Joseph had the right attitude toward sin. Sin was against God. Sin hurt God. And Joseph simply stated the obvious, "How could I do this against God?"

2. Is It Possible To Overcome Temptation?

The Bible gives us a secret of victory in **1 John 5:4**, **"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Faith is the victory.**

Now this faith is a confidence that God has provided a way to have victory over temptation. If you are convinced there is no possible way to overcome temptation, then the result is obvious.

You will be defeated! Therefore, you want to avoid everything and anything that will hinder your faith in the promises of God. That's one reason I find it difficult to be around those who claim to be Christians, yet seem to always testify that there is no way we can have victory over sin. When you are in a church or are under the teaching of someone who constantly declares that Christians must always be sinning, it is unlikely your faith will be of the victorious kind referred to above.

Rather than listening to the testimony of so-called Christians who always seem defeated by sin, look to the Word of God. However, we must be careful, because people can quote from the Bible a verse here and there out of context. This can bring us to wrong conclusions. For example many have attempted to quote from **Romans, chapter 7** as a verification that a Christian must always be under the power of sin and can never escape it. They erroneously state that Romans chapter 7 is Paul's personal testimony. However, you only get the true context when you read **Romans chapters 6, 7 and 8** together. Then you realize that Romans chapter 7 is actually not giving a description of a true Christian, but rather of a man trying to have victory over sin through keeping the law in his own human strength. Whenever you see the phrase "according to the flesh," it means "according to human strength and will power."

You see this clarified in **Romans 8:1-3**, *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.* You see Paul is making a contrast with the man in Romans chapter 7 who walks or tries to live and keep the law according to the flesh (according to his own human strength and will power) and those in Romans chapter 8, who have experienced the victory of living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Another example is when people quote **1 John 1:8**, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* That would give you the impression that no Christian could ever have victory over sin. However, when you put that verse in the context of the whole first chapter of John, you see that he is referring to people who claim they don't have any sin and therefore don't need Jesus to be their Savior. These are people who have never been saved and yet claim they have no sin that needs forgiven. Rather than claiming that Christians should sin, 1 John claims that we are either living in the light (true Christians) or living in darkness (sin). It can't be both ways. You can't be a child of sin and a child of God at the same time!

3. The Promise and Blessing of Victory

Let me just give you a few of the many promises in the Bible of victory over sin and temptation. The more you allow these promises to sink deep into your heart, the greater will be your confidence and faith in God to give you victory in temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13, *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

Ephesians 6:10-11 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James 1:12 Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

James 4:6-7, But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*" Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

2 Peter 2:9 Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.

4. Practical Advice

I don't want to leave you with the impression that there are no practical steps you need to take to have victory over temptation. I needed to give you the basis of victory first: A changed attitude toward sin and faith in the promises of God. Without this foundation, there can be no victory. Yet, in the promises I quote above, there are instructions or conditions that we need to fulfill. The following is a list of three practical ways the Bible teaches us to deal with temptation:

- a. I should be careful to not deliberately place myself in a situation I know I could be weak and fall in temptation. Jesus taught us to pray in **Matthew 6:13** **And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.** We can hardly pray for God to not lead us into temptation, when we place ourselves into situations we know we would be weak in. That is what is called, "presumption." And presumption always results in defeat.
- b. We should always recognize that we are weak and can do nothing except by prayer and dependence on God. Jesus said to his disciples in **Matthew 26:41**, **"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."** This involves a real humility where we depend on God. As we read above "God resists the proud, but gives grace (power) to the humble." And then there is a warning given in **1 Corinthians 10:12**, **Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**
- c. We need to use the sword God has given us to battle Satan. That sword is the Word of God, the Bible. We should never joke about Satan for you and I are no match for his ability to deceive. Also, we should never try to use our human logic with Satan. Jesus Himself was tempted by Satan. Understand clearly that temptation is not sin. Only when we yield to temptation is there sin. The Bible tells us in **Hebrews 2:18**, **For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.** And in **Hebrews 4:14-15** we read, **Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.** I would encourage you to read on your own how Jesus was tempted in **Matthew 4:1-11** and notice especially how Jesus dealt with temptation. Please don't assume Jesus used His supernatural powers to deal

with temptation. He resisted temptation exactly as a pattern for how we are to resist it. That is, He used the Word of God against the suggestions of Satan. In every temptation Jesus responded to Satan, "*It is written.*" Then he quoted from the Scriptures in answer to Satan. The result was complete victory. I should also mention, however, that this does not mean you use Scripture as some type of magic. In fact, if you look closely at the Scripture Jesus quoted, they all reflected how He was living. Those verses from the Bible were part of His life and already deep into His heart. So the greatest weapon we have in temptation is to quote Scripture that we have already made part of our life. One reason many are so defeated in temptation is their consistent neglect of reading, memorizing and especially obeying the Bible.

It is important for you to know that Jesus is more powerful than Satan. However, His power is only available to us through faith. So rather than focusing on Satan, look to Jesus and the power of His Name, His Blood, and His Word to provide victory over all sin.

Chapter 11 – What To Do If I'm A Christian And I Fall Into Sin

1. Is Sin a Certainty or a Possibility?

We need to establish a very important Biblical teaching. This has been discussed in previous chapters, but needs to be reinforced again. Does the Bible teach that a Christian must sin or does the Bible teach that Christian might sin? Is sin a certainty in the Christian's life or a possibility?

Those who teach that sin is a certainty often quote Scriptures like:

Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"

James 2:10 "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all."

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

Ecclesiastes 7:20 "For *there is* not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin."

Yet, there are other Scriptures that seem to indicate the opposite:

John 8:10-11, When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

John 8:34-36 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

Romans 6:12-18 "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

1 John 3:4-9 "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God."

1 John 5:15 "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him."

What is the answer? Clearly the overwhelming verdict of the Bible is that Christians should not practice sin. It should not be the normal pattern of their lives. In fact, a Christian who realizes that sin hurts the God he loves, can not bring himself to do it. This is not talking about an absolute impossibility, but a moral improbability. No one would question me if I said I love my grandson and could never hurt him. Physically there is the possibility of the action, but emotionally I find it out of the question.

When the Bible speaks of sin in the Christian's life, it almost always refers to something in the past. The present reality of the Christian life is victory over sin.

2. Is Sin Possible in the Christian's Life?

Let me allow the Bible itself to answer that question in **1 John 2:1-2**, "**My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation (sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.**"

Here the little conjunction "if" indicates a possibility but not a certainty. For it to be a certainty the Scripture would need to have said "And when anyone sins..." I've taken the time to establish this, because the last thing God wants you to experience is spiritual defeat in your Christian life. The abundance of God's available grace (supernatural power), the multitude of promises to victory given in His Word, and the very success of the work of Jesus on the Cross, proves that you and I can have victory over sin. We need not sin, but we might sin. We need to see that sin is not to be the norm for the Christian life. If it happens it is a painful abnormality.

3. I've Failed the Lord - Now What?

Let me share two simple instructions concerning this situation:

- a. Don't ever give up when you fall. Get up and look to Jesus. He'll be there to help you and renew you.
- b. Don't ever make excuses for sin or try to make it less serious than it is. Take full responsibility. Confess and repent, but also learn.

Never lose sight of the fact that God invested an enormous price in giving His only Son to die so you and I could be saved. He didn't do this so He could then find an excuse to turn His back on us if we fall. Yes, sin is serious and it hurts God deeply. If we truly love someone, then nothing will be as painful as hurting that one we love. For a Christian to sin without it breaking his heart and bringing him to weep in deep repentance, indicates something is radically wrong! The love relationship is not in place. However, the last thing we want to do if we should sin is despair.

Jesus has given us many promises to encourage us that He will be there to help us and lift us. Just listen to this promise in **Hebrews 13:5**, **Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

So if you have failed the Lord, don't run away from Him. Run to Him immediately! He will wrap His loving arms around you and weep with you. He will forgive and renew you. You need never turn back and give up.

4. Will We Learn?

1 John 3:6 gives us the lesson we need to learn if we have sinned. **"Whoever abides in Him does not sin."** Notice it did not say whoever is super strong does not sin. Nor whoever has fasted and prayed many hours and has locked himself in a monastery does not sin. No, that's not the answer. The answer is "Abiding in Jesus."

In **John 15:5-6** Jesus makes the issue very clear, **"I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned."**

The lesson we must learn and hold dear to our heart is that we need Jesus every hour and every moment of the day. To try to live the Christian life in our own strength is to invite absolute failure. To abide means we stay close to Him in love and trust Him moment by moment to keep us and protect us. To abide means we speak to Him often in prayer and delight to hear Him speak to us through His Word, the Bible. In fact, the Bible should become a love letter from His heart to our heart.

5. Do We Have The Correct Definition of Sin?

To be fair, some of the disagreement over sin in the Christian's life may have to do with the definition of sin. Many have come to an erroneous definition of sin relative to what we have discussed. Some feel like the slightest deviation from God's absolute holiness and perfection is sin. They feel every thought and every feeling that is anything less than perfect is sin. However, this makes every exhortation in the Bible become useless. For example in **1 John 2:1**, the elderly Apostle writes, **"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin."** But if the definition of sin that John is using is anything short of God's absolute perfection, then he's wasting his time. Why would the Bible even encourage or exhort people to not sin? The answer is, that's not the correct definition.

But sin, that God wants to give us victory over, is a willful disobedience to God's known will or law. That's the definition of sin the Bible is dealing with relative to guilt and responsibility. That's why a little child, before it reaches the age of accountability, is innocent in God's eyes even though it does something wrong in the absolute sense. Yet, the fact that each of us come short of God's absolute perfection, does require the constant cleansing of the blood of Jesus Christ. **1 John 1:7** hits on this, **"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."**

The Christian never reaches the point where he does not need to depend on the cleansing power of the Blood of Jesus Christ moment by moment to be kept clean from all sin. Yes, we must walk in the light of what God has shown us is right and wrong. We can't live presuming on God's mercy with willful disobedience and then claim that cleansing of His Blood. On the other hand, there is a constant and deep humility that recognizes how short we come from God's perfection

and how many things are done ignorantly. It is both important and good that a Christian confesses those faults and shortcomings. Anything in our lives that comes short of God's ideal, we should humbly confess especially in relation to people around us. These need the cleansing Blood as much as any outright act of rebellion.

Finally, to abide in Jesus means to yield our lives to Him. That brings me to another very important truth. You should be encouraged to know that God wants to do a deeper work in each of our hearts. This work deals with the inward affections of our hearts. We can allow God to purify those affections. This is perhaps the most encouraging part of all that we have to share with you.

Chapter 12 – How To Practically Live A Holy Life

1. God's Character and Joy - The Basis of Holiness.

a. What does it mean to be holy?

Perhaps no other word in the Bible has been more misunderstood than the word, "holy." We usually associate this with being pure or something sacred. It seems to be a very high word. Many view this as some type of super attainment reserved only for the select few. Visions come to mind of so-called "holy men" who live alone in a mountain somewhere or monks living in a monastery with little contact with people. Others view it as a word that threatens them and makes them feel like God could never receive them.

I could go into a lot the theological detail in defining what the word holy means. But to make it very simple, the definition of holy is: "To be like Jesus." And to be holy and live a holy life simply means, "To love like Jesus loved." In the Bible we find what looks like an impossible command, but is actually a wonderful promise: **1 Peter 1:13-16 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."**

Many look at that command, "Be holy, for I am holy," as a horrible wall than can never be removed or climbed over. What has never been considered by those having this idea, however, is that this is a promise rather than an impossible demand by God. God is holy. That is His nature. Also He is the most joyful being in the entire universe. His joy derives from His own holy nature. It is this God who wants to share His nature with you and I. He wants to make us like His Son, Jesus. So the reality of holiness in our lives will be the greatest source of joy. To be like Jesus is truly great joy!

b. Why should I want to be holy?

I've given a little hint to the answer by the word, "joy." Although joy and happiness are usually associated, there is a profound difference. Happiness depends on what happens to us or how I feel. If good things happen to me or I feel good, I am happy. If bad things happen or I don't feel so good, happiness seems to evaporate. On the other hand, joy depends not on what happens to me, but what I am on the inside. Joy includes a sense of freedom from guilt or condemnation. Even more joy comes from a sense of satisfaction inside. Joy comes when we know that our lives have a special purpose and that we are fulfilling that purpose. Above everything joy is a direct result of love - love we receive and love that fills our hearts. The highest joy is when we express our love toward others. Why did God give His only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross? **John 3:16** declares it was because, "**God so loved the world.**" The joy of the Lord is the expression of His love that gives. So holiness or the command to be holy, is God declaring His desire to share His joy with us and especially His love.

Let me quote a number of Scriptures from John's Gospel that may to help you see this. In **John 15:9-12** we read, "**As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one**

another as I have loved you." Notice Jesus calls it "My joy." It is a personal joy that comes from within His own holy character and He desires to share that with us. Notice also that the purpose of all that Jesus was instructing here was that His disciples would have His Joy. Yet in discussing joy, I have underlined how He mentions love six times. So we see a direct relation between love and the fullness of joy.

In **John 16:23-24** Jesus says, **"And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."** Can you guess what it is that we might ask for that our joy may be full? There's only one answer, "His love." If I would be full of joy, I need to be full of God's love. And I can be full of God's love by asking. **"Ask, and you will receive."**

c. **How is it possible that I can be holy?**

The answer to this is very important. It is especially important that you see what God's answer is, not what I have to say. Look again at John's Gospel. I want you to hear what Jesus prayed as He talked to His Father in behalf of His disciples. **John 17** is termed by many as *"The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus."* It is indeed a revelation of the things Jesus asks of the Father in behalf of every true Christian. But before we look at it, I want to ask you a question. Is it possible that Jesus could pray for something and the Father would refuse what Jesus asks? Of course the answer is, "No!" Stop and think about that and get that firmly in your heart as you read **John 17** and specifically I'm quoting the request of Jesus in **John 17:13-18**, **"But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."**

The word "sanctify" is very interesting. It has a dual meaning. First, to set apart or reserve something for a special purpose. Second, it literally means to make holy or pure. Jesus is asking the Father to sanctify us or make us holy. Then He declares that He is willing to sanctify Himself so that we might be sanctified. That means that Jesus is willing to set Himself apart for a special purpose so that His disciples could be made holy. The reference here is to His sacrifice on the cross. Jesus died for us that He might sanctify us. Just to make sure this is clear, look at **Hebrew 13:12**, **Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.** When Jesus was put on the cross to die, this happened outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Then look at **Ephesians 5:25-27**, **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."** He gave Himself as a sacrifice on the cross to sanctify (make holy) Christians.

Finally, consider the prayer of the Apostle Paul for Christians at Thessalonica, **1 Thessalonians 5:23-24**, **"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole**

spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*. "

Notice several things from this: (1) We are sanctified or made holy only because of Christ's selfless love sacrifice of Himself on the cross. (2) In both the prayer of Jesus as well as the prayer of Paul, the request that Christians be sanctified (made holy) is directed to the Father. (3) In all the Scripture references above the common means by which Christians can be made holy are God's truth (His Word) and the Blood of Jesus.

The greatest problem is so many wrong conceptions we have of the subject. We need to consider this calmly from the Bible, God's Word. So let me encourage you. God wants you and me to be holy. That is not a threat, nor is it an impossible demand. Rather it is a promise of most wondrous beauty. It is a promise that God wants to share His nature with us. He is the most joyful being in the entire universe. His joy is a direct outflow of His love. To be made holy is to be sanctified and filled with God's love. To be holy is to be like Jesus. To live holy is to love like Jesus loved. But it is God's work and provision, not our attainment or accomplishment. It is something that Jesus provided for us through His blood sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection and ascension into heaven. Most important it is something available to each Christian for Jesus said, "Ask and you shall receive."

2. God's work and provision, not our attainment.

a. God's Part and Our Part

I feel that one area that causes many to become defensive concerning the possibility of sanctification in the Christian life is due to confusing two things. They confuse what God will do in us with the conditions that we need to fulfill in order for Him to do His work. Let me make it very clear that no human being has the ability to make himself pure and holy. We were born with a sinful nature and we can no more change or get rid of that sinful nature than a leopard can get rid of his spots. We can not become holy and pure through personal discipline. Personal discipline is important in our Christian life. However, to expect that I can make myself pure by discipline is like trying to fly by using my hands and arms as wings (remember that illustration).

No serious student of the Bible can deny that it has a lot to say about God's desire for a Christian to be sanctified and holy. Just a quick search of the words holy, sanctify, sanctification, sanctified, purified, purity, pure heart and holiness in the New Testament alone turns up almost 100 references in relation to the Christian. Some teach that while a Christian can become holy, it is only after a slow process of growth and development. However, that means that we can grow into holiness or into heart purity. While there are plenty of references in the Bible to the importance of Christians growing in the grace of God, no where do I find we are to grow into heart purity or sanctification. We didn't grow into salvation and we don't grow into heart purity. It is God's work, not our work. When we accept the Bible teaching that sanctification is God's work which He does in us and not our works, then we realize that time is not a factor.

God saved us in a moment of time. Yes, there was a period of preparation before we became a Christian, when God patiently helped us to see our need. He helped us to meet the conditions for Him to save us. The experience of salvation or being born again was not the end of God working in our life. It was really the beginning of growth and development just like any new child that is born. But there was a moment in time when spiritual life began, just like there was a moment when we were born physically.

Now there is an identical parallel in the experience of sanctification. Clearly, when we look at those who testified in the Bible that their hearts were made pure, like Peter referring to the day of Pentecost and to Cornelius, it is an instantaneous event just like salvation. (See **Acts 15:8-9** "**So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.**")

You may ask how God can purify our hearts in a moment of time. Well, I can't even answer how God can save us in a moment of time, but I know He does. There is a verse of Scripture that I think we need to memorize and never forget in **Mark 10:26-27**, **And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."** Never let that truth leave you. Never let anyone convince you otherwise. With God all things are possible. He can indeed sanctify us and make us holy in a moment of time. In fact, this is His promise to us.

Let me just give you a few references from the Bible on this. I could list 50 or more references, but just read the following over and ask yourself with an open heart what the Bible teaches is God's will for the Christian. I think you will see the promise that God wants to sanctify and fill every Christian with His Holy Spirit.

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

John 17:16-20 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;

Acts 1:4-5 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Acts 2:1-4 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

Hebrews 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 13:12-13 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

b. What is My Part?

I again find an interesting parallel between how a person becomes a Christians (gets saved) and how he experiences sanctification. There is God's part and there is our part.

Let me summarize the steps and conditions we went through **to allow God to save us**. In every step it was God who acted first with His grace to help us. We did not even have the freedom to choose to be saved until God's grace enabled us. So every step was only taken with the help of God:

- **Preparation** - Time when we honestly opened our hearts to give God a chance to speak to us through His Word, the Bible.
- **Conviction** - Time when we realized we were sinners and that our sins hurt God. We became deeply sorry for our sins and were willing to turn from them.
- **Faith Develops** - We became convinced that Jesus died for us and made it possible that our sins could be forgiven and cleansed.
- **Step of Faith** - We prayed and told God that we had sinned and that we hated our sins and were turning from them (repentance). We trusted God's promise as we asked to be forgiven and for Jesus to come into our heart.
- **Witness** - Because of the merits and work of Jesus on the cross, God forgave us and cleansed us of the guilt of sin. He let us know what He had done in us by sending the Holy Spirit into our life with a sweet peace and assurance.
- **Growth in Christ** - The beginning of the process of growing and developing in our new Christian life.

Now let me show you the parallel in the steps and conditions we must go through **to allow God to purify our hearts**. Again every step can only be taken with utter dependency on the Holy Spirit:

- **Preparation** - Time when we honestly open our hearts and allow God the opportunity to show us from His Word, the Bible, His many promises that we could be made holy and be like Jesus. Actually, our Christian life begins with initial sanctification, when we are putting off the old practices of the past and walking in the light God gives us.
- **Conviction** - As we walk in the light by obeying new truth God helps us to see, we realize that we love Jesus more and more. However, we also realize there is this selfish

and self-centered nature within us that is unlike Jesus. We become deeply sorry for this and desire above everything to have this sinful nature removed from us. We want to be like Jesus, but we can not see how it is possible.

- **Faith Develops** - As we stop listening to doubt and to people of doubt and focus on God's promises, we became convinced that Jesus died so that we can be sanctified and purified within. His work on the cross made it possible that our heart could be purified through His blood.
- **Step of Faith** - We pray with a surrendered heart and tell God that our inward nature is full of pride and selfishness. Actually the revelation of all the Holy Spirit shows us about our heart produces a deep sorrow. But we honestly confess this to God, though it would seem to break our heart with sorrow. As we pray the sorrow gives way to hope and anticipation. We find that we can trust God's promises. We then ask Him specifically to purify us. In faith, we believe Him to remove this inward sinful nature and fill us full of Himself, full of Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit and full of His wonderful love.
- **Witness** - Because of the victorious work of Jesus on the cross, God does what He promised. He purifies our heart through faith and fills us with His Holy Spirit. He lets us know what He has done in us through the sweet, gentle peace and love that the Holy Spirit gives us. In fact, the Holy Spirit Himself becomes our Peace. He becomes the Love of Jesus in our hearts.
- **Growth in Christ** - Then the process of growing and developing really accelerates, because the thing that hindered growth (the self-centered nature) is removed.

c. **Is That It?**

No, that isn't it. Actually this experience is not an "it" at all. Rather this experience of heart purity is like a wonderful marriage between you and Jesus, the lover of your soul. Marriage is a sacred covenant between two people in which they keep their love only for each other until death would separate them. So it is for the one whose heart has been made pure, their love and devotion is for Jesus alone. There are no other gods, or idols, or loves, but just this wonderful person ruling within their heart without a rival. When you see this clearly, you wonder how you tried to live your Christian life for so long without a pure heart. But don't think such an exclusive love for Jesus will prohibit your love for others. It will actually enhance our love for others. Just like a husband and wife share their love with their children so we share Christ's love with the world.

Now I must give you a word of warning. While the heart is made pure by God's work in a moment of time, you will still be living in a body that is imperfect and has even been scared by sin. You will not be free from making mistakes. You will continue to make adjustments in you life. Holiness makes us especially humble and teachable. In fact, the pure in heart will have someone come up to them and tell them about all their faults and failures. Yet instead of wanting to fight back, there is a sweet humility that says "Thank You." We want our life to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Our life becomes an adventure of seeking and finding new ways to please Jesus, the lover of our soul.

You know some people enter marriage with the idea that it will always be easy and there will never be any misunderstandings or need to say we are sorry. But such an unrealistic approach produces more divorces than we realize. Marriage does require continual adjustments and a willingness to admit when we are wrong. Actually a pure heart will make it much easier for you to admit mistakes and faults since pride is not hindering you as it once did.