

<[marshall.cousineau@gmail.com](mailto:marshall.cousineau@gmail.com)>, Scott Novak <[scott.novak@rocket.com](mailto:scott.novak@rocket.com)>

Cc:

Bcc:

Date: Fri, 14 Dec 2018 21:40:23 -0800

Subject: Re: Salvation explained by C Spurgeon

Okay. Here is the whole thing. Good stuff!

<https://www.chapellibrary.org/literature/epub-reader/?fldCode=fait>

- Erv

On Fri, Dec 14, 2018 at 9:17 PM Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)> wrote:

Dang! It would not let me copy his entire sermon. Let me see if I can send it another way. It is just so beautiful how he is able to explain so clearly every element of our salvation. He answers any question an unbeliever could have. - Erv

"Faith

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

The Object of Faith; or, to what faith looks. I am told in the Word of God to believe. What am I to believe? I am bidden to look. To what am I to look? What is to be the object of my hope, belief, and confidence? The reply is simple. The object of faith to a sinner is Christ Jesus. How many make a mistake about this and think that they are to believe on God the Father! Now, belief in God is an after-result of faith in Jesus. We come to believe in the eternal love of the Father as the result of trusting t ----- Message truncated -----

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[Erv Thomas](#)

*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv*



**Subject:** Saving Faith

**From:** Erv <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** Matt.Lister@rocket.com,jeff@gladeng.com,manuel.luz@oakhills.org,scott.novak@rocket.com,marshall.cousineau@gmail.com

**Date Sent:** Thu, 27 Sep 2018 07:47:46 +0200

**Date Received:** Thu, 27 Sep 2018 07:47:46 +0200

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Again, I don't think 'faith' or 'believe' was confusing to the people who heard it from Jesus in Greek. - Erv

Faith 'unto' Salvation

This "faith unto salvation" has been illustrated in many ways. If I stand on the twenty-seventh floor of a tall building and press the button for an elevator, I am confident (I have faith) that the elevator will arrive. Indeed, it does, and the door opens. I am now presented with a vehicle that, I am confident (I have faith), will take me to the ground floor, or to the top of that building, provided I step into it. When I do, my faith in that elevator takes the form of personal trust. It has become not only objective confidence but a personal reality to me. In the same way, the faith of the gospel—the truth of Christianity—becomes the path to my personal salvation when I exercise faith. This is accomplished by accepting Christ's death as my way to right standing before God.

**Subject:** Re: God under trial  
**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>  
**To:** Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>  
**Cc:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, Marshall Cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>, Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>  
**Date Sent:** Sun, 16 Sep 2018 19:55:20 -0700  
**Date Received:**

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You're probably right. He always spoke to the people in parables to use as a filter to actually hide his message and prevent people from hearing who had no true desire to believe in Him. I don't know how He was able to do that, though. Was the 'magic' in the parables themselves or just. since He was God, He knew that particular format would work. I don't know any 'magic' filtering parables so I have to just try and be as clear as I can when I get an opportunity and almost let my explanation be the 'magic' parable. If they understand what I am saying, maybe that is the same indicator as the parables that they truly want to hear. Evangelism is hard. - Erv

On Sun, Sep 16, 2018 at 1:59 PM <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)> wrote:

Sometimes I wonder if God has no interest in answering the question as posed. Jesus wasn't interested in giving the Pharisees and Scribes a sign when they asked for it. And why not, I wonder? The implication behind the question "can you prove to me that God exists?" is that they would act positively on the knowledge if you could deliver it. But, would they? On the other hand, Jesus was very free in showing signs and wonders to those who had no hidden agenda and no turf to defend. Is unwillingness to surrender more the core problem than unbelief?

But having said all that, I am grateful for apologists and apologetics. Taken in the right doses at the right time, it has been a huge help. Maybe apologetics is like medication (or kale) - just because a little is good doesn't mean that more is better. So, equip yourself with a variety of apologetics tools, but don't expect them to fix everything. Or something like that.

Jeff

**From:** Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 16, 2018 1:48 PM  
**To:** Jeff Gladstone <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)>; Lister, Matt <[Matt.Lister@rocket.com](mailto:Matt.Lister@rocket.com)>; Manuel Luz <[manuel.luz@oakhills.org](mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org)>; Marshall Cousineau <[marshall.cousineau@gmail.com](mailto:marshall.cousineau@gmail.com)>; Scott Novak <[scott.novak@rocket.com](mailto:scott.novak@rocket.com)>  
**Subject:** God under trial

Hey guys, continuing the thread of my last email I tried this approach (below). What do you think of it? Could something like that be used with a non-Christian? I think there are about 10 ways we decide if anything is true in our lives and we use one, or a combination of, them all. I am still defining these 'methodologies.' What I see right away is if you just use 2-3 of them, in addition to the scientific method, one can really prove that God exists beyond any reasonable doubt and that the method proving Him is consistent with how we validate everything else in our life. I don't like a double-standard

or an inconsistent standard when attacking the existing of God. What one does with God after realizing He does exist is another topic. I guess there is an entire field of study on this whole subject called Epistemology. It is very interesting! But, it is easy to get tangled in the weeds. - Erv

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Court: God you are charged with the crime of not existing. What is your plea?

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\*\* All accusations against the client originate from him and therefore his testimony is ruled inadmissible

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Jury: TBD

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[Erv Thomas](#)

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*International Life @ FLC*



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[Erv Thomas](#)

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*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** RE: God under trial

**From:** jeff@gladeng.com

**To:** 'Erv Thomas' <iamerv@gmail.com>, "'Lister, Matt'" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, 'Manuel Luz' <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, 'Marshall Cousineau' <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>, 'Scott Novak' <scott.novak@rocket.com>

**Date Sent:** Sun, 16 Sep 2018 15:58:57 -0500

**Date Received:** Sun, 16 Sep 2018 13:59:47 -0700 (PDT)

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Sometimes I wonder if God has no interest in answering the question as posed. Jesus wasn't interested in giving the Pharisees and Scribes a sign when they asked for it. And why not, I wonder? The implication behind the question "can you prove to me that God exists?" is that they would act positively on the knowledge if you could deliver it. But, would they? On the other hand, Jesus was very free in showing signs and wonders to those who had no hidden agenda and no turf to defend. Is unwillingness to surrender more the core problem than unbelief?

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**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Sunday, September 16, 2018 1:48 PM

**To:** Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>; Lister, Matt <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>; Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>; Marshall Cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>; Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>

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*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** God under trial

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>,"Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>,Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,Marshall Cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com> ,Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>

**Date Sent:** Sun, 16 Sep 2018 11:47:31 -0700

**Date Received:**

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[Erv Thomas](#)

"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** How is someone saved?

**From:** erv thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>, Matt Lister <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Marshall Cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>

**Date Sent:** Thu, 21 Jun 2018 00:38:01 -0700

**Date Received:** Thu, 21 Jun 2018 00:38:03 -0700 (PDT)

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## VI. Three Steps in a Sinner's Salvation

Peter, an ambassador of Jesus Christ with a commission to selected-out ones who are sojourners in a foreign land, those scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, selected out ones by the fore-ordination of God the Father to be recipients of the setting-apart work of the Spirit which results in obedience (of faith) and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace to you (for daily living) and (heart) peace be multiplied (I Peter 1:1, 2).

Word Studies in Authorized Version

THE FIRST step is the sinner's election according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. "Elect" is from a word which means "to pick out" or "select." It refers here to the act of God in sovereign grace choosing individuals to salvation. The same word is translated "chosen" in Ephesians 1:4, and is literally "chosen out," that is, the choice is made out of a number. God chose us out before the foundation of the world. In the eternity before the universe came into existence, yes, always, God had us in His heart for salvation.

This election was according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. The word translated "foreknowledge" is from a Greek word which in a connection like this means more than mere previous knowledge. It is used in Acts 2:23, "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," the words "counsel" and "foreknowledge" being in a construction in the Greek text which makes the latter word refer to the same thing to which the word "counsel" refers, and makes it a further description of that thing. The word "determinate" is the translation of a Greek word which in the form in which it is used here means "that which has been appointed or decreed." The word "counsel" refers to an interchange of opinions, a mutual advising, the exchange of deliberative judgment. Thus the word "foreknowledge" refers to that counsel of God in which after deliberative judgment certain among mankind were designated to a certain position, that position being defined by the context. The same Greek word translated "foreknowledge" in verse two is translated by the word "foreordained" in verse twenty. Therefore the election of the saints was determined in the counsel of God which consisted of a judgment which was the outgrowth of deliberation, that judgment having for its purpose the designating of certain ones to a position defined in the context. The words "according to" are from a preposition which implies domination or control over something. Mere foreknowledge does not have within it any compelling necessities which would require the election of certain individuals. The fact that the saints were elected, was part of God's previous knowledge. The election or choice of the saints was therefore in accordance with or determined by the counsel of God the Father. That is the first step in our salvation.

The second step is found in the words, "through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience." The Greek word translated "sanctification" means literally "to set apart" or "to consecrate." We must not confuse the act of dedication with that of consecration. A saint may dedicate himself and all he possesses to God. God consecrates a saint to a certain position, that is, He sets him apart. Here we have the act of God the Holy Spirit setting the individual apart, consequent upon his being selected out by God the Father. The idea in the Greek is that God the Father chose the saint to a certain thing, and that was, to be set apart by the Holy Spirit. Thus we have the Holy Spirit taking hold of the one chosen, for the purpose of bringing that lost sinner to the act of faith in the Lord Jesus and His precious blood. The obedience here is not that of the saint as engendered in the heart by the Holy Spirit, but the obedience of the sinner to the faith, as in Acts 6:7, where "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." Peter refers here to the act of placing faith in the Lord Jesus as the One who shed His precious blood on Calvary's Cross to atone for man's sin. The act of God the Spirit in setting apart the individual, is His work of

bringing that lost sinner to the place where he puts his faith in the Saviour. There is nothing in the sin-darkened heart of a sinner which would reach out and appropriate the Lord Jesus as Saviour. The hand of faith must be energized or motivated by the Holy Spirit. He supplies the faith necessary. Salvation is a work of God from start to finish. And yet it is true that each lost sinner must by an act of his will place his faith in the Saviour. He has that responsibility. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16), is sublimely true. But "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17), is also true. We cannot reconcile or understand these things, but we can trust God for them and believe them.

The third step in our salvation is expressed by the words, "and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." The divine order is first, obedience, then the sprinkling of the blood. The latter expression is taken by Peter from Old Testament usage, the blood of sprinkling referring there to animal blood typical of the cleansing blood of our Lord.

This act of faith results in the individual's cleansing by the precious blood of Christ, the work of God the Son. This is justification, the removal of the guilt and penalty of sin and the imputation of a righteousness, Christ Himself, in whom the believer stands complete forever.

Thus each believer is elected or chosen out, this choice determined by the deliberative counsel of God the Father. The individual chosen is set apart or consecrated by the Holy Spirit, this being the work of God the Spirit in imparting faith to him. This faith is answered by God the Son, who through His precious blood cleanses the believer and brings him unto salvation. God the Father chooses the individual, God the Spirit brings him to the act of faith, and God the Son cleanses him from sin.

Put your faith in the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour, and you will find that God the Father chose you to salvation, God the Holy Spirit brought you to the act of faith, and God the Son cleansed you from sin in His precious blood.

Sent from my iPad

**Subject:** Faith in OT

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Gladstone Engineering <jeff@gladeng.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@rocket.com>, Marshall Cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Mon, 23 Apr 2018 17:15:39 +0000

**Date Received:**

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Pretty interesting :) - Erv

EMUNAH: Which means FAITH

When I first started following God, I thought faith was an intellectual decision - I knew there was a God, so therefore I had faith. But the Hebrew word for 'faith' - emunah - is less about KNOWING, and more about DOING.

'Emunah' literally means "to take firm action", so to have faith is to act. It's kinda like a staircase; you may intellectually know the stairs go up to the next level, but until you climb the stairs you won't experience the next level. What you do is more important than what you know. Don't just believe in the stairs, climb the stairs.

What would you need to change today to ensure your faith was defined by what you did, instead of what you know?

**Subject:** Salvation  
**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>  
**To:** Jane Thomas <ethomas@isionline.org>  
**Date Sent:** Fri, 20 Apr 2018 06:02:07 +0000  
**Date Received:**

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Use this - Erv

## A CHRISTIAN WORKER'S RESOURCE

This section includes:

**How to Become a Christian**

**How to Follow Up with a New Believer**

**Mining the Treasures of the *Life Application Study Bible***

**So You've Been Asked to Speak . . .**

**Taking the Step to Application**

**How to Become a Christian**

As a believer, you will have the opportunity to talk to others about your faith. At times you will find a person who wants to know how he or she can become a Christian. Following is a guide you can use to help a person understand what it means to begin a relationship with Christ.

**FACT:** You were created by a loving God. You have great value. God loves you and wants to have a personal relationship with you.

**SET-UP:** Explain to the person that the world tells us that we are accidents of nature. We began as ooze in a pond, evolved into apes, and finally into humans. We live, we die, so we should grab for all we can get in this life—after all, that's the only way to fulfillment. In contrast, the Bible tells us that we are *not* accidents. We were created by a loving God who knew about us before we were born. We are here for a purpose, and we can find ultimate fulfillment by finding a relationship with him.

Read the following verses and make the following points:

**God created you.**

*Psalm 139:13-16. You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.*

God knew you before you were born—even while you were in your mother's womb. He knew all about your family and your life until now. [Be sensitive that some people have had difficult

circumstances in their lives. Explain that God has not been absent, but has been drawing this person to himself.] He wants to give you a brand new start and a new way of living. He can do that when you give him your life. Why would you do that? Because . . .

### **God wants to have a personal relationship with you.**

John 17:3. *And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.*

God is not some “force,” an unspeaking or unseeing idol, or merely another name for your own self-esteem. Instead, God is a person, your Creator, who created you to be in relationship with him. Why? Because . . .

### **God loves you.**

John 3:16. *For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

You can turn your life over to God’s control because he loves you and wants the very best for you. In fact, he loves you so much that he gave his Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for you. I’ll explain more about that in a minute. I just want you to realize that when you trust God, you are actually trusting the One who created you. When you turn your life over to him, you are giving your life to the One who knows you inside out. Don’t you think that’s a good place to put your trust?

FACT: Your sin keeps you from having a personal relationship with God.

SET-UP: Most people don’t understand the concept of sin. We live in a fairly amoral world that believes each person can decide what is right, what is true, and what is “moral”—whatever that might mean. Television and movies don’t help with their portrayals of happy people blatantly living sinful lives. You will probably need to explain that God has set some standards about right and wrong, and that there is such a thing as “sin.”

### **What is sin?**

James 4:17. *Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.*

1 John 3:4. *Everyone who sins is breaking God’s law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God.*

God is holy and perfect; people are sinful. You probably know that for yourself—if you tried to be perfect for a day, you’d quickly discover that you couldn’t do it. [Here, you can draw a picture of a chasm, with a stick figure on one side and the word “God” on the other. Put the word “sin” in the chasm and explain further.] Sin means not understanding or even caring about what is “right.” You defy God when you know what is right and then refuse to do it.

### **Who has sinned?**

Romans 3:23. *For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.*

Romans 5:17. *For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many.*

The Bible says “everyone has sinned.” We simply cannot help it—we’re human. When Adam, the “one man,” sinned (way back in the Garden of Eden in the book of Genesis), sin entered the human race and sinfulness is part of our nature. You might be asking, “So what?”

### **What’s so bad about sin?**

Romans 6:23. *For the wages of sin is death.*

Isaiah 59:2. *It’s your sins that have cut you off from God.*

Sin leads to death. That’s a big problem! Because God is perfect, he cannot have anything to do with us because we are sinners. He wants to have a personal relationship with us but he can’t because of sin! So what did God do?

**FACT:** Only through Jesus Christ can you have a personal relationship with God.

**SET-UP:** Sometimes people don’t understand the concept of having a “relationship” with a being they cannot see or touch. Yet it is a reality. That’s why Jesus Christ came. He was a human being who lived on this earth so that we could understand what God is like. At this point you may discover that the person has lots of questions (for example, “How can God be God and also Jesus?”), the details of which can send you off the point. If that happens, explain that you don’t have all of the answers to some of those kinds of questions—in fact, some questions are simply unanswerable because we humans cannot completely understand God and how he works. Explain that having a relationship with Christ is a spiritual reality that must be experienced, and that doing so will answer a lot of questions. The key questions to deal with at this point in the discussion include:

### **Why Jesus Christ?**

John 14:6. *Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*

Remember how God can’t have anything to do with us because of sin? Well, he decided to deal with our sin. Problem was, he had made it clear throughout the Old Testament that sin leads to death. In the Old Testament, people sacrificed animals as a way to show how sorry they were for their sins. And that was only temporary. God’s plan all along was to send his Son, Jesus—a perfect human being—to be the final and ultimate sacrifice.

### **Why did Jesus have to die?**

1 Peter 3:18. *Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.*

Jesus died to take the penalty our sins deserved. In essence, he took our punishment so that we wouldn’t have to! Now, because of Jesus, the way is prepared for us to be able to have a personal relationship with a holy God. [At this point, you can draw a cross in the chasm, connecting the two

sides. On the cross, write the word “Jesus.” This visually shows that Jesus is the only way to God. Also add that Jesus did not stay dead. He rose from the dead, which is a promise to us that we will also rise from the dead and go to heaven to be with him.] So what do you need to do next?

**FACT:** You must personally respond by trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

**SET-UP:** The fact of salvation means nothing unless a person accepts it for himself or herself. Emphasize that even if the person grew up in church, he or she still needs to accept Jesus personally. Also emphasize that even if the person has led a terrible life, no one is too bad for God—a person does not have to “clean up his act” before coming to Christ. In fact, Jesus died to take away all that sin and to help the person start anew. So emphasize that being good is not good enough, yet no one is too bad to be able to be forgiven—God wants all people to come to him. All people need to trust in Jesus in order to be saved. So what kind of response should a person have? Talk about the following:

### **You respond with belief in Christ.**

*Romans 10:9. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

You simply need to believe. That doesn't mean that you don't have any questions or that you understand everything. It simply means recognizing that you are indeed a sinner in need of a Savior. You recognize that you cannot be good enough for a perfect God on your own. And you understand that God loved you so much that he sent Jesus to save you. If you believe that, say so.

### **You respond by receiving Christ.**

*John 1:12. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.*

“Receiving Christ” means acknowledging your belief in Christ, inviting him to come into your life, turning to God from your present way of living (repentance), and then beginning the adventure of letting God direct your life! And the moment you ask, it's done. Jesus has come in!

**QUESTION:** Would you like to accept Jesus as your Savior?

**SET-UP:** If the person is ready, explain that he or she can express belief and trust in Christ through prayer. Prayer is simply talking to God. He knows what a person means even when it is difficult to express. Tell the person that he or she may use their own words, or they can repeat the following prayer after you:

*Dear God, I know that my sin has separated me from you. Thank you that Jesus Christ died in my place. I ask Jesus to forgive my sin and to come into my life. Please begin to direct my life. Thank you for giving me eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

That's it! You can officially welcome this person into God's family—your new brother or sister in Christ!

Just as a baby is not born and then left to fend for himself, so a newborn believer in God's family

needs some guidance. As the one who introduced him or her to Christ, you should attempt to help this new believer grow. The following pages will show you how.

## **How to Follow Up with a New Believer**

### Helping a New Believer Take the Next Steps in the Christian Life

If you have had the privilege of helping someone make the step of faith and accept Jesus as Savior, you want to continue that relationship if possible by offering some help to that new believer about the basics of the Christian faith. Your friend may wonder: “What does ‘being a Christian’ mean? How does it make a difference in my life? What should I be doing differently from now on?” This section gives you fourteen discussion points to use with a new believer. You don’t need to (and shouldn’t) cover all of these points in one sitting. These are designed to be discussion points that you can use over the course of several weeks as part of discipling someone in understanding the basic tenets of the Christian faith and ways they can keep growing.

Tell your friend that you would like to get together regularly (in person, by phone, by e-mail, by instant messaging, whatever works) over the next few weeks to talk about the next steps in his or her walk with God. After you’ve worked out a schedule, give the person a first assignment—to get a Bible (if he or she doesn’t already have one—or doesn’t have one in an easy-to-read translation). You might offer to go with the person, as the first trip to a Christian bookstore and its wide array of Bibles can be a bit daunting. Or even better—purchase a Bible yourself and give it as a gift. Also ask the person to get a journal in which to record some of the material you will be sharing as well as some of his or her own thoughts.

You can use each numbered point below as a basis for each meeting, or divide up the material as you wish. Read the Bible verses. As you meet together, help your friend find the verses in the Bible and underline them. Encourage him or her to ask whatever questions come to mind. You may not know all the answers. If you don’t, be honest and say, “I don’t know the answer to that question, but I’ll do some research and see what I can find out.” Then do what you can to try to answer that question to the best of your ability.

Also realize that God will do his work in his timing. Don’t expect a new believer to suddenly get rid of all vices (not swear anymore, quit smoking, and change his or her wardrobe the very next day after accepting Christ). Part of your discipleship process will be to help him or her learn how to be sensitive to God’s leading. You will need to be sensitive as well—to know what to say and when to say it, and what not to say until the time is right. Commit yourself to praying daily for this new believer!

Here are the points to discuss:

#### ***1. You can be assured of your salvation.***

You recently became a Christian, but you may have experienced doubts about what really happened to you. So I want to share with you some assurances that God gives in the Bible.

**God assures you that Jesus Christ has come into your life.**

*John 14:20. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.*

**God assures you that your sins have been forgiven.**

Colossians 2:13. *You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.*

**God assures you that you have eternal life.**

1 John 5:13. *I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.*

ASSIGNMENT: In your journal, write a description of when, where, and how you became a Christian. Make a note of the assurances that God has given you today.

**2. You can know that you are loved unconditionally.**

No matter what else may be going on in your life, no matter what acceptance or rejection you may be facing from others, you can know that God has completely accepted you and loves you unconditionally.

**God loves you, chose you, and adopts you into his own family.**

Ephesians 1:4 *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.*

ASSIGNMENT: Write about what it means to you to be a part of God's family and to be loved unconditionally.

**3. You have a new life in Christ.**

What's next? God has given you a new life, but don't expect to be different all at once. Just as a new baby has to grow and learn, so God is going to work in you and help you to grow.

**You have begun a relationship that will continue the rest of your life.**

Colossians 2:6 *And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him.*

ASSIGNMENT: Write how it feels to know that God has given you a new life. What does that mean to you personally?

**4. You have the privilege of prayer.**

Just as good friends can talk to each other, so God, your heavenly Father, wants you to talk to him. And, while you may not understand it right now, you'll find that he "talks" to you as well.

**You can pray to God about anything and everything. He wants to hear from you.**

Philippians 4:6. *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.*

ASSIGNMENT: Commit yourself to getting used to talking to God. Start out with about three minutes a day of focused time talking to God. Talk to him as you would to a friend. In your journal, begin a list of the things you're talking to God about and the concerns that you're bringing to him.

### **5. You have the treasure of God's Word.**

When you buy a new gadget, you usually get an instruction manual. With your new life in Christ, you need God's instruction manual, the Bible. In fact, the communication you "hear" from God will often come as you read his Word.

**You can trust God's Word.**

*2 Timothy 3:16. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.*

ASSIGNMENT: Commit yourself to spending five minutes a day reading the Bible. Begin in the book of Mark (in the New Testament) and read about Jesus. As a result of something you read, write in your journal something you learned or something you need to do.

### **6. You have a great friend in Jesus, so get to know him!**

As you're reading in the book of Mark, you've been learning more about Jesus. In essence, Jesus is God put into focus for human eyes. Jesus came in order to show us God and then to take the punishment for our sins.

**Only because of Jesus do you have a personal relationship with God.**

*Colossians 1:19-20 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.*

ASSIGNMENT: Write a prayer to Jesus, thanking him for all he did for you.

### **7. You have a new lifestyle.**

A good foundation is essential for a house to stand strong. Jesus wants you to know that obeying God will give your life a solid foundation.

**You show your love for Jesus by doing as he says.**

*John 14:15. "If you love me, obey my commandments."*

*Philippians 2:13. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*

ASSIGNMENT: In your journal, write one area of your life where you are obeying God and one where you think you are not. Ask God to show you what he wants you to do, and then to give you the strength to do it.

### **8. God will help you to follow and obey him.**

As a Christian, you have been given the Holy Spirit. He will give you insight into what God is like and what he wants you to do.

**God gives you his Holy Spirit to enable you to live the Christian life.**

*John 14:26. "But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you."*

ASSIGNMENT: Write down one question that you'd like the Holy Spirit to help you with. Now take a couple of minutes and just talk to God about it.

### **9. You can resist temptation.**

Becoming a Christian is like switching sides in a battle. You used to be on Satan's side and now you're on God's side—and Satan isn't happy about it! He wants to try to trip you up and tempt you to disobey God.

**You're not alone in temptation. God promises to show the way out.**

*1 Corinthians 10:13. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.*

ASSIGNMENT: List three temptations that Satan often uses on you. Now thank God ahead of time that he will show you how not to give in next time.

### **10. You can continue to receive forgiveness.**

As a child in God's family, you'll still mess up. But God's love for you is so great that he will continue to forgive you.

**When you mess up, go to God and ask him to forgive you.**

*1 John 1:9. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*

ASSIGNMENT: Write down ways that you have disobeyed God recently. Look at each one and confess it through prayer. Then cross out each sin. Let this remind you of God's loving forgiveness. Commit to obey him in the future.

### **11. You have the privilege of worship.**

When you became a Christian, you joined a family—sometimes called “the body of Christ,” which means you're now “related” to Christians all over the world! You need to join a portion of that family by beginning to attend a local church.

**You need the church to help you continue to grow.**

*Hebrews 10:24-25 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*

ASSIGNMENT: Go with some friends or family to church this week. List two ways you worshiped God.

### **12. You can let others know about what Christ has done for you.**

If you found a really great doctor, or a helpful mechanic, or even a terrific diet, you probably would tell your closest friend about it. Since you've found the One who forgives sin and gives you a new life, don't you think that's something you ought to share?

**The news you have to share is the best news anyone could hear!**

Romans 1:16. *For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.*

ASSIGNMENT: Write down the name of one person who needs to know Jesus Christ. Start praying for that person to become a Christian. Ask a Christian friend to pray with you for the person and to help you learn how to share your faith with him or her.

### **13. Take time to memorize Scripture.**

To fight a battle you need powerful equipment. The Holy Spirit will use the power of God's Word like a sword to defeat Satan. A great strategy is to memorize Scripture so you always have it with you.

**Memorized verses will give you comfort and help you in temptation.**

Ephesians 6:17. *Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

ASSIGNMENT: Review the verses you've underlined in your Bible. Choose one or two favorites and begin to memorize them.

### **14. Realize your long-term goal—to be like Christ.**

You've been a Christian for a short time now, and you're learning that you have a lifelong relationship with Christ. So what's your long-range goal? Becoming like Christ!

**Fortunately, you don't do this alone. God works in you to help you become more like his Son.**

Philippians 1:6. *And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*

Psalms 119:105. *Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.*

ASSIGNMENT: Make a list of at least five ways you want to become more like Jesus. Spend time asking God to help you. Remind yourself to read this part of your journal in one month to check on your spiritual growth.

### **Mining the Treasures of the *Life Application Study Bible***

As a believer in Christ, you will often be asked questions about your faith—sometimes these are from honest seekers with tough questions that have bothered them; sometimes they're questions used by the questioners in hopes of tripping you up. In either case, it helps to be prepared with answers, or at least to know where to find the answers. The *Life Application Study Bible* notes were written not only to help explain the contents of the Bible and to get people started in thinking about application, but also to answer some of these key questions.

The treasures are here, and so we have mined them for you by guiding you to the notes that best answer questions in the following twenty-five categories. The references noted after each question are for the note(s) that will best help you to answer that question. (A number in parentheses indicates that there is more than one note on that particular Scripture.)

## BELIEF

Why should I believe? *See notes on Genesis 15:6; Exodus 9:12.*

What does it mean to “believe” in Jesus? *See note on John 3:16 (3).*

## BIBLE

Why should I read the Bible? *See notes on 2 Chronicles 17:7-9; 34:31; Psalm 119:19.*

Why should I trust the Bible? *See notes on Psalm 33:4; Proverbs 16:22; 2 Peter 1:16-21.*

Why do you call the Bible God’s Word? *See note on 2 Timothy 3:16-17.*

How is the Bible different from other religious literature? *See note on 2 Timothy 3:16.*

## CHURCH

How should I choose a church? *See notes on 1 Corinthians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 5:8-9.*

If eternal life is free, what’s this 10 percent I keep hearing about? *See notes on Deuteronomy 14:22-23; 2 Corinthians 8:10-15; 8:12 (1 and 2).*

Isn’t participation in church optional? *See note on Luke 4:16.*

## DEATH

What happens when people die? *See notes on Hebrews 2:14-15 (1 and 2); 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.*

How can I be ready to die? *See notes on Genesis 50:24; Psalm 23:4.*

## DEVIL

Is the devil real? *See notes on Job 1:6-12; Matthew 4:1 (2).*

What does the devil do? *See notes on Genesis 3:5; 3:6.*

How powerful is the devil? *See note on Joshua 6:2-5.*

## FAITH

How strong does my faith have to be? *See notes on Matthew 17:17-20; Luke 17:6; Romans 14:1ff.*

Is faith enough? That seems too easy. *See notes on 2 Kings 5:12; Matthew 3:9-10; Philippians 3:2-3 (2); James 2:1ff.*

How can I tell others about my faith? *See notes on Exodus 3:16-17; Revelation 1:5-6.*

## FORGIVENESS

How can I know that God forgives me? *See notes on Psalm 32:1-2; Isaiah 1:18; Hebrews 10:17; 1 John 1:9(1).*

## FUTURE

What can God tell me about the future? *See notes on Job 19:25-27; Matthew 24:3ff; John 14:19-21; Revelation 21:7-8; 22:20.*

How is the world going to end? *See notes on Mark 13:5-7; Luke 12:40; 1 John 2:18-23.*

## GOD

What is God really like? *See notes on Genesis 1:1; 18:14; Numbers 14:17-20; Deuteronomy 27:15-26; Psalm 34:9-10; 36:5-8; 99:5; John 14:5-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.*

What are idols and what’s wrong with them? *See notes on Exodus 20:1-6; 32:4-5; 1 Kings 18:29.*

Isn't God only all about rules? *See note on [Isaiah 5:11-13](#).*

## GOSPEL

What is the gospel? *See notes on [Matthew 4:23-24](#); [John 3:16 \(1\)](#); [Romans 1:3-5](#); [1 Corinthians 15:3-4](#).*

## GRACE

What is grace? *See note on [Ephesians 1:7-8](#).*

How important it is to have God's grace? *See note on [Nehemiah 9:28-31](#).*

## HEAVEN/HELL

What does the Bible really say about heaven? *See notes on [Mark 12:24](#); [1 Corinthians 2:9](#); [1 Peter 2:11](#).*

What does the Bible really say about hell? *See notes on [Matthew 25:46](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#); [Jude 1:7](#); [Revelation 20:14](#).*

## HOLY SPIRIT

Who is the Holy Spirit? *See notes on [Psalm 48:14](#); [John 14:15-16](#); [14:17ff](#); [Acts 1:5](#).*

## JESUS

How do we know Jesus wasn't just a really great teacher? *See notes on [Matthew 17:5](#); [Luke 24:6-7 \(2\)](#); [John 5:31ff](#); [Philippians 2:5-11 \(1\)](#).*

What do you mean when you say Jesus is God? *See notes on [Hebrews 1:1-2](#); [1:3 \(1\)](#).*

What did Jesus do for me? *See notes on [Mark 15:31](#); [2 Corinthians 5:21](#); [Colossians 1:12-14](#); [Hebrews 9:22](#).*

## LIFE

What does God really want from me? *See notes on [Numbers 9:23](#); [Judges 21:25](#); [Proverbs 13:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:8-11](#); [1 John 4:20-21](#).*

Doesn't God want me to be perfect? How can I do that? *See notes on [Matthew 5:48](#); [Romans 5:20](#); [Hebrews 10:14](#).*

How can I "commit" my life to God? *See notes on [Proverbs 16:3](#); [1 Peter 1:14-16 \(2\)](#).*

If I am a Christian, how am I supposed to live? *See notes on [Exodus 23:24-25](#); [Joshua 1:5](#); [John 17:18](#); [Romans 13:1ff](#); [1 Peter 1:8-9](#).*

## OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament seems so *old*. How much of it really applies to me today? *See notes on [Deuteronomy 4:8](#); [Matthew 5:17-20](#); [Acts 21:23-24 \(2\)](#).*

How do the Old and New Testaments relate? *See notes on [Leviticus 1:2 \(2\)](#); [Matthew 13:52](#); [Hebrews 3:5](#).*

## ONLY ONE WAY

How can Christians insist that Jesus is the only way to God? *See notes on [John 6:67-68](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [1 Timothy 2:5-6](#); [2 Timothy 4:3-5](#); [Hebrews 10:26](#).*

Why isn't just being "good" good enough? *See note on [Colossians 1:21-22](#); [Hebrews 7:28](#); [9:14](#).*

## OTHER RELIGIONS

How can you say that devout people who follow other religions are wrong? See notes on Colossians 2:20-23(2); 2:22-23; 2 John 1:1-2; 1:3-4.

What makes Christianity any different from the rest of religions? See notes on Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 5:12; 5:13.

## PRAYER

What good does prayer do? See notes on 2 Chronicles 6:19-42; Psalm 4:3; Mark 9:29.

If God knows everything, why pray? See notes on Isaiah 38:1-5; Acts 1:12-13.

How should I pray? See notes on Jonah 2:1ff; Mark 11:22-23; Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 5:14-15.

## REPENTANCE/CONFESSION

Why are confession and repentance necessary? See notes on Leviticus 5:5; 2 Samuel 12:14 (1); Matthew 3:1-2 (1); 1 John 1:9 (1 and 2).

## SIN

What is sin? See note on James 4:17.

Why is sin dangerous? What's the big deal? See notes on 2 Samuel 11:1ff; 1 Kings 11:9-10; 1 Chronicles 21:13-14; 21:14; 1 Corinthians 6:12-13 (1); 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5; Revelation 9:20-21.

Why should I call myself a sinner when I can think of a lot of people who are really bad? See note on Romans 3:23.

How could a loving God send sincere people to hell? See notes on Deuteronomy 7:2; Romans 1:18-20 (1 and 2).

Can someone be too sinful to be saved? See notes on 2 Chronicles 33:12-13; Psalm 51:1ff; 51:1-7.

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS

What are spiritual gifts? Does everyone have one? See notes on Romans 12:6 (1); 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-12.

## SUFFERING

Why do bad things happen to good people? See notes on Job 1:1ff; 2:10; Acts 12:2-11; Romans 8:28.

How does God help me deal with the problems in my life? See notes on Exodus 5:22-23; Job 5:17-26; Psalm 106:40-42; Philippians 1:29; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3; Hebrews 11:35-39.

## TEMPTATION

How does the devil tempt me? See notes on Luke 4:3 (1 and 2).

Why does the devil tempt me? See note on Genesis 3:1-6.

At what point does temptation become sin? See note on Matthew 4:1ff (1).

How do I handle temptation? See notes on Matthew 26:40-41; Luke 4:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:13.

## TRINITY

Why isn't the Trinity like believing in three gods? See notes on Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Acts 1:4-5.

## So You've Been Asked to Speak . . .

Chances are you're going to find yourself faced with the task of leading a Bible study, giving a

devotional, offering a short talk, or teaching a Sunday school class. Or perhaps you will be given the responsibility for leading a small group study and you won't know where to begin.

The *Life Application Study Bible* is an inexhaustible resource of information. If you follow some of the steps and hints below, you'll be able to put together a talk that is both informative and challenging—to any audience, at any time.

## ***Ways to Use the Life Application Study Bible as a Research Tool***

### Using the Master Index

If you need to cover a topic, take a quick trip to the Master Index and look up the topic. There you will find notes on that topic (with a phrase that gives you an idea of the content of the note) as well as any charts or personality profiles on that topic. (See the Sample Lesson below to get an idea how this would work.)

### Focusing on a Book of the Bible

For studying a Bible book, the *Life Application Study Bible* has plenty of overview material to help. Simply start at the beginning of the book you're studying. For example, if you're working through Jonah with your Bible study group or preparing to speak about that book, use the introductory material to get a sense of the time frame, the author and reason for writing, and an introduction that places the book into a contemporary setting. Study the Blueprint to understand how the book is laid out. Read the Megathemes and discover the main themes of that book and their importance. Many books also include overview maps with key events noted to give you the geographical context and flow.

### Focusing on a Particular Passage

If you have been assigned a verse or passage of Scripture to discuss, use the life application notes, cross-references, and section headings to help you put the passage into context. If you don't find a note on that particular verse, consider the topic that you want to discuss and go to the index to look up the topic and other notes that will give further insight.

### Using the Cross-References

The cross-references are an often-missed resource. For example, if you're studying the life of David or of Solomon, you can use the cross-references linked from the text to send you to the same account recorded in 2 Samuel or in 1 Chronicles.

### Studying the Personality Profiles

The Personality Profiles are a nearly inexhaustible resource of study ideas. For instance, in a women's Bible study, you could work your way through the profiles of women. Or you could study the profiles ahead of time and do a topical study based on the life lessons for various women (using them like case studies). You can study all the people in a particular book, compare various kings or apostles, or even study the Bible characters by age (for example, choosing some of the more elderly faithful followers, such as Simeon and Anna, for an older group).

### Employing the Charts as Visual Aids

The charts are designed to be simple and to summarize Bible data and teachings. They will give you

an overview of a topic either from a specific book or the Bible as a whole. You could do an entire study from one chart or series of charts. For example, the charts in *Proverbs* pull together scattered verses on similar topics. These would be helpful in discussing key topics covered in *Proverbs*. In addition, the Bible includes several large charts that give sweeping overviews on various topics.

### Seeing the Big Picture of Jesus by Using the Harmony of the Gospels

In studying a Gospel or the life of Christ, the Harmony of the Gospels presents his story in chronological order (the events are numbered, and the numbers also appear in the text) and will show you where the same stories appear in other Gospels. (The Harmony of the Gospels is located after the Gospel of John.) In addition, none of the study notes have been repeated—so the notes you read in *Matthew* on the feeding of the five thousand will be different from the notes you read about that same story elsewhere. Use the Harmony to help you get a full picture of an event by seeing it from the different perspectives of all who wrote about the same event. Read the same accounts in different Gospels. Notice the differing details. Consider the point of view of the authors.

### Getting a Wider Perspective by Using the Harmony of Kings and Chronicles

In a study of the books of Kings or Chronicles, the Harmony of the Kings and Chronicles (located between the books of 1 and 2 Kings) will give you a visual timeline for when the various kings ruled, tell whether accounts of their reigns are recorded in other books, and show the prophet who was preaching at the time. Similarly, if you're studying any of the prophetic books, you can use the Harmony to learn about what was going on in the kingdom to which the prophet had been called to speak. This will give you great insight into why the prophet spoke as he did.

### Sampling the Maps

If your group is interested in maps, use the maps in the Gospels (in conjunction with the Harmony) to trace Jesus' steps throughout his ministry. Use the maps of Paul's journeys and follow his footsteps across Asia Minor and on to Rome. Use the maps in *Genesis* to help your readers visualize the whereabouts of the people they are studying.

These are just a few suggestions for using the resources in the *Life Application Study Bible*. The following section takes you through steps for planning a topical talk using the Master Index.

### ***A Sample Lesson in Six Easy Steps***

You've been given the assignment to give a talk to a group about the importance of prayer in a Christian's life.

**STEP ONE: Pray.**

Begin by asking God to guide you as you put together your talk. Ask him to give you insight and wisdom. Ask him to guide the process and give you the right words to say.

**STEP TWO: Anticipate questions.**

List questions your group might have about this topic, focusing on particular issues that may be important to them at this time. (For example, if a family is facing a difficult illness and God doesn't seem to be answering their request, you will need to be prepared to discuss the issue of unanswered prayer.)

STEP THREE: Prepare an outline.

Keeping in mind the questions from step two, begin an outline. Three points are usually good. Give an introduction (an anecdote, a question, an example). List the three points you want to make about prayer. Give an application-oriented conclusion (see the article, “Taking the Step to Application” on the following pages).

STEP FOUR: Go to the Master Index.

Look up “Prayer” in the Master Index. You’ll find a long list of notes on various verses. Whittle it down by looking at the topic sentence for each note; then jot down the locations of notes you think might fit into your outline. Also notice that the Master Index lists three charts that focus on prayer and three Personality Profiles that include life lessons on the topic of prayer. Make a note of the page numbers for these.

STEP FIVE: Read the passages, notes, and other helpful materials.

Now refer to your jotted list and read the notes, charts, and profiles. When you find Bible verses and significant points in the notes that you want to use, write them on your three-point outline.

STEP SIX: Put it all together.

Now make your points flow together. Write transition sentences between points. Finally, add a conclusion that challenges your listeners to take the message to heart and let it make a difference in their lives.

### **Taking the Step to Application**

Whether you are studying the Bible for yourself or teaching it to others, moving toward application is the most important part of the studying and teaching process. You see, just having information about what is in the Bible is not enough (even Satan knew enough of the Bible to be able to quote it – Matthew 4:1-11). Understanding the context or the concepts is not enough. Even being able to see that it is relevant to today’s world is not enough. For the Bible to really make a difference in our lives, we need to (1) receive the message personally, (2) reflect on our lives and identify what needs to change as a result of God’s Word, and (3) lay out a plan to make that change. Taking the step to application means that we finish our Bible study or go away from a lesson asking:

Now that I know what God wants me to do, how am I going to start doing it?

Application is the step between *knowing* what the Bible says and *doing* what it says. While the truths of the Bible never change, people’s life situations are different and are constantly changing. You must continue to study the Bible and learn the new things God wants you to learn. And when you teach, you may be able to tell your listeners how *you* are applying certain principles from God’s Word, but at the same time you need to give them the tools and the opportunity to apply the Bible to *their own* life situations. So how do you do that? We have developed a Bible study system called the Pyramid (see below). Using the nine sets of questions in the Pyramid, you will be able to study the Bible and then apply its principles more practically and thoroughly to your personal life situations.

## Life Application Pyramid

Each step is described in detail below, followed by the questions you should ask yourself as you work your way over the Pyramid toward application. After point 5, at the top of the Pyramid, we offer an example of how your study might look. Then follow points 6 to 9 down the other side of the Pyramid. We have provided an example here as well, although these points will vary greatly for each individual.

### 1. People

Begin by identifying the people in the passage, the characters who are actively involved. Sometimes no specific individuals or groups will be named (such as when you're reading Proverbs or Romans). But don't forget the author and the original audience. Note the people and learn something about them. (For example, if you're reading Isaiah's message to Moab, look up the "Moabites" in the Master Index and read the notes to better understand the people in this passage.) So you should ask,

- Who are all the people in this passage?
- How are these people like people in my world?
- What characteristics of these people do I see in myself?

### 2. Place

Next, consider Place. This step puts the passage in its original setting, the historical and cultural context. You can learn about Place by again using the Master Index and looking up the notes (and often the maps). The more you know about the culture, history, and problems of the people in the passage, the more you will be able to find parallels to your life today. Ask,

- What is the setting of this passage?
- What are the significant details in the history, culture, and geography?
- What are the similarities to my world?

### 3. Plot

This step answers the question "What's happening?" Usually you can discover this by the context of the passage and book. The notes in the section you're reading will also help you to unravel the plot of a particular passage. Ask,

- What is happening in this passage?
- What is the conflict or tension?
- What would I have done in this situation?
- How is this similar to what is happening in my life or in the world today?

#### 4. Point

Before you can determine what something in the Bible means for you today, you must first ascertain the meaning for the original audience. The events recorded in the Bible happened to real people at specific times in history. Real audiences heard the parables, and real churches received the epistles. Therefore, carefully consider the cultural context (what you learned in the first three steps) to find the particular lessons that God wanted to teach these people. A clear understanding of the Point can prevent damaging misapplication and is invaluable for determining the timeless truths in the passage. To determine the Point, ask,

- What was the intended message for the original audience?
- What did the people in the passage learn?
- What did God want them to do?
- What was God's solution to the problem?

#### 5. Principles

The next step is to determine what transferable principles are embedded in the passage. The Point and Principles may be exactly the same—or may be indirectly related. The Principles are the distilled essence of a passage. You should ask,

- What is the message for all of humankind?
- What are the timeless truths?
- What is the moral of the story?

Here are possible answers for Acts 27:27–44 for the first five steps up the Bible study Pyramid.

**PEOPLE:** Luke (the author, included in the “we” passage), Paul, the sailors, other prisoners, soldiers guarding the other prisoners, the army officer guarding Paul (Julius, see 27:1), God.

**PLACE:** on ship, sailing across the Adriatic Sea (27:27), near the island of Malta (28:1), during a terrible storm, as Paul and other Roman prisoners were being taken to Rome for trial; the journey was undertaken “late in the fall” (27:9), so it may have been October, a time when dangerous storms could arise suddenly.

**PLOT:** Paul had warned that the trip would be disastrous (27:9-10), but the officer in charge didn't listen and determined to sail anyway. When the terrible storm arose, Paul encouraged everyone (27:22) and told them what to do; this time the Roman crew listened (27:31-38). Paul also thanked God in front of everyone (27:35). When the ship began to break up, the soldiers were about to kill their prisoners (so they wouldn't escape), but the officer guarding Paul stopped them (27:43).

**POINT:** Paul was confident of God's protection and care, even during a life-threatening storm. This confidence freed Paul to encourage others, even his captors, and to give a clear testimony of his

faith in Christ.

**PRINCIPLES:** God is present and in control of all our “storms”; we can take courage and have hope because we know that God is with us and he cares for us. Even when we are going through difficult times, we should encourage and help others and give clear evidence of our faith.

Now you’ve made it up one side of the Pyramid. The path to the top of the Pyramid narrows to a single point and a few principles, but the paths going down the other side are diverse and varied for each person and for each situation. Points 6 to 9 are as follows:

## 6. Present

This step expands the areas of application for the Point and Principles that you have extracted so far. A different kind of thinking is required because you are expanding possibilities and adding your life to the Principles. Here you describe the significant implications of these timeless truths for life at home, school, job, and in your neighborhood. This step brings the truth into your context, into today’s world, here and now. The meaning for the original audience may be clear, but the implications for the Present may be rich and varied. Ask,

- What do these Principles mean for my society and culture?
- How is this relevant?
- What back then is similar to today?
- How can I make the timeless truth timely?

## 7. Parallels

This step is similar to Present, except that it is very personal, addressing specific life situations, fears, hopes, and relationships. This is the time to explore all the areas of life where the truth might apply. Thus, you should ask,

- What does this truth mean for me?
- Where are my areas of need, conviction, and opportunity?
- Where in my life might this truth possibly apply?

## 8. Priorities

After surfacing application areas, select one that you consider to be most important—one that God is nudging you about. This is one of the more difficult steps—it can be easy to start rationalizing or to make excuses. But to truly get God’s Word into your life and grow as a believer, you need to listen when God speaks. In taking this step, you are answering the question, “So what?”; that is, what does this passage say about how I should change? This involves asking these tough questions:

- How should I adjust my Priorities?
- What should I change about my values, beliefs, attitudes, or character?

- What about my thoughts and motives should change?
- What kind of person does God want me to become?

## 9. Plan

After pinpointing what needs to change, you need to take action. You need to answer the question, “Now what?” and put truth into practice by determining to change and then making plans to live differently. Planning involves selecting a goal, breaking it down into bite-size pieces, and getting moving! These questions will help:

- What does God want me to do about what I have learned?
- What steps will get me to that goal?
- What should be my first step? How should I get started?

Here are possible answers for Acts 27:27–44 for the last four steps down the Bible study Pyramid. While the answers in Steps 1 through 5 are pretty straightforward, the answers in Steps 6 through 9 will vary greatly from person to person, so these are merely suggestions:

**PRESENT:** I’m not a prisoner of a foreign government being taken to trial by ship in a terrible storm, but I do have rough seas in my life. I have a conflict with my daughter’s teacher, a problem with one of my company’s clients, and other difficult situations.

**PARALLELS:** The main parallel to my life is Paul’s attitude in the middle of the crisis—he remained calm, gave instructions, encouraged everyone, and was a positive example of a follower of Christ. In both the problem at school and the one at work, I need to explain my case calmly and confidently. But in doing this, I should be positive and helpful, not negative, hateful, or divisive.

**PRIORITIES:** My natural tendency is to get angry and tell someone off when I think he or she is wrong, or to shout orders without being sensitive to the feelings of others. I think that God wants me to be more patient and understanding. Perhaps through the way I communicate, I can be a positive witness for Christ.

**PLAN:** With the conflict at school, I need to speak directly to the teacher (not write a letter) and explain my position carefully, calmly, and with concern for the feelings of the teacher. I will make an appointment, write out my points beforehand so I won’t get off on tangents and get upset, and carefully explain my position while letting the teacher know that I respect him.

Remember, a big difference stands between *knowing* and *doing*, and another big difference between *teaching* and *doing*. So as you begin taking the steps to application in both your personal study and in your teaching, ask yourself:

Am I doing what God wants me to do?

Am I obeying him?

Be honest in your self-evaluation. Applying the Bible begins *now*, with you. James wrote:

*But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. (James 1:22-25).*

This article is adapted from Dave Veerman, *How to Apply the Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993). Books are available at [www.lifeapplicationbible.com](http://www.lifeapplicationbible.com).

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[Erv Thomas](#)

*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv*

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** Becoming a...  
**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>  
**To:** Jane Thomas <ethomas@isionline.org>  
**Date Sent:** Mon, 15 Jan 2018 00:55:15 +0000  
**Date Received:**  
**Attachments:** IMG\_0106.jpg

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Hi



# BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

UPDATED EDITION



# JOHN STOTT

One of the greatest problems for the Christian faith is ignorance. This is obvious for those living in parts of the world where there is little exposure to or influence by Christians. But it is also true for those living in parts of the world where Christianity has had a strong heritage but is now on the decline. Despite such a tradition, people do not know or understand the basic beliefs and

practices of Christianity. While some people reject Christianity without clearly understanding it, others are attracted to Jesus and probably would become Christians if they knew how. This booklet explains in simple terms how to become a Christian.

Christianity claims to be God's solution to the greatest problem humans face. But it's impossible to understand or accept the solution without being clear about the problem. So let's first examine the problem.

The Bible says, "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth" (1 John 1:5-6). Based on this Scripture, our basic problem can be summarized in three statements.

First, we "walk in darkness." In other words, all people are sinners. Though we don't often think in terms of sin, we can't close our eyes to an obvious fact. The Bible teaches and our experience confirms that the darkness of selfishness and sin overshadow our lives.

Second, "God is light." Unlike us, "there is no darkness at all" in him. God is pure and spotless. Third, just as light and darkness can't live together, neither can God and sin. Speaking about God, the ancient prophet Habakkuk says, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing" (Habakkuk 1:13). The Bible also says that God "lives in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16). This is the logical conclusion: we cannot "have fellowship with him" until the darkness—sin—has been removed from us.

The problem should now be clear to us. How can we who live in darkness be reconciled to a holy God, who lives in light? More directly, how can my sins be forgiven and removed so I can have fellowship with God?

## THE CHRISTIAN ANSWER

Let's allow the Bible to answer our question in its own words. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Jesus came into the world to solve humanity's basic problem. He came to be our Savior, which he accomplished by dying on the cross. He came to earth not to live but to die. He lived in the shadow of the cross from the beginning. He knew perfectly well that death awaited him in Jerusalem. In fact, he clearly predicted it.

On the night he was betrayed by one of his followers, when he gave his disciples bread and poured out wine, he not only predicted his death but explained its purpose. Speaking of the wine, he said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

Someone might ask, "What is the connection between his death and our forgiveness?" The real meaning of Jesus' death on the cross is not so much about his physical and mental pain and suffering, but in the spiritual anguish he endured. From noon to three the land became dark. This was a symbol of the darkness of our sin that surrounded Jesus while he hung on the cross. To fully understand what was happening, we need some background information.

Regarding what Jesus experienced on the cross, the ancient prophet Isaiah, who lived hundreds of years before Jesus, said,

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity [sin] of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

And the apostle Paul explains, "God made him who had no sin to be sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Isaiah further explains,

He was pierced for our rebellion,  
crushed for our sins.  
He was beaten so we could be whole.  
He was whipped so we could be healed. (Isaiah 53:5 NLT)

Jesus not only carried our sins but experienced their penalty as well. This penalty is death—separation from God (Romans 6:23). God, who is light, cannot be in fellowship with darkness—even when his dear Son was enveloped in it for us. So, because he was unable to be in the presence of or even look at evil, God turned away his face from his Son, and Jesus cried out in desolate abandonment, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Then, after Jesus carried our sins “in his body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24), he cried out again, this time not in despair but in triumph, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). The work of salvation was accomplished.

Then, as if to confirm the truth of the words Jesus had spoken, God gave his dramatic reply. “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Mark 15:38). The thick veil in the temple in Jerusalem, which for centuries had stood as a symbol of the barrier sin had erected between the sinner and God, was ripped apart. Then God’s righteousness was perfectly satisfied; Christ had fully borne the penalty for the sins of the whole world and so had opened the gate of heaven to all believers.

Furthermore, Jesus’ resurrection from death and his return to the Father is final and decisive proof that his sacrifice had been effective for the removal of sin and that God’s righteousness had been fully satisfied. Jesus is depicted as sitting at the Father’s right hand because he is now resting after perfectly completing the work of salvation he had been given to do.

Sin is the basic problem humans face. And Christianity is a “message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). It is the “gospel,” that is, good news of what God has done in Christ to deliver us from our sins.

## WHAT MUST I DO?

Some people think that forgiveness of sins is automatically given to everyone through Christ’s death. However, God’s solution to the problem of sin is not automatic and impersonal. God does not force salvation on those who do not want it. He respects his own gift of free will to humans. He offers us salvation; however, he does not force anyone to accept it.

The Bible is clear that we can’t earn salvation. We must receive it as a gift from God. How? By taking three simple steps.

I must admit that in God’s sight I am a helpless sinner. Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” All men and women are sinners indiscriminately. That is to say, though there may be some distinction between us in the degree we have sinned; there is no difference in the fact. This statement includes me. In thought, word and deed I have continually disobeyed God’s commandments and fallen short of what I should have been. Consequently, I have been banished from God’s presence as Isaiah 59:1-2 makes clear:

Your iniquities have separated  
you from your God;  
your sins have hidden his face from you.

Furthermore, I am helpless to fix the problem. No amount of good works can win God’s favor. In utter humility, I must admit that I am a helpless sinner. I need a Savior to make me right with God.

I must believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to be the Savior I need. The Son of God “loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). He carried my sins in his own body. He was made sin for me. More than that, he voluntarily endured the penalty I deserved because of my sins. He was pierced for my rebellion; he was crushed for my sins. First Peter 3:18 says that in order to bring me back to God, Christ, the innocent One, suffered for the sins that I, the guilty one, had committed. I must come to Christ through prayer and claim my personal share in what he did for everyone. He died to be the Savior of the world; I must ask him to be my Savior. He bore the sins of all people; I must ask him to take my sins away. He suffered to bring everyone back to God. I must ask him to bring me.

What I must do is explained by Christ in Revelation 3:20: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.” The house is a picture of my

life. Christ stands outside the front door. He will not force his way in. He does not use a battering ram. He waits patiently until I open the door. Then he will come in. When he enters, he will become the Savior I acknowledge I need, and I will find myself reconciled to God, enjoying that fellowship with him I was created for.

## SOME SOBERING THOUGHTS

Before taking this step, we would be wise to consider its implications. Jesus constantly discouraged people from following him if they were doing so for the wrong reasons. We too must carefully consider our reasons for accepting him. There are rich rewards in following Christ, but there is a price to be paid. What demand does Christ make on me if I accept his offer?

I must repent of my sin. Jesus said, "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). When a person receives Christ, he or she must also repent. This doesn't mean being sorry for the past; I must repent. That is, I must turn my back on everything in my past life I know to be wrong, and I must be willing to let Christ cast it out of my life forever. I can't do this by myself. And if my repentance is genuine, it will include making restitution by repaying stolen money or property or time, by making some needed apology, by contradicting lies about others I have spread, and so on. I must surrender to Christ. He wants to be my Lord as well as my Savior. He wants to take possession of all my life and rule in it so that from today on, his Word guides me in everything. I will consult him before making any decisions, pray constantly about my career, and do my best to discover and obey his will in little things and big. I will never forget what he said about denying myself and following him (Mark 8:34). I must confess Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord before others. I realize that I cannot be a secret disciple. I will tell others that Jesus is my Lord, and if my faith is challenged, I will own up to the fact that I am a follower of Christ. I will not be ashamed to show by my life that I am a Christian. I am aware that I may lose some of my old friends, and some will sneer at me, but Christ told me not to be ashamed of him (Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 8:38). I will count it a privilege to suffer for his sake (Acts 5:41).

## A PRAYER

We have seen what it means and what it costs to be a Christian. The issues are clear. If Christ makes demands, he also gives rewards. Nothing in this world can compare with the deep and inward satisfaction of knowing him (Philippians 3:8). Even if we were the losers by coming to Christ, his dying love is such that we cannot turn away.

If you clearly understand what Christ has done for us on the cross and you have considered carefully the demands he makes, nothing is stopping you from becoming a Christian. Go somewhere where you can be quiet and alone, without fear of interruption, and pray a prayer of faith such as this:

"Lord Jesus Christ, I humbly admit that I have sinned in my thinking and speaking and acting. I am guilty of deliberate wrongdoing. I know my sins have separated me from your holy presence, and that I am helpless to commend myself to you.

"I believe that you died on the cross for my sins, carrying them in your own body and suffering in my place.

"I have thoughtfully counted the cost of following you. I sincerely repent and turn away from my past sins. I am willing to surrender to you as my Lord and Master. Help me to not be ashamed of you.

"So now I come to you. I believe that for a long time you have been patiently standing outside the door knocking. I now open the door. Please come in, Jesus, and be my Savior and Lord for ever. Amen."

## SOME FINAL SUGGESTIONS

The following are some words of advice for those who have sincerely said this prayer and received the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tell somebody today what you have done. Don't doubt that the Lord Jesus has come into your life. Don't worry if you do not feel any different. His sure promise, not your feelings, is the

ground of your faith. Read Revelation 3:20 and John 6:37. He has promised to come into your life if you receive him and to receive you if you come to him. Believe his word. He will be true to it. Join a Christian group (church, Bible study, etc.). God does not intend us to live the Christian life alone. Sunday worship is a Christian duty. Maintain and develop your new friendship with Christ by disciplining yourself to have a daily time, morning and evening, of quiet Bible reading and prayer. You will find this indispensable. Start praying for someone else to introduce to Christ. You cannot enjoy a monopoly of the gospel!

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[Erv Thomas](#)

*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv*

*International Life @ FLC*





# BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

UPDATED EDITION



# JOHN STOTT

**Subject:** Great little book by Calvin!

**From:** erv thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

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**Date Sent:** Sat, 16 Dec 2017 11:22:02 -0800

**Date Received:** Sat, 16 Dec 2017 11:22:08 -0800 (PST)

**Attachments:** Christian Life.pdf

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Brothers, I just came across this book last night by John Calvin. It is a quick read and ha quickly made my top 10 Christian books ever read. I recommend you read it over the Christmas break and we can discuss it in the new year :) - Erv

## CHAPTER 1

SCRIPTURE'S CALL TO CHRISTIAN LIVING THE GOAL OF God's work in us is to bring our lives into harmony and agreement with His own righteousness, and so to manifest to ourselves and others our identity as His adopted children. We discover in God's law a picture of God's own image, to which we are being progressively conformed. But since we are lazy and require prodding and encouragement in this, it will be helpful to construct in this work a model of the mature Christian life from various passages of Scripture, so that those who are truly repentant of heart will not lose their way on the path to greater conformity to God's image. I know that in addressing the topic of the mature Christian life, I am entering on a vast and complex subject. Even if I were merely to summarize all that has been written by others on this topic, the result would be a long and dense volume. Previous generations of theologians have written large works on individual virtues, but they wasted no words. For when anyone seeks to describe and commend a particular virtue, it seems as if his pen is spontaneously led to write at great length because of the significance of his subject. Indeed, one will not seem to have described any particular virtue sufficiently unless he writes at great length. In this work, however, it's not my intention to say too much, nor to discuss every virtue in great detail, nor to stray into lengthy exhortations. Such exhortations can be found in the writings of those who have gone before us, especially in the sermons of the church fathers. My goal here is simply to present to godly people a model for ordering their lives. I intend, that is, to identify a certain universal principle to guide Christians in their duties. Perhaps in the future I will have time to address the subject of Christian virtues more fully. Or maybe others better suited to the task will do so. By nature I love brevity, so perhaps even if I tried to write something larger I would not succeed in my effort. In any case, even if a longer work on the subject of the Christian life were worthwhile, I would hesitate to attempt such now, because my purpose in this work is to present doctrine simply and concisely. When philosophers write about the virtuous life, they identify certain primary goals for human beings such as integrity and honor, and from these they derive specific duties and the entire chorus of remaining virtues. But Scripture has its own order and plan that is more beautiful and certain than any philosophic method. The philosophers, wanting to draw attention to themselves, strive to be very clear—clear, that is, in showcasing their own rhetorical skills. But the Spirit of God lacks such a motive in His teaching. He has not, therefore, followed the specific method of the philosophers, though he has revealed truth clearly enough to keep us from despising clarity. ♦ THERE ARE TWO main parts to the instruction from Scripture on the Christian life that follow. The first is that a love of righteousness—to which we are not naturally prone—must be implanted and poured into our hearts. The second is that we need some model that will keep

us from losing our way in our pursuit of righteousness. Scripture contains many arguments to encourage us on the path of righteousness. Many of these arguments I have noted elsewhere,

and some I note here. To begin with, what better foundation can Scripture give for the pursuit of righteousness than to tell us we should be holy because God Himself is holy? Moreover, when we were scattered and wandering like sheep, lost in the maze of the world, God found us and gathered us to Himself. When we contemplate this relationship between ourselves and God, let us remember that holiness is the bond of our union with Him. Not, of course, because we enter into fellowship with Him by the merit of our own holiness. Rather, we first of all cling to Him, and then, having received His holiness, we follow wherever He calls us. For it is characteristic of His glory that He has no fellowship with sin and impurity. Holiness is the goal of our calling. Therefore we must consistently set our sights upon holiness if we would rightly respond to God's calling. To what purpose did God pull us out of the wickedness and pollution of this world—wickedness and pollution in which we were submerged—if we allow ourselves to wallow in such wickedness and pollution for the rest of our lives? Furthermore, if we count ourselves among God's people, Scripture tells us to live as citizens of the holy city of Jerusalem, which He has consecrated to Himself. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. HEBREWS 13:14 It's shameful that the citizens of the holy city should pollute it by their impurity. Thus, we read that there will be a dwelling place in God's tabernacle for those who walk blamelessly and pursue righteousness. It's not right that the sanctuary in which God dwells should resemble a filthy stable. ♦ TO PROMPT US toward righteousness more effectively, Scripture tells us that God the Father, who has reconciled us to Himself in His Anointed One, Jesus Christ, has given us in Christ a model to which we should conform our lives. You will not find a better model in the philosophers—in whom many expect to find the only correct and orderly treatment of moral philosophy. They, while doing their best to encourage us to be virtuous, have nothing to say except that we should live "according to nature." Scripture, however, draws its encouragement from the true fountain. It teaches us to contemplate our lives in relation to God, our Author, to whom we are bound. And, having taught us that we have fallen from the true state and condition of our original creation, Scripture adds that Christ, through whom we have been restored to favor with God, is set before us as a model whose form and beauty should be reflected in our own lives. What could be more effective than this? Indeed, what more is needed than this? We have been adopted by the Lord as children with this understanding—that in our lives we should mirror Christ who is the bond of our adoption. And truly, unless we are devoted—even addicted—to righteousness, we will faithlessly abandon our Creator and disown Him as our Savior.

Scripture derives some principle of conduct from every gift of God described to us in it, and from every aspect of our salvation. God has manifested Himself as Father to us. If we do not manifest ourselves as sons to Him in turn, we prove ourselves to be extremely ungrateful (Mal. 1:6; 1 John 3:1). Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. EPHESIANS 5:1 Christ has cleansed us by washing us with His blood, and has communicated this cleansing to us through baptism. It would be inappropriate, therefore, for us to defile ourselves with fresh filthiness (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:10; 1 Peter 1:15, 19). Christ has engrafted us into His body. We, therefore, who are His members must be especially careful not to fling mud or filthiness on the body of Christ (John 15:3-6; 1 Cor. 6:15; Eph. 5:23-33). Christ our Head has ascended into heaven. We, therefore, must set aside earthly affections and wholeheartedly long for that place (Col. 3:1ff.). The Holy Spirit has consecrated us as temples of God. We, therefore, must let the glory of God shine through us, and we must not pollute ourselves with sin. Our bodies and souls have been destined to heavenly incorruption and an unfading crown. We, therefore, must strive upward—keeping ourselves pure and incorruptible until the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:23). These are most holy foundations on which to build the Christian life. Nothing like these can be found in the philosophers, who in their commendation of virtue never rise above the dignity that natural man can achieve. ♦ SOMETHING MUST BE said about those who want to be called Christians but possess nothing of Christ except the title and appearance. They arrogantly glory in His holy name. But only those who have gained a true knowledge of Christ from the Word of the gospel have a relationship with Him. And the Apostle denies that any have rightly learned Christ who have not learned that they must put off the old man, who is corrupted by deceitful desires, and put on Christ. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to

your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. EPHESIANS 4:20-24 Such nominal Christians demonstrate their knowledge of Christ to be false and offensive no matter how eloquently and loudly they talk about the gospel. For true doctrine is not a matter of the tongue, but of life; neither is Christian doctrine grasped only by the intellect and memory, as truth is grasped in other fields of study. Rather, doctrine is rightly received when it takes possession of the entire soul and finds a dwelling place and shelter in the most intimate affections of the heart. So let such people stop lying, or let them prove themselves worthy disciples of Christ, their teacher.

We have given priority to doctrine, which contains our religion, since it establishes our salvation. But in order for doctrine to be fruitful to us, it must overflow into our hearts, spread into our daily routines, and truly transform us within. Even the philosophers rage against and reject those who profess an art that ought to govern one's life, but who twist that art hypocritically into empty chatter. How much more then should we detest the foolish talk of those who give lip service to the gospel? The gospel's power ought to penetrate the innermost affections of the heart, sink down into the soul, and inspire the whole man a hundred times more than the lifeless teachings of the philosophers. ♦ I'M NOT SAYING that the conduct of a Christian will breathe nothing but pure gospel, although this should be desired and pursued. I'm not, in other words, talking about gospel perfection, as if I were unwilling to acknowledge or recognize a man or a woman as a Christian who has not obtained perfection. If that were the case, everyone would be excluded from the church, since we do not find any in it who are close to being perfect. Indeed, we find many in the church who have progressed little toward perfection, but who, nevertheless, it would be unjust to reject as Christians. What I am saying is this: Let us fix our eyes on the goal and sole object of our pursuit. Let that goal, toward which we must strive and contend, be established from the beginning. After all, it's not right to barter with God regarding what we will and won't undertake from those things He has prescribed for us in His Word. God always commends—as of utmost importance— integrity as the principal part of His worship. And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, "You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel." 1 KINGS 9:4-5 And by the word integrity He means sincere simplicity of heart, free from pretense and deceit, which is the opposite of duplicity of heart. In other words, right living has a spiritual basis where the inner affection of the soul is sincerely devoted to God for the nurture of holiness and righteousness. Of course, none of us is capable of running swiftly on the right course while we remain in the earthly confinement of our bodies. Indeed, most of us are so oppressed with weakness that we make little progress—staggering, limping, and crawling on the ground. But let us move forward according to the measure of our resources and pursue the path we have begun to walk. None of us will move forward with so little success that we will not make some daily progress in the way. Therefore, let us keep trying so that we might continually make some gains in the way of the Lord, and neither let us despair over how small our successes are. For however much our successes fall short of our desire, our efforts aren't in vain when we are farther along today than yesterday. So let us fix our eyes on the goal with sincerity and simplicity, aspiring to that end—neither foolishly congratulating ourselves, nor excusing our evil deeds. Let us press on

with continual striving toward that goal so that we might surpass ourselves—until we have finally arrived at perfection itself. This, indeed, is what we follow after and pursue all our lives, but we will only possess it when we have escaped the weakness of the flesh and have been received into His perfect fellowship.

CHAPTER 2 SELF-DENIAL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE THE LAW OF the Lord is the best and most suitable instruction for the proper ordering of our lives. Nevertheless, it seemed good to our heavenly teacher to conform us by an even more precise rule than what's given in the precepts of the law. This is the sum of that rule: It is the duty of believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. And in this consists genuine worship of Him. From this rule is derived the exhortation that believers not be conformed to this world, but be transformed

by the renewal of their minds, so that by testing they may discern what is the will of God. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ROMANS 12:1-2 This is a marvelous thing—we are consecrated and dedicated to God to the end that we might not think, speak, meditate, or act unless it be to His glory. The sacred can't be put to profane use without injustice to God. If we are not our own but the Lord's, it's clear what errors we must flee, and what we must direct our whole lives toward. We are not our own; therefore, neither our reason nor our will should dominate our plans and actions. We are not our own; therefore, let us not make the gratification of our flesh our end. We are not our own; therefore, as much as possible, let us forget ourselves and our own interests. Rather, we are God's. Therefore, let us live and die to Him. We are God's. Therefore, let His wisdom and His will govern all our actions. We are God's. Therefore, let us—in every way in all our lives—run to Him as our only proper end. How far has he progressed who's been taught that he is not his own—who's taken rule and dominion away from his own reason and entrusted them to God. For the plague of submitting to our own rule leads us straight to ruin, but the surest way to safety is neither to know nor to want anything on our own, but simply to follow the leading of the Lord. Let then our first step be to abandon ourselves, that we may apply all our strength to obedience to God. When I say "obedience," I don't mean giving lip service to God; but rather, being free from the desire of the flesh, turning our minds over completely to the bidding of the

Spirit of God. The philosophers are ignorant of this transformation (which Paul calls the "renewing of the mind") even though it constitutes the very beginning of life (Eph. 4:23). They enthrone man's reason alone as ruler, and they think it alone should be listened to. Indeed, they grant and entrust government of conduct to human reason alone. But Christian philosophy, on the other hand, orders human reason to give place—to submit and yield—to the Holy Spirit. For it's not now we who live, but Christ who lives and reigns in us (Gal. 2:20). ♦ ANOTHER POINT FOLLOWS: We shouldn't seek our own interests but those that are the Lord's, and we should work to promote His glory. This is great progress in the Christian life—that we nearly forget ourselves, that in all matters we hold our own concerns in less esteem, and that we faithfully strive to devote our energies to God and His commands. For when Scripture orders us to disregard our own concerns, it eradicates from our souls the desire to possess things for ourselves, to love power, and to long for the praise of men. Moreover, it uproots our appetite for ambition as well as our appetite for all human glory and other more secret evils. It's indeed fitting that the Christian consider that his entire life stands in relation to God. Just as he submits all he is and does to God's judgment and decision, so also he religiously refers every intention of his mind to God. For the one who has learned to regard God in everything he does is at the same time being drawn away from every vain thought. This is the self-denial that Christ diligently commended to His disciples from the very beginning of their apprenticeship. Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." MATTHEW 16:24 Once self-denial has occupied the heart, it crowds out the evils of pride, arrogance, and pretentiousness as well as greed, lust, gluttony, cowardice, and everything else that is born of self-love. On the other hand, where self-denial does not reign, the worst vices thrive shamelessly. Or, if there is any semblance of virtue, it's corrupted by a depraved desire for glory. No man wants to freely do what is right without first renouncing himself according to God's command. Those who haven't been overcome by this sense of need for self-denial have followed virtue for the sake of praise. Moreover, many philosophers, being overcome with arrogance, have recommended seeking virtue for its own sake. They recommend seeking virtue only for the sake of pride. Yet God isn't pleased with those who strive after fleeting praise. He isn't pleased with those who have puffed-up hearts and who manifest to others that they have received their reward in this life (Matt. 6:5-6, 16). Prostitutes and tax collectors are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than such people. Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe

him.” MATTHEW 21:31-32

Nevertheless, we still need to understand clearly the nature of the obstacles that hinder a man, when he does not deny himself, from walking the right path. For rightly it has been said, “There is a world of vices hidden in the soul of man.” You won’t find any proper remedy to such vices other than to deny yourself, to disregard your own ambitions, and to stretch your mind to seek wholly those things that the Lord requires of you—and to seek them because they are pleasing to Him. ♦ IN ANOTHER PLACE in Scripture, Paul more clearly— albeit briefly—rehearses the various parts of the well-ordered life. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14). In this passage, after Paul sets forth the grace of God to motivate us, he removes two obstacles that severely hinder us in order to clear our path to worship God: first, our natural inclination toward ungodliness; and second, worldly desires that seek to ensnare us all the more. By “ungodliness” he means not only superstition, but anything that contends seriously with the fear of God. By “worldly desires” he means the desires of the flesh. Thus, he orders us, making reference to each table of the law, to put off our natural inclinations and to deny ourselves—that is, to resist whatever our reason and will demand. Now, every right action in life belongs to one of three categories: self-control, uprightness, and godliness. Of these, self-control means purity and self-restraint, as well as blamelessly and carefully using the things we have, and acting with patience when we lack anything. Uprightness means observing all the requirements of justice so that we render to each one what is rightly due him. Godliness separates us from the impurities of the world and unites us to God in genuine holiness. These three—self-control, uprightness, and godliness—when they are joined together in an unbreakable bond, make us complete. But in truth, nothing is more difficult than saying goodbye to carnal reason and subduing—indeed, conquering—our desires and joining ourselves to God and our brothers. We are, essentially, contemplating the life of the angels even as we trudge through the mire of earth’s filthiness. Paul recalls us to the hope of blessed immortality in order to free our souls from all snares, and he admonishes us not to contend for such righteousness without hope. For Christ has first appeared as our Redeemer, and, by His second coming, He will bring forth the fruit of the redemption He has secured for us. In this way, Paul subdues all the temptations that vex us and that keep us from aspiring to heavenly glory. Indeed, he teaches us to live as strangers in this world so that we won’t lose our heavenly inheritance. ♦

MOREOVER, WE UNDERSTAND from this passage, Titus 2:11-14, that the denial of ourselves is partly in reference to men and is partly—indeed, chiefly—in reference to God. Scripture orders us to live with men in such a way as to prefer their honor to our own and to devote ourselves in good faith to promoting their welfare (Rom. 12:10).

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. PHILIPPIANS 2:3 Thus it gives us commands that our souls are incapable of fulfilling unless our souls are emptied of their natural inclination. Each of us thinks we have just cause for elevating ourselves and despising all others in comparison to ourselves—our self-love ruins us with such blindness. If, in fact, God has gifted us with something that is good in itself, we immediately make it the basis for praising ourselves to such a degree that we not only swell up but almost burst with pride. We carefully conceal our abundant vices from others—and we pretend they’re small and insignificant. In fact, we so delude ourselves that we sometimes embrace our vices as virtues. When others possess gifts that we would admire in ourselves—or even better gifts—we spitefully ridicule and degrade their gifts, refusing to rightly acknowledge them as gifts. Similarly, when others possess vices, we’re not content merely to point them out and harshly and sternly reproach them, but we wickedly exaggerate them. Thus our arrogance grows as we seek to exalt ourselves above others, as if we were different from them. Truly, there’s no one who does not flippantly and boldly disregard and despise others as inferiors. Yes, the poor outwardly defer to the rich, common people to nobles, servants to masters, the unlearned to the educated. But there’s not one who does not nourish a high opinion of himself

within. Everyone flatters himself and carries, as it were, a kingdom in his breast. Consider arrogant men who, in order to gratify themselves, criticize the character and morals of others. And when contention arises, their venom erupts. As long as everything is going smoothly and pleasantly, they present themselves with a kind of gentleness. But in reality, how few there are who can maintain such a superficial appearance of modesty when they are jabbed and aggravated. The only remedy for this is to uproot these toxic diseases—love of strife and love of self—that are implanted deeply within us. Scripture does this uprooting with its teaching. For it teaches us that those things that God has given us are not in any way goods originating from ourselves. Instead, they are free gifts from God. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. JAMES 1:17 Those who brag about the gifts they have show themselves to be ungrateful. “For who sees anything different in you?” as Paul says. “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). By constant recognition of our vices, let us return to humility. By so doing, there will be nothing left in us to puff us up, but, on the contrary, there will be much to put us in our place. On the other hand, we are called to respect and commend whatever gifts of God we see in others, and to honor those in whom such gifts reside. For it would be shameful for us to withhold honor from those whom God has deemed worthy of honor. Moreover, so as not to

insult those to whom we owe honor and goodwill, we are taught to overlook their vices— though not, of course, to encourage their vices by admiring them. In this way, we will act not only with moderation and modesty, but with grace and friendliness toward others. We will never achieve genuine meekness except by having our hearts saturated with self-denial and respect for others. ♦ WE WILL MEET many difficulties as we try to dutifully seek the good of our neighbors. We won’t make any headway in this regard unless we lay aside concern for ourselves—indeed, unless we somehow lay aside our very self. For how, unless we forsake ourselves and commit ourselves wholly to others, can we bring forth those works that Paul identifies as love? “Love,” he says, “is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable;” and so on. That single command that we not insist on our own way—with what force must we resist our own nature to pursue it. Our very nature inclines us toward self-love. As a result, we don’t easily deny ourselves or our desires in order to seek the good of others. Even less are we willing to give up our right to something and give that right to another. In order to lead us by the hand to such self-denial, Scripture warns us that whatever we have freely received from the Lord is given to us on the condition that it be used for the common good of the church. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace. 1 PETER 4:10 The proper use, then, of all the good gifts we have received is the free and generous sharing of those gifts with others. No more certain principle nor more effective exhortation for keeping that rule is imaginable than this: Scripture teaches us that all the gifts we utilize are given to us by God. And they are given along with this law of our faith—that they be put to use for the good of our neighbors. But Scripture goes even further than this when it compares us and the gifts we’ve been given to the members of a human body. No member of the body exists to serve itself, nor does each member exist merely for its own private use. Rather, it puts its abilities to use for the other members of the body. Nor does any member of the body alone receive any advantage from itself outside of that which belongs to the entire body. Whatever, therefore, a godly man is able to do, he should do it for his brothers. He should consider his own interests only insofar as he sets his mind on the general edification of the whole church. Let this, then, be our rule for kindness and benevolence: We are merely stewards of whatever gifts God has given to us in order to help our neighbors. We must give an account of our stewardship, and right stewardship is that which is fueled by the rule of love. Consequently, we must not merely join zeal for the good of others with concern for our own well-being, but we must submit concern for our own well-being to the good of others. To help us better understand that this law of stewardship rightly applies to whatever gifts we receive from Him, God applied this law to the smallest gifts of His kindness in former times. For He commanded that the firstfruits of His people’s produce be offered to Him.

The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.

EXODUS 23:19 In this way, God's people of old testified that it was wrong to secure any profit from their produce before it was consecrated to God. Now, if God's gifts to us are ultimately sanctified to us after our hands have offered them back to their very author, any use of those gifts that is not perfumed by such an offering will be a corrupt abuse of them. But we would strive in vain to increase the Lord's wealth by offering our gifts to Him. Since, therefore, our kindness—as the Prophet says—cannot reach Him, we should practice it toward His saints who are on earth (Ps. 16:2-3). Thus our charitable gifts are compared to holy sacrifices, since they correspond to those sacrifices that were required by the law (Heb. 13:16). ♦ FURTHERMORE, SO THAT we don't grow weary in doing good (which otherwise would be certain to happen immediately), we must understand the next point put forward by the Apostle—that "love is patient" and "is not irritable." The Lord instructs us to do good to all people throughout the entire world, many of whom are unworthy of such good if judged by their own merit. But Scripture comes to our rescue with the best of reasons for doing good to all people. It teaches us not to regard others according to their own merits, but to consider in them the image of God to which we owe both honor and love. But the image of God should be more diligently regarded in those who are of the household of faith, because it has been renewed and restored in them by the Spirit of Christ. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. GALATIANS 6:10 Therefore, you have no cause to evade anyone who stands before you and needs your service. Suppose he's a stranger. The Lord, however, has stamped him with His own mark that's familiar to you, and for that reason God forbids you to despise your own flesh. Suppose he is contemptible and worthless. The Lord, however, shows him to be one whom He has condescended to decorate with His own image. Suppose you owe him nothing for what he's done. But God—to whom you know you are obligated because of His many wonderful benefits to you—puts Himself, as it were, in that person's place. Suppose he is unworthy of even your smallest labors for his sake. But the image of God, according to which this person is commended to you, warrants your giving of yourself and your all. Supposing a man not only deserves nothing good from you, but he has also provoked you with injustices and injuries— even this is not just cause for you to stop embracing him with affection and fulfilling your duties of love to him. He has deserved, you might say, something much different from me. But what has the Lord deserved? When He orders you to forgive that man for whatever sin he has committed against you, He calls you to do so not because that man deserves it, but because God Himself has forgiven you (Luke 17:3-4). This is the only path to achieving that which is not only difficult for, but entirely adverse to, our human nature—that is, loving those who hate us, repaying evil with good, and blessing those who curse us.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. MATTHEW 5:44 We must be sure not to dwell on the wickedness of men, but rather to consider the image of God in them. That image, concealing and obliterating their shortcomings, entices us by its beauty and dignity to love and welcome them. ♦ THIS SELF-MORTIFICATION, THEREFORE, will only take place in us when we fulfill the sum of love's requirements. And we fulfill these requirements not when we merely perform all the external duties of love—even if we don't overlook any of them—but when we do so from a sincere affection of love. For it might happen that someone fully performs his obligations as external duties go, and yet he is far from performing them for the right reason. For example, you may see certain people who want to appear very generous, and yet they give nothing without resenting the recipients of their generosity by their proud expressions or arrogant words. Hence the wretchedness into which this unhappy age has sunk—that hardly any charitable gifts are given, at least by the majority of men, without contempt for those to whom they are given. Such viciousness would not have been tolerated even among the pagans of old. Something more is required from Christians than wearing a cheerful face and rendering their duties attractive by friendly words. First, they should imagine themselves in the situation of that person who needs their help, and they should pity his bad fortune as if they themselves both bore it and felt it. Thus they will be compelled, by a feeling of mercy and humanity, to give him help as if it were given to themselves. One who has this mind-set and approaches the task of helping his brothers will not contaminate his duties to others with arrogance or resentment. He won't despise a brother whom he helps because his brother needs such help, nor will he subject his brother to himself as a debtor. We would of course never mock

an injured limb which the rest of the body labors to revive, nor would we consider that limb particularly indebted to the body's other members because it has received more help than it has given. The help that different members of the body mutually offer one another should not—according to the law of nature—be considered a favor, but rather as an obligation that would be unnatural to refuse. For this same reason, one who has performed a single obligation should not consider himself free from doing more—as generally happens when a wealthy person, after offering something of his own, leaves it to others to see to remaining needs, as if such remaining needs had nothing to do with him. Rather, everyone should consider himself—however great he may be—a debtor to his neighbors. And he must set no limit to the exercise of kindnesses toward others short of the failure of his own resources. For such kindnesses, as far and as wide as they extend, should conform to the rule of love. ♦ LET'S DISCUSS AGAIN more fully the chief part of our self-denial, which, as I've said, relates to God. I've mentioned many things about this that would be superfluous to repeat. It will suffice here to discuss how self-denial forms us to be calm and patient in this life. First of all, then, in striving for either convenience or tranquility in this present life, Scripture calls us to resign our wills and everything that is ours to the Lord, and to turn the affections of our hearts over to Him to be tamed and bridled.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. MATTHEW 6:10 Our lust is furious and our greed limitless in pursuing wealth and honors, chasing after power, heaping up riches, and gathering all those vain things which seem to give us grandeur and glory. On the other hand, we greatly fear and hate poverty, obscurity, and humility, and so we avoid these realities in every way. Thus, we see that those who order their lives according to their own counsel have a restless disposition. We see how many tricks they try, how many pursuits they exhaust themselves with in order to secure the objects of their ambition or greed, while trying to avoid, on the other hand, poverty and humility. Therefore, in order not to be entangled in such snares, godly men must hold this course: First of all, they must neither desire, nor aspire, nor expect to prosper for any other reason than the Lord's blessing. Therefore, let them safely and confidently cast themselves on and rest in that blessing. The flesh might seem beautifully sufficient to itself while it strives by its own power, or ascends by its own zeal, or is assisted by the favor of men toward honors and wealth. However, it's nevertheless certain that all these things will come to nothing and that we will accomplish nothing by our talents or efforts, except insofar as the Lord prospers both. But, on the contrary, His blessing by itself finds a way, in spite of every obstacle, to bring all things to a glad and prosperous end for us. Second, we are admittedly able to secure for ourselves, entirely apart from His blessing, something of glory and riches, just as we often see great honors and wealth piled up by ungodly men. Yet whatever we obtain will turn to evil without His blessing, since those on whom God's curse remains do not taste even the smallest amount of true happiness. We obviously shouldn't desire what makes us more miserable. ♦ SUPPOSING WE ACCEPT that the method of obtaining every prosperous and desirable success rests entirely with God's blessing, and that without God's blessing, every kind of misery and misfortune awaits us. It then also stands that we should not greedily strive for wealth and honors, whether trusting in our own natural skill or persistence, relying on the favor of men, or resting on a hollow dream of good fortune. On the contrary, we should always look to the Lord, that by His care we might be led to whatever lot in life He provides for us. The result of this will be, in the first place, that we won't rush forward to capture wealth and lay hold of honors through unlawful acts and treachery, evil devices, or greed, to the injury of our neighbors. Rather, we will follow after those things that don't draw us away from innocence. For who can continue to hope for the help of divine blessing while committing various evils, theft, and other wickedness? For just as God's blessing doesn't come to anyone except those who are pure in thought and deed, so also does that blessing call back from impure thoughts and perverse actions all those who seek it. Second, a bridle will be placed on us so that we won't burn with untamed lust for growing rich or greedily desiring honors. Isn't it shameful for one to look for God's help to obtain those things which he desires when those things are contrary to God's Word? For that which God curses with His own mouth He will not accompany with the help of His blessing.

Finally, if our hope and desire don't succeed, we will nevertheless be restrained from being

impatient and cursing our condition, whatever it may be. For we will understand that such cursing of our condition would be murmuring against God who distributes riches, poverty, honor, and contempt according to His will. In summary, the one who rests on God's blessing in the manner that I've described won't employ wicked means—he knows he'll gain nothing—in the frantic pursuit of things men typically pursue. If he prospers, he won't attribute this to himself or to his own diligence, industry, or luck. Rather, he will acknowledge God as the author of his good fortune. A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. JOHN 3:27 If the affairs of others prosper while he makes little progress, or even regresses, he will endure his poverty with greater patience and moderation of spirit than an impious man would endure minor success that does not precisely meet his desire. For he has this comfort, which provides greater security to him than the highest peak of wealth or power— he knows that his affairs are ordered by the Lord and, as such, promote his salvation. We see this sentiment in David, who, while following God and entrusting himself to God's rule, declared: "I do not occupy myself with things too great and marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother" (Ps. 131:1-2). ♦

THERE ARE OTHER circumstances in which those who are pious should stand firm in peace and patience. Such qualities should extend to every situation that we encounter in this life. No one, then, has properly denied himself except the one who has entirely abandoned himself to the Lord so that every aspect of his life will be governed by His will. The person thus composed in soul will neither judge himself to be miserable, nor will he spitefully complain against God for his lot in life, come what may. The true necessity of having such a disposition is clear if you consider how many unforeseen events we are exposed to in this life. We are continually harassed by one illness or another: the plague advances; we are cruelly vexed by the calamities of war; frost and hail render the land barren and leave us with little, devouring our expectation for the year's crop. Wife, parents, children, and close relatives are snatched away by death; homes are consumed by fire. These are events which make men curse their lives, despise the day they were born, hold in contempt heaven and its light, rage against God, and, being fluent in blasphemies, accuse God of unfairness and cruelty. But the believer must in these same circumstances consider the mercy and the fatherly kindness of God. If the believer, then, should see his house made lonely by the loss of those nearest to him, even then he must not stop praising the Lord. Rather, he must turn himself to this thought: "The Lord's grace continues to dwell in my home and will not leave it desolate." If the believer should see his crop consumed by drought, disease, or frost, or trampled down by hail and famine threaten him, even then he must not despair within his soul, nor should he become angry toward God. Rather, he must persist with confidence in this truth: "But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever" (Ps. 79:13). God, then, will provide for us, however barren the land. If the believer should be afflicted by

illness, he must not be so stung by the severity of his hardship that he erupts in impatience and demands from God an explanation. Rather, he must, considering the justice and gentleness of God's discipline, recall himself to patience. Indeed, the believer should accept whatever comes with a gentle and thankful heart, because he knows that it is ordained by the Lord. Moreover, he must not stubbornly resist the rule of God into whose power he has placed himself and all his affairs. So let the Christian make it his priority to drive from his breast that foolish and unfortunate comfort of pagans, who, in order to bolster their spirits against all adverse events, credit those events to fortune. They think it's silly to be angry at fortune, since she is reckless, aimless, and blind— inflicting her wounds equally on the deserving and the undeserving. In contrast, the rule of godliness is to recognize that God's hand is the sole judge and governor of every fortune, and because His hand is not recklessly driven to fury, it distributes to us both good and ill according to His orderly righteousness.

CHAPTER 3 BEARING OUR CROSS IS A PART OF SELF-DENIAL THE GODLY MIND, however, must rise even higher— that is, to that place that Christ calls His disciples when He bids every one of them to take up his cross. Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." MATTHEW 16:24 For those whom the Lord has chosen and condescended to welcome into fellowship with Him should prepare

themselves for a life that is hard, laborious, troubled, and full of many and various kinds of evil. For it's the will of their heavenly Father to test them in this way so that He might prove them by trials. Having begun this way with Christ, His only-begotten Son, He continues similarly with all His children. For although Christ is the Son, beloved before all others—the one in whom the Father's soul delights— we nevertheless see how little ease and comfort Christ experienced (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Indeed, it could be said that He not only had a cross continually placed upon Him when He lived on earth, but even that His life was nothing other than a kind of perpetual cross. Scripture gives the reason for this: It was necessary that Christ "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Why, then, would we exempt ourselves from the same situation to which Christ our head was subjected—particularly since He was subjected to suffering for our sake to provide for us a pattern of patience in Himself? On this account the Apostle Paul teaches that all God's children are appointed to this end—to be made like Christ.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ROMANS 8:29 From this also we receive remarkable consolation, that in the midst of dark and difficult circumstances, which we consider hostile and evil, we share in Christ's sufferings. For just as He entered into heavenly glory from a labyrinth involving every kind of evil, so we, in the same way, are led through various trials. And thus Paul himself says in another place that as long as we are learning to share in His suffering, we will know the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:10). If it has been allotted us to share in His death, then we are prepared to share in the glory of His resurrection. How perfectly suited this reality is to lessening the severity of every cross—the more we are afflicted with adverse circumstances, so much more certainly is our communion with Christ confirmed. By virtue of this communion, sufferings themselves not only become blessings to us, but they also serve to promote our salvation. ♦ MOREOVER, OUR LORD in no way had to take upon Himself the bearing of a cross except to prove and testify to His own obedience to His Father. However, there are many reasons why we ourselves must spend our lives subject to a constant cross. First of all, there's the fact that unless our own weaknesses are regularly displayed to us, we easily overestimate our own virtue, being by nature inclined to attribute all good things to our own doing. We don't doubt that our virtue will remain whole and unconquered in the face of whatever difficulties may come. Thus, we're drawn into a foolish and inflated view of our flesh. And then, trusting in our flesh, we brazenly exalt ourselves before God Himself, acting as if our own abilities are sufficient without His grace. There's no better method for God to curb such arrogance than by demonstrating to us through experience our weakness and frailty. He afflicts us with disgrace, poverty, childlessness, illness, and other troubles. And we, for our part, quickly crumble before such blows, being far from able to withstand them. Thus humbled, we learn to call on His strength, which alone can make us stand under the weight of such affliction. Indeed, the holiest among us know they stand by God's grace and not by their own virtues. Yet they would nevertheless become too confident in their own courage and constancy if they weren't led to a more intimate knowledge of themselves by the testing of the cross. Such sluggish self-confidence even snuck up on David: "As for me, I said in my prosperity, 'I shall never be moved.' By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong; you hid your face; I was dismayed" (Ps. 30:6-7). Thus David admits that when his affairs prospered, his sensibilities were confounded, so that he neglected the grace of God on which he should have relied and trusted rather than in himself. He assured himself of his own permanence. If this happened to so great a prophet as David, each of us should tremble and take caution. While men, then, delude themselves during times of tranquility with a notion of their own great constancy and patience, they learn the truth about themselves when humbled by times of difficulty. Believers, being warned of their own weaknesses by such proofs, make progress toward humility and, shedding their perverse confidence in their flesh, cast themselves on the grace of God. When they have so cast themselves on the grace of God, they experience the presence of divine power in which there is sufficient and abundant help. ♦

MOREOVER, PAUL TEACHES that "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character" (Rom. 5:3-4). For God has promised believers that He will be with them in times of suffering. Believers, being upheld by God's hand, experience this truth while they patiently

endure such times. For they're unable to endure such suffering in their own strength. Therefore, as saints endure suffering, they experience God's providing of the strength He has promised to give in times of need. And so their hope is also made strong. It would be ungrateful for them not to expect that they'll discover—in the end—how constant and sure God's truth is. We see now how many related benefits are born from the cross. The cross destroys the false notion of our own strength that we've dared to entertain, and it destroys that hypocrisy in which we have taken refuge and pleasure. It strips us of carnal self-confidence, and thus humbling us, instructs us to cast ourselves on God alone so that we won't be crushed or defeated. Such victory is followed by hope, since the Lord—by providing what He has promised—establishes His truthfulness for what lies ahead. Even for these reasons alone, it's clear how vital the discipline of the cross is for us. It's no little thing to be stripped of our blind self-love and thus to be made aware of our own weakness. Moreover, having been impressed with our own weakness, we learn to despair of ourselves. Then, having despaired of ourselves, we transfer our trust to God. Next, we rest in our trust in God, and we rely on His help and persevere unconquered to the end. Then standing on His grace, we see that He is true to His promises. Finally, being confident in the certainty of His promises, our hope is strengthened. ♦ ANOTHER REASON THE Lord afflicts His people is to test their endurance and to train them in obedience. They are quite unable to produce obedience unless He Himself empowers them. But it pleases Him to illuminate and testify by clear proofs to those graces that He has bestowed on the saints, so that those graces don't lie hidden and idle. In Scripture, therefore, God is said to test His servants' endurance when He puts on display that strength and constancy in suffering that He has given to them. So God tested Abraham and verified his piety when Abraham didn't refuse to sacrifice his one and only son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." GENESIS 22:11-12 Peter likewise teaches that our faith is proven by trials, just as gold is refined in a furnace of fire. Shouldn't this most excellent gift of endurance, which believers receive from their God, be put to use and made certain and evident? Otherwise, men would never value the gift of endurance according to its true worth. But God Himself acts justly when He ordains circumstances that excite the virtues He has given to believers, so that those virtues don't escape notice or, indeed, remain unused and waste away. There is, then, good reason for difficult circumstances in the lives of the saints, since they create endurance in them.

Believers are also trained in obedience by means of the cross. For thus they are taught to live according to God's will rather than their own. If everything went according to their own plans, they would never know what it means to follow God. Even the philosopher Seneca refers to an old proverb in which individuals were told to "follow God" when being encouraged to endure adversity. This proverb hinted at the truth that a person truly and finally submits to God's yoke when his hand and his back are exposed to God's discipline. Therefore, we shouldn't run from all the ways in which our heavenly Father shapes us in obedience, for it's right that we prove ourselves obedient to Him in every circumstance. ♦ BUT IF WE want to grasp how much we need such training in obedience, we must recall how prone our flesh is to cast off God's yoke as soon as it enjoys any period of relative peace and quiet. Our flesh is like a stubborn horse that becomes wild and unmanageable and doesn't recognize its rider—however much it previously obeyed his commands—after several days spent idly grazing. We continually find in ourselves that which God lamented in the people of Israel. Growing fat and lazy, we buck against Him who has fed and nourished us. But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. DEUTERONOMY 32:15 God's kindness should cause us to reflect on and delight in His goodness. But our perverse ingratitude is such that we make His kindness a means of growing ever more spoiled. Thus, we must be restrained by some discipline so that we don't break forth in obstinacy—acting wickedly because of our great wealth, becoming puffed up with pride because of honors, or growing arrogant because we possess other goods in ourselves or our circumstances. The Lord Himself providentially opposes, conquers, and restrains the ferocity of our flesh by the medicine of the cross. He does this in ways that uniquely serve each believer's well-being. For we're not all equally or severely oppressed by the same diseases. Nor do we all require the same exact cure.

And so we see that each believer is subjected to a different kind of cross. Our heavenly doctor, having purposed to restore all of us to health, treats some more leniently. Meanwhile, He applies stronger remedies to others. But none of us is left untouched by or remains immune to His medicine—He knows we are all diseased. ♦ **MOREOVER, IN ORDER** to keep us in proper obedience to Himself, our merciful Father not only anticipates our weaknesses but also regularly corrects our past failings. Thus, when we are afflicted, we should immediately call to mind our past life. As we do so, we will undoubtedly discover that our past failings are worthy of whatever discipline we receive. Nevertheless, we shouldn't let awareness of our past sins serve as the principal reason for the call to endure suffering. Scripture supplies a more profound reason for us when it teaches that in adverse circumstances we're being disciplined by the Lord so that we won't be condemned with the world.

But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 1 CORINTHIANS 11:32 Therefore, in the midst of the bitterness of tribulations, we should recognize the kindness and mercy of our Father toward us. For even in such tribulations, He doesn't cease to promote our salvation. Indeed, He afflicts us not to ruin or destroy us, but instead to deliver us from the condemnation of the world. This awareness leads us to what Scripture teaches in another place: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11-12). When we discern our Father's rod of discipline in our lives, shouldn't we present ourselves to Him as obedient and teachable sons rather than as obstinate and hopeless men who've become hardened in wrongdoing? If God didn't call us back to Himself by means of correction when we fell from Him, He would destroy us. Thus, it's rightly said in Scripture that we are illegitimate children, not sons, if we are without discipline. If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. HEBREWS 12:8 Therefore, we are indeed wicked if we shun Him while He manifests to us His kindness and His care for our salvation. Scripture teaches that there's a difference between believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers become worse and more obstinate in consequence of the lashes they receive, just like slaves of earnest and deep-seated wickedness. Believers repent just like individuals gifted with the status of sonship. Choose, then, which of these you will be. But since I have spoken elsewhere on this subject, I will end this discussion, satisfied to have briefly touched on it here. ♦ **FURTHERMORE, WE HAVE** a particular consolation when we suffer persecution for righteousness' sake. In such persecution, we should consider how much God, thus branding us with the mark that His soldiers bear, condescends to honor us. When I speak of suffering for righteousness' sake, I have in mind not just those who are oppressed for their defense of the gospel, but also those who encounter oppression for whatever ways they defend righteousness. Whether, then, we assert God's truth against Satan's lies or take up the cause of the good and innocent against the injustices of the wicked, we will necessarily encounter the world's displeasure and hatred. And from that may follow danger to our lives, our property, and our honor. In these circumstances, we shouldn't think it painful or troublesome to devote ourselves to God in such a way. We shouldn't judge ourselves miserable, when by His own mouth He has pronounced us blessed.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. MATTHEW 5:10 Poverty is in fact misery if we consider it in and of itself. Exile, scorn, imprisonment, and dishonor are likewise misery. And then there's death, the final calamity. But when God's favor rests on us, none of these things need threaten our happiness. Let us therefore derive greater contentment from Christ's testimony about us than from the vain estimations of our own flesh. Thus it will be that, following the example of the Apostles, we will rejoice when He considers us worthy to suffer disgrace for His name (Acts 5:41). What then? Though innocent and clear of conscience, we might be stripped of our resources by the wickedness of the ungodly, and so reduced to poverty in the view of men—but before God in heaven our riches are thereby truly increased. We might be thrust out of our homes, but thereby we are drawn more intimately into God's household. We might be harassed and despised, but thereby we drive deeper roots into Christ. We might be branded with disgrace and dishonor, but thereby we gain a more honorable rank in the kingdom of God. We might be slaughtered, but thereby a door unto the

blessed life is opened to us. We ought to be ashamed to think less of those things on which God places such value than we do of this present life's shadowy and fleeting pleasures. ♦ SCRIPTURE, THEN, ABUNDANTLY comforts us by these and similar teachings when we experience dishonor and harm for our defense of what's right. Thus, we show ourselves ungrateful if we don't freely and gladly receive such dishonor and harm from the hand of the Lord. This form of the cross, by which Christ wills to be glorified in us, is unique to believers—just as Peter also teaches. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 1 PETER 4:14 But since we, by natural impulse, judge dishonorable treatment worse than a hundred deaths, Paul reminds us that as Christians we will experience not only persecution but also disgrace. This is because we hope in the living God (1 Tim. 4:10). Elsewhere, Paul bids us to walk after his own example, whether people slander us or praise us (2 Cor. 6:8). But the gladness that is required from us in the midst of persecution doesn't destroy every feeling of anguish and sorrow. For the saints' endurance regarding the cross wouldn't be called endurance if they weren't tormented with sorrow and choked with grief. If there were no difficulty in poverty, no suffering in illness, no sting in disgrace, no horror in death, then we would face these things indifferently—and what courage or perseverance could then be credited to us? Each of these things, by virtue of their own inherent bitterness, might naturally and entirely consume our souls. But in the midst of them, the courage of the believer makes itself known. Though severely oppressed and touched by the feeling of some bitterness, the believer, nevertheless, courageously fights that feeling and in the end perseveres. In the midst

of these feelings, the endurance of the believer reveals itself. Though mercilessly provoked, the believer is nevertheless restrained by the fear of God from bursting forth in anger. In the midst of them, the steadfastness of the believer shines. Though wounded by sorrow and grief, he finds rest in the spiritual comfort of his God. ♦ PAUL FITTINGLY DESCRIBES the war that believers wage against natural feelings of anguish in their pursuit of endurance and perseverance: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9). We see that bearing the cross with endurance doesn't mean that a person is absolutely stupefied or robbed of every feeling of sorrow. The Stoics of old foolishly idealized such a person—one who, having stripped himself of all humanity, feels the same whether he encounters adversity or prosperity, sorrow or success; or rather one who feels nothing—like a stone. And what did the Stoics achieve by such sublime wisdom? They painted a portrait of endurance that has never been found, nor can exist, among men. Indeed, while they wished to represent endurance accurately and precisely, they deprived humankind of the power of genuine endurance. At present, likewise, there are among Christians new Stoics who think it a vice not only to groan and weep, but even to be sad or upset. And indeed, these ridiculous ideas generally come from idle men. They employ themselves more in observation than in action, and they can produce nothing more than fantasies. But this cruel philosophy is nothing to us. Our Master and Lord condemned it not only by word but also by example. Our Lord groaned and wept, both for His own and others' difficult circumstances. Nor did He teach His disciples anything different: "The world," He said, "will rejoice, but you will weep and lament" (John 16:20). And, so that no one should turn such weeping and lamenting into sin, He expressly declared those who mourn to be blessed. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. MATTHEW 5:4 And no wonder. For if all tears are condemned, what will we make of our very own Lord, from whose body trickled tears of blood (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:44)? If all fear is judged faithlessness, what place will we give to that dread which according to Scripture heavily oppressed Him? If all sadness should be dismissed, how will we accept that His soul was sorrowful even unto death (Matt. 26:38)? ♦ I'VE SAID THESE things about our experience of grief in order to keep godly people from despair—to keep them, that is, from immediately abandoning the pursuit of endurance because they cannot rid themselves of a natural feeling of sorrow. Such despair and abandonment will come to those who turn endurance into indifference. They will turn a courageous and faithful man into a wooden post. Rather, Scripture praises the saints for endurance when we, though knocked around by evil circumstances, remain unbroken and undefeated; when we, though pricked by bitterness, are simultaneously filled with spiritual joy; when we, though oppressed by anxiety, breathe freely—

cheered by the consolation of God.

Nevertheless, there lives within our hearts a revulsion to evil circumstances because of our natural disposition, which flees and shrinks back from adverse realities. Yet godly affection strives after obedience to the divine will, even in the midst of such difficulties. Such revulsion to adversity was noted by our Lord when He said to Peter: “When you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18). It is, of course, unlikely that Peter, when it came time for him to glorify God through his death, was dragged to it unwilling and resistant. If such had been the case, he would have received little praise for his martyrdom. But even if he obeyed the divine command with the highest degree of enthusiasm in his heart, he was still torn by a divided will, because he couldn’t cast off his humanity. When he reflected on the savage death that he would suffer, he was struck with horror, and would have willingly run away. But the thought that he was called to that death by God’s own command then came to his aid, conquering and trampling his fear, so that he willingly and cheerfully submitted himself to death. If, then, we want to be disciples of Christ, we should make it our aim to soak our minds in the sort of sensitivity and obedience to God that can tame and subdue every natural impulse contrary to His command. So it will be that no matter what kind of cross is placed upon us, we will steadily maintain endurance even through the narrowest straits of the soul. Indeed, adverse circumstances will keep their bitterness, and we will feel their bite. When afflicted by illness, we will groan and toss and long for health. When pursued by poverty, we will feel the stings of sadness and anxiety. We will bear the weight of sorrow at dishonor, contempt, and injustice. When loved ones die, we will naturally weep. But this will always be our conclusion: Nevertheless, the Lord has willed it. Therefore, let us follow His will. Indeed, this thought must intervene in the midst of sorrow’s very stings, in the midst of our groans and tears, in order to incline our hearts to endure those things with which they’re inflicted. ♦ SINCE WE HAVE found in God’s will the main reason to endure the cross, I should briefly explain the difference between a Christian approach to suffering and one promoted by the worldly wisdom of the philosophers. In truth, very few philosophers have attained the height of realizing that God’s hand forms us through affliction, or who have recognized that our role in affliction is to submit to God. Indeed, they offer no reason for enduring suffering except that such suffering is a fact of life. But this is nothing other than to say, “We must submit to God, since it is vain to struggle against Him.” If, however, we submit to God only because we judge suffering necessary—supposing we could escape—then we no longer genuinely obey God. But Scripture bids us to see something much different in God’s will—namely, fairness and justice, and then concern for our salvation. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ROMANS 8:28

And thus Christian exhortations to endure suffering are of this sort: Whether we suffer poverty, exile, imprisonment, contempt, sickness, childlessness, or any such thing, let us remember that nothing happens apart from God’s pleasure and providence, and that God Himself does nothing that isn’t perfectly in order. What then? Don’t our innumerable and frequent faults deserve more severe and weighty punishments than those that He, according to His mercy, has placed on us? Isn’t it fair that our flesh be tamed and made familiar with the yoke in order to keep it from running wild with lust according to its natural disposition? Are God’s justice and truth not worthy causes to suffer for? But if God’s impartiality is truly made apparent in our sufferings, we cannot complain or struggle against them without fault. Thus, we don’t hear that frigid song: “Yield, for such suffering is necessary.” We hear, rather, instruction that is lively and full of power: “Submit, because it is not right to resist. Endure, because unwillingness to do so is defiance of God’s justice.” But since in the end we only find attractive those things that we perceive to be for our good and well-being, our kind Father comforts us also in this way—assuring us that He works for our salvation by that very cross with which He afflicts us. If it’s clear that tribulations work toward our salvation, shouldn’t we accept them with a grateful and calm spirit? In bearing them with endurance, we’re not yielding to necessity, but we’re assenting to our own good. Such considerations will bear this fruit: However much our spirits might shrink beneath the cross, naturally adverse to its bitterness, they will expand in equal measure with

spiritual joy. And this will give rise to thanksgiving, which cannot exist without joy—thanksgiving and praise of our Lord can only spring from a glad and joyful heart. If there's nothing that can stop such thanksgiving and praise in us, then it's clear that the bitterness of the cross must be tempered with spiritual joy.

CHAPTER 4 MEDITATION ON OUR FUTURE LIFE IN WHATEVER TROUBLE comes to us, we should always set our eyes on God's purpose to train us to think little of this present life and inspire us to think more about the future life. For God knows well that we are greatly inclined to love this world by natural instinct. Thus, He uses the best means to draw us back and shake us from our slumber, so that we don't become entirely stuck in the mire of our love for this world. We all, throughout our entire lives, want to act as though we were longing for heavenly immortality and striving urgently after it. Indeed, we judge it shameful not to distinguish ourselves in some way from the brute animals, whose condition would be much the same as ours if we didn't hope for eternity after death. But examine the plans, pursuits, and actions of whomever you wish, and you'll find them to be entirely earthly. Thus we see our stupidity. Our minds, having been dulled by the blinding glare of empty wealth, power, and honor, can see no farther than these things. And our hearts, burdened with greed, ambition, and lust for gain, can

rise no higher than these things. In sum, our entire soul, entangled in the enticements of the flesh, seeks its happiness on earth. In order to resist this wickedness, the Lord teaches His people about the emptiness of this present life through constant lessons in suffering. Thus, so that His people don't promise themselves lofty and untroubled peace in this life, He often permits them to be troubled and harassed by wars, uprisings, robberies, and other injuries. So that they don't gawk with too much greediness at frail and tottering riches, or rest on those they already possess, He reduces them to poverty—or at least restricts them to very little wealth—through exile, barrenness of land, fire, or other means. So that they aren't enticed too much by the advantages of married life, He lets them be frustrated by the offenses of their spouse, humbles them by the wickedness of their children, or afflicts them with the loss of a child. However, there are times when God deals more gently with His people. Yet even when He does, so that they don't become puffed up with pride or inflated with self-confidence, He sets before their eyes disease and danger to teach them how unstable and fleeting are those good things that come to men, who are subject to death. It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. PSALM 119:71 In the end, we rightly profit from the discipline of the cross when we learn that this life, considered in itself, is troubled, turbulent, attended by many miseries, and never entirely happy, and that whatever things we consider good in this life are uncertain, passing, vain, and spoiled because they're mixed with many evils. And from this we likewise conclude that we should expect and hope for nothing other than trouble in this life, and that we should set our eyes on heaven where we expect our crown. So, indeed, we ought to realize that our souls will never seriously rise to the desire and contemplation of the future life until they've been soaked in scorn for this present life. ♦ THERE'S NO MIDDLE ground between these two things: either earth must become worthless to us, or we must remain bound by the chains of extravagant love for it. If, then, we care for eternity, we must make every effort to free ourselves from those chains. Of course, this present life has many attractions that entice us—many displays of comfort, charm, and sweetness. So that we are not enchanted, we must be continually pulled away from such temptations. What would become of us if we enjoyed perpetual good fortune and delight, since even regular stings of misfortune fail to awaken us to proper reflection on our misery? Man's life is like a vapor or shadow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. JAMES 4:14 Not only the learned understand this. Ordinary people also know this well-worn truth, and—judging it useful to remember—have highlighted it in many famous proverbs. But there's nothing we bring to mind and think about less diligently than this truth. For we all make our

plans as if we were constructing immortality for ourselves in this world. If we pass by a funeral or walk among graves, then—because our eyes are confronted with the image of death—we eloquently philosophize on the emptiness of life. But even this doesn't always happen, for these things often don't make an impression on us. And even when they do, our love of wisdom is momentary. It vanishes as soon as we turn our backs and leaves without a trace in our memory.

In short, it fades like the applause in the theater of some pleasant show. Forgetting not just death, but even mortality itself—as if no rumor of it had ever reached our ears—we return to the lazy security of earthly immortality. If, in the meantime, someone interrupts us with the proverb that man is but a momentary thing, we admit this to be so, but give so little attention to it that the notion of our permanence remains firmly impressed on our minds. Who, therefore, can deny how valuable it is not only to be reminded about the miserable condition of our earthly life with words, but to be convinced of it by things that happen to us? This is especially so since, even when overcome by life's miseries, we barely manage to stop staring at this present life with depraved and stupid admiration, as if it contained within itself the sum of our greatest goods. But if God desires to teach us in this way, it's our duty in turn to hear Him when He calls to us, waking us from our slumber so that we might strive with our whole heart toward contempt of the world and meditation on the future life. ♦ HOWEVER, THE CONTEMPT for this present life that believers should cultivate shouldn't produce hatred of this life or ingratitude toward God. This life, though bursting at the seams with every kind of misery, should still be considered one of God's blessings that shouldn't be dismissed. We're guilty of ingratitude to God if we fail to recognize something of divine blessing in this life. Indeed, believers in particular should see evidence of divine kindness in this life, since everything in it has been designed to further their own salvation. Before He openly presents to us our inheritance of eternal glory, God desires to declare Himself our Father through smaller proofs. Such proofs are the good gifts He daily bestows on us. If then this life helps us understand God's goodness, should we turn up our noses at it as if it didn't contain even a crumb of advantage to us? Therefore, it's right that we clothe ourselves in this attitude and affection—that we place this life among those gifts of divine kindness that shouldn't be disdained. Some might object: "Every creature longs to be permanent." I admit the same, of course. In fact, I'm arguing that on this basis we should set our eyes on future immortality, where that permanent condition that never appears on earth will prevail. For Paul rightly teaches believers to approach death cheerfully, not desiring to be unclothed but to be clothed (2 Cor. 5:2-4). Even brute animals and lifeless creatures—even trees and stones—being conscious of their present futility, long for the day of the final resurrection when they will be set free from corruption along with the sons of God. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ROMANS 8:19

Since we are gifted with the light of intelligence, and, what's more, illumined by God's Spirit, shouldn't we raise our minds higher than this decaying earth when troubled about our existence? But this is neither the time nor the place to argue about such problems as the fear of death. From the outset of this work I professed that I have little desire to get caught up in lengthy discussions about common topics. Those whose souls are fearful of death should read Cyprian's little book on the subject of death. Or perhaps they should be sent to read the philosophers, whose contempt of death would put such fearful souls to shame. Let us, however, remember this truth: No one has made much progress in the school of Christ who doesn't look forward joyfully both to his death and the day of his final resurrection. For Paul identifies all believers by this characteristic. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. TITUS 2:11-14 And Scripture, so often as it sets forth a reason for solid joy, directs us to consider these things. "Rejoice," says the Lord, "and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near." Why should that which the Lord intended to powerfully incite us to rejoicing and cheerfulness produce only sadness and dismay? If this is how we feel, how can we still glory in Him as though He were our master? Let us then arrive at a more sensible frame of mind. Even if the blind and stupid desire of our flesh opposes us, let us not hesitate to desire the Lord's coming—not with wishes alone, but with groans and sighs—as the greatest of all events. For He comes as our Redeemer to rescue us from this immense whirlpool of evils and miseries and to lead us to that blessed inheritance of His own life and glory. ♦ THIS IS CERTAIN: the entire body of believers, so long as they live on earth, must be like sheep destined for slaughter. Thus they are conformed to Christ their head (Rom. 8:36). They will be miserable if they don't set their

minds on heaven and so rise above all that's in the world—and pierce the facade of present circumstances (1 Cor. 15:19). When they once have raised their heads above this earth, even though they should see the ungodly decked out in wealth and awards, enjoying the utmost tranquility, flaunting every kind of splendor and luxury, and abounding in every kind of pleasure—even if, moreover, they should be wickedly attacked by the ungodly, haughtily insulted by them, exploited by their greed, or harassed by their desires in some other way—even then believers will bear such evils. For they will set their eyes on that day when the Lord will receive His faithful people into the peace of His kingdom, wipe every tear from their eyes, clothe them in garments of glory and gladness, feed them with the indescribable sweetness of His own pleasures, raise them to fellowship in His own lofty heights, and—at last—grant them participation in His own happiness (Isa. 25:8; Rev. 7:17). But He will

cast the wicked, who have flourished on earth, into utter disgrace. He will turn their pleasures into suffering, their laughter and delight into tears and hissing. He will disturb their tranquility with pains of conscience. He will punish their self-indulgence with unquenchable fire. And He will subject them to the godly, whose patience they have exhausted. For, as Paul testifies, it's right for those who are miserable and have been unjustly afflicted to receive rest, and it's right for the wicked who have tormented the godly to receive affliction, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven (2 Thess. 1:6-7). This, surely, is our great consolation. Robbed of this consolation, we must either despair in our soul, or seek comfort—to our own destruction—in the empty comforts of this world. Indeed, even the prophet himself confessed that his feet nearly slipped when he considered for too long the prosperity of the ungodly in the present age. Nor could he steady himself in any other way than by entering into the sanctuary of God and considering anew the end of the godly and the wicked. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. PSALM 73:16-17 To sum up everything in a word: The cross of Christ finally triumphs in believers' hearts—over the devil, the flesh, sin, and the wicked—when their eyes are turned to the power of the resurrection.

CHAPTER 5 HOW THE PRESENT LIFE AND ITS COMFORTS SHOULD BE USED BY MEANS OF such lessons, Scripture also fully teaches us how we should use the good things of this earth rightly. This is a matter that shouldn't be neglected in composing a rule for life. Since we're alive, we should make use of this life's necessary supports. We shouldn't avoid those things which seem to serve our pleasure more than our necessity. Instead, we should hold to some rule so that we can use the things of this world—whether they serve necessity or delight—with a pure conscience. The Lord prescribes this rule in His Word when He says that this present life is a kind of pilgrimage for His people, wherein they eagerly travel toward the heavenly kingdom. If they are merely passing through this land, then without doubt they should make use of its goods only insofar as they aid rather than hinder their journey. Thus, it's with good reason that Paul urges us to make use of this world just as if we were not using it, and, similarly, to buy possessions as though we were selling them. This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as

though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31 But since this is truly slippery ground with steep slopes in every direction, we should strive to set our feet where we can stand safely. There have been some men—good and holy in other respects—who saw that self-indulgence and luxury are, because of unbridled desire, perpetually taken too far. These men understood that self-indulgence and luxury needed to be severely curbed. Thus, in order to correct such a difficult problem, they devised a rule to oppose it—permitting men to use bodily goods only insofar as self-indulgence and luxury were necessities to life. Their counsel was certainly pious, but they were too severe in what they demanded from men. For they bound men's consciences more narrowly than the Word of the Lord binds them—a very dangerous thing to do. In fact, they made it necessary to abstain from everything that's not essential to life. Thus, according to them, it's barely permissible to eat and drink anything more than bread and water.

Others were even more severe, such as Crates of Thebes, who reportedly cast his riches into the sea because he believed he would be destroyed by them if they were not destroyed. But many today look for a loophole so they can excuse the excessive desire of the flesh in using external things. Meanwhile, they wish to pave a way for self-indulgence. And so, they take as fact what I won't concede—that freedom in using external things shouldn't be restrained in any measure, and that it should be left to each man's conscience to make use of externalities as he sees fit. I admit, for my part, that consciences neither can nor should be bound by fixed and precise statutes in these matters. But since Scripture gives us general rules for the proper use of external things, we should certainly restrain ourselves according to those rules. ♦ WE WON'T GO wrong in the use of God's gifts as long as we let their use be governed by their author's purpose in creating and designing them for us—for truly He created them for our good, not our ruin. No one, therefore, will hold a truer course than he who carefully considers this purpose of God's gifts. Thus, if we consider the purpose for which He created food, we find He had regard not only for our necessity but also our pleasure and enjoyment. So too with clothes—the purpose was our adornment and honor in addition to our necessity. In the case of herbs, trees, and fruits, He considered the pleasantness of their appearance and charm of their smell in addition to their various uses. If this weren't true, the prophet couldn't list among God's benefits wine, which gladdens the heart of man, and oil, which makes man's face shine. You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart. PSALM 104:14-15

Nor could Scripture, in order to commend God's generosity, point out everywhere that He has given all such things to men. Even the natural qualities of things demonstrate how much and how far we can enjoy them. Would the Lord have dressed the flowers with a beauty that runs freely to meet our eyes if it were wrong to be moved by such beauty? Would He have endowed them with so sweet a fragrance that flows freely into our nostrils if it were wrong to be moved by the pleasantness of such fragrance? Isn't the answer obvious? Has God not distinguished colors in such a way as to make some more pleasing than others? Again I ask, isn't the answer obvious? Isn't it clear that He made gold and silver, ivory and marble attractive—rendering them more precious than other metals or stones? In sum, isn't it obvious that He has given us many praiseworthy things, even though they're not necessary? ♦ LET US, THEN, dismiss that inhuman philosophy that only permits us to use created things out of necessity—a philosophy that spitefully deprives us of the lawful enjoyment of divine kindness and by its very nature reduces man to a block of wood, robbed of all his senses. Yet we must no less diligently oppose our fleshly desires that will rush forward without restraint if not kept in check. And, as noted above, we must understand too that there are those who encourage the desires of the flesh, not denying themselves anything under the pretext of liberty. To start, desire is bridled when we acknowledge that all things given to us are given in order that we might know their author. This leads us to gratitude for His kindness toward us. But how can we be thankful if we drink and indulge in wine so much that we become dazed—unable to perform the duties of piety to which we are called? How can we know God if our flesh, boiling over from overindulgence of our base desires, so infects our minds with its corruption that we cannot discern what's right or honorable? How can there be thankfulness to God for clothing if, on the basis of our fancy and expensive clothes, we both admire ourselves and look down on others? Or if we let elegance and style open a door to sexual immorality? How can there be acknowledgment of God if our minds are enchanted by the splendor of His gifts? For many people devote their senses to pleasures so much that their minds are buried in them. Many people are so fascinated with marble, gold, and paintings that they're transformed, as it were, into marble, metal, or painted figures. The scent from the kitchen or other sweet odors so paralyzes them that they lose all spiritual sense of smell. And the same thing is seen with the remaining senses. It's evident, then, that in our present circumstances we should considerably curb such freedom that leads to abuse. We should, rather, conform to Paul's rule that we make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. ROMANS 13:14 For if the desires of the flesh are given too much leeway, they will burst forth without limit or restraint. ♦

THERE IS NO more certain or reliable path for us than contempt of this present life and meditation on heavenly immortality. Two principles follow from this, in order that those who use this world might not be affected by it. First, let those who have wives live as though they had none; let those who buy live as though they did not buy (1 Cor. 7:29, 31). Paul teaches this. Let believers learn to bear scarcity with no less calm and patience than they experience abundance—all with moderation. The one who seeks to hold on to the things of this world lightly puts to death his own immoderate appetite for food and drink. He puts to death cowardice, ambition, pride, haughtiness, and dissatisfaction with respect to his table, his buildings, and his clothes. Indeed, he puts to death every care and affection which might lead him astray or hinder his meditation on heavenly life and his zeal for the improvement of his soul. What Cato said long ago is true: “Luxury produces much care and much carelessness for virtue.” There is also an old proverb that states, “Those who are much occupied with concern for the body generally neglect the soul.” Therefore, even if the freedom that believers have with respect to external things cannot be subjected to a fixed formula, it should nevertheless be subjected to this rule: Let them indulge themselves very little. Rather, let them—by a perpetual intention of the heart—aim to eliminate their stockpiles of superfluous wealth, and to curb extravagance, and to take caution not to turn things given to them for support into obstacles. ♦

AS A SECOND principle, those who have few possessions must learn to endure patiently their humble circumstances, not becoming agitated with excessive longing after things. Those who keep this rule have made much progress in the school of our Lord, but those who haven’t give little proof that they are disciples of Christ. Indeed, numerous vices accompany the longing for earthly possessions. Besides, the one who cannot bear poverty is most likely to exhibit the opposite vice in the midst of prosperity. For example, the one who blushes over his cheap clothes will take pride in his expensive ones. The one unsatisfied with his simple meal, fidgeting with desire for something more significant, will abuse better foods by his lack of self-restraint. The one who struggles to endure his humble and ordinary status, growing agitated in spirit, won’t be able to restrain his arrogance if he obtains honor. Therefore, let all those who genuinely pursue piety strive to learn, according to the Apostle’s example, both to hunger and to be satisfied, to have much and to suffer poverty. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. PHILIPPIANS 4:12 Moreover, Scripture has a third rule by which it regulates our use of earthly things. I said something about it previously when we dealt with the rules of love. Scripture teaches that everything we own—everything appointed for our benefit—has been given to us by God’s kindness, so that all that we own is like a deposit for which we must one day give an account. Therefore, we should manage our possessions as if these words were constantly sounding in

our ears: “Turn in the account of your management” (Luke 16:2). At the same time, we should remember who will receive the account we give—namely, one who has commended self-control, soberness, frugality, and modesty just as much as He has condemned luxury, pride, showiness, and vanity; one who has approved no use of possessions but that which is joined with love; one who has already condemned with His own mouth whatever pleasures drag man’s heart away from integrity and purity or muddle his thinking. ♦ FINALLY, IT SHOULD be noted that the Lord bids each of us to consider, in all of life’s actions, our calling. For He knows how greatly human nature is inclined to restlessness. He knows the fickleness with which it is carried this way and that. He knows the desire and ambition with which it embraces objects opposed to one another. Therefore, so that by our folly and rashness we don’t produce mass confusion, He has ordained particular duties to each one in his station in life. And so that no one should overstep his boundaries, He has identified various stations in life as callings. Every individual’s rank in life, therefore, is a kind of post assigned to him by the Lord, to keep him from rushing about rashly for the whole of his life. This distinction, which He has applied to our stations in life, is so necessary that all our actions are judged in relation to it. And this judgment of our actions in relation to our calling is often much different than the judgment that human reason or philosophy makes. Philosophers consider no deed more noble than freeing one’s country from a tyrant. Yet the ordinary citizen who lays hands on a tyrant is openly condemned by the voice of

the heavenly Judge. However, I don't want to waste time on numerous examples of this point. It's sufficient that we recognize our calling from the Lord to be the principle and foundation of good works in all our affairs. The one who doesn't frame his actions with reference to his calling will never keep the right course in his duties. He will perhaps occasionally do things that are praiseworthy in appearance, but his actions, whatever value they might have before men, will be rejected before God's throne. Nor will there be consistency in his actions in the various spheres of his life. Consequently, the one who directs himself toward the goal of observing God's calling will have a life well composed. Free from rash impulses, he won't attempt more than his calling warrants. He will understand that he shouldn't overstep his boundaries. He who lives in obscurity will live an ordinary life without complaint, so that he won't be found guilty of deserting his divinely appointed post. Indeed, in the midst of troubles, hardships, annoyances, and other burdens, he will find great relief when he remembers that God is his guide in all these matters. The magistrate will more gladly attend to his duties. The father will more gladly commit himself to his responsibilities. Each person, in whatever his station in life, will endure and overcome troubles, inconveniences, disappointments, and anxieties, convinced that his burden has been placed upon him by God. Great consolation will follow from all of this. For every work performed in obedience to one's calling, no matter how ordinary and common, is radiant— most valuable in the eyes of our Lord. <<Paste more text if the brothers like this>>

## CHAPTER 1

### SCRIPTURE'S CALL TO CHRISTIAN LIVING

THE GOAL OF God's work in us is to bring our lives into harmony and agreement with His own righteousness, and so to manifest to ourselves and others our identity as His adopted children. We discover in God's law a picture of God's own image, to which we are being progressively conformed. But since we are lazy and require prodding and encouragement in this, it will be helpful to construct in this work a model of the mature Christian life from various passages of Scripture, so that those who are truly repentant of heart will not lose their way on the path to greater conformity to God's image.

I know that in addressing the topic of the mature Christian life, I am entering on a vast and complex subject. Even if I were merely to summarize all that has been written by others on this topic, the result would be a long and dense volume. Previous generations of theologians have written large works on individual virtues, but they wasted no words. For when anyone seeks to describe and commend a particular virtue, it seems as if his pen is spontaneously led to write at great length because of the significance of his subject. Indeed, one will not seem to have described any particular virtue sufficiently unless he writes at great length.

In this work, however, it's not my intention to say too much, nor to discuss every virtue in great detail, nor to stray into lengthy exhortations. Such exhortations can be found in the writings of those who have gone before us, especially in the sermons of the church fathers. My goal here is simply to present to godly people a model for ordering their lives. I intend, that is, to identify a certain universal principle to guide Christians in their duties. Perhaps in the future I will have time to address the subject of Christian virtues more fully. Or maybe others better suited to the task will do so. By nature I love brevity, so perhaps even if I tried to write something larger I would not succeed in my effort. In any case, even if a longer work on the subject of the Christian life were worthwhile, I would hesitate to attempt such now, because my purpose in this work is to present doctrine simply and concisely.

When philosophers write about the virtuous life, they identify certain primary goals for human beings such as integrity and honor, and from these they derive specific duties and the entire chorus of remaining virtues. But Scripture has its own order and plan that is more beautiful and certain than any philosophic method. The philosophers, wanting to draw attention to themselves, strive to be very clear—clear, that is, in showcasing their own rhetorical skills. But the Spirit of God lacks such a motive in His teaching. He has not, therefore, followed the specific method of the philosophers, though he has revealed truth clearly enough to keep us from despising clarity. ♦

THERE ARE TWO main parts to the instruction from Scripture on the Christian life that follow. The first is that a love of righteousness—to which we are not naturally prone—must be implanted and poured into our hearts. The second is that we need some model that will keep

us from losing our way in our pursuit of righteousness. Scripture contains many arguments to encourage us on the path of righteousness. Many of these arguments I have noted elsewhere, and some I note here.

To begin with, what better foundation can Scripture give for the pursuit of righteousness than to tell us we should be holy because God Himself is holy? Moreover, when we were scattered and wandering like sheep, lost in the maze of the world, God found us and gathered us to Himself. When we contemplate this relationship between ourselves and God, let us remember that holiness is the bond of our union with Him. Not, of course, because we enter into fellowship with Him by the merit of our own holiness. Rather, we first of all cling to Him, and then, having received His holiness, we follow wherever He calls us. For it is characteristic of His glory that He has no fellowship with sin and impurity. Holiness is the goal of our calling. Therefore we must consistently set our sights upon holiness if we would rightly respond to God's calling. To what purpose did God pull us out of the wickedness and pollution of this world—wickedness and pollution in which we were submerged—if we allow ourselves to wallow in such wickedness and pollution for the rest of our lives?

Furthermore, if we count ourselves among God's people, Scripture tells us to live as citizens of the holy city of Jerusalem, which He has consecrated to Himself.

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

HEBREWS 13:14

It's shameful that the citizens of the holy city should pollute it by their impurity. Thus, we read that there will be a dwelling place in God's tabernacle for those who walk blamelessly and pursue righteousness. It's not right that the sanctuary in which God dwells should resemble a filthy stable. ♦

TO PROMPT US toward righteousness more effectively, Scripture tells us that God the Father, who has reconciled us to Himself in His Anointed One, Jesus Christ, has given us in Christ a model to which we should conform our lives. You will not find a better model in the philosophers—in whom many expect to find the only correct and orderly treatment of moral philosophy. They, while doing their best to encourage us to be virtuous, have nothing to say except that we should live "according to nature." Scripture, however, draws its encouragement from the true fountain. It teaches us to contemplate our lives in relation to God, our Author, to whom we are bound. And, having taught us that we have fallen from the true state and condition of our original creation, Scripture adds that Christ, through whom we have been restored to favor with God, is set before us as a model whose form and beauty should be reflected in our own lives. What could be more effective than this? Indeed, what more is needed than this? We have been adopted by the Lord as children with this understanding—that in our lives we should mirror Christ who is the bond of our adoption. And truly, unless we are devoted—even addicted—to righteousness, we will faithlessly abandon our Creator and disown Him as our Savior.

Scripture derives some principle of conduct from every gift of God described to us in it, and from every aspect of our salvation. God has manifested Himself as Father to us. If we do not manifest ourselves as sons to Him in turn, we prove ourselves to be extremely ungrateful (Mal. 1:6; 1 John 3:1).

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

EPHESIANS 5:1

Christ has cleansed us by washing us with His blood, and has communicated this cleansing to us through baptism. It would be inappropriate, therefore, for us to defile ourselves with fresh filthiness (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:10; 1 Peter 1:15, 19). Christ has engrafted us into His body. We, therefore, who are His members must be especially careful not to fling mud or filthiness on the body of Christ (John 15:3–6; 1 Cor. 6:15; Eph. 5:23–33). Christ our Head has ascended into heaven. We, therefore, must set aside earthly affections and wholeheartedly long for that place (Col. 3:1ff.). The Holy Spirit has consecrated us as temples of God. We, therefore, must let the glory of God shine through us, and we must not pollute ourselves with sin. Our bodies and souls have been destined to heavenly incorruption and an unfading crown. We, therefore, must strive upward—keeping ourselves pure and incorruptible until the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:23). These are most holy foundations on which to build the Christian life. Nothing like these can be found in the philosophers, who in their commendation of virtue never rise above the dignity that natural man can achieve. ♦

SOMETHING MUST BE said about those who want to be called Christians but possess nothing of Christ except the title and appearance. They arrogantly glory in His holy name. But only those who have gained a true knowledge of Christ from the Word of the gospel have a relationship with Him. And the Apostle denies that any have rightly learned Christ who have not learned that they must put off the old man, who is corrupted by deceitful desires, and put on Christ.

But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

EPHESIANS 4:20–24

Such nominal Christians demonstrate their knowledge of Christ to be false and offensive no matter how eloquently and loudly they talk about the gospel. For true doctrine is not a matter of the tongue, but of life; neither is Christian doctrine grasped only by the intellect and memory, as truth is grasped in other fields of study. Rather, doctrine is rightly received when it takes possession of the entire soul and finds a dwelling place and shelter in the most intimate affections of the heart. So let such people stop lying, or let them prove themselves worthy disciples of Christ, their teacher.

We have given priority to doctrine, which contains our religion, since it establishes our salvation. But in order for doctrine to be fruitful to us, it must overflow into our hearts, spread into our daily routines, and truly transform us within. Even the philosophers rage against and reject those who profess an art that ought to govern one's life, but who twist that art hypocritically into empty chatter. How much more then should we detest the foolish talk of those who give lip service to the gospel? The gospel's power ought to penetrate the innermost affections of the heart, sink down into the soul, and inspire the whole man a hundred times more than the lifeless teachings of the philosophers. ♦

I'M NOT SAYING that the conduct of a Christian will breathe nothing but pure gospel, although this should be desired and pursued. I'm not, in other words, talking about gospel perfection, as if I were unwilling to acknowledge or recognize a man or a woman as a Christian who has not obtained perfection. If that were the case, everyone would be excluded from the church, since we do not find any in it who are close to being perfect. Indeed, we find many in the church who have progressed little toward perfection, but who, nevertheless, it would be unjust to reject as Christians.

What I am saying is this: Let us fix our eyes on the goal and sole object of our pursuit. Let that goal, toward which we must strive and contend, be established from the beginning. After all, it's not right to barter with God regarding what we will and won't undertake from those things He has prescribed for us in His Word. God always commends—as of utmost importance—integrity as the principal part of His worship.

And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, "You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel."

1 KINGS 9:4–5

And by the word integrity He means sincere simplicity of heart, free from pretense and deceit, which is the opposite of duplicity of heart. In other words, right living has a spiritual basis where the inner affection of the soul is sincerely devoted to God for the nurture of holiness and righteousness.

Of course, none of us is capable of running swiftly on the right course while we remain in the earthly confinement of our bodies. Indeed, most of us are so oppressed with weakness that we make little progress—staggering, limping, and crawling on the ground. But let us move forward according to the measure of our resources and pursue the path we have begun to walk. None of us will move forward with so little success that we will not make some daily progress in the way. Therefore, let us keep trying so that we might continually make some gains in the way of the Lord, and neither let us despair over how small our successes are. For however much our successes fall short of our desire, our efforts aren't in vain when we are farther along today than yesterday. So let us fix our eyes on the goal with sincerity and simplicity, aspiring to that end—neither foolishly congratulating ourselves, nor excusing our evil deeds. Let us press on

with continual striving toward that goal so that we might surpass ourselves—until we have finally arrived at perfection itself. This, indeed, is what we follow after and pursue all our lives, but we will only possess it when we have escaped the weakness of the flesh and have been received into His perfect fellowship.

## CHAPTER 2

### SELF-DENIAL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

THE LAW OF the Lord is the best and most suitable instruction for the proper ordering of our lives. Nevertheless, it seemed good to our heavenly teacher to conform us by an even more precise rule than what's given in the precepts of the law. This is the sum of that rule: It is the duty of believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. And in this consists genuine worship of Him. From this rule is derived the exhortation that believers not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of their minds, so that by testing they may discern what is the will of God.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

ROMANS 12:1–2

This is a marvelous thing—we are consecrated and dedicated to God to the end that we might not think, speak, meditate, or act unless it be to His glory. The sacred can't be put to profane use without injustice to God.

If we are not our own but the Lord's, it's clear what errors we must flee, and what we must direct our whole lives toward. We are not our own; therefore, neither our reason nor our will should dominate our plans and actions. We are not our own; therefore, let us not make the gratification of our flesh our end. We are not our own; therefore, as much as possible, let us forget ourselves and our own interests.

Rather, we are God's. Therefore, let us live and die to Him. We are God's. Therefore, let His wisdom and His will govern all our actions. We are God's. Therefore, let us—in every way in all our lives—run to Him as our only proper end. How far has he progressed who's been taught that he is not his own—who's taken rule and dominion away from his own reason and entrusted them to God. For the plague of submitting to our own rule leads us straight to ruin, but the surest way to safety is neither to know nor to want anything on our own, but simply to follow the leading of the Lord.

Let then our first step be to abandon ourselves, that we may apply all our strength to obedience to God. When I say "obedience," I don't mean giving lip service to God; but rather, being free from the desire of the flesh, turning our minds over completely to the bidding of the

Spirit of God. The philosophers are ignorant of this transformation (which Paul calls the “renewing of the mind”) even though it constitutes the very beginning of life (Eph. 4:23). They enthrone man’s reason alone as ruler, and they think it alone should be listened to. Indeed, they grant and entrust government of conduct to human reason alone. But Christian philosophy, on the other hand, orders human reason to give place—to submit and yield—to the Holy Spirit. For it’s not now we who live, but Christ who lives and reigns in us (Gal. 2:20). ♦

ANOTHER POINT FOLLOWS: We shouldn’t seek our own interests but those that are the Lord’s, and we should work to promote His glory. This is great progress in the Christian life—that we nearly forget ourselves, that in all matters we hold our own concerns in less esteem, and that we faithfully strive to devote our energies to God and His commands. For when Scripture orders us to disregard our own concerns, it eradicates from our souls the desire to possess things for ourselves, to love power, and to long for the praise of men. Moreover, it uproots our appetite for ambition as well as our appetite for all human glory and other more secret evils. It’s indeed fitting that the Christian consider that his entire life stands in relation to God. Just as he submits all he is and does to God’s judgment and decision, so also he religiously refers every intention of his mind to God. For the one who has learned to regard God in everything he does is at the same time being drawn away from every vain thought.

This is the self-denial that Christ diligently commended to His disciples from the very beginning of their apprenticeship.

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

MATTHEW 16:24

Once self-denial has occupied the heart, it crowds out the evils of pride, arrogance, and pretentiousness as well as greed, lust, gluttony, cowardice, and everything else that is born of self-love. On the other hand, where self-denial does not reign, the worst vices thrive shamelessly. Or, if there is any semblance of virtue, it’s corrupted by a depraved desire for glory. No man wants to freely do what is right without first renouncing himself according to God’s command. Those who haven’t been overcome by this sense of need for self-denial have followed virtue for the sake of praise. Moreover, many philosophers, being overcome with arrogance, have recommended seeking virtue for its own sake. They recommend seeking virtue only for the sake of pride. Yet God isn’t pleased with those who strive after fleeting praise. He isn’t pleased with those who have puffed-up hearts and who manifest to others that they have received their reward in this life (Matt. 6:5–6, 16). Prostitutes and tax collectors are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than such people.

Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.”

MATTHEW 21:31–32

Nevertheless, we still need to understand clearly the nature of the obstacles that hinder a man, when he does not deny himself, from walking the right path. For rightly it has been said, “There is a world of vices hidden in the soul of man.” You won’t find any proper remedy to such vices other than to deny yourself, to disregard your own ambitions, and to stretch your mind to seek wholly those things that the Lord requires of you—and to seek them because they are pleasing to Him. ♦

IN ANOTHER PLACE in Scripture, Paul more clearly— albeit briefly—rehearses the various parts of the well-ordered life. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11–14). In this passage, after Paul sets forth the grace of God to motivate us, he removes two obstacles that severely hinder us in order to clear our path to worship God: first, our natural inclination toward ungodliness; and second, worldly desires that seek to ensnare us all the more. By “ungodliness” he means not only superstition, but anything that contends seriously with the fear of God. By “worldly desires” he means the desires of the flesh. Thus, he orders us, making reference to each table of the law, to put off our natural inclinations and to deny ourselves—that is, to resist whatever our reason and will demand.

Now, every right action in life belongs to one of three categories: self-control, uprightness, and godliness. Of these, self-control means purity and self-restraint, as well as blamelessly and carefully using the things we have, and acting with patience when we lack anything. Uprightness means observing all the requirements of justice so that we render to each one what is rightly due him. Godliness separates us from the impurities of the world and unites us to God in genuine holiness. These three—self-control, uprightness, and godliness—when they are joined together in an unbreakable bond, make us complete. But in truth, nothing is more difficult than saying goodbye to carnal reason and subduing—indeed, conquering—our desires and joining ourselves to God and our brothers. We are, essentially, contemplating the life of the angels even as we trudge through the mire of earth’s filthiness. Paul recalls us to the hope of blessed immortality in order to free our souls from all snares, and he admonishes us not to contend for such righteousness without hope. For Christ has first appeared as our Redeemer, and, by His second coming, He will bring forth the fruit of the redemption He has secured for us. In this way, Paul subdues all the temptations that vex us and that keep us from aspiring to heavenly glory. Indeed, he teaches us to live as strangers in this world so that we won’t lose our heavenly inheritance. ♦

MOREOVER, WE UNDERSTAND from this passage, Titus 2:11–14, that the denial of ourselves is partly in reference to men and is partly—indeed, chiefly—in reference to God. Scripture orders us to live with men in such a way as to prefer their honor to our own and to devote ourselves in good faith to promoting their welfare (Rom. 12:10).

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

Thus it gives us commands that our souls are incapable of fulfilling unless our souls are emptied of their natural inclination. Each of us thinks we have just cause for elevating ourselves and despising all others in comparison to ourselves—our self-love ruins us with such blindness. If, in fact, God has gifted us with something that is good in itself, we immediately make it the basis for praising ourselves to such a degree that we not only swell up but almost burst with pride.

We carefully conceal our abundant vices from others—and we pretend they're small and insignificant. In fact, we so delude ourselves that we sometimes embrace our vices as virtues. When others possess gifts that we would admire in ourselves—or even better gifts—we spitefully ridicule and degrade their gifts, refusing to rightly acknowledge them as gifts. Similarly, when others possess vices, we're not content merely to point them out and harshly and sternly reproach them, but we wickedly exaggerate them. Thus our arrogance grows as we seek to exalt ourselves above others, as if we were different from them. Truly, there's no one who does not flippantly and boldly disregard and despise others as inferiors. Yes, the poor outwardly defer to the rich, common people to nobles, servants to masters, the unlearned to the educated. But there's not one who does not nourish a high opinion of himself within.

Everyone flatters himself and carries, as it were, a kingdom in his breast. Consider arrogant men who, in order to gratify themselves, criticize the character and morals of others. And when contention arises, their venom erupts. As long as everything is going smoothly and pleasantly, they present themselves with a kind of gentleness. But in reality, how few there are who can maintain such a superficial appearance of modesty when they are jabbed and aggravated. The only remedy for this is to uproot these toxic diseases—love of strife and love of self—that are implanted deeply within us. Scripture does this uprooting with its teaching. For it teaches us that those things that God has given us are not in any way goods originating from ourselves. Instead, they are free gifts from God.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

JAMES 1:17

Those who brag about the gifts they have show themselves to be ungrateful. "For who sees anything different in you?" as Paul says. "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Cor. 4:7). By constant recognition of our vices, let us return to humility. By so doing, there will be nothing left in us to puff us up, but, on the contrary, there will be much to put us in our place.

On the other hand, we are called to respect and commend whatever gifts of God we see in others, and to honor those in whom such gifts reside. For it would be shameful for us to withhold honor from those whom God has deemed worthy of honor. Moreover, so as not to

insult those to whom we owe honor and goodwill, we are taught to overlook their vices—though not, of course, to encourage their vices by admiring them. In this way, we will act not only with moderation and modesty, but with grace and friendliness toward others. We will never achieve genuine meekness except by having our hearts saturated with self-denial and respect for others. ♦

WE WILL MEET many difficulties as we try to dutifully seek the good of our neighbors. We won't make any headway in this regard unless we lay aside concern for ourselves—indeed, unless we somehow lay aside our very self. For how, unless we forsake ourselves and commit ourselves wholly to others, can we bring forth those works that Paul identifies as love? “Love,” he says, “is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable;” and so on. That single command that we not insist on our own way—with what force must we resist our own nature to pursue it. Our very nature inclines us toward self-love. As a result, we don't easily deny ourselves or our desires in order to seek the good of others. Even less are we willing to give up our right to something and give that right to another.

In order to lead us by the hand to such self-denial, Scripture warns us that whatever we have freely received from the Lord is given to us on the condition that it be used for the common good of the church.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.  
1 PETER 4:10

The proper use, then, of all the good gifts we have received is the free and generous sharing of those gifts with others. No more certain principle nor more effective exhortation for keeping that rule is imaginable than this: Scripture teaches us that all the gifts we utilize are given to us by God. And they are given along with this law of our faith—that they be put to use for the good of our neighbors. But Scripture goes even further than this when it compares us and the gifts we've been given to the members of a human body. No member of the body exists to serve itself, nor does each member exist merely for its own private use. Rather, it puts its abilities to use for the other members of the body. Nor does any member of the body alone receive any advantage from itself outside of that which belongs to the entire body. Whatever, therefore, a godly man is able to do, he should do it for his brothers. He should consider his own interests only insofar as he sets his mind on the general edification of the whole church. Let this, then, be our rule for kindness and benevolence: We are merely stewards of whatever gifts God has given to us in order to help our neighbors. We must give an account of our stewardship, and right stewardship is that which is fueled by the rule of love. Consequently, we must not merely join zeal for the good of others with concern for our own well-being, but we must submit concern for our own well-being to the good of others.

To help us better understand that this law of stewardship rightly applies to whatever gifts we receive from Him, God applied this law to the smallest gifts of His kindness in former times. For He commanded that the firstfruits of His people's produce be offered to Him.

The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.  
EXODUS 23:19

In this way, God's people of old testified that it was wrong to secure any profit from their produce before it was consecrated to God. Now, if God's gifts to us are ultimately sanctified to us after our hands have offered them back to their very author, any use of those gifts that is not perfumed by such an offering will be a corrupt abuse of them. But we would strive in vain to increase the Lord's wealth by offering our gifts to Him. Since, therefore, our kindness—as the Prophet says—cannot reach Him, we should practice it toward His saints who are on earth (Ps. 16:2–3). Thus our charitable gifts are compared to holy sacrifices, since they correspond to those sacrifices that were required by the law (Heb. 13:16). ♦

FURTHERMORE, SO THAT we don't grow weary in doing good (which otherwise would be certain to happen immediately), we must understand the next point put forward by the Apostle—that "love is patient" and "is not irritable." The Lord instructs us to do good to all people throughout the entire world, many of whom are unworthy of such good if judged by their own merit. But Scripture comes to our rescue with the best of reasons for doing good to all people. It teaches us not to regard others according to their own merits, but to consider in them the image of God to which we owe both honor and love. But the image of God should be more diligently regarded in those who are of the household of faith, because it has been renewed and restored in them by the Spirit of Christ.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

GALATIANS 6:10

Therefore, you have no cause to evade anyone who stands before you and needs your service. Suppose he's a stranger. The Lord, however, has stamped him with His own mark that's familiar to you, and for that reason God forbids you to despise your own flesh. Suppose he is contemptible and worthless. The Lord, however, shows him to be one whom He has condescended to decorate with His own image. Suppose you owe him nothing for what he's done. But God—to whom you know you are obligated because of His many wonderful benefits to you—puts Himself, as it were, in that person's place. Suppose he is unworthy of even your smallest labors for his sake. But the image of God, according to which this person is commended to you, warrants your giving of yourself and your all. Supposing a man not only deserves nothing good from you, but he has also provoked you with injustices and injuries—even this is not just cause for you to stop embracing him with affection and fulfilling your duties of love to him. He has deserved, you might say, something much different from me. But what has the Lord deserved? When He orders you to forgive that man for whatever sin he has committed against you, He calls you to do so not because that man deserves it, but because God Himself has forgiven you (Luke 17:3–4). This is the only path to achieving that which is not only difficult for, but entirely adverse to, our human nature—that is, loving those who hate us, repaying evil with good, and blessing those who curse us.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.  
MATTHEW 5:44

We must be sure not to dwell on the wickedness of men, but rather to consider the image of God in them. That image, concealing and obliterating their shortcomings, entices us by its beauty and dignity to love and welcome them. ♦

THIS SELF-MORTIFICATION, THEREFORE, will only take place in us when we fulfill the sum of love's requirements. And we fulfill these requirements not when we merely perform all the external duties of love—even if we don't overlook any of them—but when we do so from a sincere affection of love. For it might happen that someone fully performs his obligations as external duties go, and yet he is far from performing them for the right reason. For example, you may see certain people who want to appear very generous, and yet they give nothing without resenting the recipients of their generosity by their proud expressions or arrogant words. Hence the wretchedness into which this unhappy age has sunk—that hardly any charitable gifts are given, at least by the majority of men, without contempt for those to whom they are given. Such viciousness would not have been tolerated even among the pagans of old.

Something more is required from Christians than wearing a cheerful face and rendering their duties attractive by friendly words. First, they should imagine themselves in the situation of that person who needs their help, and they should pity his bad fortune as if they themselves both bore it and felt it. Thus they will be compelled, by a feeling of mercy and humanity, to give him help as if it were given to themselves. One who has this mind-set and approaches the task of helping his brothers will not contaminate his duties to others with arrogance or resentment. He won't despise a brother whom he helps because his brother needs such help, nor will he subject his brother to himself as a debtor. We would of course never mock an injured limb which the rest of the body labors to revive, nor would we consider that limb particularly indebted to the body's other members because it has received more help than it has given. The help that different members of the body mutually offer one another should not—according to the law of nature—be considered a favor, but rather as an obligation that would be unnatural to refuse. For this same reason, one who has performed a single obligation should not consider himself free from doing more—as generally happens when a wealthy person, after offering something of his own, leaves it to others to see to remaining needs, as if such remaining needs had nothing to do with him. Rather, everyone should consider himself—however great he may be—a debtor to his neighbors. And he must set no limit to the exercise of kindnesses toward others short of the failure of his own resources. For such kindnesses, as far and as wide as they extend, should conform to the rule of love. ♦

LET'S DISCUSS AGAIN more fully the chief part of our self-denial, which, as I've said, relates to God. I've mentioned many things about this that would be superfluous to repeat. It will suffice here to discuss how self-denial forms us to be calm and patient in this life.

First of all, then, in striving for either convenience or tranquility in this present life, Scripture calls us to resign our wills and everything that is ours to the Lord, and to turn the affections of our hearts over to Him to be tamed and bridled.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
MATTHEW 6:10

Our lust is furious and our greed limitless in pursuing wealth and honors, chasing after power, heaping up riches, and gathering all those vain things which seem to give us grandeur and glory. On the other hand, we greatly fear and hate poverty, obscurity, and humility, and so we avoid these realities in every way. Thus, we see that those who order their lives according to their own counsel have a restless disposition. We see how many tricks they try, how many pursuits they exhaust themselves with in order to secure the objects of their ambition or greed, while trying to avoid, on the other hand, poverty and humility.

Therefore, in order not to be entangled in such snares, godly men must hold this course: First of all, they must neither desire, nor aspire, nor expect to prosper for any other reason than the Lord's blessing. Therefore, let them safely and confidently cast themselves on and rest in that blessing. The flesh might seem beautifully sufficient to itself while it strives by its own power, or ascends by its own zeal, or is assisted by the favor of men toward honors and wealth. However, it's nevertheless certain that all these things will come to nothing and that we will accomplish nothing by our talents or efforts, except insofar as the Lord prospers both. But, on the contrary, His blessing by itself finds a way, in spite of every obstacle, to bring all things to a glad and prosperous end for us. Second, we are admittedly able to secure for ourselves, entirely apart from His blessing, something of glory and riches, just as we often see great honors and wealth piled up by ungodly men. Yet whatever we obtain will turn to evil without His blessing, since those on whom God's curse remains do not taste even the smallest amount of true happiness. We obviously shouldn't desire what makes us more miserable. ♦

SUPPOSING WE ACCEPT that the method of obtaining every prosperous and desirable success rests entirely with God's blessing, and that without God's blessing, every kind of misery and misfortune awaits us. It then also stands that we should not greedily strive for wealth and honors, whether trusting in our own natural skill or persistence, relying on the favor of men, or resting on a hollow dream of good fortune. On the contrary, we should always look to the Lord, that by His care we might be led to whatever lot in life He provides for us.

The result of this will be, in the first place, that we won't rush forward to capture wealth and lay hold of honors through unlawful acts and treachery, evil devices, or greed, to the injury of our neighbors. Rather, we will follow after those things that don't draw us away from innocence. For who can continue to hope for the help of divine blessing while committing various evils, theft, and other wickedness? For just as God's blessing doesn't come to anyone except those who are pure in thought and deed, so also does that blessing call back from impure thoughts and perverse actions all those who seek it.

Second, a bridle will be placed on us so that we won't burn with untamed lust for growing rich or greedily desiring honors. Isn't it shameful for one to look for God's help to obtain those things which he desires when those things are contrary to God's Word? For that which God curses with His own mouth He will not accompany with the help of His blessing.

Finally, if our hope and desire don't succeed, we will nevertheless be restrained from being impatient and cursing our condition, whatever it may be. For we will understand that such cursing of our condition would be murmuring against God who distributes riches, poverty, honor, and contempt according to His will. In summary, the one who rests on God's blessing in the manner that I've described won't employ wicked means—he knows he'll gain nothing—in the frantic pursuit of things men typically pursue. If he prospers, he won't attribute this to himself or to his own diligence, industry, or luck. Rather, he will acknowledge God as the author of his good fortune.

A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

JOHN 3:27

If the affairs of others prosper while he makes little progress, or even regresses, he will endure his poverty with greater patience and moderation of spirit than an impious man would endure minor success that does not precisely meet his desire. For he has this comfort, which provides greater security to him than the highest peak of wealth or power— he knows that his affairs are ordered by the Lord and, as such, promote his salvation. We see this sentiment in David, who, while following God and entrusting himself to God's rule, declared: "I do not occupy myself with things too great and marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother" (Ps. 131:1–2). ♦

THERE ARE OTHER circumstances in which those who are pious should stand firm in peace and patience. Such qualities should extend to every situation that we encounter in this life. No one, then, has properly denied himself except the one who has entirely abandoned himself to the Lord so that every aspect of his life will be governed by His will. The person thus composed in soul will neither judge himself to be miserable, nor will he spitefully complain against God for his lot in life, come what may.

The true necessity of having such a disposition is clear if you consider how many unforeseen events we are exposed to in this life. We are continually harassed by one illness or another: the plague advances; we are cruelly vexed by the calamities of war; frost and hail render the land barren and leave us with little, devouring our expectation for the year's crop. Wife, parents, children, and close relatives are snatched away by death; homes are consumed by fire. These are events which make men curse their lives, despise the day they were born, hold in contempt heaven and its light, rage against God, and, being fluent in blasphemies, accuse God of unfairness and cruelty. But the believer must in these same circumstances consider the mercy and the fatherly kindness of God. If the believer, then, should see his house made lonely by the loss of those nearest to him, even then he must not stop praising the Lord. Rather, he must turn himself to this thought: "The Lord's grace continues to dwell in my home and will not leave it desolate." If the believer should see his crop consumed by drought, disease, or frost, or trampled down by hail and famine threaten him, even then he must not despair within his soul, nor should he become angry toward God. Rather, he must persist with confidence in this truth: "But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever" (Ps. 79:13). God, then, will provide for us, however barren the land. If the believer should be afflicted by

illness, he must not be so stung by the severity of his hardship that he erupts in impatience and demands from God an explanation. Rather, he must, considering the justice and gentleness of God's discipline, recall himself to patience.

Indeed, the believer should accept whatever comes with a gentle and thankful heart, because he knows that it is ordained by the Lord. Moreover, he must not stubbornly resist the rule of God into whose power he has placed himself and all his affairs. So let the Christian make it his priority to drive from his breast that foolish and unfortunate comfort of pagans, who, in order to bolster their spirits against all adverse events, credit those events to fortune. They think it's silly to be angry at fortune, since she is reckless, aimless, and blind— inflicting her wounds equally on the deserving and the undeserving. In contrast, the rule of godliness is to recognize that God's hand is the sole judge and governor of every fortune, and because His hand is not recklessly driven to fury, it distributes to us both good and ill according to His orderly righteousness.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **BEARING OUR CROSS IS A PART OF SELF-DENIAL**

THE GODLY MIND, however, must rise even higher— that is, to that place that Christ calls His disciples when He bids every one of them to take up his cross.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

MATTHEW 16:24

For those whom the Lord has chosen and condescended to welcome into fellowship with Him should prepare themselves for a life that is hard, laborious, troubled, and full of many and various kinds of evil. For it's the will of their heavenly Father to test them in this way so that He might prove them by trials. Having begun this way with Christ, His only-begotten Son, He continues similarly with all His children.

For although Christ is the Son, beloved before all others—the one in whom the Father's soul delights— we nevertheless see how little ease and comfort Christ experienced (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Indeed, it could be said that He not only had a cross continually placed upon Him when He lived on earth, but even that His life was nothing other than a kind of perpetual cross. Scripture gives the reason for this: It was necessary that Christ "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Why, then, would we exempt ourselves from the same situation to which Christ our head was subjected—particularly since He was subjected to suffering for our sake to provide for us a pattern of patience in Himself? On this account the Apostle Paul teaches that all God's children are appointed to this end—to be made like Christ.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

ROMANS 8:29

From this also we receive remarkable consolation, that in the midst of dark and difficult circumstances, which we consider hostile and evil, we share in Christ's sufferings. For just as He entered into heavenly glory from a labyrinth involving every kind of evil, so we, in the same way, are led through various trials. And thus Paul himself says in another place that as long as we are learning to share in His suffering, we will know the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:10). If it has been allotted us to share in His death, then we are prepared to share in the glory of His resurrection. How perfectly suited this reality is to lessening the severity of every cross—the more we are afflicted with adverse circumstances, so much more certainly is our communion with Christ confirmed. By virtue of this communion, sufferings themselves not only become blessings to us, but they also serve to promote our salvation. ♦

MOREOVER, OUR LORD in no way had to take upon Himself the bearing of a cross except to prove and testify to His own obedience to His Father. However, there are many reasons why we ourselves must spend our lives subject to a constant cross. First of all, there's the fact that unless our own weaknesses are regularly displayed to us, we easily overestimate our own virtue, being by nature inclined to attribute all good things to our own doing. We don't doubt that our virtue will remain whole and unconquered in the face of whatever difficulties may come. Thus, we're drawn into a foolish and inflated view of our flesh. And then, trusting in our flesh, we brazenly exalt ourselves before God Himself, acting as if our own abilities are sufficient without His grace. There's no better method for God to curb such arrogance than by demonstrating to us through experience our weakness and frailty. He afflicts us with disgrace, poverty, childlessness, illness, and other troubles. And we, for our part, quickly crumble before such blows, being far from able to withstand them. Thus humbled, we learn to call on His strength, which alone can make us stand under the weight of such affliction. Indeed, the holiest among us know they stand by God's grace and not by their own virtues. Yet they would nevertheless become too confident in their own courage and constancy if they weren't led to a more intimate knowledge of themselves by the testing of the cross.

Such sluggish self-confidence even snuck up on David: "As for me, I said in my prosperity, 'I shall never be moved.' By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong; you hid your face; I was dismayed" (Ps. 30:6–7). Thus David admits that when his affairs prospered, his sensibilities were confounded, so that he neglected the grace of God on which he should have relied and trusted rather than in himself. He assured himself of his own permanence. If this happened to so great a prophet as David, each of us should tremble and take caution. While men, then, delude themselves during times of tranquility with a notion of their own great constancy and patience, they learn the truth about themselves when humbled by times of difficulty. Believers, being warned of their own weaknesses by such proofs, make progress toward humility and, shedding their perverse confidence in their flesh, cast themselves on the grace of God. When they have so cast themselves on the grace of God, they experience the presence of divine power in which there is sufficient and abundant help. ♦

MOREOVER, PAUL TEACHES that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character” (Rom. 5:3–4). For God has promised believers that He will be with them in times of suffering. Believers, being upheld by God’s hand, experience this truth while they patiently endure such times. For they’re unable to endure such suffering in their own strength. Therefore, as saints endure suffering, they experience God’s providing of the strength He has promised to give in times of need. And so their hope is also made strong. It would be ungrateful for them not to expect that they’ll discover—in the end—how constant and sure God’s truth is.

We see now how many related benefits are born from the cross. The cross destroys the false notion of our own strength that we’ve dared to entertain, and it destroys that hypocrisy in which we have taken refuge and pleasure. It strips us of carnal self-confidence, and thus humbling us, instructs us to cast ourselves on God alone so that we won’t be crushed or defeated. Such victory is followed by hope, since the Lord—by providing what He has promised—establishes His truthfulness for what lies ahead. Even for these reasons alone, it’s clear how vital the discipline of the cross is for us. It’s no little thing to be stripped of our blind self-love and thus to be made aware of our own weakness. Moreover, having been impressed with our own weakness, we learn to despair of ourselves. Then, having despaired of ourselves, we transfer our trust to God. Next, we rest in our trust in God, and we rely on His help and persevere unconquered to the end. Then standing on His grace, we see that He is true to His promises. Finally, being confident in the certainty of His promises, our hope is strengthened. ♦

ANOTHER REASON THE Lord afflicts His people is to test their endurance and to train them in obedience. They are quite unable to produce obedience unless He Himself empowers them. But it pleases Him to illuminate and testify by clear proofs to those graces that He has bestowed on the saints, so that those graces don’t lie hidden and idle. In Scripture, therefore, God is said to test His servants’ endurance when He puts on display that strength and constancy in suffering that He has given to them.

So God tested Abraham and verified his piety when Abraham didn’t refuse to sacrifice his one and only son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”  
GENESIS 22:11–12

Peter likewise teaches that our faith is proven by trials, just as gold is refined in a furnace of fire. Shouldn’t this most excellent gift of endurance, which believers receive from their God, be put to use and made certain and evident? Otherwise, men would never value the gift of endurance according to its true worth. But God Himself acts justly when He ordains circumstances that excite the virtues He has given to believers, so that those virtues don’t escape notice or, indeed, remain unused and waste away. There is, then, good reason for difficult circumstances in the lives of the saints, since they create endurance in them.

Believers are also trained in obedience by means of the cross. For thus they are taught to live according to God's will rather than their own. If everything went according to their own plans, they would never know what it means to follow God. Even the philosopher Seneca refers to an old proverb in which individuals were told to "follow God" when being encouraged to endure adversity. This proverb hinted at the truth that a person truly and finally submits to God's yoke when his hand and his back are exposed to God's discipline. Therefore, we shouldn't run from all the ways in which our heavenly Father shapes us in obedience, for it's right that we prove ourselves obedient to Him in every circumstance. ♦

BUT IF WE want to grasp how much we need such training in obedience, we must recall how prone our flesh is to cast off God's yoke as soon as it enjoys any period of relative peace and quiet. Our flesh is like a stubborn horse that becomes wild and unmanageable and doesn't recognize its rider—however much it previously obeyed his commands—after several days spent idly grazing. We continually find in ourselves that which God lamented in the people of Israel. Growing fat and lazy, we buck against Him who has fed and nourished us.

But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked;  
you grew fat, stout, and sleek;  
then he forsook God who made  
him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.

DEUTERONOMY 32:15

God's kindness should cause us to reflect on and delight in His goodness. But our perverse ingratitude is such that we make His kindness a means of growing ever more spoiled. Thus, we must be restrained by some discipline so that we don't break forth in obstinacy—acting wickedly because of our great wealth, becoming puffed up with pride because of honors, or growing arrogant because we possess other goods in ourselves or our circumstances. The Lord Himself providentially opposes, conquers, and restrains the ferocity of our flesh by the medicine of the cross. He does this in ways that uniquely serve each believer's well-being. For we're not all equally or severely oppressed by the same diseases. Nor do we all require the same exact cure. And so we see that each believer is subjected to a different kind of cross. Our heavenly doctor, having purposed to restore all of us to health, treats some more leniently. Meanwhile, He applies stronger remedies to others. But none of us is left untouched by or remains immune to His medicine—He knows we are all diseased. ♦

MOREOVER, IN ORDER to keep us in proper obedience to Himself, our merciful Father not only anticipates our weaknesses but also regularly corrects our past failings. Thus, when we are afflicted, we should immediately call to mind our past life. As we do so, we will undoubtedly discover that our past failings are worthy of whatever discipline we receive.

Nevertheless, we shouldn't let awareness of our past sins serve as the principal reason for the call to endure suffering. Scripture supplies a more profound reason for us when it teaches that in adverse circumstances we're being disciplined by the Lord so that we won't be condemned with the world.

But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:32

Therefore, in the midst of the bitterness of tribulations, we should recognize the kindness and mercy of our Father toward us. For even in such tribulations, He doesn't cease to promote our salvation. Indeed, He afflicts us not to ruin or destroy us, but instead to deliver us from the condemnation of the world. This awareness leads us to what Scripture teaches in another place: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11–12). When we discern our Father's rod of discipline in our lives, shouldn't we present ourselves to Him as obedient and teachable sons rather than as obstinate and hopeless men who've become hardened in wrongdoing?

If God didn't call us back to Himself by means of correction when we fell from Him, He would destroy us. Thus, it's rightly said in Scripture that we are illegitimate children, not sons, if we are without discipline.

If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

HEBREWS 12:8

Therefore, we are indeed wicked if we shun Him while He manifests to us His kindness and His care for our salvation. Scripture teaches that there's a difference between believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers become worse and more obstinate in consequence of the lashes they receive, just like slaves of earnest and deep-seated wickedness. Believers repent just like individuals gifted with the status of sonship. Choose, then, which of these you will be. But since I have spoken elsewhere on this subject, I will end this discussion, satisfied to have briefly touched on it here. ♦

FURTHERMORE, WE HAVE a particular consolation when we suffer persecution for righteousness' sake. In such persecution, we should consider how much God, thus branding us with the mark that His soldiers bear, condescends to honor us. When I speak of suffering for righteousness' sake, I have in mind not just those who are oppressed for their defense of the gospel, but also those who encounter oppression for whatever ways they defend righteousness. Whether, then, we assert God's truth against Satan's lies or take up the cause of the good and innocent against the injustices of the wicked, we will necessarily encounter the world's displeasure and hatred. And from that may follow danger to our lives, our property, and our honor. In these circumstances, we shouldn't think it painful or troublesome to devote ourselves to God in such a way. We shouldn't judge ourselves miserable, when by His own mouth He has pronounced us blessed.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 5:10

Poverty is in fact misery if we consider it in and of itself. Exile, scorn, imprisonment, and dishonor are likewise misery. And then there's death, the final calamity. But when God's favor rests on us, none of these things need threaten our happiness. Let us therefore derive greater contentment from Christ's testimony about us than from the vain estimations of our own flesh.

Thus it will be that, following the example of the Apostles, we will rejoice when He considers us worthy to suffer disgrace for His name (Acts 5:41). What then? Though innocent and clear of conscience, we might be stripped of our resources by the wickedness of the ungodly, and so reduced to poverty in the view of men—but before God in heaven our riches are thereby truly increased. We might be thrust out of our homes, but thereby we are drawn more intimately into God's household. We might be harassed and despised, but thereby we drive deeper roots into Christ. We might be branded with disgrace and dishonor, but thereby we gain a more honorable rank in the kingdom of God. We might be slaughtered, but thereby a door unto the blessed life is opened to us. We ought to be ashamed to think less of those things on which God places such value than we do of this present life's shadowy and fleeting pleasures. ♦

SCRIPTURE, THEN, ABUNDANTLY comforts us by these and similar teachings when we experience dishonor and harm for our defense of what's right. Thus, we show ourselves ungrateful if we don't freely and gladly receive such dishonor and harm from the hand of the Lord. This form of the cross, by which Christ wills to be glorified in us, is unique to believers—just as Peter also teaches.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

1 PETER 4:14

But since we, by natural impulse, judge dishonorable treatment worse than a hundred deaths, Paul reminds us that as Christians we will experience not only persecution but also disgrace. This is because we hope in the living God (1 Tim. 4:10). Elsewhere, Paul bids us to walk after his own example, whether people slander us or praise us (2 Cor. 6:8).

But the gladness that is required from us in the midst of persecution doesn't destroy every feeling of anguish and sorrow. For the saints' endurance regarding the cross wouldn't be called endurance if they weren't tormented with sorrow and choked with grief. If there were no difficulty in poverty, no suffering in illness, no sting in disgrace, no horror in death, then we would face these things indifferently—and what courage or perseverance could then be credited to us? Each of these things, by virtue of their own inherent bitterness, might naturally and entirely consume our souls. But in the midst of them, the courage of the believer makes itself known. Though severely oppressed and touched by the feeling of some bitterness, the believer, nevertheless, courageously fights that feeling and in the end perseveres. In the midst

of these feelings, the endurance of the believer reveals itself. Though mercilessly provoked, the believer is nevertheless restrained by the fear of God from bursting forth in anger. In the midst of them, the steadfastness of the believer shines. Though wounded by sorrow and grief, he finds rest in the spiritual comfort of his God. ♦

PAUL FITTINGLY DESCRIBES the war that believers wage against natural feelings of anguish in their pursuit of endurance and perseverance: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8–9). We see that bearing the cross with endurance doesn’t mean that a person is absolutely stupefied or robbed of every feeling of sorrow. The Stoics of old foolishly idealized such a person—one who, having stripped himself of all humanity, feels the same whether he encounters adversity or prosperity, sorrow or success; or rather one who feels nothing—like a stone. And what did the Stoics achieve by such sublime wisdom? They painted a portrait of endurance that has never been found, nor can exist, among men. Indeed, while they wished to represent endurance accurately and precisely, they deprived humankind of the power of genuine endurance.

At present, likewise, there are among Christians new Stoics who think it a vice not only to groan and weep, but even to be sad or upset. And indeed, these ridiculous ideas generally come from idle men. They employ themselves more in observation than in action, and they can produce nothing more than fantasies. But this cruel philosophy is nothing to us. Our Master and Lord condemned it not only by word but also by example. Our Lord groaned and wept, both for His own and others’ difficult circumstances. Nor did He teach His disciples anything different: “The world,” He said, “will rejoice, but you will weep and lament” (John 16:20). And, so that no one should turn such weeping and lamenting into sin, He expressly declared those who mourn to be blessed.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.  
MATTHEW 5:4

And no wonder. For if all tears are condemned, what will we make of our very own Lord, from whose body trickled tears of blood (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:44)? If all fear is judged faithlessness, what place will we give to that dread which according to Scripture heavily oppressed Him? If all sadness should be dismissed, how will we accept that His soul was sorrowful even unto death (Matt. 26:38)? ♦

I’VE SAID THESE things about our experience of grief in order to keep godly people from despair—to keep them, that is, from immediately abandoning the pursuit of endurance because they cannot rid themselves of a natural feeling of sorrow. Such despair and abandonment will come to those who turn endurance into indifference. They will turn a courageous and faithful man into a wooden post. Rather, Scripture praises the saints for endurance when we, though knocked around by evil circumstances, remain unbroken and undefeated; when we, though pricked by bitterness, are simultaneously filled with spiritual joy; when we, though oppressed by anxiety, breathe freely—cheered by the consolation of God.

Nevertheless, there lives within our hearts a revulsion to evil circumstances because of our natural disposition, which flees and shrinks back from adverse realities. Yet godly affection strives after obedience to the divine will, even in the midst of such difficulties. Such revulsion to adversity was noted by our Lord when He said to Peter: “When you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18).

It is, of course, unlikely that Peter, when it came time for him to glorify God through his death, was dragged to it unwilling and resistant. If such had been the case, he would have received little praise for his martyrdom. But even if he obeyed the divine command with the highest degree of enthusiasm in his heart, he was still torn by a divided will, because he couldn't cast off his humanity. When he reflected on the savage death that he would suffer, he was struck with horror, and would have willingly run away. But the thought that he was called to that death by God's own command then came to his aid, conquering and trampling his fear, so that he willingly and cheerfully submitted himself to death.

If, then, we want to be disciples of Christ, we should make it our aim to soak our minds in the sort of sensitivity and obedience to God that can tame and subdue every natural impulse contrary to His command. So it will be that no matter what kind of cross is placed upon us, we will steadily maintain endurance even through the narrowest straits of the soul. Indeed, adverse circumstances will keep their bitterness, and we will feel their bite. When afflicted by illness, we will groan and toss and long for health. When pursued by poverty, we will feel the stings of sadness and anxiety. We will bear the weight of sorrow at dishonor, contempt, and injustice. When loved ones die, we will naturally weep. But this will always be our conclusion: Nevertheless, the Lord has willed it. Therefore, let us follow His will. Indeed, this thought must intervene in the midst of sorrow's very stings, in the midst of our groans and tears, in order to incline our hearts to endure those things with which they're inflicted. ♦

SINCE WE HAVE found in God's will the main reason to endure the cross, I should briefly explain the difference between a Christian approach to suffering and one promoted by the worldly wisdom of the philosophers. In truth, very few philosophers have attained the height of realizing that God's hand forms us through affliction, or who have recognized that our role in affliction is to submit to God. Indeed, they offer no reason for enduring suffering except that such suffering is a fact of life. But this is nothing other than to say, “We must submit to God, since it is vain to struggle against Him.” If, however, we submit to God only because we judge suffering necessary—supposing we could escape—then we no longer genuinely obey God.

But Scripture bids us to see something much different in God's will—namely, fairness and justice, and then concern for our salvation.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

ROMANS 8:28

And thus Christian exhortations to endure suffering are of this sort: Whether we suffer poverty, exile, imprisonment, contempt, sickness, childlessness, or any such thing, let us remember that nothing happens apart from God's pleasure and providence, and that God Himself does nothing that isn't perfectly in order. What then? Don't our innumerable and frequent faults deserve more severe and weighty punishments than those that He, according to His mercy, has placed on us? Isn't it fair that our flesh be tamed and made familiar with the yoke in order to keep it from running wild with lust according to its natural disposition? Are God's justice and truth not worthy causes to suffer for?

But if God's impartiality is truly made apparent in our sufferings, we cannot complain or struggle against them without fault. Thus, we don't hear that frigid song: "Yield, for such suffering is necessary." We hear, rather, instruction that is lively and full of power: "Submit, because it is not right to resist. Endure, because unwillingness to do so is defiance of God's justice." But since in the end we only find attractive those things that we perceive to be for our good and well-being, our kind Father comforts us also in this way—assuring us that He works for our salvation by that very cross with which He afflicts us. If it's clear that tribulations work toward our salvation, shouldn't we accept them with a grateful and calm spirit? In bearing them with endurance, we're not yielding to necessity, but we're assenting to our own good.

Such considerations will bear this fruit: However much our spirits might shrink beneath the cross, naturally adverse to its bitterness, they will expand in equal measure with spiritual joy. And this will give rise to thanksgiving, which cannot exist without joy—thanksgiving and praise of our Lord can only spring from a glad and joyful heart. If there's nothing that can stop such thanksgiving and praise in us, then it's clear that the bitterness of the cross must be tempered with spiritual joy.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **MEDITATION ON OUR FUTURE LIFE**

IN WHATEVER TROUBLE comes to us, we should always set our eyes on God's purpose to train us to think little of this present life and inspire us to think more about the future life. For God knows well that we are greatly inclined to love this world by natural instinct. Thus, He uses the best means to draw us back and shake us from our slumber, so that we don't become entirely stuck in the mire of our love for this world.

We all, throughout our entire lives, want to act as though we were longing for heavenly immortality and striving urgently after it. Indeed, we judge it shameful not to distinguish ourselves in some way from the brute animals, whose condition would be much the same as ours if we didn't hope for eternity after death. But examine the plans, pursuits, and actions of whomever you wish, and you'll find them to be entirely earthly. Thus we see our stupidity. Our minds, having been dulled by the blinding glare of empty wealth, power, and honor, can see no farther than these things. And our hearts, burdened with greed, ambition, and lust for gain, can

rise no higher than these things. In sum, our entire soul, entangled in the enticements of the flesh, seeks its happiness on earth.

In order to resist this wickedness, the Lord teaches His people about the emptiness of this present life through constant lessons in suffering. Thus, so that His people don't promise themselves lofty and untroubled peace in this life, He often permits them to be troubled and harassed by wars, uprisings, robberies, and other injuries. So that they don't gawk with too much greediness at frail and tottering riches, or rest on those they already possess, He reduces them to poverty—or at least restricts them to very little wealth—through exile, barrenness of land, fire, or other means. So that they aren't enticed too much by the advantages of married life, He lets them be frustrated by the offenses of their spouse, humbles them by the wickedness of their children, or afflicts them with the loss of a child. However, there are times when God deals more gently with His people. Yet even when He does, so that they don't become puffed up with pride or inflated with self-confidence, He sets before their eyes disease and danger to teach them how unstable and fleeting are those good things that come to men, who are subject to death.

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.  
PSALM 119:71

In the end, we rightly profit from the discipline of the cross when we learn that this life, considered in itself, is troubled, turbulent, attended by many miseries, and never entirely happy, and that whatever things we consider good in this life are uncertain, passing, vain, and spoiled because they're mixed with many evils. And from this we likewise conclude that we should expect and hope for nothing other than trouble in this life, and that we should set our eyes on heaven where we expect our crown. So, indeed, we ought to realize that our souls will never seriously rise to the desire and contemplation of the future life until they've been soaked in scorn for this present life. ♦

THERE'S NO MIDDLE ground between these two things: either earth must become worthless to us, or we must remain bound by the chains of extravagant love for it. If, then, we care for eternity, we must make every effort to free ourselves from those chains. Of course, this present life has many attractions that entice us—many displays of comfort, charm, and sweetness. So that we are not enchanted, we must be continually pulled away from such temptations. What would become of us if we enjoyed perpetual good fortune and delight, since even regular stings of misfortune fail to awaken us to proper reflection on our misery? Man's life is like a vapor or shadow.

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.  
JAMES 4:14

Not only the learned understand this. Ordinary people also know this well-worn truth, and—judging it useful to remember—have highlighted it in many famous proverbs. But there's nothing we bring to mind and think about less diligently than this truth. For we all make our

plans as if we were constructing immortality for ourselves in this world. If we pass by a funeral or walk among graves, then—because our eyes are confronted with the image of death—we eloquently philosophize on the emptiness of life. But even this doesn't always happen, for these things often don't make an impression on us. And even when they do, our love of wisdom is momentary. It vanishes as soon as we turn our backs and leaves without a trace in our memory. In short, it fades like the applause in the theater of some pleasant show. Forgetting not just death, but even mortality itself—as if no rumor of it had ever reached our ears—we return to the lazy security of earthly immortality. If, in the meantime, someone interrupts us with the proverb that man is but a momentary thing, we admit this to be so, but give so little attention to it that the notion of our permanence remains firmly impressed on our minds.

Who, therefore, can deny how valuable it is not only to be reminded about the miserable condition of our earthly life with words, but to be convinced of it by things that happen to us? This is especially so since, even when overcome by life's miseries, we barely manage to stop staring at this present life with depraved and stupid admiration, as if it contained within itself the sum of our greatest goods. But if God desires to teach us in this way, it's our duty in turn to hear Him when He calls to us, waking us from our slumber so that we might strive with our whole heart toward contempt of the world and meditation on the future life. ♦

HOWEVER, THE CONTEMPT for this present life that believers should cultivate shouldn't produce hatred of this life or ingratitude toward God. This life, though bursting at the seams with every kind of misery, should still be considered one of God's blessings that shouldn't be dismissed. We're guilty of ingratitude to God if we fail to recognize something of divine blessing in this life. Indeed, believers in particular should see evidence of divine kindness in this life, since everything in it has been designed to further their own salvation. Before He openly presents to us our inheritance of eternal glory, God desires to declare Himself our Father through smaller proofs. Such proofs are the good gifts He daily bestows on us. If then this life helps us understand God's goodness, should we turn up our noses at it as if it didn't contain even a crumb of advantage to us? Therefore, it's right that we clothe ourselves in this attitude and affection—that we place this life among those gifts of divine kindness that shouldn't be disdained.

Some might object: "Every creature longs to be permanent." I admit the same, of course. In fact, I'm arguing that on this basis we should set our eyes on future immortality, where that permanent condition that never appears on earth will prevail. For Paul rightly teaches believers to approach death cheerfully, not desiring to be unclothed but to be clothed (2 Cor. 5:2–4). Even brute animals and lifeless creatures—even trees and stones—being conscious of their present futility, long for the day of the final resurrection when they will be set free from corruption along with the sons of God.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.  
ROMANS 8:19

Since we are gifted with the light of intelligence, and, what's more, illumined by God's Spirit, shouldn't we raise our minds higher than this decaying earth when troubled about our existence?

But this is neither the time nor the place to argue about such problems as the fear of death. From the outset of this work I professed that I have little desire to get caught up in lengthy discussions about common topics. Those whose souls are fearful of death should read Cyprian's little book on the subject of death. Or perhaps they should be sent to read the philosophers, whose contempt of death would put such fearful souls to shame. Let us, however, remember this truth: No one has made much progress in the school of Christ who doesn't look forward joyfully both to his death and the day of his final resurrection. For Paul identifies all believers by this characteristic.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

TITUS 2:11–14

And Scripture, so often as it sets forth a reason for solid joy, directs us to consider these things.

“Rejoice,” says the Lord, “and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near.” Why should that which the Lord intended to powerfully incite us to rejoicing and cheerfulness produce only sadness and dismay? If this is how we feel, how can we still glory in Him as though He were our master? Let us then arrive at a more sensible frame of mind. Even if the blind and stupid desire of our flesh opposes us, let us not hesitate to desire the Lord's coming—not with wishes alone, but with groans and sighs—as the greatest of all events. For He comes as our Redeemer to rescue us from this immense whirlpool of evils and miseries and to lead us to that blessed inheritance of His own life and glory. ♦

**THIS IS CERTAIN:** the entire body of believers, so long as they live on earth, must be like sheep destined for slaughter. Thus they are conformed to Christ their head (Rom. 8:36). They will be miserable if they don't set their minds on heaven and so rise above all that's in the world—and pierce the facade of present circumstances (1 Cor. 15:19). When they once have raised their heads above this earth, even though they should see the ungodly decked out in wealth and awards, enjoying the utmost tranquility, flaunting every kind of splendor and luxury, and abounding in every kind of pleasure—even if, moreover, they should be wickedly attacked by the ungodly, haughtily insulted by them, exploited by their greed, or harassed by their desires in some other way—even then believers will bear such evils. For they will set their eyes on that day when the Lord will receive His faithful people into the peace of His kingdom, wipe every tear from their eyes, clothe them in garments of glory and gladness, feed them with the indescribable sweetness of His own pleasures, raise them to fellowship in His own lofty heights, and—at last—grant them participation in His own happiness (Isa. 25:8; Rev. 7:17). But He will

cast the wicked, who have flourished on earth, into utter disgrace. He will turn their pleasures into suffering, their laughter and delight into tears and hissing. He will disturb their tranquility with pains of conscience. He will punish their self-indulgence with unquenchable fire. And He will subject them to the godly, whose patience they have exhausted. For, as Paul testifies, it's right for those who are miserable and have been unjustly afflicted to receive rest, and it's right for the wicked who have tormented the godly to receive affliction, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven (2 Thess. 1:6–7). This, surely, is our great consolation. Robbed of this consolation, we must either despair in our soul, or seek comfort—to our own destruction—in the empty comforts of this world. Indeed, even the prophet himself confessed that his feet nearly slipped when he considered for too long the prosperity of the ungodly in the present age. Nor could he steady himself in any other way than by entering into the sanctuary of God and considering anew the end of the godly and the wicked.

But when I thought how to understand this,  
it seemed to me a wearisome task,  
until I went into the sanctuary of God;  
then I discerned their end.

PSALM 73:16–17

To sum up everything in a word: The cross of Christ finally triumphs in believers' hearts—over the devil, the flesh, sin, and the wicked—when their eyes are turned to the power of the resurrection.

## CHAPTER 5

### HOW THE PRESENT LIFE AND ITS COMFORTS SHOULD BE USED

BY MEANS OF such lessons, Scripture also fully teaches us how we should use the good things of this earth rightly. This is a matter that shouldn't be neglected in composing a rule for life. Since we're alive, we should make use of this life's necessary supports. We shouldn't avoid those things which seem to serve our pleasure more than our necessity. Instead, we should hold to some rule so that we can use the things of this world—whether they serve necessity or delight—with a pure conscience.

The Lord prescribes this rule in His Word when He says that this present life is a kind of pilgrimage for His people, wherein they eagerly travel toward the heavenly kingdom. If they are merely passing through this land, then without doubt they should make use of its goods only insofar as they aid rather than hinder their journey. Thus, it's with good reason that Paul urges us to make use of this world just as if we were not using it, and, similarly, to buy possessions as though we were selling them.

This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as

though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:29–31

But since this is truly slippery ground with steep slopes in every direction, we should strive to set our feet where we can stand safely. There have been some men—good and holy in other respects—who saw that self-indulgence and luxury are, because of unbridled desire, perpetually taken too far. These men understood that self-indulgence and luxury needed to be severely curbed. Thus, in order to correct such a difficult problem, they devised a rule to oppose it—permitting men to use bodily goods only insofar as self-indulgence and luxury were necessities to life. Their counsel was certainly pious, but they were too severe in what they demanded from men. For they bound men’s consciences more narrowly than the Word of the Lord binds them—a very dangerous thing to do. In fact, they made it necessary to abstain from everything that’s not essential to life. Thus, according to them, it’s barely permissible to eat and drink anything more than bread and water. Others were even more severe, such as Crates of Thebes, who reportedly cast his riches into the sea because he believed he would be destroyed by them if they were not destroyed.

But many today look for a loophole so they can excuse the excessive desire of the flesh in using external things. Meanwhile, they wish to pave a way for self-indulgence. And so, they take as fact what I won’t concede—that freedom in using external things shouldn’t be restrained in any measure, and that it should be left to each man’s conscience to make use of externalities as he sees fit. I admit, for my part, that consciences neither can nor should be bound by fixed and precise statutes in these matters. But since Scripture gives us general rules for the proper use of external things, we should certainly restrain ourselves according to those rules. ♦

WE WON’T GO wrong in the use of God’s gifts as long as we let their use be governed by their author’s purpose in creating and designing them for us—for truly He created them for our good, not our ruin. No one, therefore, will hold a truer course than he who carefully considers this purpose of God’s gifts. Thus, if we consider the purpose for which He created food, we find He had regard not only for our necessity but also our pleasure and enjoyment. So too with clothes—the purpose was our adornment and honor in addition to our necessity. In the case of herbs, trees, and fruits, He considered the pleasantness of their appearance and charm of their smell in addition to their various uses. If this weren’t true, the prophet couldn’t list among God’s benefits wine, which gladdens the heart of man, and oil, which makes man’s face shine.

You cause the grass to grow for the livestock  
and plants for man to cultivate,  
that he may bring forth food from the earth  
and wine to gladden the heart of man,  
oil to make his face shine  
and bread to strengthen man’s heart.

PSALM 104:14–15

Nor could Scripture, in order to commend God's generosity, point out everywhere that He has given all such things to men.

Even the natural qualities of things demonstrate how much and how far we can enjoy them. Would the Lord have dressed the flowers with a beauty that runs freely to meet our eyes if it were wrong to be moved by such beauty? Would He have endowed them with so sweet a fragrance that flows freely into our nostrils if it were wrong to be moved by the pleasantness of such fragrance? Isn't the answer obvious? Has God not distinguished colors in such a way as to make some more pleasing than others? Again I ask, isn't the answer obvious? Isn't it clear that He made gold and silver, ivory and marble attractive—rendering them more precious than other metals or stones? In sum, isn't it obvious that He has given us many praiseworthy things, even though they're not necessary? ♦

LET US, THEN, dismiss that inhuman philosophy that only permits us to use created things out of necessity—a philosophy that spitefully deprives us of the lawful enjoyment of divine kindness and by its very nature reduces man to a block of wood, robbed of all his senses. Yet we must no less diligently oppose our fleshly desires that will rush forward without restraint if not kept in check. And, as noted above, we must understand too that there are those who encourage the desires of the flesh, not denying themselves anything under the pretext of liberty.

To start, desire is bridled when we acknowledge that all things given to us are given in order that we might know their author. This leads us to gratitude for His kindness toward us. But how can we be thankful if we drink and indulge in wine so much that we become dazed—unable to perform the duties of piety to which we are called? How can we know God if our flesh, boiling over from overindulgence of our base desires, so infects our minds with its corruption that we cannot discern what's right or honorable? How can there be thankfulness to God for clothing if, on the basis of our fancy and expensive clothes, we both admire ourselves and look down on others? Or if we let elegance and style open a door to sexual immorality? How can there be acknowledgment of God if our minds are enchanted by the splendor of His gifts?

For many people devote their senses to pleasures so much that their minds are buried in them. Many people are so fascinated with marble, gold, and paintings that they're transformed, as it were, into marble, metal, or painted figures. The scent from the kitchen or other sweet odors so paralyzes them that they lose all spiritual sense of smell. And the same thing is seen with the remaining senses. It's evident, then, that in our present circumstances we should considerably curb such freedom that leads to abuse. We should, rather, conform to Paul's rule that we make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.  
ROMANS 13:14

For if the desires of the flesh are given too much leeway, they will burst forth without limit or restraint. ♦

THERE IS NO more certain or reliable path for us than contempt of this present life and meditation on heavenly immortality. Two principles follow from this, in order that those who use this world might not be affected by it. First, let those who have wives live as though they had none; let those who buy live as though they did not buy (1 Cor. 7:29, 31). Paul teaches this. Let believers learn to bear scarcity with no less calm and patience than they experience abundance—all with moderation. The one who seeks to hold on to the things of this world lightly puts to death his own immoderate appetite for food and drink. He puts to death cowardice, ambition, pride, haughtiness, and dissatisfaction with respect to his table, his buildings, and his clothes. Indeed, he puts to death every care and affection which might lead him astray or hinder his meditation on heavenly life and his zeal for the improvement of his soul.

What Cato said long ago is true: “Luxury produces much care and much carelessness for virtue.” There is also an old proverb that states, “Those who are much occupied with concern for the body generally neglect the soul.” Therefore, even if the freedom that believers have with respect to external things cannot be subjected to a fixed formula, it should nevertheless be subjected to this rule: Let them indulge themselves very little. Rather, let them—by a perpetual intention of the heart—aim to eliminate their stockpiles of superfluous wealth, and to curb extravagance, and to take caution not to turn things given to them for support into obstacles.



AS A SECOND principle, those who have few possessions must learn to endure patiently their humble circumstances, not becoming agitated with excessive longing after things. Those who keep this rule have made much progress in the school of our Lord, but those who haven't give little proof that they are disciples of Christ. Indeed, numerous vices accompany the longing for earthly possessions. Besides, the one who cannot bear poverty is most likely to exhibit the opposite vice in the midst of prosperity. For example, the one who blushes over his cheap clothes will take pride in his expensive ones. The one unsatisfied with his simple meal, fidgeting with desire for something more significant, will abuse better foods by his lack of self-restraint. The one who struggles to endure his humble and ordinary status, growing agitated in spirit, won't be able to restrain his arrogance if he obtains honor. Therefore, let all those who genuinely pursue piety strive to learn, according to the Apostle's example, both to hunger and to be satisfied, to have much and to suffer poverty.

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

PHILIPPIANS 4:12

Moreover, Scripture has a third rule by which it regulates our use of earthly things. I said something about it previously when we dealt with the rules of love. Scripture teaches that everything we own—everything appointed for our benefit—has been given to us by God's kindness, so that all that we own is like a deposit for which we must one day give an account. Therefore, we should manage our possessions as if these words were constantly sounding in

our ears: “Turn in the account of your management” (Luke 16:2). At the same time, we should remember who will receive the account we give—namely, one who has commended self-control, soberness, frugality, and modesty just as much as He has condemned luxury, pride, showiness, and vanity; one who has approved no use of possessions but that which is joined with love; one who has already condemned with His own mouth whatever pleasures drag man’s heart away from integrity and purity or muddle his thinking. ♦

FINALLY, IT SHOULD be noted that the Lord bids each of us to consider, in all of life’s actions, our calling. For He knows how greatly human nature is inclined to restlessness. He knows the fickleness with which it is carried this way and that. He knows the desire and ambition with which it embraces objects opposed to one another. Therefore, so that by our folly and rashness we don’t produce mass confusion, He has ordained particular duties to each one in his station in life. And so that no one should overstep his boundaries, He has identified various stations in life as callings. Every individual’s rank in life, therefore, is a kind of post assigned to him by the Lord, to keep him from rushing about rashly for the whole of his life. This distinction, which He has applied to our stations in life, is so necessary that all our actions are judged in relation to it. And this judgment of our actions in relation to our calling is often much different than the judgment that human reason or philosophy makes. Philosophers consider no deed more noble than freeing one’s country from a tyrant. Yet the ordinary citizen who lays hands on a tyrant is openly condemned by the voice of the heavenly Judge.

However, I don’t want to waste time on numerous examples of this point. It’s sufficient that we recognize our calling from the Lord to be the principle and foundation of good works in all our affairs. The one who doesn’t frame his actions with reference to his calling will never keep the right course in his duties. He will perhaps occasionally do things that are praiseworthy in appearance, but his actions, whatever value they might have before men, will be rejected before God’s throne. Nor will there be consistency in his actions in the various spheres of his life.

Consequently, the one who directs himself toward the goal of observing God’s calling will have a life well composed. Free from rash impulses, he won’t attempt more than his calling warrants. He will understand that he shouldn’t overstep his boundaries. He who lives in obscurity will live an ordinary life without complaint, so that he won’t be found guilty of deserting his divinely appointed post. Indeed, in the midst of troubles, hardships, annoyances, and other burdens, he will find great relief when he remembers that God is his guide in all these matters. The magistrate will more gladly attend to his duties. The father will more gladly commit himself to his responsibilities. Each person, in whatever his station in life, will endure and overcome troubles, inconveniences, disappointments, and anxieties, convinced that his burden has been placed upon him by God. Great consolation will follow from all of this. For every work performed in obedience to one’s calling, no matter how ordinary and common, is radiant—most valuable in the eyes of our Lord.

<<Paste more text if the brothers like this>>

**Subject:** "13. The Greek Word for Faith"

**From:** erv thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>, Matt Lister <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Marshall Cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>

**Date Sent:** Fri, 1 Dec 2017 21:07:11 -0800

**Date Received:** Fri, 01 Dec 2017 21:07:12 -0800 (PST)

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Man, the English definition for 'faith' really misses the point of the gospel. That is sort of sad that believers don't really know what they are doing when they put their 'faith' in Jesus. It probably explains why believers are slack in doing their homework to make sure assurance and conviction is at the root of their faith. Blind faith must be a term invented by Satan to deceive believers. What does Screwtape tell Wormwood about this? - Erv

### 13. The Greek Word for Faith

The Usage in early secular documents throws light upon its meaning. In the sentence "whom no one would trust, even if they were willing to work," we see its meaning of confidence in the person's character and motives. The sentence "I have trusted no one to take it to her," speaks of a person's lack of confidence in the ability of another to perform a certain task. From the standpoint of the one trusted we have "I am no longer trusted, unless I behave fairly." Paul uses the word in I Thessalonians 2:4; Galatians 2:7; I Corinthians 9:17; and I Timothy 1:11 "I was put in trust with the gospel, the gospel, ... was committed unto me, the gospel ... which was committed to my trust." This is the verb usage. When we come to the noun, we have the meaning of "faith and confidence, fidelity and faithfulness." The adjective gives us "faithful and trustworthy." Paul uses the word in his directions to the Philippean jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31). He exhorts him to consider the Lord Jesus worthy of trust as to His character and motives. He exhorts him to place his confidence in His ability to do just what He says He will do. He exhorts him to entrust the salvation of his soul into the hands of the Lord Jesus. He exhorts him to commit the work of saving his soul to the care of the Lord. That means a definite taking of one's self out of one's own keeping and entrusting one's self into the keeping of the Lord Jesus. That is what is meant by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ."

<https://ref.ly/o/wuest/3758309?length=1573> via @Logos

Sent from my iPad

**Subject:** "Saving faith is so called because..."

**From:** erv thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>, Matt Lister <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Marshall Cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>

**Date Sent:** Fri, 24 Nov 2017 22:05:42 -0800

**Date Received:** Fri, 24 Nov 2017 22:05:44 -0800 (PST)

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"Saving faith is so called because it has eternal life inseparably connected with it. It cannot be better defined than in the words of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism: "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel." The object of saving faith is the whole revealed Word of God. Faith accepts and believes it as the very truth most sure. But the special act of faith which unites to Christ has as its object the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 7:38; Acts 16:31). This is the specific act of faith by which a sinner is justified before God (Rom. 3:22, 25; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9; John 3:16-36; Acts 10:43; 16:31). In this act of faith the believer appropriates and rests on Christ alone as Mediator in all his offices."

<https://ref.ly/o/eastons/885010?length=824> via @Logos

Sent from my iPad

**Subject:** A good definition of believe

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** marshall cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>, Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>, Matt Lister <matt.lister@rocket.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, Gladstone Engineering <jeff@gladeng.com>

**Date Sent:** Tue, 29 Aug 2017 21:29:03 -0700

**Date Received:** Tue, 29 Aug 2017 21:29:11 -0700 (PDT)

**Attachments:** image1.PNG

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Sent from my iPad

# Signs and Belief

BIBLEX.com

*to believe in Christ is not simply to say He is the Son of God, but to fully and relationally invest in the person of Christ*

Module 5 > Session 5: Aligned



**Subject:** My thoughts on 'Believe'

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>,"Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>,"Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,"Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>,"Cousineau, Marshall" <marshall.cousineau@rocket.com>

**Date Sent:** Wed, 25 Jan 2017 11:18:35 -0800

**Date Received:** Wed, 25 Jan 2017 11:18:35 -0800 (PST)

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Hey guys,

Happy Hump Day. For some odd reason, I was pondering the word 'believe' last night. I love the Greek language because it is so exact. But, this time I did not delve into *pistos* to understand believe further. I decided just to explore it from my English understanding alone. Here is what I came up with:

Jesus, almost desperately, cries out throughout the gospels- why wont you believe? Over and over and over. Let's take a few from John, for example (end of email).

Believe really is a huge word, even in English (much more in the Greek). Jesus, again, almost in desperation, pleads- why wont you believe Me? Believe in Me? You have all the prophecies. You have the witness of 2 or more- My Father Himself, Me, John the Baptist, my disciples... You have My miracles and signs. You have heard the voice of My Father from heaven. You have my sinless life on display. My teaching with authority... BELIEVE IN WHO I AM. BELIEVE WHAT I SAY.

1. Who does He want us to **believe He is**? I can only think of 2 things. The Messiah. The Son of God = God the Son. The Jews recognized this is what He wanted them to believe and some did accept it and many opposed it

- Embedded in this is He is saying 'believe in' Me. My character. My essence. My love and goodness. My perfection. Even in the English language this carries over. My daughter once was ministering to a girl way out on the fringe. This girl was way, way out on the fringe of life. I am not even sure she went to school. Anyway, one time they were waking and a boyfriend of the girl drove by and gave them a ride to Orangevale. Long story short, my daughter was a couple hours late getting home. I think it was almost midnight. When she got home I was so beside myself I actually could not even speak!! That has never happened in my whole life. I sat her down in front of me and just could not say anything for a long time. Finally, she could see my utter despair, anger, hurt and she told me what happened. Then she said- believe me daddy. 2 things. Believe what I am saying to you is true **and** believe 'in' me, you know me. I did. Both. This is the same as what Jesus is pleading for all through the gospels.

- When my son was on the swim team many times he would qualify for Championships at Sierra College. Before he swam I would say- long arms, we believe in you. Meaning- We are fully behind you. We know what you are capable of. If you fail, we know you are equally capable of handling that. Whatever the case, we are in that pool with you. Again, exactly what I see Jesus asking for

2. **Believe what I say**. Similar to the above, but also with obedience added. Believe I am telling you nothing but the truth to the degree that you obey it! Every single word. Believe it. Count on it. Obey it.

Just thinking on this from the English side actually has helped me more than studying the word in the Greek. Go figure. Way to go English - Erv

## **John**

- those who believe in His name
- do you believe?
- how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
- he who does not believe has been judged

- It is no longer because of what you said that we believe
- Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe
- you do not believe Him whom He sent.
- For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me
- how will you believe My words?
- This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent
- What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You?
- But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe
- For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe
- or unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.
- many came to believe in Him.
- But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.
- Do you believe in the Son of Man?
- And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him
- I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me
- But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep
- If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me
- but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may [fn]know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father
- and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?
- If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation
- For this reason they could not believe
- And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me

--

[Erv Thomas](#)

"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** Billy G tidbit

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Gladstone Engineering <jeff@gladeng.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@rocket.com>, marshall cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Tue, 24 Jan 2017 12:12:39 -0800

**Date Received:** Tue, 24 Jan 2017 12:12:39 -0800 (PST)

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We do not know Christ through the five physical senses, but we know Him through the sixth sense that God has given every man—the ability to believe.

Sent from my Pixie thing

**Subject:** Why do people refuse to believe in JC?

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>,"Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>,"Manuel Luz" <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,"Scott Novak" <scott.novak@rocket.com>,"marshall cousineau" <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Mon, 31 Oct 2016 16:47:17 -0700

**Date Received:** Mon, 31 Oct 2016 16:47:17 -0700 (PDT)

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Brothers,

I thought this was a good BSF question and answer from John 5:

**What reasons did Jesus give in this passage for people's refusal to believe? How will you pray for someone you know who falls into this category?**

1. They think the answer to eternal life is just searching the scriptures (in and of themselves?). 2. unwilling to come to Jesus. 3. do not have the love of God in themselves. 4. do not receive Him (like #2). desire for, and to, receiving glory from one another. 5. they do not seek the glory that is from God. 6. trusting in Moses, the law (or really anything besides Christ and His grace). Anyone/anything besides Christ that one sets their hope. \*\*\* I will just pray against these things and ask for wisdom from God in how I can address these with each student individually.

--

[Erv Thomas](#)

*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv*

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** Re: [EXTERNAL] RE: Salvation chart useful?

**From:** Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>

**To:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**Cc:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>, "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@rocket.com>, Marshall Cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Wed, 5 Oct 2016 23:04:17 +0000

**Date Received:** Wed, 05 Oct 2016 16:04:21 -0700 (PDT)

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One thing I am just now thinking about. In Eastern cultures, religion is apparently more a way of life, than a set of belief statements. You walk through faith in eastern culture more than think through it. Perhaps we might be making it too hard? Perhaps they are more ready to hear the invitation of the Gospel than we think? I don't know.

One thing that you do better than anyone, Erv, as you did this for me when I was a new Christian, is that you really stressed the relationship over religion. Maybe stressing the relationship with the living Jesus is the way to go. And as you get to know them more closely, it will model them knowing Jesus. Of course, relationships are not generally linear, but that's a good thing, I think.

Just some sideways thoughts!

Man

On Oct 5, 2016, at 2:25 PM, Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)> wrote:

Thanks guys, all this is useful information. In a way I am sort of back at square one in sharing my faith with these students. In very many ways they are like little children, maybe even pre-schoolers. I gave one of the students an App of the Bible story for children ages 6-8, or something like that. She loves it!! Maybe because the English is easy and the graphics are easy and the whole message is easy to understand. Whatever I do, I think I need to make it very, very simple to understand. I thought maybe that chart would make it so simple all I had to do is point on a line and say which line are you on?

To Jeff's point, if I understand it, you are saying heaven is only part of the package, the real issue is walking with, obeying and enjoying Jesus now and what that would look like and why that should appeal to them. Certainly very true. Let me think on this more and pray about it. In some ways this is quite difficult. The carnal man cannot accept or understand the things of God then you add in all of the cultural, language, race, and age barriers and barriers and I am sure no matter what I say will confuse the heck out of them :/ Fortunately, the Holy Spirit can take my mumbo jumbo and apply it to their hearts. Hey, come to think of it, I speak in tongues! I have the gift of tongues! I speak mumbo jumbo and God makes it so they hear the gospel in their own language (cultural, gender, age...) and get saved. Finally I get it! That is what Pentecost was all about! - Erv

On Wed, Oct 5, 2016 at 12:45 PM, Lister, Matt <[Matt.Lister@rocket.com](mailto:Matt.Lister@rocket.com)> wrote:

I like what Jeff says. To be honest, when I first opened up the link and saw the diagram I thought you were joking. It just looked like random stick figures and arrows. Upon closer inspection I saw what it was trying to convey and I suppose that if you were following the directions and adding the graphics one at a time it might make sense. I just feel sorry for the guy in the audience who is late and comes in at the end.

Matt

Ps. Do we meet for lunch anymore? I think I may be out of phase on the day.

---

**From:** Gladstone Engineering [mailto:[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 05, 2016 12:00 PM  
**To:** 'Erv Thomas'; Lister, Matt; 'Manuel Luz'; Novak, Scott; 'marshall cousineau'  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] RE: Salvation chart useful?

Without any prompting from Manuel, I'm feeling bold and inspired this morning, and I'm going to toss out this vein of discussion: Along the lines of the drum that Dallas Willard beats (and John MacArthur, though in different words), is there a way to highlight the fact that the salvation event is just one aspect (yes, essential) of LIFE with Christ as disciples – as his people and as his friends. Since you are engaging these students early in the process, it seems like a great opportunity to nip in the bud the over-simplification that we western evangelicals have tended to train into the minds of people – that it all boils down to “getting to heaven.” If we don't learn to love walking with Jesus in this life, why would we enjoy him in the next? And you don't even need to make a big deal of the fact that you're talking about “Lordship Salvation” vs some other kind of salvation; just talk as if there is no other kind (because, ahem, there isn't). They have the opportunity to become whole, beautiful people—just like Jesus—and to live with him forever.

Jeff

**From:** Erv Thomas [mailto:[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 05, 2016 10:44 AM  
**To:** Lister, Matt <[Matt.Lister@rocket.com](mailto:Matt.Lister@rocket.com)>; Gladstone, Jeff <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)>; Manuel Luz <[manuel.luz@oakhills.org](mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org)>; Scott Novak <[scott.novak@rocket.com](mailto:scott.novak@rocket.com)>; marshall cousineau <[Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com](mailto:Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com)>  
**Subject:** Salvation chart useful?

Brothers,

God has blessed me greatly putting me exactly where I belong in ministry, has given me great favor in the eyes of the school, teachers and especially the students. I have tremendous interactions with the students weekly and bedsides being their TA, I now have 4 weekly Talk Times with a total of about ~40 students regularly. :)! They completely trust me, respect me and like me. Again, I completely believe God orchestrated every aspect of this. Maybe even the tumor? :/

This means, to me, that I am now perfectly positioned to go to the next level with these students in understanding the gospel and this wonderful love the Lord has for them. I am speaking at our Fall camp next week. I was thinking of using this salvation plan diagram. I would draw it on the whiteboard and explain it at the same time.

What are your thoughts about it? Would it have helped you when you were seeking the Lord?

<http://www.reachinginternationals.com/know-god-personally-diagram/>

- Erv

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[Erv Thomas](#)

*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" -*

*Erv*

 <~WRD000.jpg>

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[Erv Thomas](#)

*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" -*

*Erv*

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** Re: [EXTERNAL] RE: Salvation chart useful?  
**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>  
**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>  
**Cc:** Gladstone Engineering <jeff@gladeng.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@rocket.com>, marshall cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>  
**Date Sent:** Wed, 5 Oct 2016 14:25:33 -0700  
**Date Received:** Wed, 5 Oct 2016 14:25:33 -0700 (PDT)

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Thanks guys, all this is useful information. In a way I am sort of back at square one in sharing my faith with these students. In very many ways they are like little children, maybe even pre-schoolers. I gave one of the students an App of the Bible story for children ages 6-8, or something like that. She loves it!! Maybe because the English is easy and the graphics are easy and the whole message is easy to understand. Whatever I do, I think I need to make it very, very simple to understand. I thought maybe that chart would make it so simple all I had to do is point on a line and say which line are you on?

To Jeff's point, if I understand it, you are saying heaven is only part of the package, the real issue is walking with, obeying and enjoying Jesus now and what that would look like and why that should appeal to them. Certainly very true. Let me think on this more and pray about it. In some ways this is quite difficult. The carnal man cannot accept or understand the things of God then you add in all of the cultural, language, race, and age barriers and barriers and I am sure no matter what I say will confuse the heck out of them :/ Fortunately, the Holy Spirit can take my mumbo jumbo and apply it to their hearts. Hey, come to think of it, I speak in tongues! I have the gift of tongues! I speak mumbo jumbo and God makes it so they hear the gospel in their own language (cultural, gender, age...) and get saved. Finally I get it! That is what Pentecost was all about! - Erv

On Wed, Oct 5, 2016 at 12:45 PM, Lister, Matt <[Matt.Lister@rocket.com](mailto:Matt.Lister@rocket.com)> wrote:

I like what Jeff says. To be honest, when I first opened up the link and saw the diagram I thought you were joking. It just looked like random stick figures and arrows. Upon closer inspection I saw what it was trying to convey and I suppose that if you were following the directions and adding the graphics one at a time it might make sense. I just feel sorry for the guy in the audience who is late and comes in at the end.

Matt

Ps. Do we meet for lunch anymore? I think I may be out of phase on the day.

---

**From:** Gladstone Engineering [mailto:[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 05, 2016 12:00 PM  
**To:** 'Erv Thomas'; Lister, Matt; 'Manuel Luz'; Novak, Scott; 'marshall cousineau'  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] RE: Salvation chart useful?

Without any prompting from Manuel, I'm feeling bold and inspired this morning, and I'm going to toss out this vein of discussion: Along the lines of the drum that Dallas Willard beats (and John MacArthur, though in different words), is there a way to highlight the fact that the salvation event is just one aspect (yes,

essential) of LIFE with Christ as disciples – as his people and as his friends. Since you are engaging these students early in the process, it seems like a great opportunity to nip in the bud the over-simplification that we western evangelicals have tended to train into the minds of people – that it all boils down to “getting to heaven.” If we don’t learn to love walking with Jesus in this life, why would we enjoy him in the next? And you don’t even need to make a big deal of the fact that you’re talking about “Lordship Salvation” vs some other kind of salvation; just talk as if there is no other kind (because, ahem, there isn’t). They have the opportunity to become whole, beautiful people—just like Jesus—and to live with him forever.

Jeff

**From:** Erv Thomas [mailto:[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)]

**Sent:** Wednesday, October 05, 2016 10:44 AM

**To:** Lister, Matt <[Matt.Lister@rocket.com](mailto:Matt.Lister@rocket.com)>; Gladstone, Jeff <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)>; Manuel Luz <[manuel.luz@oakhills.org](mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org)>; Scott Novak <[scott.novak@rocket.com](mailto:scott.novak@rocket.com)>; marshall cousineau <[Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com](mailto:Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com)>

**Subject:** Salvation chart useful?

Brothers,

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This means, to me, that I am now perfectly positioned to go to the next level with these students in understanding the gospel and this wonderful love the Lord has for them. I am speaking at our Fall camp next week. I was thinking of using this salvation plan diagram. I would draw it on the whiteboard and explain it at the same time.

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*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv*

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** RE: [EXTERNAL] RE: Salvation chart useful?

**From:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@Rocket.com>

**To:** Gladstone Engineering <jeff@gladeng.com>, 'Erv Thomas' <iamerv@gmail.com>, 'Manuel Luz' <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@Rocket.com>, 'marshall cousineau' <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Wed, 5 Oct 2016 19:45:25 +0000

**Date Received:** Wed, 05 Oct 2016 12:46:00 -0700 (PDT)

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I like what Jeff says. To be honest, when I first opened up the link and saw the diagram I thought you were joking. It just looked like random stick figures and arrows. Upon closer inspection I saw what it was trying to convey and I suppose that if you were following the directions and adding the graphics one at a time it might make sense. I just feel sorry for the guy in the audience who is late and comes in at the end.

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**From:** Gladstone Engineering [mailto:jeff@gladeng.com]

**Sent:** Wednesday, October 05, 2016 12:00 PM

**To:** 'Erv Thomas'; Lister, Matt; 'Manuel Luz'; Novak, Scott; 'marshall cousineau'

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] RE: Salvation chart useful?

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**Sent:** Wednesday, October 05, 2016 10:44 AM

**To:** Lister, Matt <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>; Gladstone, Jeff <jeff@gladeng.com>; Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>; Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>; marshall cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Subject:** Salvation chart useful?

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This means, to me, that I am now perfectly positioned to go to the next level with these students in understanding the gospel and this wonderful love the Lord has for them. I am speaking at our Fall camp next week. I was thinking of using this salvation plan diagram. I would draw it on the whiteboard and explain it at the same time.

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- Erv

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[Erv Thomas](#)

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**Subject:** RE: Salvation chart useful?

**From:** Gladstone Engineering <jeff@gladeng.com>

**To:** 'Erv Thomas' <iamerv@gmail.com>,"'Lister, Matt'" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>,'Manuel Luz' <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,'Scott Novak' <scott.novak@rocket.com>,'marshall cousineau' <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Wed, 5 Oct 2016 11:59:59 -0700

**Date Received:** Wed, 05 Oct 2016 12:01:04 -0700 (PDT)

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Without any prompting from Manuel, I'm feeling bold and inspired this morning, and I'm going to toss out this vein of discussion: Along the lines of the drum that Dallas Willard beats (and John MacArthur, though in different words), is there a way to highlight the fact that the salvation event is just one aspect (yes, essential) of LIFE with Christ as disciples - as his people and as his friends. Since you are engaging these students early in the process, it seems like a great opportunity to nip in the bud the over-simplification that we western evangelicals have tended to train into the minds of people - that it all boils down to "getting to heaven." If we don't learn to love walking with Jesus in this life, why would we enjoy him in the next? And you don't even need to make a big deal of the fact that you're talking about "Lordship Salvation" vs some other kind of salvation; just talk as if there is no other kind (because, ahem, there isn't). They have the opportunity to become whole, beautiful people—just like Jesus—and to live with him forever.

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**From:** Erv Thomas [mailto:iamerv@gmail.com]

**Sent:** Wednesday, October 05, 2016 10:44 AM

**To:** Lister, Matt <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>; Gladstone, Jeff <jeff@gladeng.com>; Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>; Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>; marshall cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

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*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** RE: [EXTERNAL] Salvation chart useful?  
**From:** "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@Rocket.com>  
**To:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>,"Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@Rocket.com>,"Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>,"Manuel Luz" <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,"marshall cousineau" <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>  
**Date Sent:** Wed, 5 Oct 2016 18:37:43 +0000  
**Date Received:** Wed, 05 Oct 2016 11:37:44 -0700 (PDT)

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Hey Erv,

Don't have much time to explain, but I wanted to get some quick feedback to you in case I don't see you before your Fall Camp. I personally don't think it would be much value to them. I think it's helpful to leadership to understand the different levels of interaction that could take place at the different positions of the salvation plan diagram. I think that someone who is open to hearing truth might benefit from a talk about what is truth and taking it from there.

My 2 cents.

Scott

**From:** Erv Thomas [mailto:iamerv@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 05, 2016 10:44 AM  
**To:** Lister, Matt; Gladstone, Jeff; Manuel Luz; Novak, Scott; marshall cousineau  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Salvation chart useful?

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**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>,"Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>,Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>,marshall cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Wed, 5 Oct 2016 10:44:01 -0700

**Date Received:** Wed, 5 Oct 2016 10:44:01 -0700 (PDT)

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Brothers,

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*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** Re: Saved just by believing?

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>,"Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>,Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>,marshall cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Sat, 1 Oct 2016 01:03:20 -0700

**Date Received:** Sat, 1 Oct 2016 01:03:20 -0700 (PDT)

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Spurgeon has a good explanation, as well:

The first "believed on him": these are the right kind. What is it to believe on Christ? It means not only to accept what he says as true, and to believe that he is the Messiah and the Son of God, but trustfully to rest in him. To believe on him is to take him as the ground of our hopes, as our Saviour, upon whom we depend for salvation. When we believe in him or on him, we accept him as God sets him forth; and we make use of him by trusting on him to do for us what God has appointed him to do. This trusting on Jesus is saving faith. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." To believe him may be a very different thing from believing on him. Such belief may fall far short of saving faith. To believe on him means heartily to give yourself up to him, and to follow him as the way, the truth, and the life to you. Rejecting all rival confidences, the heart leans on Jesus all its weight, and leaves with him all its burdens. Believing in him, we repose all our concerns, for time and for eternity, in his hands. To believe on him is also to believe implicitly. We believe all that he may yet say. We accept not only what he says which we can fully understand, but that which as yet is dark to us. We so believe in him that we go with him in all his teachings, be they what they may. We not only go as far as he has hitherto revealed himself to us, but we are prepared to go as much farther as he pleases. What he says is truth to us, on the sole evidence that he says it. We believe in Jesus, not because we judge that what he says can be endorsed by our understanding (though that is, indeed, the case), but because he says it. Our Lord's word is reason enough for us. The ipse dixit of the Son of God suffices us, even if all men deny his assertions. He has said it, and he is the truth itself. We believe on him; Son of God and Son of man, living, dying, risen again, ascended into the heavens, we trust him. He is our infallible prophet, and our omniscient teacher. We rest ourselves wholly on him. That is saving faith. Oh, that it may be said of this congregation, "Many believed on him"!

But there is another kind of faith which was produced by the Saviour's testimony, and had much of hope in it, and yet it never came to anything. There is a temporary faith which believes Jesus in a sense, and after its own way of understanding him, or rather of misunderstanding him. This faith believes about him; believes that he was undoubtedly sent of God; that he was a great prophet; that what he says is, to a high degree, reasonable and right, and so forth. This faith believes what he has just now said; but it is not prepared to believe on him so as to accept everything that he may say at another time. This faith believes everything that commands itself to its own judgment: it does not, in fact, believe in Jesus, but believes in itself, and in him so far as he agrees with its own opinions. This faith is not prepared to obey Christ, and accept him as its Master and Lord. This was the kind of faith these Jews possessed: it was a faith which was so crowded up with a mass of favourite prejudices that before long it was smothered by them. They might accept Jesus as the Messiah, but then he must be the kind of Messiah they had always pictured in their own minds—a leader who would defeat the Romans, who would deliver Palestine from the foreign yoke, rebuild the temple, and glorify the Jewish race. They half hoped that he might turn out to be a great leader for their own purposes; but they did not believe in him as he revealed himself as the light of the world, as the Son of God, and as one with the Father.

On Saturday, October 1, 2016, Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)> wrote:

Brothers,

There is probably more information here than you care to read but still, take a moment and just peruse it. Just skimming it you will read some great explanations of what believing really meant to Jesus when He used the word. Seems like we could avoid a lot of problems in the church if new believers really understood what Christ means when He asks them to believe in Him.

- Erv

[http://www.preceptaustin.org/1thessalonians\\_213#believe](http://www.preceptaustin.org/1thessalonians_213#believe)

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[Erv Thomas](#)

"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv  
*International Life @ FLC*



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[Erv Thomas](#)

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*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** Re: What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>

**Cc:** Marshall Cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>, "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@rocket.com>, Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>, "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>

**Date Sent:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 15:26:58 -0700

**Date Received:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 15:26:58 -0700 (PDT)

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Good question. Good discussion topic, as well, if I can ever get back to the Thursday group (eating at In-n-Out by myself now) :/

It would be good to define what discipleship is and how to go about it. I was disciples in college and I read a book- Disciples are Made, Not Born, after I got saved. It would be interesting to hear from all the guys if they had similar experiences.

There is certainly some disconnect somewhere. I agree, the church as we know it certainly is on the decline, 'believers' in Jesus denying themselves and taking up their cross seems to be on the rise. Shoot, even simple home Bible studies just reading verse by verse seem to have gone by the wayside.

Maybe Christianity is like politics and we are all trained to dodge the real issue with words and semantics. Maybe it is just human nature to pretend to be a Christian. Short of just going through the Bible verse by verse and modeling a genuine walk with the Lord, I also don't know the answer.

Not sure why, I know this sounds sacrilegious, but I am happy that America still has even a 'fake' respect for Jesus and the Bible. We haven't lost our roots entirely. Of course an argument could be made that a strong deceived Christian nation is in a worse state than a sincere nation that has never heard.

I guess this is another v topic to spend looking into with my free retirement time. :) - Erv

PS. I do feel bad about the burden this places on you and the 'church.' Seems similar to Intel having the best processors bur not for the mobile market where everything is now headed

On Sep 29, 2016 11:17, "Manuel Luz" <[manuel.luz@oakhills.org](mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org)> wrote:

Erv, I was not against the survey, and I really appreciated you sharing it. It gives us insights, one way or another.

One thing—and I admit that I have been part of the problem—is that Americans can still hang with Jesus (according to Barna), but they are seeing the institutional church as increasingly irrelevant. So where does discipleship happen in that scenario? I don't have answers to that one.

Man

On Sep 29, 2016, at 10:39 AM, Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)> wrote:

Yes, I was speaking more tongue in cheek. Even if any church did the survey I would be inclined not to believe it. MacArthur coined the term 'easy believism' years ago and

Jesus Himself says- why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?

However, there are some insightful takeaways from the survey. Jesus is still huge in America and so is the Bible. Now, they may be mistaken and/or deceived in many ways, for sure. Still, I think it should give us some level of confidence in our sharing the gospel. It also can help us prepare and ask the right questions and then tell the right version of what the word 'believe' means in the NT. Also, Barna seems to recognize their answer to mean that they have just taken the 'first step,' which might fit with Manuel's statement that they need to be disciplined to "'long' for the pure milk of the word so that they may grow by it with respect to salvation" and then to obey it "not becoming forgetful hearers but effectual doers."

As you can see, I am turning into a bona fide missionary. Evangelism is always on my mind now. I want to know everything about it- every verse in the Bible but also all the learning I can get on where people are at, what are they thinking about Christ and the Bible.

On the whole, America is still committed to Jesus. The act of making a personal commitment to Jesus—often seen as the “first step” in becoming a Christian—is a step that more than six in 10 Americans say they have taken and, moreover, that commitment is still important in their life today.

Have a great lunch!

- Erv

On Thursday, September 29, 2016, Gladstone Engineering <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)> wrote:

Right... who says Barna is even asking the right questions?

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**From:** Manuel Luz [mailto:[manuel.luz@oakhills.org](mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org)]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 29, 2016 9:30 AM  
**To:** Novak, Scott <[scott.novak@Rocket.com](mailto:scott.novak@Rocket.com)>  
**Cc:** Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)>; Lister, Matt <[Matt.Lister@Rocket.com](mailto:Matt.Lister@Rocket.com)>; Jeff Gladstone <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)>; Marshall Cousineau <[Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com](mailto:Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com)>  
**Subject:** Re: [EXTERNAL] What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group

My two cents...

Because one of the inadvertent errors of evangelical Christianity is that we have reduced the Gospel to propositional good news. In other words, becoming a Christian is assenting to a series of propositional truths, so that we know we are “in or out”, going to heaven or hell. Fire insurance. In essence, we are making “Christians” and not “disciples” and hence, we are not making real Christians at all. But the practical reality is, you cannot be a Christian without living the life of a disciple of Jesus.

From Dallas Willard:

"The word *disciple* occurs 269 times in the New Testament. *Christian* is found three times and was first introduced to refer precisely to disciples of Jesus...The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ. But the point is not merely verbal. What is more important is that the kind of life we see in the earliest church is that of a special type of person. All of the assurances and benefits offered to humankind in the gospel evidently presuppose such a life and do not make realistic sense apart from it. The disciple of Jesus is not the deluxe or heavy-duty model of the Christian—especially padded, textured, streamlined, and empowered for the fast lane on the straight and narrow way. He or she stands on the pages of the New Testament as the first level of basic transportation in the Kingdom of God."

Good morning, btw. Hope you're all having a good day!

Man

On Sep 29, 2016, at 8:50 AM, Novak, Scott <scott.novak@Rocket.com> wrote:

If this is true, then why is Christianity not more of a norm? I have a hard time believing numbers like this. Seems like it is really something like 1/10. Just sayin'...

Scott

-----Original Message-----

From: Erv Thomas [mailto:iamerv@gmail.com]

Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2016 12:56 AM

To: Lister, Matt; Gladstone Engineering; Manuel Luz; Novak, Scott; marshall cousineau

Subject: [EXTERNAL] What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group

6/10 Americans have accepted Christ into their lives. Way to go America - Erv

<https://www.barna.com/research/what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs/#.V-zIFutHarU>

Sent from my iPad

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[Erv Thomas](#)

"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" -  
Erv

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** Re: What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group

**From:** Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>

**To:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**Cc:** Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>, "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@rocket.com>, "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Marshall Cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 18:17:11 +0000

**Date Received:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 11:17:14 -0700 (PDT)

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Erv, I was not against the survey, and I really appreciated you sharing it. It gives us insights, one way or another.

One thing—and I admit that I have been part of the problem—is that Americans can still hang with Jesus (according to Barna), but they are seeing the institutional church as increasingly irrelevant. So where does discipleship happen in that scenario? I don't have answers to that one.

Man

On Sep 29, 2016, at 10:39 AM, Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)> wrote:

Yes, I was speaking more tongue in cheek. Even if any church did the survey I would be inclined not to believe it. MacArthur coined the term 'easy believism' years ago and Jesus Himself says- why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?

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As you can see, I am turning into a bona fide missionary. Evangelism is always on my mind now. I want to know everything about it- every verse in the Bible but also all the learning I can get on where people are at, what are they thinking about Christ and the Bible.

On the whole, America is still committed to Jesus. The act of making a personal commitment to Jesus—often seen as the "first step" in becoming a Christian—is a step that more than six in 10 Americans say they have taken and, moreover, that commitment is still important in their life today.

Have a great lunch!

- Erv

On Thursday, September 29, 2016, Gladstone Engineering <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)> wrote:

Right... who says Barna is even asking the right questions?

---

**From:** Manuel Luz [mailto:[manuel.luz@oakhills.org](mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org)]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 29, 2016 9:30 AM  
**To:** Novak, Scott <[scott.novak@Rocket.com](mailto:scott.novak@Rocket.com)>  
**Cc:** Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)>; Lister, Matt <[Matt.Lister@Rocket.com](mailto:Matt.Lister@Rocket.com)>; Jeff Gladstone <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)>; Marshall Cousineau <[Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com](mailto:Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com)>  
**Subject:** Re: [EXTERNAL] What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group

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Good morning, btw. Hope you're all having a good day!

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On Sep 29, 2016, at 8:50 AM, Novak, Scott <[scott.novak@Rocket.com](mailto:scott.novak@Rocket.com)> wrote:

If this is true, then why is Christianity not more of a norm? I have a hard time believing numbers like this. Seems like it is really something like 1/10. Just sayin'...

Scott

-----Original Message-----

From: Erv Thomas [<mailto:iamerv@gmail.com>]

Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2016 12:56 AM

To: Lister, Matt; Gladstone Engineering; Manuel Luz; Novak, Scott; marshall  
cousineau

Subject: [EXTERNAL] What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs -  
Barna Group - Barna Group

6/10 Americans have accepted Christ into their lives. Way to go America - Erv

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[Erv Thomas](#)

*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" -  
Erv*

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** Re: What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** Gladstone Engineering <jeff@gladeng.com>

**Cc:** Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@rocket.com>, "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Marshall Cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 10:39:17 -0700

**Date Received:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 10:39:17 -0700 (PDT)

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**From:** Manuel Luz [mailto:[manuel.luz@oakhills.org](mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org)]

**Sent:** Thursday, September 29, 2016 9:30 AM

**To:** Novak, Scott <scott.novak@Rocket.com>

**Cc:** Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)>; Lister, Matt <Matt.Lister@Rocket.com>; Jeff Gladstone <[jeff@gladeng.com](mailto:jeff@gladeng.com)>; Marshall Cousineau <[Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com](mailto:Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com)>

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Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2016 12:56 AM

To: Lister, Matt; Gladstone Engineering; Manuel Luz; Novak, Scott; marshall cousineau

Subject: [EXTERNAL] What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group

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**Subject:** RE: [EXTERNAL] What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group  
**From:** Gladstone Engineering <jeff@gladeng.com>  
**To:** 'Manuel Luz' <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, "'Novak, Scott'" <scott.novak@Rocket.com>  
**Cc:** 'Erv Thomas' <iamerv@gmail.com>, "'Lister, Matt'" <Matt.Lister@Rocket.com>, 'Marshall Cousineau' <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>  
**Date Sent:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 10:09:42 -0700  
**Date Received:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 10:10:38 -0700 (PDT)

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**From:** Manuel Luz [mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 29, 2016 9:30 AM  
**To:** Novak, Scott <scott.novak@Rocket.com>  
**Cc:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>; Lister, Matt <Matt.Lister@Rocket.com>; Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>; Marshall Cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>  
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**Subject:** Re: [EXTERNAL] What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs - Barna Group - Barna Group  
**From:** Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>  
**To:** "Novak, Scott" <scott.novak@Rocket.com>  
**Cc:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>, "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@Rocket.com>, Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>, Marshall Cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>  
**Date Sent:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 16:30:16 +0000  
**Date Received:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 09:30:20 -0700 (PDT)

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**Date Sent:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 15:50:10 +0000  
**Date Received:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 08:50:12 -0700 (PDT)

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**Date Sent:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 00:55:45 -0700

**Date Received:** Thu, 29 Sep 2016 00:55:47 -0700 (PDT)

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**Subject:** Re: Why CS Lewis believes the existence of God is proved  
**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>  
**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>,"Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>,Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>,marshall cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>  
**Date Sent:** Sat, 24 Sep 2016 10:04:23 -0700  
**Date Received:** Sat, 24 Sep 2016 10:04:23 -0700 (PDT)

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I think this might make it clearer:

### **Berkeley's Causal Proof for the Existence of God**

- a) Our ideas of sense must have a cause
- b) Ideas of sense, unlike those of imagination, do not depend on our own will, so they must have some other cause.
- c) Ideas of sense are not caused by material objects, since matter does not exist.
- d) Ideas of sense cannot be caused by other ideas; since ideas are inactive and have no power or agency, they cannot be the cause of anything.
- e) Therefore, our ideas of sense must be caused by some other mind, since this is the only other possible explanation.

This mind must be God. Why? Consider our ideas of sense. First, they are always internally consistent, so they are the product of only one mind. Second, they are incredibly complex and varied, so this source mind must be of unimaginable power. Third, despite their infinite variety and complexity, these ideas are ordered to such a minute detail so as to make the most detailed scientific investigations show consistency. So, this mind must be benevolent. This cause, then, must be unique, unimaginably powerful and benevolent. Sounds like God!

Adapted from: Garrett Thomson, *Descartes to Kant: An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*. Waveland Press, 1997, pages 166-167.

### **A Second Argument**

- 1) All ideas must be perceived.
- 2) Sensible objects are collections of ideas.
- 3) Objects continue to exist even when they are not perceived by any finite minds. 4) Therefore, there is a nonfinite spirit or mind which perceives objects.

Notice that #2 depends on the truth of Berkeley's idealism. Premise three assumes that objects continue to exist even when they are not perceived by finite minds. A safe assumption??

Adapted from: Garrett Thomson, *Descartes to Kant: An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*. Waveland Press, 1997, page 168.

On Saturday, September 24, 2016, Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)> wrote:

Hey guys,

CS Lewis believes the existence of God was proven by Bishop Berkeley's reasoning below:

#### 3.1.3 God's existence

The last major item in Berkeley's ontology is God, himself a spirit, but an infinite one. Berkeley believes that once he has established idealism, he has a novel and convincing argument for God's existence as the cause of our sensory ideas. He argues by elimination: What could cause my sensory ideas? Candidate causes, supposing that Berkeley has already established that matter doesn't exist, are (1) other ideas, (2) myself, or (3) some other spirit. Berkeley

eliminates the first option with the following argument (PHK 25):

- (1) Ideas are manifestly passive—no power or activity is perceived in them.
- (2) But because of the mind-dependent status of ideas, they cannot have any characteristics which they are not perceived to have.

Therefore,

- (3) Ideas are passive, that is, they possess no causal power.

It should be noted that premise (2) is rather strong; Phillip Cummins (1990) identifies it as Berkeley's "manifest qualities thesis" and argues that it commits Berkeley to the view that ideas are radically and completely dependent on perceivers in the way that sensations of pleasure and pain are typically taken to be.[13]

The second option is eliminated with the observation that although I clearly can cause some ideas at will (e.g. ideas of imagination), sensory ideas are involuntary; they present themselves whether I wish to perceive them or not and I cannot control their content. The hidden assumption here is that any causing the mind does must be done by willing and such willing must be accessible to consciousness. Berkeley is hardly alone in presupposing this model of the mental; Descartes, for example, makes a similar set of assumptions.

This leaves us, then, with the third option: my sensory ideas must be caused by some other spirit. Berkeley thinks that when we consider the stunning complexity and systematicity of our sensory ideas, we must conclude that the spirit in question is wise and benevolent beyond measure, that, in short, he is God.

I believe in the existence of God. There must be food because I am always hungry. Similarly, there must be God since I am always hungry for Him. :) - Erv

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**Subject:** Why CS Lewis believes the existence of God is proved

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, "Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>, Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>, Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>, marshall cousineau <Marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

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**Subject:** Re: How someone is saved  
**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>  
**To:** Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>  
**Cc:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>, Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>, "Cousineau, Marshall" <marshall.cousineau@rocket.com>  
**Date Sent:** Fri, 23 Sep 2016 09:55:26 -0700  
**Date Received:** Fri, 23 Sep 2016 09:55:26 -0700 (PDT)

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Yeah, I have never had any real interest in the Bible apart from how it becomes real in my life. For these charts it is helpful to keep my aware of each students journey and how to pray for them at each step. It also keeps me 'sharp' in always being ready to share and help them in their next steps.

I was getting ready to create an exhaustive document of how the gospel or encounter with Jesus is initiated throughout the entire NT- Jesus Himself, the disciples before resurrection, the disciples afterwards and in Acts, Paul.... Before I did the massive task, I found it already done on the internet and sent hat out last night. To me, this is the perfect compliment to the charts. The charts mostly prepare me as I pray and am burdened for each student. The document covering every Bible example shows me the how it looks and helps me when it is my turn. I do think they both are really helping me in the real world. But, the proof is in the pudding. I am still anxiously anticipating my first student salvation - Erv

On Thu, Sep 22, 2016 at 8:51 PM, Manuel Luz <[manuel.luz@oakhills.org](mailto:manuel.luz@oakhills.org)> wrote:

I know we're dealing with theoreticals here, but I don't know how much merit these two charts have in the real world. I'm sure they are helpful, just that a person's journey is way more complicated than this. I know mine was.

Great to hear about the good things going on with Ervy. Don't know what to do about Thursdays though.

Did you guys land on any solutions? I myself have my sabbath on Monday, so I could move it to that day, but it would be a little inconvenient for Debbie.

Let me know.

Man

On Sep 22, 2016, at 6:22 PM, Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)> wrote:

Hey guys,

Now that I have been a missionary for ~ 3 years, I know everything there is to know about how someone is saved :)

Here are 2 charts that have been useful in helping me to 'see' where I am at with each individual student. They both originate from Dr Engel. One is called the Gray Matrix, I believe. Not sure what the other one is called, but it is derived from Dr Engels original. Maybe a good topic of discussion for Thursday as to where certain people are on your radar to get saved. I would save this email as I think those 2 charts are each very useful in their own way. Sort of hard to find them on the internet. - Erv

<image.png> <image.png>

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**From:** Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>  
**To:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>  
**Cc:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>, Jeff Gladstone <jeff@gladeng.com>, Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>, "Cousineau, Marshall" <marshall.cousineau@rocket.com>  
**Date Sent:** Fri, 23 Sep 2016 03:51:17 +0000  
**Date Received:** Thu, 22 Sep 2016 20:51:19 -0700 (PDT)

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I know we're dealing with theoreticals here, but I don't know how much merit these two charts have in the real world. I'm sure they are helpful, just that a person's journey is way more complicated than this. I know mine was.

Great to hear about the good things going on with Ervy. Don't know what to do about Thursdays though.

Did you guys land on any solutions? I myself have my sabbath on Monday, so I could move it to that day, but it would be a little inconvenient for Debbie.

Let me know.

Man

On Sep 22, 2016, at 6:22 PM, Erv Thomas <[iamerv@gmail.com](mailto:iamerv@gmail.com)> wrote:

Hey guys,

Now that I have been a missionary for ~ 3 years, I know everything there is to know about how someone is saved :)

Here are 2 charts that have been useful in helping me to 'see' where I am at with each individual student. They both originate from Dr Engel. One is called the Gray Matrix, I believe. Not sure what the other one is called, but it is derived from Dr Engels original. Maybe a good topic of discussion for Thursday as to where certain people are on your radar to get saved. I would save this email as I think those 2 charts are each very useful in their own way. Sort of hard to find them on the internet. - Erv

<image.png> <image.png>

--

[Erv Thomas](#)

*"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are"* - Erv

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** How someone is saved

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <Matt.Lister@rocket.com>,"Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>,"Manuel Luz" <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,"Scott Novak" <scott.novak@rocket.com>,"Cousineau, Marshall" <marshall.cousineau@rocket.com>

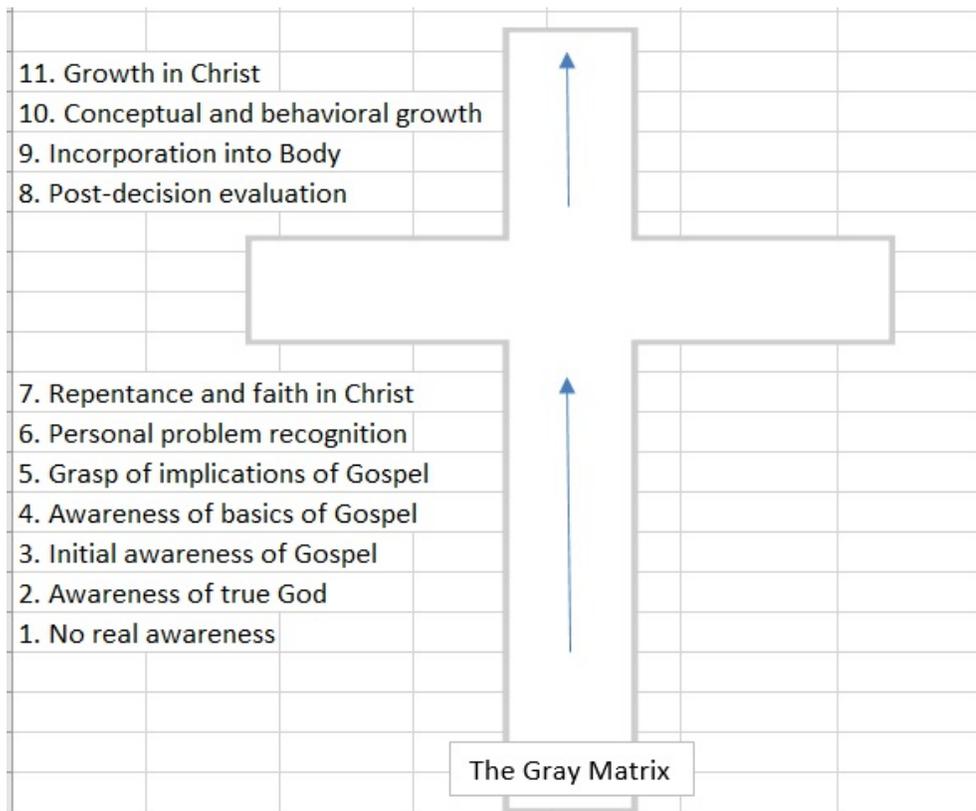
**Date Sent:** Thu, 22 Sep 2016 18:22:23 -0700

**Date Received:** Thu, 22 Sep 2016 18:22:23 -0700 (PDT)

Hey guys,

Now that I have been a missionary for ~ 3 years, I know everything there is to know about how someone is saved :)

Here are 2 charts that have been useful in helping me to 'see' where I am at with each individual student. They both originate from Dr Engel. One is called the Gray Matrix, I believe. Not sure what the other one is called, but it is derived from Dr Engels original. Maybe a good topic of discussion for Thursday as to where certain people are on your radar to get saved. I would save this email as I think those 2 charts are each very useful in their own way. Sort of hard to find them on the internet. - Erv



Spiritual Awareness and Growth

God's Initiative	Christian's Responsibility		International's Response
		+10	Vision for future ministry
	Ministry outreach	+9	Effective outreach to others
	↑	+8	Development of Christian leadership
		+7	Growth in total stewardship
Witness of the Spirit	Christian fellowship	+6	Recognition and utilization of spiritual gifts
↑	↑	+5	Understanding and application of Bible doctrine
	Personal growth	+4	Growth in Bible study
	↑	+3	Conceptual behavioral growth
		+2	Adoption of Christian identity
	Harvesting	+1	Assurance of salvation
Gives spiritual life	↑		Conversion: New Creation in Christ
↑		-1	Repentance
Convicts	Cultivating and watering the crop	-2	Decision to act
↑	↑	-3	Recognition of personal problem in relation to God
	Planting the seed	-4	Positive attitude toward the Gospel
	↑	-5	Grasp of fundamentals of the Gospel
		-6	Awareness of fundamentals of the Gospel
		-7	Developing positive attitude toward God
Reveals himself	Preparing the soil	-8	Questioning present religious concept of God
	↑	-9	Religious awareness, but no knowledge of God
		-10	No conscious awareness of supreme being

Adapted and used by permission of Dr. James F. Engel

--  
[Erv Thomas](#)

"I am glad that we can't have it all in life, the trade-offs we're forced to make define who we are" - Erv

*International Life @ FLC*



**Subject:** "To Everyone an Answer": Eight Tips for Sharing Your Faith

**From:** Erv Thomas <iamerv@gmail.com>

**To:** "Lister, Matt" <matt.lister@rocket.com>,"Gladstone, Jeff" <jeff@gladeng.com>,"Manuel Luz <manuel.luz@oakhills.org>,"Scott Novak <scott.novak@rocket.com>,"Marshall Cousineau <marshall.cousineau@gmail.com>

**Date Sent:** Sat, 2 Jan 2016 00:29:44 -0800

**Date Received:** Sat, 2 Jan 2016 00:29:44 -0800 (PST)

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<https://shar.es/16WJbO>

- Erv

There's a common perception in our culture that religious faith is irrational, that people who believe in God do so on the basis of feelings or emotion, not evidence. Atheist Daniel Dennett even go...

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