



Statements of Faith

So then Faith
cometh by hearing,
and hearing by
the word of God.

Romans 10:17

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Statements of Faith

Forward

We believe that there are essential doctrines of truth that a believer must know in order to understand the Bible correctly. If you will adhere to these principles, you will be equipped to teach and proclaim the Word of God to the world.

Chapter 1

The Gospel is to be proclaimed to the entire world

After Jesus had died for our sins, was resurrected and just before he ascended into heaven, he commanded his apostles to share the gospel.

Mark 16:15-16,

"And he said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Jesus told his disciples to go into the entire world, telling everyone that he had paid the penalty for sin and that those who believe in him can be forgiven and live eternally with God. Christian disciples today in all parts of the world are preaching this gospel to people who haven't heard about Christ.

The driving power that carries missionaries around the world and sets Christ's church in motion is the faith that comes from the resurrection. Do you ever feel as though you don't have the skill or determination to be a witness for Christ? You must personally realize that Jesus rose from the dead and lives for you today. As you grow in your relationship with Christ, he will give you both the opportunities and the inner strength to tell his message.

Our Lord wants the gospel preached to everyone. The word "gospel" literally means good news or good tidings.

2 Cor. 5:10-11

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

[11] Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

While eternal life is a free gift given on the basis of God's grace (Ephes. 2:8-9), each of us will still be judged by Christ. This judgment will reward us for how we have lived. God's gracious gift of salvation does not free us from the requirement for faithful obedience. All Christians must give account for how they have lived (see Matthew 16:27; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Matthew 20:6

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, why stand ye here all the day idle?

This parable is not about rewards but about salvation. It is a strong teaching about grace, God's generosity. We should not begrudge those who turn to God in the last moments of life, because, in reality, no one deserves eternal life. Even the criminal who repented as he was dying (Luke 23:40-43) will be there along with people who have believed and served God for many years.

Stand strong in spreading the Gospel

1 Cor. 15:1-4

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

[2] By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

[3] For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

[4] And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

Many churches contain people who do not yet believe. Some are moving in the direction of belief, and others are simply pretending. Imposters, however, are not to be removed (see Matthew 13:28-29), for that is the Lord's work alone. The Good News about Jesus Christ will save us *if* we firmly believe it and faithfully follow it.

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

[19] Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

[20] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

God gave Jesus authority over heaven and earth. On the basis of that authority, Jesus told his disciples to make more disciples as they preached, baptized, and taught. With this same authority, Jesus still commands us to tell others the Good News and make them disciples for the kingdom.

There are two parts to the great commission.

- (1) Preaching the Gospel.
- (2) Teaching new converts how to become soul winners. We must give account to God for each day of our lives. Romans 14:12

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Each person is accountable to Christ, not to others. While the church must be uncompromising in its stand against activities that are expressly forbidden by Scripture (adultery, homosexuality, murder, theft), it should not create additional rules and regulations and give them equal standing with God's law. Many times Christians base their moral judgments on opinion, personal dislikes, or cultural bias rather than on the Word of God.

All have sinned and need a Saviour.

John 3:36

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Jesus says that those who believe in him have everlasting life. To receive eternal life is to join in God's life, which by nature is eternal. Thus, eternal life begins at the moment of spiritual rebirth.

John, the author of this Gospel, has been demonstrating that Jesus is the true Son of God. Jesus sets before us the greatest choice in life. We are responsible to decide today whom we will obey (Joshua 24:15), and God wants us to choose him and life (Deut. 30:15-20). The wrath of God is God's final judgment and rejection of the sinner. To put off the choice is to choose not to follow Christ. Indecision is a fatal decision.

Acts 1:8

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Power from the Holy Spirit is not limited to strength beyond the ordinary—that power also involves courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. The disciples would need all these gifts to fulfill their mission. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you can experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

After they received the Holy Spirit.

Notice the progression:

- (1) they would receive the Holy Spirit,
- (2) he would give them power, and
- (3) they would witness with extraordinary results. Often we try to reverse the order and witness by our own power and authority. Witnessing is not showing what we can do for God. It is showing and telling what God has done for us.

Jesus had instructed his disciples to witness to people of all nations about him (Matthew 28:19-20). But they were told to wait first for the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). God has important work for you to do for him, but you must do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. We often like to get on with the job, even if it means running ahead of God. But waiting is sometimes part of God's plan. Are you waiting and listening for God's complete instructions, or are you running ahead of his plans? We need God's timing and power to be truly effective.

This verse describes a series of ever-widening circles. The gospel was to spread, geographically, from Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria, and finally to the whole world. It would begin with the devout Jews in Jerusalem and Samaria, spread to the mixed race in Samaria, and finally is offered to the Gentiles in the uttermost parts of the earth. God's gospel has not reached its final destination if someone in your family, your workplace, your school, or your community hasn't heard about Jesus Christ.

Romans 16:25-26

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

[26] But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

Paul exclaims that it is wonderful to be alive when the mystery, God's secret—his way of saving the Gentiles—is becoming known throughout the world! All the Old Testament prophecies were coming true, and God was using Paul as his instrument to tell this Good News.

Chapter 2

The Bible is the Inspired Word of God

The doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible means that the Bible in the original documents. It is God-breathed. It is divine. Because the Scriptures are the inspired word of God, we can conclude that they are also inerrant and authoritative. A correct view of God will lead us to a correct view of his word.

2 Tim. 3:15-17

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

[16] All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

[17] That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The Bible is not a collection of stories, fables, myths, or merely human ideas about God. It is not a human book. Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed his person and plan to certain believers, who wrote down his message for his people. This process is known as inspiration. The writers wrote from their own personal, historical, and cultural contexts. Although they used their own minds, talents, language, and style, they wrote what God wanted them to write. Scripture is completely trustworthy because God was in control of its writing. Its words are entirely authoritative for our faith and lives. The Bible is “God-breathed.” Read it, and use its teachings to guide your conduct.

The whole Bible is God’s inspired Word. Because it is inspired and trustworthy, we should read it and apply it to our lives. The Bible is our standard for testing everything else that claims to be true. It is our safeguard against false teaching and our source of guidance for how we should live. It is our only source of knowledge about how we can be saved. God wants to show you what is true and equip you to live for him. How much time do you spend in God’s Word? Read it regularly to discover God’s truth and to become confident in your life and faith. Develop a plan for reading the whole Bible, not just the familiar passages.

1 Peter 1:20-21

Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

[21] Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

Christ's sacrifice for our sins was not an afterthought, not something God decided to do when the world spun out of control. This plan was set in motion by the all-knowing, eternal God long before the world was created. What a comfort it must have been to Jewish believers to know that Christ's coming and his work of salvation were planned by God long before the world began. This assured them that the law was not being scrapped because it didn't work, but that both the law and the coming of Christ were part of God's eternal plan.

1 Thess. 2:13

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

In the New Testament, the word of God usually refers to the preaching of the gospel, the Old Testament, or Jesus Christ himself. Today we often apply it only to the Bible. Remember that Jesus Christ himself is the Word

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

What Jesus taught and what he did, are tied inseparably to who he is. John shows Jesus as fully human and fully God. Although Jesus took upon himself full humanity and lived as a man, he never ceased to be the eternal God who has always existed, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and the source of eternal life. This is the truth about Jesus, and the foundation of all truth. If we cannot or do not believe this basic truth, we will not have enough faith to trust our eternal destiny to him. That is why John wrote this Gospel—to build faith and confidence

in Jesus Christ so that we may believe that he truly was and is the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

2 Peter 1:21

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

“Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” means that Scripture did not come from the creative work of the prophets’ own invention or interpretation. God inspired the writers, so their message is authentic and reliable. God used the talents, education, and cultural background of each writer (they were not mindless robots); and God cooperated with the writers in such a way to ensure that the message he intended was faithfully communicated in the very words they wrote.

Chapter 3

Jesus Christ is Divine

The virgin birth of Jesus our Lord

Luke 1:31

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.

God's favor does not automatically bring instant success or fame. His blessing on Mary, the honor of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain: her peers would ridicule her; her fiancé would come close to leaving her; her son would be rejected and murdered. But through her son would come the world's only hope, and this is why Mary has been praised by countless generations as the young girl who "found favor with God." Her submission was part of God's plan to bring about our salvation. If sorrow weighs you down and dims your hope, think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out his plan.

Luke 1:35

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Jesus was born without the sin that entered the world through Adam. He was born holy, just as Adam was created sinless. In contrast to Adam, who disobeyed God, Jesus obeyed God and was thus able to face sin's consequences in our place and make us acceptable to God (Romans 5:14-19).

His sinless life

Hebrews 7:26

For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

No one can add to what Jesus did to save us; our past, present, and future sins are all forgiven, and Jesus is with the Father as a sign that our sins are forgiven. If you are a Christian, remember that Christ has paid the price for your sins once and for all. (See also Hebrews 9:24-28.)

As our high priest, Christ is our advocate, the mediator between God and us. He looks after our interests and intercedes for us with God. The Old Testament high priest went before God once a year to plead for the forgiveness of the nation's sins; Christ makes perpetual intercession before God for us. Christ's continuous presence in heaven with the Father assures us that our sins have been paid for and forgiven (see Romans 8:33-34; Hebrews 2:17-18; Hebrews 4:15-16; Hebrews 9:24). This wonderful assurance frees us from guilt and from fear of failure.

1 Peter 2:22

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

We may suffer for many reasons. Some suffering is the direct result of our own sin; some happens because of our foolishness; and some is the result of living in a fallen world. Peter is writing about suffering that comes as a result of doing good. Christ never sinned, and yet he suffered so that we could be set free. When we follow Christ's example and live for others, we too may suffer. Our goal should be to face suffering as he did—with patience, calmness, and confidence that God is in control of the future.

The Miracles of Jesus

Acts 2:22

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

Everything that happened to Jesus was under God's control. The Roman government or the Jewish officials never disrupted his plans. This was especially comforting to those facing oppression during the time of the early Christian church.

His Substitutionary work on the Cross

2 Cor. 5:21

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

When we trust in Christ, we make an exchange—our sin for his righteousness. Our sin was poured into Christ at his crucifixion. His righteousness is poured into us at our conversion. This is what Christians mean by Christ's atonement for sin. In the world, bartering works only when two people exchange goods of relatively equal value. But God offers to trade his righteousness for our sin—something of immeasurable worth for something completely worthless. How grateful we should be for his kindness to us.

His Resurrection from the Dead

Matthew 28:6

He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Jesus' resurrection is the key to the Christian faith.

Why?

- (1) Just as he promised, Jesus rose from the dead. We can be confident, therefore, that he will accomplish all he has promised.
- (2) Jesus' bodily resurrection shows us that the living Christ is ruler of God's eternal kingdom, not a false prophet or imposter.
- (3) We can be certain of our resurrection because he was resurrected. Death is not the end—there is future life.
- (4) The power that brought Jesus back to life is available to us to bring our spiritually dead selves back to life.
- (5) The resurrection is the basis for the church's witness to the world. Jesus is more than just a human leader; he is the Son of God.

1 Cor. 15:4

And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

The resurrection is an historical fact. Don't be discouraged by doubters who deny the resurrection. Be filled with hope because of the knowledge that one day you, and they, will see the living proof when Christ returns. (For more evidence on the resurrection, see the chart in Mark 15:47.)

Jesus is exalted at the right hand of the Father

Acts 1:9

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

It was important for the disciples to see Jesus taken up into heaven. Then they knew without a doubt that he was God and that his home was in heaven.

After 40 days with his disciples (Acts 1:3), Jesus returned to heaven. The two men dressed in white were angels who proclaimed to the disciples that one day Jesus would return in the same way he went—bodily and visibly. History is not haphazard or cyclical; it is moving toward a specific point—the return of Jesus to judge and rule over the earth.

Acts 1:11

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

We should be ready for his sudden return (1 Thess. 5:2), not by standing around “looking into the sky,” but by working hard to share the gospel so that others will be able to share in God's great blessings.

Chapter 4

Fallen man is in Need of a Saviour

Genesis 1:26-27

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

[27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Knowing that we are made in God's image and thus share many of his characteristics provides a solid basis for self-worth. Human worth is not based on possessions, achievements, physical attractiveness, or public acclaim. Instead it is based on being made in God's image. Because we bear God's image, we can feel positive about ourselves. Criticizing or downgrading ourselves is criticizing what God has made and the abilities he has given us. Knowing that you are a person of worth helps you love God, know him personally, and make a valuable contribution to those around you.

Genesis 2:17

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

God gave Adam responsibility for the garden and told him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Rather than physically preventing him from eating, God gave Adam a choice, and thus the possibility of choosing wrongly.

God still gives us choices, and we, too, often choose wrongly. These wrong choices may cause us pain, but they can help us learn and grow and make better choices in the future. Living with the consequences of our choices teaches us to think and choose more carefully.

Genesis 3:6

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Satan tried to make Eve think that sin is good, pleasant, and desirable. Knowledge of both good and evil seemed harmless to her. People usually choose wrong things because they have become convinced that those things are good, at least for themselves. Our sins do not always appear ugly to us, and the pleasant sins are the hardest to avoid. So prepare yourself for the attractive temptations that may come your way. We cannot always prevent temptation, but there is always a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). Use God's Word and God's people to help you stand against it.

Romans 5:12-19

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

[13] (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

[14] Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

[15] But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

[16] And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.

[17] For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

[18] Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

[19] For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Paul has shown that keeping the law does not bring salvation. Here he adds that breaking the law is not what brings death. Death is the result of Adam's sin and of the sins we all commit, even if they don't resemble Adam's. Paul reminds his readers that for thousands of years the law had not yet been explicitly given, and yet people died. The law was added, he explains in Romans 5:20, to help people see their sinfulness, to show them the seriousness of their offenses, and to drive them to God for mercy and pardon. This was true in Moses' day, and it is still true today. Sin is a deep discrepancy between who we are and who we were created to be. The law points out our sin and places the responsibility for it squarely on our shoulders. But the law offers no remedy. When we are convicted of sin, we must turn to Jesus Christ for healing.

Adam is a pattern; he is the counterpart of Christ. Just as Adam was a representative of created humanity, so is Christ the representative of a new spiritual humanity.

What a promise this is to those who love Christ! We can reign over sin's power, over death's threats, and over Satan's attacks. Eternal life is ours now and forever. In the power and protection of Jesus Christ, we can overcome temptation. See Romans 8:17 for more on our privileged position in Christ.

Chapter 5

The Salvation of Man

Luke 24:47

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Jesus opened these people's minds to understand the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit does this in our lives today when we study the Bible. Have you ever wondered how to understand a difficult Bible passage? Besides reading surrounding passages, asking other people, and consulting reference works, pray that the Holy Spirit will open your mind to understand, giving you the needed insight to put God's Word into action in your life.

Luke wrote to the Greek-speaking world. He wanted them to know that Christ's message of God's love and forgiveness should go to all the world. We must never ignore the worldwide scope of Christ's gospel. God wants all the world to hear the Good News of salvation.

John 3:3

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

What did Nicodemus know about the kingdom? From the Bible he knew it would be ruled by God, it would be restored on earth, and it would incorporate God's people. Jesus revealed to this devout Pharisee that the kingdom would come to the whole world (John 3:16), not just the Jews, and that Nicodemus wouldn't be a part of it unless he was personally born again (John 3:5). This was a revolutionary concept: the kingdom is personal, not national or ethnic, and its entrance requirements are repentance and spiritual rebirth. Jesus later taught that God's kingdom has *already begun* in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). It will be fully realized when Jesus returns again to judge the world and abolish evil forever (Rev. 21; Rev. 22).

Romans 10:13-15

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

[14] How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

[15] And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Have you ever been asked, “How do I become a Christian?” These verses give you the beautiful answer—salvation is as close as your own mouth and heart. People think it must be a complicated process, but it is not. If we believe in our hearts and say with our mouths that Christ is the risen Lord, we will be saved.

Ephes. 2:8

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

We become Christians through God’s unmerited grace, not as the result of any effort, ability, intelligent choice, or act of service on our part. However, out of gratitude for this free gift, we will seek to help and serve others with kindness, love, and gentleness, and not merely to please ourselves. While no action or work we do can help us obtain salvation, God’s intention is that our salvation will result in acts of service. We are not saved merely for our own benefit but to serve Christ and build up the church (Ephes. 4:12).

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

The power to live as a Christian comes from the Holy Spirit. Because Christ died and rescued us from sin, we are free from sin’s control. God gives us the power and understanding to live according to his will and to do good. Then we will look forward to Christ’s wonderful return with eager expectation and hope.

Titus 3:5-7

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

[6] Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

[7] That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Paul summarized what Christ does for us when he saves us. We move from a life full of sin to one where we are led by God's Holy Spirit. *All* our sins, not merely some, are washed away. Washing refers to the water of baptism, which is a sign of salvation. In becoming a Christian, the believer acknowledges Christ as Lord and recognizes Christ's saving work. We gain eternal life with *all* its treasures. We have *renewal* by the Holy Spirit, and he continually renews our hearts. None of this occurs because we earned or deserved it; it is all God's gift.

The Inward Evidence of Salvation

Romans 8:16

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

One of these outstanding privileges is being led by the Spirit. (see Galatians 4:5- 6). We may not always feel as though we belong to God, but the Holy Spirit is our witness. His inward presence reminds us of who we are and encourages us with God's love (Romans 5:5).

We are no longer cringing and fearful slaves; instead, we are the Master's children. What a privilege! Because we are God's children, we share in great treasures as co- heirs. God has already given us his best gifts: his Son, forgiveness, and eternal life; and he encourages us to ask him for whatever we need.

The Outward Evidence of Salvation

Ephes. 4:24

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Our old way of life before we believed in Christ is completely in the past. We should put it behind us like old clothes to be thrown away. This is both a once-for-all decision when we decide to accept Christ's gift of salvation (Ephes. 2:8-10) and also a daily conscious commitment. We are not to be driven by desire and impulse. We must put on the new role, head in the new direction, and have the new way of thinking that the Holy Spirit gives.

Titus 2:12

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

The power to live as a Christian comes from the Holy Spirit. Because Christ died and rescued us from sin, we are free from sin's control. God gives us the power and understanding to live according to his will and to do good. Then we will look forward to Christ's wonderful return with eager expectation and hope.

It is not enough to renounce sin and evil desires; we must also live actively for God. To fight against lust, we must say no to temptation, but we must also say yes to active service for Christ.

Chapter 6

Church Ordinances

Baptism in Water

Matthew 28:19

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

The disciples were to baptize people because baptism unites a believer with Jesus Christ in his or her death to sin and resurrection to new life. Baptism symbolizes submission to Christ, a willingness to live God's way, and identification with God's covenant people.

Mark 16:16

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

It is not the water of baptism that saves, but God's grace accepted through faith in Christ. Because of Jesus' response to the criminal on the cross who died with him, we know it is possible to be saved without being baptized (Luke 23:43). Baptism alone, without faith, does not automatically bring a person to heaven. Those who refuse to believe will be condemned, regardless of whether or not they have been baptized.

Acts 10:47-48

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

[48] And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

In this case, the people were baptized after they received the Holy Spirit, publicly declaring their allegiance to Christ and identification with the Christian community.

Cornelius wanted Peter to stay with him for several days. He was a new believer and realized his need for teaching and fellowship

Romans 6:4

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

Romans 6:4

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

In the church of Paul's day, immersion was the usual form of baptism—that is, new Christians were completely “buried” in water. They understood this form of baptism to symbolize the death and burial of the old way of life. Coming up out of the water symbolized resurrection to new life with Christ. If we think of our old, sinful life as dead and buried, we have a powerful motive to resist sin. We can consciously choose to treat the desires and temptations of the old nature as if they were dead. Then we can continue to enjoy our wonderful new life with Jesus (see Galatians 3:27 and Col. 2:12 and Col. 3:1-4 for more on this concept).

Holy Communion

1 Peter 1:4

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The power to grow doesn't come from within us, but from God. Because we don't have the resources to be truly godly, God allows us to “participate in the divine nature” in order to keep us from sin and help us live for him. When we are born again, God by his Spirit empowers us with his own moral goodness. See John 3:6; John 14:17-23; 2 Cor. 5:21; and 1 Peter 1:22-23.

1 Cor. 11:26

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

The early church remembered that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the night of the Passover meal (Luke 22:13-20). Just as Passover celebrated deliverance from slavery in Egypt, so the Lord's Supper celebrates deliverance from sin by Christ's death.

Christians pose several different possibilities for what Christ meant when he said, "This is my body."

- 1) Some believe that the wine and bread actually become Christ's physical blood and body.
- (2) Others believe that the bread and wine remain unchanged, but Christ is spiritually present with the bread and wine.
- (3) Still others believe that the bread and wine symbolize Christ's body and blood.

Christians generally agree, however, that participating in the Lord's Supper is an important element in the Christian faith and that Christ's presence, however we understand it, strengthens us spiritually.

What is this new covenant? In the old covenant, people could approach God only through the priests and the sacrificial system. Jesus' death on the cross ushered in the new covenant or agreement between God and us. Now all people can personally approach God and communicate with him. The people of Israel first entered into this agreement after their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 24), and it was designed to point to the day when Jesus Christ would come. The new covenant completes, rather than replaces, the old covenant, fulfilling everything the old covenant looked forward to (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). Eating the bread and drinking the cup shows that we are remembering Christ's death for us and renewing our commitment to serve him.

Jesus said, "Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." How do we remember Christ in the Lord's Supper? By thinking about what he did and why

he did it. If the Lord's Supper becomes just a ritual or a pious habit, it no longer remembers Christ, and it loses its significance.

The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20) is a visible representation of the Good News of the death of Christ for our sins. It reminds us of Christ's death and the glorious hope of his return. Our participation in it strengthens our faith through fellowship with Christ and with other believers.

Chapter 7

The Evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Luke 24:49

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Luke wrote to the Greek-speaking world. He wanted them to know that Christ's message of God's love and forgiveness should go to the entire world. We must never ignore the worldwide scope of Christ's gospel. God wants all the world to hear the Good News of salvation.

Acts 1:4

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

The Trinity is a description of the unique relationship of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If Jesus had stayed on earth, his physical presence would have limited the spread of the gospel, because physically he could be in only one place at a time. After Christ was taken up into heaven, he would be spiritually present everywhere through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent so that God would be with and within his followers after Christ returned to heaven. The Spirit would comfort them, guide them to know his truth, remind them of Jesus' words, give them the right words to say, and fill them with power (see John 14-16).

At Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) the Holy Spirit was made available to all who believed in Jesus. We receive the Holy Spirit (are baptized with him) when we receive Jesus Christ.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit must be understood in the light of his total work in Christians.

(1) The Spirit marks the beginning of the Christian experience. We cannot belong to Christ without his Spirit (Romans 8:9); we cannot be united to Christ

without his Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17); we cannot be adopted as his children without his Spirit (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7); we cannot be in the body of Christ except by baptism in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Acts 1:8

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Power from the Holy Spirit is not limited to strength beyond the ordinary—that power also involves courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. The disciples would need all these gifts to fulfill their mission. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you can experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Jesus promised the disciples that they would receive power to witness after they received the Holy Spirit.

Notice the progression:

- (1) they would receive the Holy Spirit,
- (2) he would give them power, and
- (3) they would witness with extraordinary results. Often we try to reverse the order and witness by our own power and authority.

Witnessing is not showing what we can do for God. It is showing and telling what God has done for us.

Jesus had instructed his disciples to witness to people of all nations about him (Matthew 28:19-20). But they were told to wait first for the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). God has important work for you to do for him, but you must do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. We often like to get on with the job, even if it means running ahead of God. But waiting is sometimes part of God's plan. Are you waiting and listening for God's complete instructions, or are you running ahead of his plans? We need God's timing and power to be truly effective.

Acts 2:4

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

This was a fulfillment of John the Baptist's words about the Holy Spirit's baptizing with fire (Luke 3:16), and of the prophet Joel's words about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29).

Why tongues of fire? Tongues symbolize speech and the communication of the gospel. Fire symbolizes God's purifying presence, which burns away the undesirable elements of our lives and sets our hearts aflame to ignite the lives of others. On Mount Sinai, God confirmed the validity of the Old Testament law with fire from heaven (Exodus 19:16-18).

At Pentecost, God confirmed the validity of the Holy Spirit's ministry by sending fire. At Mount Sinai, fire had come down on one place; at Pentecost, fire came down on many believers, symbolizing that God's presence is now available to all who believe in him.

God made his presence known to this group of believers in a spectacular way—violent wind, fire, and his Holy Spirit.

These people literally spoke in other languages—a miraculous attention-getter for the international crowd gathered in town for the feast. All the nationalities represented recognized their own languages being spoken. But more than miraculous speaking drew people's attention; they saw the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The apostles continued to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit wherever they went.

This Evidence is subsequent to the new birth.

Acts 8:12-17

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

[13] Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

[14] Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

[15] Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

[16] (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

[17] Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Peter and John were sent to Samaria to find out whether or not the Samaritans were truly becoming believers. The Jewish Christians, even the apostles, were still unsure whether Gentiles (non-Jews) and half-Jews could receive the Holy Spirit. It wasn't until Peter's experience with Cornelius (Acts 10) that the apostles became fully convinced that the Holy Spirit was for all people. It was John who had asked Jesus if they should call fire down from heaven to burn up a Samaritan village that refused to welcome them (Luke 9:51-55). Here he and Peter went to the Samaritans to pray with them.

This was a crucial moment for the spread of the gospel and for the growth of the church. Peter and John had to go to Samaria to help keep this new group of believers from becoming separated from other believers. When Peter and John saw the Lord working in these people, they were assured that the Holy Spirit worked through **all** believers—Gentiles and mixed races as well as “pure” Jews.

Acts 10:44-46

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

[45] And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

[46] For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

Cornelius and Peter were very different people. Cornelius was wealthy, a Gentile, and a military man. Peter was a Jewish fisherman turned preacher. But God's plan included both of them. In Cornelius's house that day, a new chapter in Christian history was written as a Jewish Christian leader and a Gentile Christian convert each discovered something significant about God at work in the other

person.

Cornelius needed Peter and his gospel to know the way to salvation. Peter needed Cornelius and his salvation experience to know that Gentiles were included in God's plan. You and another believer may also need each other to understand how God works!

Acts 11:14-16

Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.
[15] And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

[16] Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

Jesus had also demonstrated clearly that he and his message were for all people. He preached in Samaria (John 4:1-42); in the region of the Gerasenes, populated by Greeks (Mark 5:1-20); and he even reached out to Romans (Luke 7:1-10). The apostles shouldn't have been surprised that they were called to do the same.

An Overflowing Fullness of the Spirit

John 7:37-39

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

[38] He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

[39] (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

In promising to give the Holy Spirit to all who believed, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, for that was something only the Messiah could do.

Jesus used the term living water in John 4:10 to indicate eternal life. Here he uses the term to refer to the Holy Spirit. The two go together: wherever the Holy Spirit is accepted, he brings eternal life. Jesus teaches more about the Holy Spirit

in John 14-16. The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus' followers at Pentecost (Acts 2) and has since been available to all who believe in Jesus as Savior.

A Deepening Reverence for God

Acts 2:43

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

About 3,000 people became new believers when Peter preached the Good News about Christ. These new Christians were united with the other believers, taught by the apostles, and included in the prayer meetings and fellowship. New believers in Christ need to be in groups where they can learn God's Word, pray, and mature in the faith. If you have just begun a relationship with Christ, seek out other believers for fellowship, prayer, and teaching. This is the way to grow.

Hebrews 12:28

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

Those who follow Christ are part of this unshakable kingdom, and they will withstand the shaking, sifting, and burning. When we feel unsure about the future, we can take confidence from these verses. No matter what happens here, our future is built on a solid foundation that cannot be destroyed. Don't put your confidence in what will be destroyed; instead, build your life on Christ and his unshakable kingdom. (See Matthew 7:24-29 for the importance of building on a solid foundation.)

A Greater Dedication to God's Work

Acts 2:42

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Breaking of bread" refers to communion services that were celebrated in remembrance of Jesus and were patterned after the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples before his death (Matthew 26:26-29).

Chapter 8

The Gifts of the Spirit

The Gifts Named in the Scripture

1 Cor. 12:7-11

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

[8] For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

[9] To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

[10] To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

[11] But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

“Prophecy” is not just a prediction about the future; it can also mean preaching God’s Word with power. “Distinguishing between spirits” means the ability to discern whether a person who claims to speak for God is actually doing so, or is speaking by an evil spirit. (Paul discusses tongues and their interpretation in more detail in 1 Cor. 14.) No matter what gift (s) a person has, each gift that is given by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit decides which gifts each one of us should have.

We are responsible to use and sharpen our gifts, but we can take no credit for what God has freely given us.

Romans 12:6-8

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

[7] Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

[8] Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Paul uses the concept of the human body to teach how Christians should live

and work together. Just as the parts of the body function under the direction of the brain, so Christians are to work together under the command and authority of Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Ephes. 4:1-16).

God gives us gifts so we can build up his church.

To use them effectively, we must

- (1) realize that all gifts and abilities come from God;
- (2) understand that not everyone has the same gifts;
- (3) know who we are and what we do best;
- (4) dedicate our gifts to God's service and not to our personal success;
- (5) be willing to utilize our gifts wholeheartedly, not holding back anything from God's service.

God's gifts differ in nature, power, and effectiveness according to his wisdom and graciousness, not according to our faith. The "measure of faith" (Romans 12:3) or the "proportion to his faith" means that God will give spiritual power necessary and appropriate to carry out each responsibility. We cannot, by our own effort or willpower, drum up more faith and thus be more effective teachers or servants.

These are God's gifts to his church, and he gives faith and power as he wills. Our role is to be faithful and to seek ways to serve others with what Christ has given us.

Prophecy in Scripture is not always predicting the future. Often it means preaching God's messages (1 Cor. 14:1-3).

Look at this list of gifts and imagine the kinds of people who would have each gift. Prophets are often bold and articulate. Servers (those in ministry) are faithful and loyal. Teachers are clear thinkers. Encouragers know how to motivate others.

Givers are generous and trusting. Leaders are good organizers and managers. Those who show mercy are caring people who are happy to give their time to others.

It would be difficult for one person to embody all these gifts. An assertive

prophet would not usually make a good counselor, and a generous giver might fail as a leader. When you identify your own gifts (and this list is far from complete), ask how you can use them to build up God's family. At the same time, realize that your gifts can't do the work of the church all alone. Be thankful for people whose gifts are completely different from yours. Let your strengths balance their weaknesses, and be grateful that their abilities make up for your deficiencies. Together you can build Christ's church.

1 Cor. 12:28-30

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

[29] Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

[30] Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

The greater gifts are those that are more beneficial to the body of Christ. Paul has already made it clear that one gift is not superior to another, but he urges the believers to discover how they can serve Christ's body with the gifts God has given them. Your spiritual gifts are not for your own self-advancement. They were given to you for serving God and enhancing the spiritual growth of the body of believers.

Chapter 9

Sanctification Through Obedience

Sanctification is an act of separation from evil, and a dedication to God.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

[2] And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

We are to give ourselves to Christ as living sacrifices, obey the government, love our neighbors, and take special care of those who are weak in the faith. He closes with personal remarks. Throughout this section, we learn how to live our faith each day.

When sacrificing an animal according to God's law, a priest would kill the animal, cut it in pieces, and place it on the altar. Sacrifice was important, but even in the Old Testament God made it clear that obedience from the heart was much more important (see 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; Amos 5:21-24). God wants us to offer ourselves, not animals, as *living* sacrifices—daily laying aside our own desires to follow him, putting all our energy and resources at his disposal and trusting him to guide us. We do this out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven.

God has good, pleasing, and perfect plans for his children. He wants us to be transformed people with renewed minds, living to honor and obey him. Because he wants only what is best for us, and because he gave his Son to make our new lives possible, we should joyfully give ourselves as living sacrifices for his service.

Christians are called to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,” with its behavior and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behavior is off limits for them.

Our refusal to conform to this world's values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behavior and customs— “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant. Only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed (see Romans 8:5).

1 Thess. 5:23 and the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we cannot avoid every kind of evil because we live in a sinful world. We can, however, make sure that we don't give evil a foothold by avoiding tempting situations and concentrating on obeying God.

The spirit, soul, and body refer not so much to the distinct parts of a person as to the entire being of a person. This expression is Paul's way of saying that God must be involved in *every* aspect of our lives. It is wrong to think that we can separate our spiritual lives from everything else, obeying God only in some ethereal sense or living for him only one day each week. Christ must control all of us, not just a “religious” part.

Hebrews 13:12

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

It may be necessary to leave the “camp” and suffer with Christ. To be outside the camp meant to be unclean—in the days of the exodus, those who were ceremonially unclean had to stay outside the camp. But Jesus suffered humiliation and uncleanness outside the Jerusalem gates on their behalf. The time had come for Jewish Christians to declare their loyalty to Christ above any other loyalty, to choose to follow the Messiah whatever suffering that might entail. They needed to move outside the safe confinement of their past, their traditions, and their ceremonies to live for Christ.

Sanctification Leads to Holiness.

Hebrews 12:14

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

Sin always blocks our vision of God; so if we want to see God, we must renounce sin and obey him (see Psalm 24:3-4). Holiness is coupled with living in peace. A right relationship with God leads to right relationships with fellow believers.

Although we will not always feel loving toward all other believers, we must pursue peace as we become more Christ like.

We are able to obey God's command by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:15-16

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

[16] because it is written, be ye holy; for I am holy.

Peter tells us to be like our heavenly Father—holy in everything we do. Holiness means being totally devoted or dedicated to God, set aside for his special use and set apart from sin and its influence. We're to be set apart and different, not blending in with the crowd, yet not being different just for the sake of being different. What makes us different are God's qualities in our lives. Our focus and priorities must be his. All this is in direct contrast to our old ways (1 Peter 1:14). We cannot become holy on our own, but God gives us his Holy Spirit to help us obey and to give us power to overcome sin. Don't use the excuse that you can't help slipping into sin. Call on God's power to free you from sin's grip.

Sanctification is realized in believer by recognizing his identification with Christ by his death and resurrection through faith.

Romans 6:13

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin:

but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Sanctification is the change God makes in our lives as we grow in the faith. Romans 6 explains that believers are free from sin's control. Romans 7 discusses the continuing struggle believers have with sin.

Romans 8:1-2

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

[2] For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:13

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

“Put to death the misdeeds of the body” means to regard as dead the power of sin in your body (see Romans 6:11; Galatians 5:24). When we regard sin's appeal as dead and lifeless, we can ignore temptation when it comes.

Galatians 2:20

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

God looks at us as if we had died with Christ. Because our sins died with him, we are no longer condemned (Col. 2:13-15). Relationally, we have become one with Christ, and his experiences are ours. Our Christian life began when, in unity with him, we died to our old life (see Romans 6:5-11). In our daily life, we must regularly crucify sinful desires that keep us from following Christ. This too is a kind of dying with him (Luke 9:23-25).

And yet the focus of Christianity is not dying, but living. Because we have been crucified with Christ, we have also been raised with him (Romans 6:5). *Legally*, we have been reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:19) and are free to grow into

Christ's likeness (Romans 8:29). And in our daily life, we have Christ's resurrection power as we continue to fight sin (Ephes. 1:19-20). We are no longer alone, for Christ lives in us—he is our power for living and our hope for the future (Col. 1:27).

Philip. 2:12-13

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

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

God has not left us alone in our struggles to do his will. He wants to come alongside us and be within us to help. God helps us *want* to obey him and then gives us the *power* to do what he wants. The secret to a changed life is to submit to God's control and let him work. Next time, ask God to help you *want* to do his will.

To be like Christ, we must train ourselves to think like Christ. To change our desires to be more like Christ's, we need the power of the indwelling Spirit (Phil. 1:19), the influence of faithful Christians, and obedience to God's Word (not just exposure to it), and sacrificial service. Often it is in *doing* God's will that we gain the *desire* to do it

1 Peter 1:5

Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time?

God will help us remain true to our faith through whatever difficult times we must face. The "last time" is the judgment day of Christ described in Romans 14:10 and Rev. 20:11-15. We may have to endure trials, persecution, or violent death, but our souls cannot be harmed if we have accepted Christ's gift of salvation. We know we will receive the promised rewards.

Chapter 10

Divine Healing is for today

Deliverance from sickness is provided through the atonement, and is available to all believers.

Isaiah 53:4-5

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

[5] But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

How could an Old Testament person understand the idea of Christ dying for our sins (our transgressions and iniquities)—actually bearing the punishment that we deserved? The sacrifices suggested this idea, but it is one thing to kill a lamb, and something quite different to think of God’s chosen servant as that Lamb. But God was pulling aside the curtain of time to let the people of Isaiah’s day look ahead to the suffering of the future Messiah and the resulting forgiveness made available to all mankind.

Matthew 8:16-17

When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick:

[17] That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

Matthew continues to show Jesus’ kingly nature. Through a single touch, Jesus healed (Matthew 8:3, 15); when he spoke a single word, evil spirits fled his presence (Matthew 8:16). Jesus has authority over all evil powers and all earthly disease. He also has power and authority to conquer sin. Sickness and evil are consequences of living in a fallen world. But in the future, when God removes all sin, there will be no more sickness and death. Jesus’ healing miracles were a taste of what the whole world will one day experience in God’s kingdom.

James 5:14-16

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

[15] And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

[16] Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

“The prayer offered in faith” does not refer to the faith of the sick person, but to the faith of the people praying. God heals, faith doesn’t. But our prayers are part of God’s healing process. That is why God often waits for our prayers of faith before intervening to heal a person.

1 Peter 2:24

Who his own self, bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Christ died for our sins, in our place, so we would not have to suffer the punishment we deserve. This is called substitutionary atonement.

1 Chron. 7:14

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Solomon asked God to make provisions for the people when they sinned.

God answered with four conditions for forgiveness:

- (1) humble yourself by admitting your sins,
- (2) pray to God, asking for forgiveness,
- (3) seek God continually, and
- (4) turn from sinful behavior.

True repentance is more than talk—it is changed behavior. Whether we sin individually, as a group, or as a nation, following these steps will lead to

forgiveness. God will answer our earnest prayers.

Mark 16:18

They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

There are times when God intervenes miraculously to protect his followers. Occasionally he gives them special powers. Paul handled a snake safely (Acts 28:5), and the disciples healed the sick (Matthew 10:1; Acts 3:7-8). This does not mean, however, that we should test God by putting ourselves in dangerous situations.

Chapter 11

The Blessed Hope

There is a Resurrection for those who have fallen asleep in Christ.

1 Thess. 4:16-17

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: [17] Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Because Jesus Christ came back to life, so will all believers. All Christians, including those living when Christ returns, will live with Christ forever. Therefore, we need not despair when loved ones die or world events take a tragic turn. God will turn our tragedies to triumphs, our poverty to riches, our pain to glory, and our defeat to victory. All believers throughout history will stand reunited in God's very presence, safe and secure. As Paul comforted the Thessalonians with the promise of the resurrection, so we should comfort and reassure each other with this great hope.

Romans 8:23

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

We will be resurrected with bodies, glorified bodies like the body Christ now has in heaven (see 1 Cor. 15:25-58). We have the "firstfruits," the first installment or down payment of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our resurrection life (see 2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5; Ephes. 1:14).

Titus 2:13

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

The power to live as a Christian comes from the Holy Spirit. Because Christ

died and rescued us from sin, we are free from sin's control. God gives us the power and understanding to live according to his will and to do good. Then we will look forward to Christ's wonderful return with eager expectation and hope.

1 Cor. 15:51-52

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

[52] In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

We will not all sleep" means that Christians alive at that day will not have to die but will be transformed immediately. A trumpet blast will usher in the new heaven and earth. The Jews would understand the significance of this because trumpets were always blown to signal the start of great festivals and other extraordinary events (Numbers 10:10).

Chapter 12

The Millennial Reign of Christ

The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with his saints to reign on earth for one thousand years.

Zech. 14:5

And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Only God's people will escape God's punishment (Matthew 24:16-20). In this time of confusion, God will clearly know who his people are.

Matthew 24:27

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

In times of persecution even strong believers will find it difficult to be loyal. To keep from being deceived by false messiahs, we must understand that Jesus' return will be unmistakable (Mark 13:26); no one will doubt that it is he. If you have to be told that the Messiah has come, then he hasn't (Matthew 24:27). Christ's coming will be obvious to everyone.

Matthew 24:30

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

The nations of the earth will mourn because unbelievers will suddenly realize they have chosen the wrong side. Everything they have scoffed about will be happening, and it will be too late for them.

Rev. 1:7

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindred's of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

John is announcing the return of Jesus to earth (see also Matthew 24; Mark 13; 1 Thess. 4:15-18). Jesus' second coming will be visible and victorious. All people will see him arrive (Mark 13:26), and they will know it is Jesus. When he comes, he will conquer evil and judge all people according to their deeds (Rev. 20:11-15).

Rev. 19:11-14

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

[12] His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

[13] And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

[14] And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

John's vision shifts again. Heaven opens and Jesus appears, this time not as a Lamb, but as a warrior on a white horse (symbolizing victory). Jesus came first as a Lamb to be a sacrifice for sin, but he will return as a Conqueror and King to execute judgment (2 Thess. 1:7-10). Jesus' first coming brought forgiveness; his second will bring judgment. The battle lines have been drawn between God and evil, and the world is waiting for the King to ride onto the field.

Rev. 20:1-6

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

[2] And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

[3] And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be

fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

[4] And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

[5] But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

[6] Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

The millennial reign will bring salvation to Israel.

Ezekiel 37:21-22

And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:

[22] And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all:

Zeph. 3:19-20

Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

[20] At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord.

The message of doom in the beginning of the book becomes a message of hope by the end. There will be a new day when God will bless his people. If the leaders in the church today were to hear a message from a prophet of God, the message would probably resemble the book of Zephaniah. Under Josiah's religious reforms,

the people did return to God *outwardly*, but their hearts were far from him. Zephaniah encouraged the nation to gather together and pray for salvation. We must also ask ourselves: Is our reform merely an outward show, or is it changing our hearts and lives? We need to gather together and pray, to walk humbly with God, to do what is right, and to hear the message of hope regarding the new world to come.

Romans 11:26-27

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

[27] For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Their identity of Israel as a people won't be discarded. God chose the nation of Israel, and he has never rejected it.

He also chose the church, through Jesus Christ, and he will never reject it either. This does not mean, of course, that all Jews or all church members will be saved. It is possible to belong to a nation or to an organization without ever responding in faith. But just because some people have rejected Christ does not mean that God stops working with either Israel or the church. He continues to offer salvation freely to all. Still others say that the phrase "and so" means "in this way" or "this is how," referring to the necessity of faith in Christ.

Chapter 13

The Final Judgment

There will be a final judgment in which the wicked dead will be raised and judged according to their works.

Matthew 25:46

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all people we encounter as if they are Jesus is no easy task. What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us—feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick

Mark 9:43-48

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

[44] Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

[45] And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

[46] Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

[47] And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

[48] Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Jesus used startling language to stress the importance of cutting sin out of our lives. Painful discipline is required of his true followers. Giving up a relationship, job, or habit that is against God's will may seem painful. Our high goal, however, is worth any sacrifice; Christ is worth any possible loss. Nothing should stand in the way of faith. We must be ruthless in removing sins from our lives now in order to avoid being stuck with them for eternity. Make your choices

from an eternal perspective.

Rev. 19:20

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

The beast (the antichrist) and the false prophet have gathered the governments and armies of the earth under the antichrist's rule. The enemy armies believe they have come of their own volition; in reality, God has summoned them to battle in order to defeat them. That they would even presume to fight against God shows how their pride and rebellion have perverted their thinking. There really is no fight, however, because the victory was won when Jesus died on the cross for sin and rose from the dead. Thus the evil leaders are immediately captured and sent to their punishment, and the forces of evil are annihilated.

Rev. 20:11-15

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

[12] And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

[13] And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

[14] And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

[15] And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

At the judgment, the books are opened. They represent God's judgment, and in them are recorded the deeds of everyone, good or evil. We are not saved by deeds, but deeds are seen as clear evidence of a person's actual relationship with God.

The book of life contains the names of those who have put their trust in Christ to save them.

Rev. 21:8

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

The “cowardly” are not those who are fainthearted in their faith or who sometimes doubt or question, but those who turn back from following God. They are not brave enough to stand up for Christ; they are not humble enough to accept his authority over their lives. They are put in the same list as the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the liars, the idolaters, the sexually immoral, and those practicing magic arts.

People who overcome “stand firm to the end” (Mark 13:13).

They will receive the blessings that God promised:

- (1) eating from the tree of life (Rev. 2:7),
- (2) escaping from the lake of fire (the “second death,” Rev. 2:11),
- (3) receiving a special name (Rev. 2:17),
- (4) having authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26),
- (5) being included in the book of life (Rev. 3:5),
- (6) being a pillar in God’s spiritual temple (Rev. 3:12), and
- (7) sitting with Christ on his throne (Rev. 3:21). Those who can endure the testing of evil and remain faithful will be rewarded by God.

Chapter 14

Care for the needy

A mission given to the church is meeting human needs with ministries of love and compassion. When we give to the needy, we open the door for God's blessing on us.

Psalm 112:9

He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth forever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.

His horn will be lifted high in honor” means that God's dignity will be uplifted and those faithful to God will be honored. The horn was a symbol of power and dignity just as the horns of animals represent their strength.

Galatians 2:10

Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

The apostles were referring to the poor of Jerusalem. While many Gentile converts were financially comfortable, the Jerusalem church had suffered from the effects of a severe famine in Palestine (see Acts 11:28-30) and was struggling. So on his journeys, Paul had gathered funds for the Jewish Christians (Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-29; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8). The need for believers to care for the poor is a constant theme in Scripture. But often we do nothing, caught up in meeting our own needs and desires. Perhaps we don't see enough poverty to remember the needs of the poor. The world is filled with poor people, here and in other countries. What can you do to help?

Galatians 6:10

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

It is discouraging to continue to do right and receive no word of thanks or see no tangible results. But Paul challenged the Galatians and he challenges us to keep on doing well and to trust God for the results. In due time, we will reap a harvest of blessing.

James 1:27

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

In the first century, orphans and widows had very little means of economic support. Unless a family member was willing to care for them, they were reduced to begging, selling themselves as slaves, or starving. By caring for these powerless people, the church put God's Word into practice. When we give with no hope of receiving in return, we show what it means to serve others.

To keep ourselves from being polluted by the world, we need to commit ourselves to Christ's ethical and moral system, not the world's. We are not to adapt to the world's value system, which is based on money, power, and pleasure. True faith means nothing if we are contaminated with such values.

Proverbs 19:17

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Here God identifies with the poor as Jesus does in Matthew 25:31-46. As our Creator, God values all of us, whether we are poor or rich. When we help the poor, we honor both the Creator and his creation. God accepts our help as if we had offered it directly to him.

1 John 3:17

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

These verses give an example of how to lay down our lives for others—to help those in need. This is strikingly similar to James’s teaching (James 2:14-17). How clearly do your actions say you really love others? Are you as generous as you should be with your money, possessions, and time?

Proverbs 14:21

He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.

Luke 6:38

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

A forgiving spirit demonstrates that a person has received God’s forgiveness. Jesus uses the picture of measuring grain in a basket to ensure the full amount. If we are critical rather than compassionate, we will also receive criticism. If we treat others generously, graciously, and compassionately, however, these qualities will come back to us in full measure. We are to love others, not judge them.

Chapter 15

The New Heaven and the New Earth

According to his promise, we look for a new heaven and new earth.

2 Peter 3:12-13

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

[13] Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

God's purpose for people is not destruction but re-creation (see Isaiah 66:22; Rev. 21-22). God will purify the heavens and earth with fire; then he will create them anew. We can joyously look forward to the restoration of God's good world.

Isaiah 65:17-19

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

[18] But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

[19] And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

We have a pictorial description of the new heavens and the new earth. They are eternal, and in them safety, peace, and plenty will be available to all (see also Isaiah 66:22-23; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1). Isaiah 65:20-25 may refer to the reign of Christ on earth because sin and death have not yet been finally destroyed.

Psalms 102:25-27

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands.

[26] They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed:

[27] But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.

The writer of this psalm felt rejected and tossed aside because of his great troubles (Psalm 102:9-10). Problems and heartaches can overwhelm us and cause us to feel that God has rejected us. But God our Creator is eternally with us and will keep all his promises, even though we may feel alone. The world will perish, but God will remain. Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes these verses to show that Jesus Christ, God's Son, was also present and active at the creation of the world.

Rev. 21:1-4

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

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

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

[4] And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

The earth as we know it will not last forever, but after God's great judgment, he will create a new earth (see Romans 8:18-21; 2 Peter 3:7-13). God had also promised Isaiah that he would create a new and eternal earth (Isaiah 65:17; Isaiah 66:22). The sea in John's time was viewed as dangerous and changeable. It was also the source of the beast (Rev. 13:1). We don't know how the new earth will look or where it will be, but God and his followers—those whose names are written in the book of life—will be united to live there forever. Will you be there?

The new Jerusalem is where God lives among his people. Instead of our going up to meet him, he comes down to be with us, just as God became man in Jesus Christ and lived among us (John 1:14). Wherever God reigns, there is peace, security, and love.

The “Holy City, the new Jerusalem” is described as the place where God will “wipe every tear from their eyes.” Forevermore, there will be no death, pain, sorrow, or crying. What a wonderful truth! No matter what you are going through, it’s not the last word—God has written the final chapter, and it is about true fulfillment and eternal joy for those who love him. We do not know as much as we would like, but it is enough to know that eternity with God will be more wonderful than we could ever imagine.

Chapter 16

Divine Revelation for Believers

God revealed himself to prophets, now to us.

Hebrews 1:1-3

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

[2] Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

[3] Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

The book of Hebrews describes in detail how Jesus Christ not only fulfills the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, but how Jesus Christ is better than everything in the Jewish system of thought. The Jews accepted the Old Testament, but most of them rejected Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. The recipients of this letter seem to have been Jewish Christians. They were well-versed in Scripture, and they had professed faith in Christ. Whether through doubt, persecution, or false teaching, however, they may have been in danger of giving up their Christian faith and returning to Judaism.

God used many approaches to send his messages to people in Old Testament times. He spoke to Isaiah in visions (Isaiah 6), to Jacob in a dream (Genesis 28:10-22), and to Abraham and Moses personally (Genesis 18; Exodus 31:18). Jewish people familiar with these stories would not have found it hard to believe that God was still revealing his will, but it was astonishing for them to think that God had revealed *himself* by speaking through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment and culmination of God's revelation through the centuries. When we know him, we have all we need to be saved from our sin and to have a perfect relationship with God.

Not only is Jesus the exact representation of God, but he is God himself—the very God who spoke in Old Testament times. He is eternal; he worked with the

Father in creating the world (John 1:3; Col. 1:16).

He is the full revelation of God. You can have no clearer view of God than by looking at Christ. Jesus Christ is the complete expression of God in a human body.

Amos 3:7

Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

Even in anger, God is merciful: he always warned his people through prophets before punishing them. Warnings about sin and judgment apply to people today just as they did to Israel. Because we have been warned about our sin, we have no excuse when punishment comes. God had warned his people through his prophets, so they could not rationalize or complain when God punished them for refusing to repent. Do not take lightly the warnings in God's Word about judgment. His warnings are a way of showing mercy to you.

Daniel 2:2

Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

Dreams were considered to be messages from the gods, and the wise men were expected to interpret them. Usually the wise men could give some sort of interpretation as long as they knew what the dream was about. This time, however, Nebuchadnezzar demanded to be told the dream also. God sent a series of dreams to Nebuchadnezzar with prophetic messages that could be revealed and understood only by a servant of God. People from other time periods who received dreams from God include Jacob (Genesis 28:10-15), Joseph (Genesis 37:5-11), Pharaoh's cupbearer and his baker (Genesis 40), Pharaoh (Genesis 41), Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-15), and Joseph (Matthew 1:20-24).

Psalms 19:1-4

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

[2] Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

[3] There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

[4] Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,

We are surrounded by fantastic displays of God's craftsmanship—the heavens give dramatic evidence of his existence, his power, his love, and his care. To say that the universe happened by chance is absurd. Its design, intricacy, and orderliness point to a personally involved Creator. As you look at God's handiwork in nature and the heavens, thank him for such magnificent beauty and the truth it reveals about the Creator.

Chapter 17

The Devil is Defeated

The devil does not doubt the word of God. He may twist Scripture and misapply the Bible, but he never doubts what God says.

James 2:19

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

Paul speaks against those who try to be saved by deeds instead of true faith; James speaks against those who confuse mere intellectual assent with true faith. After all, even demons know who Jesus is, but they don't obey him. True faith involves a commitment of your whole self to God.

Luke 10:19

Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Jesus' disciples, were thrilled with their power over evil spirit.

The disciples had seen tremendous results as they ministered in Jesus' name and with his authority. They were elated by the victories they had witnessed, and Jesus shared their enthusiasm. He helped them get their priorities right, however, by reminding them of their most important victory—that their names were written in heaven. This honor was more important than any of their accomplishments. As we see God's wonders at work in and through us, we should not lose sight of the greatest wonder of all—our heavenly citizenship.

Philip. 2:9-10

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

[10] That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

1 John 3:8

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Three steps are necessary to find victory over prevailing sin:

- (1) seek the power of the Holy Spirit and God's Word;
- (2) stay away from tempting situations; and
- (3) seek the help of the body of Christ—be open to their willingness to hold you accountable and to pray for you.

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Although God and the devil are at war, we don't have to wait until the end to see who will win. God has already defeated Satan (Rev. 12:10-12), and when Christ returns, the devil and all he stands for will be eliminated forever (Rev. 20:10-15). Satan is here now, however, and he is trying to win us over to his evil cause. With the Holy Spirit's power, we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us.

Ephes. 6:11

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

In the Christian life we battle against rulers and authorities (the powerful evil forces of fallen angels headed by Satan, who is a vicious fighter, see 1 Peter 5:8). To withstand their attacks, we must depend on God's strength and use every piece of his armor. Paul is not only giving this counsel to the church, the body of Christ, but to all individuals within the church. The whole body needs to be armed. As you do battle against "the powers of this dark world," fight in the strength of the church, whose power comes from the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 18

Faith Operates Through Love

Staying in the word of God is the way to keep our faith on the increase.

Romans 10:17

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Cor. 13:13

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

In morally corrupt Corinth, love had become a mixed-up term with little meaning. Today people are still confused about love. Love is the greatest of all human qualities, and it is an attribute of God himself (1 John 4:8). Love involves unselfish service to others; to show it gives evidence that you care. Faith is the foundation and content of God's message; hope is the attitude and focus; love is the action.

When faith and hope are in line, you are free to love completely because you understand how God loves.

2 Cor. 5:14

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

Everything that Paul and his companions did was to honor God. Christ's love controlled their lives. Because Christ died for us, we also are dead to our old lives. Like Paul, we should no longer live to please ourselves; we should spend our lives pleasing Christ, who died for us and rose from the grave.

1 Thess. 1:3

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

Paul commended these young Christians for their work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope. These characteristics are the marks of effective Christians in any age.

1 John 4:18-21

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

[19] We love him, because he first loved us.

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

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

If we ever are afraid of the future, eternity, or God's judgment, we can remind ourselves of God's love. We know that he loves us perfectly (Romans 8:38-39). We can resolve our fears first by focusing on his immeasurable love for us, and then by allowing him to love others through us. His love will quiet your fears and give you confidence.

The real test of our love for God is how we treat the people right in front of us— our family members and fellow believers. We cannot truly love God while neglecting to love those who are created in his image.

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