

Ability to Love,
to Worship,
and to
Witness



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Forward

The most important prerequisite for any kind of Christian service is to be filled with faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.

God gives ability to each one. You will not prevail by might and power.

He gives ability to the unskilled, to save, to give and to stand.

Throughout this study, you will understand how God never sends his workers out without needed skills and abilities.

The church is made up of believers with varying abilities.

Find your place in the plan of God for your life. There is a job to be done, but you are never left alone without any help from God.

It has been said that those whom God calls, he qualifies.

Put on the whole armor of God and find your place in Gods kingdom.

Chapter 1



God gives ability to each one.

We're all encouraged by a leader who stirs us to move ahead, someone who believes we can do the task he has given and who will be with us all the way. God is that kind of leader. He knows the future, and his plans for us are good and full of hope. As long as God, who knows the future, provides our agenda and goes with us as we fulfill his mission, we can have boundless hope. This does not mean that we will be spared pain, suffering, or hardship, but that God will see us through to a glorious conclusion.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

God gives power to get wealth

In times of plenty, we often take credit for our prosperity and become proud that our own hard work and cleverness have made us rich. It is easy to get so busy collecting and managing wealth that we push God right out of our lives.

But it is God who gives us everything we have, and it is God who asks us to manage it for him.

Deuteronomy 8:18

Always remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you power to become rich, and he does it to fulfill the covenant he made with your ancestors.

God gives the ability to do all necessary things.

Are you content in any circumstances you face? Paul knew how to be content whether he had plenty or whether he was in need. The secret was drawing on Christ's power for strength.

Do you have great needs, or are you discontented because you don't have what you want? Learn to rely on God's promises and Christ's power to help you be content. If you always want more, ask God to remove that desire and teach you contentment in every circumstance. He will supply all your needs, but in a way that he knows is best for you.

Paul was content because he could see life from God's point of view. He focused on what he was supposed to *do*, not what he felt he should *have*. Paul had his priorities straight, and he was grateful for everything God had given him. Paul had detached himself from the nonessentials so that he could concentrate on the eternal.

Often the desire for more or better possessions is really a longing to fill an empty place in a person's life. To what are you drawn when you feel empty inside? How can you find true contentment? The answer lies in your perspective, your priorities, and your source of power.

Can we really do everything? The power we receive in union with Christ is sufficient to do his will and to face the challenges that arise from our

commitment to doing it. He does not grant us superhuman ability to accomplish anything we can imagine without regard to his interests. As we contend for the faith we will face troubles, pressures, and trials. As they come, ask Christ to strengthen you.

Philip. 4:13

For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.

Abilities may vary

The master divided the money (talents) among his servants according to their abilities. No one received more or less than he could handle. If he failed in his assignment, his excuse could not be that he was overwhelmed. Failure could come only from laziness or hatred toward the master.

The talents represent any kind of resource we are given. God gives us time, gifts, and other resources according to our abilities, and he expects us to invest them wisely until he returns. We are responsible to use well what God has given us. The issue is not how much we have, but how well we use what we have.

Matthew 25:15

He gave five bags of gold to one, two bags of gold to another, and one bag of gold to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities—and then left on his trip.

God's understanding is infinite

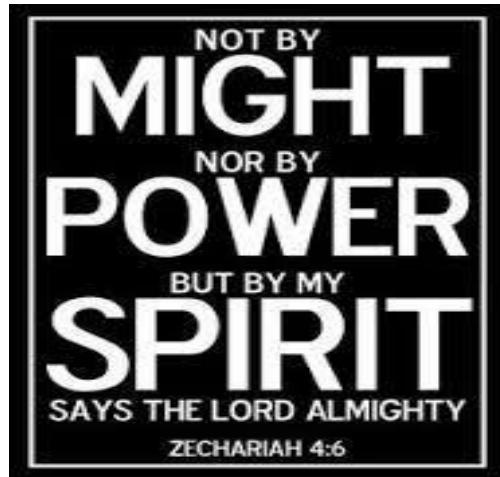
Sometimes we feel as if we don't understand ourselves—what we want, how we feel, what's wrong with us, or what we should do about it. But God's understanding has no limit, and therefore he understands us fully. If you feel troubled and don't understand yourself, remember that God understands you perfectly. Take your mind off yourself and focus it on God.

Strive to become more and more like him. The more you learn about God and his ways, the better you will understand yourself.

Psalm 147:5

How great is our Lord! His power is absolute!
His understanding is beyond comprehension!

Chapter 2



Man will not prevail by might or power

Hannah praised God for his answer to her prayer for a son. The theme of her poetic prayer is her confidence in God's sovereignty and her thankfulness for everything he had done.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, modeled her own praise song, called the Magnificat, after Hannah's prayer (Luke 1:46-55). Like Hannah and Mary, we should be confident of God's ultimate control over the events in our lives, and we should be thankful for the ways God has blessed us.

By praising God for all good gifts, we acknowledge his ultimate control over all the affairs of life.

We may come and go, and circumstances change. It's difficult to find a solid foundation that will not change.

Those who devote their lives to achievements, causes, or possessions have as their security that which is finite and changeable. The possessions that we work so hard to obtain will all pass away. But God is always present. Hope in him. He will never fail.

No doubt as Hannah said these words, she was thinking of Peninnah's arrogance and chiding. Hannah did not have to get even with Peninnah. She knew that God is all-knowing, and that he will judge all sin and pride. Hannah wisely left judgment up to God.

Resist the temptation to take justice into your own hands. God will weigh your deeds as well as those who have wronged you.

Because we live in a world where evil abounds and a nuclear holocaust always threatens, we may forget that God is in control.

Hannah saw God as:

Solid as a rock (1 Samuel 2:2),

The one who knows what we do (1 Samuel 2:3),

Sovereign over all the affairs of people (1 Samuel 2:4-8), and

The supreme judge who administers perfect justice (1 Samuel 2:10).

Remembering God's sovereign control helps us put both world and personal events in perspective.

Hannah praised God for being a Rock—firm, strong, and unchanging.

1 Samuel 2:9

He will protect his godly ones, but the wicked will perish in darkness. No one will succeed by strength alone.

God will give special abilities, even to the young.

Criticism couldn't stop David. While the rest of the army stood around, he knew the importance of taking action.

With God to fight for him, there was no reason to wait. People may try to discourage you with negative comments or mockery, but continue to do what you know is right. By doing what is right, you will be pleasing God, whose opinion matters most.

1 Samuel 17:32-37

"Don't worry about a thing," David told Saul. "I'll go fight this Philistine!"
"Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There is no way you can go against this Philistine. You are only a boy, and he has been in the army since he was a boy!"

But David persisted. "I have been taking care of my father's sheep," he said.
"When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock,

I go after it with a club and take the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death.

I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the armies of the living God!

The Lord who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!"

Saul finally consented. "All right, go ahead," he said. "And may the Lord be with you!"

God gives the weak wisdom and strength.

Jesus was teaching effectively and wisely, but the people of his hometown saw him as only a carpenter. "He's no better than we are—he's just a common laborer," they said. They were offended that others could be impressed by Jesus and follow him. They rejected his authority because he was one of their peers. They thought they knew him, but their preconceived notions about who he was made it impossible for them to accept his message. Don't let prejudice blind you to truth.

As you learn more about Jesus, try to see him for who he really is.

Jesus said that a prophet (in other words, a worker for God) is never honored in his hometown. But that doesn't make his work any less important. A person doesn't need to be respected or honored to be useful to God. If friends, neighbors, or family don't respect your Christian work, don't let their rejection keep you from serving God.

Jesus could have done greater miracles in Nazareth, but he chose not to because of the people's pride and unbelief. The miracles he did had little effect on the people because they did not accept his message or believe that he was from God. Therefore, Jesus looked elsewhere, seeking those who would respond to his miracles and message.

Mark 6:2-6

The next Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They asked, "Where did he get all his wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?"

He's just the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us." They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him.

Then Jesus told them, "A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family."

And because of their unbelief, he couldn't do any mighty miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then Jesus went out from village to village, teaching.

Stephen was performing signs and wonders.

Jesus had told the apostles that they were to witness first in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). In a short time, their message had infiltrated the entire city and all levels of society.

Even some priests were being converted, an obvious violation of the wishes of the council that would endanger their position.

The word of God spread like ripples on a pond where, from a single center, each wave touches the next, spreading wider and farther.

The gospel still spreads this way today. You don't have to change the world single-handedly—it is enough just to be part of the wave, touching those around you, who in turn will touch others until all have felt the movement. Don't ever feel that your part is insignificant or unimportant.

The most important prerequisite for any kind of Christian service is to be filled with faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.

By the Spirit's power, Stephen was a wise servant (Acts 6:3), miracle worker (Acts 6:8), and evangelist (Acts 6:10). By the Spirit's power, you can exercise the gifts God has given you.

Acts 6:8

Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.

Chapter 3



God gives ability to the unskilled

Paul was saying that these marvelous teachers (“super-apostles”) were no better than he was. They may have been more eloquent speakers, but they spoke lies and were servants of Satan.

Paul, a brilliant thinker, was not a trained, spellbinding speaker. Although his ministry was effective (see Acts 17), he had not been trained in the Greek schools of oratory and speech making, as many of the false teachers probably had been.

Paul believed in a simple presentation of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 1:17), and some people thought this showed simple-mindedness. Thus Paul’s speaking performance was often used against him by false teachers.

In all our teaching and preaching, content is far more important than the presentation. A simple, clear presentation that helps listeners understand will be of great value.

2 Cor. 11:5-6

But I don't think I am inferior to these "super apostles."

I may not be a trained speaker, but I know what I am talking about. I think you realize this by now, for we have proved it again and again.

Ability to stand during temptation

In a culture filled with moral depravity and sin-inducing pressures, Paul gave strong encouragement to the Corinthians about temptation.

He said:

- (1) Wrong desires and temptations happen to everyone, so don't feel you've been singled out;
- (2) Others have resisted temptation, and so can you;
- (3) Any temptation can be resisted because God will help you resist it.

God helps you resist temptation by helping you.

- (1) Recognize those people and situations that give you trouble
- (2) Run from anything you know is wrong,
- (3) Choose to do only what is right,
- (4) Pray for God's help, and

(5) Seek friends who love God and can offer help when you are tempted.

Running from a tempting situation is your first step on the way to victory (see 2 Tim. 2:22).

1Cor. 10:13

But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it.

All the works of God are true and just.

Nebuchadnezzar's pilgrimage with God is one of the themes of the book of Daniel.

Daniel pleaded with Nebuchadnezzar to change his ways, and God gave Nebuchadnezzar 12 months to do it. Unfortunately, there was no repentance in the heart of this proud king, and so the dream was fulfilled.

In Daniel 2:47, he acknowledged that God revealed mysteries to Daniel.

In Daniel 3:28-29 he praised the God who rescued the three Hebrews. Despite Nebuchadnezzar's recognition that God exists and works great miracles.

In Daniel 4:30 we see that he still did not acknowledge God as his Lord. We may recognize that God exists and does wonderful miracles, but God is not going to change us until we acknowledge him as Lord.

Daniel 4:36-37

"When my sanity returned to me, so did my honor and glory and kingdom. My advisers and officers sought me out, and I was reestablished as head of my kingdom, with even greater honor than before.

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and glorify and honor the King of heaven. All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble those who are proud."

No one can snatch you from God's care.

Many people asking for proof do so for the wrong reasons. Most of these questioners didn't want to follow Jesus in the way that he wanted to lead them.

They hoped that Jesus would declare himself Messiah for perverted reasons. They, along with the disciples and everyone else in the Jewish nation, would have been delighted to have him drive out the Romans.

Many of them didn't think he was going to do that, however. These doubters hoped he would identify himself so they could accuse him of telling lies (as the Pharisees did in John 8:13).

Just as a shepherd protects his sheep, Jesus protects his people from eternal harm. While believers can expect to suffer on earth, Satan cannot harm their souls or take away their eternal life with God.

There are many reasons to be afraid here on earth because this is the devil's domain (1 Peter 5:8). But if you choose to follow Jesus, he will give you everlasting safety.

John 10:26-28

But you don't believe me because you are not part of my flock. My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me,

Every word of God will be performed

Abraham never doubted that God would fulfill his promise. Abraham's life was marked by mistakes, sins, and failures as well as by wisdom and goodness, but he consistently trusted God. His faith was strengthened by the obstacles he faced, and his life was an example of faith in action. If he had looked only at his own resources for subduing Canaan and founding a nation, he would have given up in despair. But Abraham looked to God, obeyed him, and waited for God to fulfill his word.

Romans 4:21

He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised.

God is able to establish you.

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.

As Jerusalem was the center of Jewish life, Rome was the world's political, religious, social, and economic center. There the major governmental decisions were made, and from there the gospel spread to the ends of the earth.

The church in Rome was a cosmopolitan mixture of Jews, Gentiles, slaves, free people, men, women, Roman citizens, and world travelers; therefore, it had potential for both great influence and great conflict.

Paul had not yet been to Rome to meet all the Christians there, and, of course, he has not yet met us.

We too live in a cosmopolitan setting with the entire world open to us. We also have the potential for both widespread influence and wrenching conflict.

We should listen carefully to and apply Paul's teaching about unity, service, and love.

Romans 16:25

God is able to make you strong, just as the Good News says. It is the message about Jesus Christ and his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time.

God should be glorified for giving us the ability to stand.

Some people, well aware of their abilities, believe that they have the right to use their abilities as they please. Others feel that they have no special talents at all. Peter addresses both groups in these verses. Everyone has some gifts; find yours and use them. All our abilities should be used in serving others;

none are for our own exclusive enjoyment. Peter mentions speaking and serving. Paul lists these and other abilities in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-11; Ephesians. 4:11.

How is God praised when we use our abilities? When we use them as he directs, to help others, they will see Jesus in us and praise him for the help they have received. Peter may have been thinking of Jesus' words, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

1 Peter 4:11

Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you.

Are you called to help others?

Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies.

Then God will be given glory in everything through Jesus Christ.

All glory and power belong to him forever and ever. Amen.

The afflicted shall be comforted.

Many think that when God comforts us, our troubles should go away. But if that were always so, people would turn to God only out of a desire to be relieved of pain and not out of love for him. We must understand that being *comforted* can also mean receiving strength, encouragement, and hope to deal with our troubles.

The more we suffer, the more comfort God gives us. If you are feeling overwhelmed, allow God to comfort you. Remember that every trial you endure will help you comfort other people who are suffering similar troubles.

2 Cor. 1:4

He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

The suffering need not be ashamed

People can feel so guilt-ridden by their past that they think God could never forgive and accept them. But consider Paul's past. He had scoffed at the teachings of Jesus ("a blasphemer") and hunted down and murdered God's people ("a persecutor and a violent man") before coming to faith in Christ (Acts 9:1-9).

God forgave Paul and used Paul mightily for his kingdom. No matter how shameful your past, God also can forgive and use you.

We may feel that our faith in God and our love for Christ and for others is inadequate. But we can be confident that Christ will help our faith and love grow as our relationship with him deepens.

Here Paul summarizes the Good News: Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and no sinner is beyond his saving power.

Jesus didn't come merely to show us how to live a better life or to challenge us to be better people.

He came to offer us salvation that leads to eternal life. Have you accepted his offer?

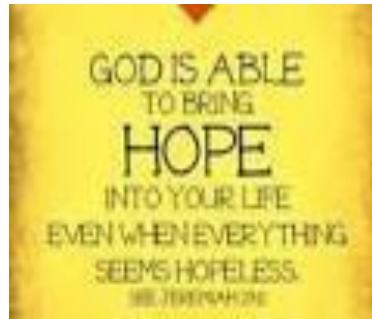
Paul calls himself “the worst” of sinners. We think of Paul as a great hero of the faith, but Paul never saw himself that way, because he remembered his life before he met Christ.

The more Paul understood God’s grace, the more he was aware of his own sinfulness. Humility and gratitude should mark the life of every Christian. Never forget that you too are a sinner saved by grace.

2 Tim. 1:12

And that is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.

Chapter 4



The ability of God is to deliver.

Daniel 3:16-17

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you.

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were pressured to deny God, but they chose to be faithful to him no matter what happened! They trusted God to deliver them, but they were determined to be faithful regardless of the consequences.

If God always rescued those who were true to him, Christians would not need faith. Their religion would be a great insurance policy, and there would be lines of selfish people ready to sign up. We should be faithful to serve God whether he intervenes on our behalf or not.

Our eternal reward is worth any suffering we may have to endure first.

God can do more than we can ask or think

Ephes. 3:20

Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope.

God has chosen us to be Christ's representatives on earth. In light of this truth, Paul challenges us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received—the awesome privilege of being called Christ's very own. This includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding, and peaceful. People are watching your life. Can they see Christ in you? How well are you doing as his representative?

God's love is total, says Paul. It reaches every corner of our experience. It is *wide*—it covers the breadth of our own experience, and it reaches out to the whole world. God's love is *long*—it continues the length of our lives.

It is *high*—it rises to the heights of our celebration and elation. His love is *deep*—it reaches to the depths of discouragement, despair, and even death. When you feel shut out or isolated, remember that you can never be lost to God's love. For another prayer about God's immeasurable and inexhaustible love, see Paul's words in Romans 8:38-39.

“The fullness of God” is fully expressed only in Christ (Col. 2:9-10). In union with Christ and through his empowering Spirit, we are complete. We have all the fullness of God available to us.

But we must appropriate that fullness through faith and through prayer as we daily live for him. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is also for you. You can ask the Holy Spirit to fill every aspect of your life to the fullest.

Deliverance from the hands of the enemy

2 Chron. 32:13-15

"Surely you must realize what I and the other kings of Assyria before me have done to all the people of the earth! Were any of the gods of those nations able to rescue their people from my power?

Name just one time when any god, anywhere, was able to rescue his people from me! What makes you think your God can do any better?

Don't let Hezekiah fool you! Don't let him deceive you like this! I say it again—no god of any nation has ever yet been able to rescue his people from me or my ancestors. How much less will your God rescue you from my power!"

Hezekiah could see with eyes of faith. The number of his opponents meant nothing as long as he was on the Lord's side. Victory is "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty" (Zech. 4:6).

Hezekiah could confidently encourage his men because he had no doubt about where he stood with God. Are you on the Lord's side? You may never face an enemy army, but the battles you face every day can be won with God's strength.

Money will become worthless

Ezekiel 7:19

"They will throw away their money, tossing it out like worthless trash. It won't buy their deliverance in that day of the Lord's anger. It will neither satisfy nor feed them, for their love of money made them stumble into sin.

God's people had allowed their love of money to lead them into sin. And for this, God would destroy them.

Money has a strange power to lead people into sin. Paul said that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10).

It is ironic that we use money—a gift of God—to buy things that separates us from him. It is tragic that we spend so much money seeking to satisfy ourselves, and so little time seeking God, the true source of satisfaction.

Money will not bring deliverance

Zeph. 1:18

Your silver and gold will be of no use to you on that day of the Lord's anger. For the whole land will be devoured by the fire of his jealousy. He will make a terrifying end of all the people on earth.

Money is not evil in itself, but it is useless to save us. In this life, money can warp our perspective, giving us feelings of security and power. Just as the Israelites' wealth could not save them from the Babylonian invasion, so at the final judgment, our riches will be worthless. Only Christ's redemptive work on our behalf matters for eternity. Christ alone will ransom us if we believe in him. Don't trust money; trust Christ.

Chapter 5



The ability of God to save

John 6:37

However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them.

Jesus did not work independently of God the Father, but in union with him. This should give us even more assurance of being welcomed into God's presence and being protected by him. Jesus' purpose was to do the will of God, not to satisfy Jesus' human desires. When we follow Jesus, we should have the same purpose.

You are drawn to God for salvation.

John 6:44

For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them from the dead.

God, not man, plays the most active role in salvation. When someone chooses to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, he or she does so only in response to the urging of God's Holy Spirit. God does the urging; then we decide whether or not to believe. Thus no one can believe in Jesus without God's help.

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life; without the work of the Holy Spirit we cannot even see our need for new life (John 14:17). All spiritual renewal begins and ends with God. He reveals truth to us, lives within us, and then enables us to respond to that truth.

The name of Jesus must be manifested

John 17:6

"I have told these men about you. They were in the world, but then you gave them to me. Actually, they were always yours, and you gave them to me; and they have kept your word.

God's glory is the revelation of his character and presence. The lives of Jesus' disciples reveal his character, and he is present to the world through them. Does your life reveal Jesus' character and presence?

Jesus was asking that the disciples be united in harmony and love as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united—the strongest of all unions. (See the note on +John 17:21-23.)

Jesus' great desire for his disciples was that they would become one. He wanted them unified as a powerful witness to the reality of God's love. Are you helping to unify the body of Christ, the church? You can pray for other Christians, avoid gossip, build others up, work together in humility, give your

time and money, exalt Christ, and refuse to get sidetracked arguing over divisive matters.

Jesus prayed for unity among the believers based on the believers' unity with him and the Father. Christians can know unity among themselves if they are living in union with God. For example, each branch living in union with the vine is united with all other branches doing the same.

We are blessed with every spiritual blessing

Ephes. 1:3

How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ.

“Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing” means that

In Christ we have all the benefits of knowing God—being chosen for salvation,

Being adopted as his children, forgiveness, insight, the gifts of the Spirit,

Power to do God’s will, the hope of living forever with Christ.

Because we have an intimate relationship with Christ, we can enjoy these blessings now.

The *heavenly realms* mean that these blessings are eternal, not temporal. The blessings come from Christ’s spiritual realm, not the earthly realm of the goddess Artemis.

The dead are made to live

Col. 2:13

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins.

Before we believed in Christ, our nature was evil. We disobeyed, rebelled, and ignored God (even at our best, we did not love him with all our heart, soul, and mind). The Christian, however, has a new nature. God has crucified the old rebellious nature (Romans 6:6) and replaced it with a new loving nature (Col. 3:9-10). The penalty of sin died with Christ on the cross. God has declared us not guilty, and we need no longer live under sin's power. God does not take us out of the world or make us robots—we will still feel like sinning, and sometimes we will sin. The difference is that before we were saved, we were slaves to our sinful nature; but now we are free to live for Christ (see Galatians 2:20).

Sprinkled with the blood of Christ

1 Peter 1:2

God the Father chose you long ago, and the Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed Jesus Christ and are cleansed by his blood.

May you have more and more of God's special favor and wonderful peace. Peter encouraged his readers by this strong declaration that they were *chosen* by God the Father. At one time, only the nation of Israel could claim to be God's chosen people; but through Christ, all believers—Jews and Gentiles—belong to God. Our salvation and security rest in the free and merciful choice of almighty God; no trials or persecutions can take away the eternal life he gives to those who believe in him.

With God, all things are possible

Matthew 19:26

Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible."

The disciples were astonished. They thought that if anyone could be saved, it would be the rich, whom their culture considered especially blessed by God.

God loves the whole world

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in.

Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone dearly, you are willing to give freely to the point of self-sacrifice.

God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us.

When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus'—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Some people are repulsed by the idea of eternal life because their lives are miserable. But eternal life is not an extension of a person's miserable, mortal life; eternal life is God's life embodied in Christ given to all believers now as a guarantee that they will live forever.

In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil, or sin. When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have.

In reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity. Receive this new life by faith and begin to evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective.

To “believe” is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means to put our trust and confidence in him that he alone can save us. It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable, and relying on him for the power to change. If you have never trusted Christ, let this promise of everlasting life be yours—and believe.

You are saved forever.

Hebrews 7:25

Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save everyone who comes to God through him. He lives forever to plead with God on their behalf.

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 us and God. 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.

The Word is able to save our souls

James 1:21

So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls.

James advises us to get rid of all that is wrong in our lives and “humbly accept” the salvation message we have received (“the word planted in you”), because it alone can save us.

Chapter 6

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

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The ability to be a Christian

John 15:5

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

Fruit is not limited to soul winning. In this chapter, answered prayer, joy, and love are mentioned as fruit (John 15:7, 11-12). Galatians 5:22-24 and 2 Peter 1:5-8 describe additional fruit: qualities of Christian character.

Remaining in Christ means

- (1) Believing that he is God's Son (1 John 4:15),
- (2) Receiving him as Savior and Lord (John 1:12),
- (3) Doing what God says (1 John 3:24),
- (4) Continuing to believe the gospel (1 John 2:24), and
- (5) Relating in love to the community of believers, Christ's body (John 15:12).

Many people try to be good, honest people who do what is right. But Jesus says that the only way to live a truly good life is to stay close to him, like a branch attached to the vine.

Apart from Christ our efforts are unfruitful. Are you receiving the nourishment and life offered by Christ, the vine? If not, you are missing a special gift he has for you.

Our adequacy comes from God

1 Cor. 3:5-6

Who is Apollos, and who is Paul, that we should be the cause of such quarrels? Why, we're only servants. Through us God caused you to believe. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

My job was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God, not we, who made it grow.

Paul planted the seed of the gospel message in people's hearts. He was a missionary pioneer; he brought the message of salvation. Apollos's role was to water—to help the believers grow stronger in the faith.

Paul founded the church in Corinth, and Apollos built on that foundation. Tragically, the believers in Corinth had split into factions, pledging loyalty to different teachers (see 1 Cor. 1:11-13).

After the preachers' work is completed, God keeps on making Christians grow. Our leaders should certainly be respected, but we should never place them on pedestals that create barriers between people or set them up as a substitute for Christ.

Wisdom none can resist

Luke 21:15

For I will give you the right words and such wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply!

Jesus warned that in the coming persecutions his followers would be betrayed by their family members and friends.

Christians of every age have had to face this possibility. It is reassuring to know that even when we feel completely abandoned, the Holy Spirit will stay with us.

He will comfort us, protect us, and give us the words we need. This assurance can give us the courage and hope to stand firm for Christ no matter how difficult the situation.

Believers admonish one another

Romans 15:14

I am fully convinced, dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well that you are able to teach others all about them.

To accept Jesus' lordship in all areas of life means to share his values and his perspective. Just as we take Jesus' view on the authority of Scripture, the

nature of heaven, and the resurrection, we are to have his attitude of love toward other Christians as well (have a “spirit of unity”). As we grow in faith and come to know Jesus better, we will become more capable of maintaining this attitude of loving unity throughout each day.

Man's work will be revealed

1 Cor. 3:13

But there is going to come a time of testing at the judgment day to see what kind of work each builder has done. Everyone's work will be put through the fire to see whether or not it keeps its value.

Two sure ways to destroy a building are to tamper with the foundation and to build with inferior materials.

The church must be built on Christ, not on any other person or principle. Christ will evaluate each minister's contribution to the life of the church, and the Day of Judgment (“the Day”) will reveal the sincerity of each person's work.

God will determine whether or not they have been faithful to Jesus' instructions.

Good work will be rewarded; unfaithful or inferior work will be discounted.

The builder “will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames” means that unfaithful workers will be saved, but like people escaping from a burning building. All their possessions (accomplishments) will be lost.

Wear the whole armor of God

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.

These who are not "flesh and blood" are demons over whom Satan has control. They are not mere fantasies—they are very real. We face a powerful army whose goal is to defeat Christ's church.

When we believe in Christ, these beings become our enemies, and they try every device to turn us away from him and back to sin.

Although we are assured of victory, we must engage in the struggle until Christ returns, because Satan is constantly battling against all who are on the Lord's side.

We need supernatural power to defeat Satan, and God has provided this by giving us his Holy Spirit within us and his armor surrounding us. If you feel discouraged, remember Jesus' words to Peter: "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18).

I can do all things through Christ

Philippians. 4:13

For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.

Chapter 7



The ability to give

People may hesitate to give generously to God if they worry about having enough money left over to meet their own needs. Paul assured the Corinthians that God was able to meet their needs. The person who gives only a little will receive only a little in return. Don't let a lack of faith keep you from giving freely and generously.

Our attitude when we give is more important than the amount we give. We don't have to be embarrassed if we can give only a small gift. God is concerned about *how* we give from the resources we have (see Mark 12:41-44).

According to that standard, the giving of the Macedonian churches would be difficult to match (2 Cor. 8:3).

2 Cor. 9:7

You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully.

God alone judges the value of the gift

There were several boxes in the temple where money could be placed. Some were for collecting the temple tax from Jewish males; the others were for freewill offerings. These particular collection boxes were probably in the court of the women.

In the Lord's eyes, this poor widow gave more than all the others put together, though her gift was by far the smallest. The value of a gift is not determined by its amount, but by the spirit in which it is given.

A gift given grudgingly or for recognition loses its value. When you give, remember—gifts of any size are pleasing to God when they are given out of gratitude and a spirit of generosity.

Mark 12:41-44

Jesus went over to the collection box in the Temple and sat and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts.

Then a poor widow came and dropped in two pennies. He called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has."

Give as God has given unto you.

Three times a year every male was to make a journey to the sanctuary in the city that would be designated as Israel's religious capital. At these festivals, each participant was encouraged to give what he could in proportion to what God had given him. God does not expect us to give more than we can, but we will be blessed when we give cheerfully. For some, 10 percent may be a

burden. For most of us, that would be far too little. Look at what you have and then give in proportion to what you have been given.

Deut. 16:10

Then you must celebrate the Festival of Harvest to honor the Lord your God. Bring him a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings you have received from him.

Deut. 16:17

All must give as they are able, according to the blessings given to them by the Lord your God.

Give with liberality.

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;

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.

Prophesying 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.

Romans 12:4-8

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.

God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you.

If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching.

If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Give to those who are in need

The Christians in Jerusalem were suffering from poverty and famine, so Paul was collecting money for them (Romans 15:25-31; 2 Cor. 8:4; 2 Cor. 9:1ff).

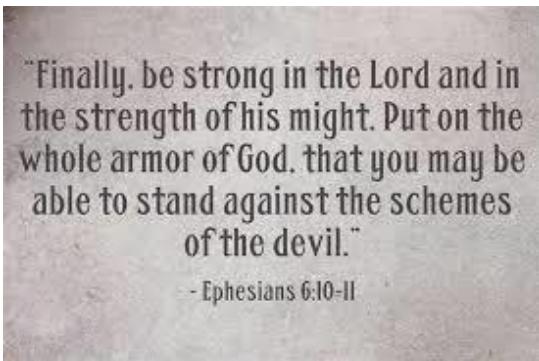
He suggested that believers set aside a certain amount each week and give it to the church until he arrived to take it on to Jerusalem. Paul had planned to go straight to Corinth from Ephesus, but he changed his mind (2 Cor. 1-2).

When he finally arrived, he took the gift and delivered it to the Jerusalem church (Acts 21:18; Acts 24:17).

1 Cor. 16:2

On every Lord's Day, each of you should put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned and save it for this offering. Don't wait until I get there and then try to collect it all at once.

Chapter 8



The Ability to stand

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.

These who are not "flesh and blood" are demons over whom Satan has control. They are not mere fantasies—they are very real. We face a powerful army whose goal is to defeat Christ's church.

When we believe in Christ, these beings become our enemies, and they try every device to turn us away from him and back to sin.

Although we are assured of victory, we must engage in the struggle until Christ returns, because Satan is constantly battling against all who are on the Lord's side.

We need supernatural power to defeat Satan, and God has provided this by giving us his Holy Spirit within us and his armor surrounding us.

If you feel discouraged, remember Jesus' words to Peter: "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18).

Ephes. 6:11-13

Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil.

For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.

Use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy in the time of evil, so that after the battle you will still be standing firm.

God will always be with you

Joshua succeeded Moses as Israel's leader. What qualifications did he have to become the leader of a nation?

- (1) God appointed him (Numbers 27:18-23).
- (2) He was one of only two living eyewitnesses to the Egyptian plagues and the exodus from Egypt. (3) He was Moses' personal aide for 40 years.
- (4) Of the 12 spies, only he and Caleb showed complete confidence that God would help them conquer the land.

Because Joshua had assisted Moses for many years, he was well prepared to take over the leadership of the nation. Changes in leadership are common in many organizations.

At such times, a smooth transition is essential for the establishment of the new administration. This doesn't happen unless new leaders are trained. If you are currently in a leadership position, begin preparing someone to take your place.

Then, when you leave or are promoted, operations can continue to run efficiently. If you want to be a leader, learn from others so that you will be prepared when the opportunity comes.

Joshua's new job consisted of leading more than two million people into a strange new land and conquering it. What a challenge—even for a man of Joshua's caliber! Every new job is a challenge. Without God it can be frightening.

With God it can be a great adventure. Just as God was with Joshua, he is with us as we face our new challenges. We may not conquer nations, but every day we face tough situations, difficult people, and temptations.

However, God promises that he will never abandon us or fail to help us. By asking God to direct us we can conquer many of life's challenges.

Joshua 1:1-5

After the death of Moses the Lord's servant, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. He said, "Now that my servant Moses is dead, you must lead my people across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them.

I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Everywhere you go, you will be on land I have given you—from the Negev Desert in the south to the Lebanon

Mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River on the east to the Mediterranean Sea on the west, and all the land of the Hittites.'

No one will be able to stand their ground against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.

God is able to keep you from stumbling

As the letter begins, so it ends—with assurance. God keeps believers from falling prey to false teachers. Although false teachers are widespread and dangerous, we don't have to be afraid if we trust God and are rooted and grounded in him.

To be sinless and perfect ("without fault") will be the ultimate condition of the believer when he or she finally sees Christ face to face. When Christ appears, and we are given our new bodies, we will be like Christ (1 John 3:2). Coming into Christ's presence will be more wonderful than we could ever imagine!

The audience to whom Jude wrote was vulnerable to heresies and to temptations toward immoral living.

Jude encouraged the believers to remain firm in their faith and trust in God's promises for their future. This was all the more important because they were living in a time of increased apostasy. We too are living in the last days, much closer to the end than were the original readers of this letter.

We too are vulnerable to doctrinal error. We too are tempted to give in to sin. Although there is much false teaching around us, we need not be afraid or give up in despair—God can keep us from falling, and he guarantees that if we remain faithful, he will bring us into his presence and give us everlasting joy.

Jude 1:24

And now, all glory to God, who is able to keep you from stumbling, and who will bring you into his glorious presence innocent of sin and with great joy.

No one will be able to stand before you.

Deut. 11:25-26

No one will be able to stand against you, for the Lord your God will send fear and dread ahead of you, as he promised you, wherever you go in the whole land.

"Today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse!

What is God's curse? It is not a magician's spell. To understand it, we must remember the conditions of the covenant between God and Israel. Both parties had agreed to the terms.

The blessings would benefit Israel if they kept their part of the covenant: They would receive the land, live there forever, have fruitful crops, and expel their enemies.

The curse would fall on Israel only if they broke their agreement; then they would forfeit God's blessing and would be in danger of crop failure, invasion, and expulsion from their land. Joshua later reviewed these blessings and curses with the entire nation (Joshua 8:34).

It is amazing that God set before the Israelites a choice between blessings and curses. It is even more amazing that most of them, through their disobedience, chose the curses.

We have the same fundamental choice today. We can live for ourselves or live in service to God. To choose our own way is to travel on a dead-end road, but to choose God's way is to receive eternal life (John 5:24).

Who will be able to stand?

At the sight of God sitting on the throne, all human beings, great and small, will be terrified, calling for the mountains to fall on them so that they will not have to face the judgment of the Lamb.

This vivid picture was not intended to frighten believers. For them, the Lamb is a gentle Savior. But those generals, emperors, or kings who previously showed no fear of God and arrogantly flaunted their unbelief will find that they were wrong, and in that day they will have to face God's wrath.

No one who has rejected God can survive the day of his wrath, but those who belong to Christ will receive a reward rather than punishment. Do you belong to Christ? If so, you need not fear these final days.

Rev. 1:17

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last."

Even in great times of trouble, those who put their trust in the Lord will be able to stand.

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