

What is the Spiritual Life?



REFLECTING the
LIFE of CHRIST

Moses C. Onwubiko

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Inside Cover Page

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Our life must first proclaim the gospel to our neighbors,
if they are to give our gospel a hearing.

Regeneration

This book will be of no benefit to you, unless you are God's child. But wait. Being born into God's family is simple. It's like drinking a cup of water when you are thirsty (John 4:14). That's good news! It's easy because the means for your spiritual birth has already been provided through the sacrificial death of His uniquely born One—Jesus Christ. You can be born again right now, by wholeheartedly accepting the message of the gospel to be true. The apostle Paul summarized the gospel: "Christ died for our sins according to Scriptures...He was buried...and ...was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Jesus Christ is risen and alive. The empty tomb was verified by His disciples' undeniable testimony of His resurrection!

Jesus is who He claimed to be—the Son of God, who came in the flesh to save you. Imagine, Isaiah the Prophet prophesied the birth of Christ seven hundred years before it occurred (Isa. 7:14). The angel confirmed Isaiah's prophecy: "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Jesus Christ made a sobering claim: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). There's no other way to be born again; He's the only way to heaven. There is no other.

The apostle John concludes, "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). You may

pause and put your trust in Christ alone and be eternally saved.
“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).
If you have believed, read on.

The Necessity of Being in Fellowship

Sin of any magnitude, through word, thought or action, breaks fellowship with God and temporarily halts the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. When a believer confesses his known sin to God alone, He forgives and cleanses the believer from unknown sins and forgotten sins. This opens the gateway of the soul, causing the believer to be filled with the Holy Spirit, the Greatest Teacher of God's Word. You may want to pause and confess any known sin(s) privately to God. Scripture is clear: "If we confess our sins, *he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins* and purify us from all unrighteousness [unknown sins, plus forgotten sins]" (1 John 1:9 emphasis added).

Dedication

Dedicated
to
Wayne and Shirley Haub

I thank God for Wayne and his wife, Shirley,
whom the Lord brought into my life and ministry.
My acquaintance with them has enhanced my experiential
knowledge of the true meaning of the love of Christ.
They have demonstrated their obedience to the mandate
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, “*A new commandment
I give to you that you love one another. By this the world
will know that you are my disciples*” (John 13:34-35).
What’s more, they came to the ministry at the embryonic
stage and have, for more than eighteen years, demonstrated
their passion for the lost and destitute in every sense of the
word. They are a source of great encouragement to me
on the mission field.

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Phoebe and Priscilla were extraordinary women of old, whom the apostle Paul gave a high recommendation for their service to our Great God. Perhaps if the apostle Paul was alive today, he may have acknowledged the immense service of Debby Hagar. She and her husband, Richard Hays, have my unequal acknowledgement for their tireless work in both editing and proofreading of this book. They make a great team in the work of our Lord.

The list of acknowledgements is extensive. My gratefulness goes to my friends and partners, Bob and Dotti Smith, Lee and Patty Smith, and Elaine Brokaw. Thanks to Robb Beyer and Greg Ford for their contributions and many thanks to Sherrill Brunton (Manager—Essence Publishing) and her team for their work.

I give a standing ovation to Gloria, my wife, who works behind the scene, living a life of quietness fitting for a virtuous woman. The crowning of my gratitude goes to the Triune God, for their work on every front—salvation, indwelling and enabling us in the fulfillment of the unique plan of the church.

How blessed is the man who[se]...delight is in
the law of the Lord...He will be like a tree
firmly planted by streams of water
(Psalm 1:1-3).

Introduction

What a time! We are living in the most interesting and exciting time in human history—when the ordinary person can become extraordinary and leave footprints of a spiritual legacy “in the sands of time.” To be extraordinary, you must be an authentic Christian. Did you know a person can be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and not be an authentic Christian? Not in the way the word *Christian* was used in the first century A.D. That question may cause you to raise your eyebrow, but the word *Christian* has been overused—superficially. Theologically speaking, a believer is one who trusts in Christ’s finished work alone for salvation; for our purposes of defining an authentic Christian, we will trace back to those who invented the name. They called them “Christians” because their lifestyle reflected the life of Christ.

When unbelievers first encountered Christ’s followers after His ascension, they simply referred to them as “brethren” (Acts 2:37) or disciples—students of Jesus Christ. Believers never held any meeting to determine what they would call themselves. It was not their concern; they were only eager to imitate the life of Christ. After a long period of close observation of the disciples’ lifestyle, the pagans nicknamed them *Christians*, because they acted like Christ, which set them apart from the rest of the world.

These disciples were called Christians because they were found to be living like their Savior, Jesus Christ. Could the same be said of Christians today? This work on the spiritual life throws the question back to you: “*Who Are You?*”¹ Are you an authentic Christian? How is your spiritual life? Do you know what constitutes the spiritual life? These questions and more will be answered as we address the many aspects of the spiritual life.

Spiritual life begins with Jesus Christ. With this overarching principle, our study will take us step by step from defining the subject to examining the life of Christ in the context of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There the work will highlight some noticeable traits that set Jesus Christ apart from the rest of the world. The Gospel writers were careful to point these things out. They include, but are not limited to: passion for God’s glory and unsurpassed love for God’s Word, resulting in rapid growth in wisdom, favor with God and man.

That’s not all. The Gospels highlight Jesus’ lifestyle of obedience, humility, grace-orientation, compassion for the destitute, love, forgiveness, dependence on the Holy Spirit and prayer. This work will address the issue of how a believer can trace the life of Christ. What’s more, it will examine the ramifications of spiritual life—on a person, a family and a nation.

The spiritual life is not about joining a church and attending services on a regular basis; it is living the life of Christ. This timely subject has been divided into three parts for scrutiny. The first part answers the question, “What is spiritual life?” It examines the difference between the godly lives of the Old Testament saints and the spiritual life of believers in the time of the Church and the biblical command for believers to imitate God. Part two takes us a step further, answering the question, “Why are we indwelt by the Holy Spirit?” It casts light on the means for living the spiritual life. It draws our attention to the conflict between the sin nature and the Holy Spirit. There we scrutinize the fruit of the Holy Spirit as well as the fruit of the sin nature. We then move on to examine the

impeccable life of Christ. We also answer the question, “What does it mean to reflect the life of Christ?”

“What is your priority in life?” This question is dealt with in part three along with numerous other theological issues such as an insight into the origin of falsehood in the church, spiritual self-evaluation and the impact of obedience and disobedience—individually and nationally. The work leaves us reflecting on the question, “What is our mission in life?” and poses the daunting question, “Am I part of the problem or the solution?”

Holy Father,

Thank You for Your immense love for us. No doubt, the thought You have for us is to give us a hope and a bright future. Our bright future depends on our total obedience to Your plan for our lives. So, Father-God, open our eyes to the truth communicated in this book. Please, make the teaching alive to us through the mentorship of the Holy Spirit. These and more I ask in the wonderful name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.



PART I

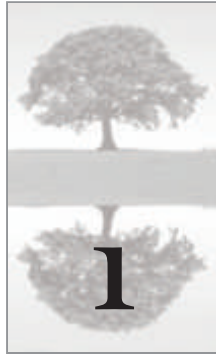
The Extraordinary Life



I hope you will follow the study objectively—with an open mind, not rushing the subject matter. The truth communicated herein, if properly understood and practiced, holds abundant blessing and maximum happiness for you.

The first part of our study examines the following:

- **What Is the Spiritual Life?**
- **Overview of the Life of Christ**



What Is the Spiritual Life?

As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, do you know what the spiritual life is about? Answering the question superficially will shortchange you from what God intends for you to learn from the study. Maybe you are one of the serious students of God's Word, who time and again has asked, "What is the spiritual life?" Spiritual life is more than just reading the Bible daily (although that is a means to it); it is more than just praying "without ceasing" (although that supports it); it is more than attending Bible studies and having books full of biblical truth (although that is a method of growth). God also mandates fellowship (Heb. 10:25). The spiritual life is allowing the Holy Spirit to manifest the life of Christ through you. One cannot live a life one knows nothing about. Agreed? In light of this, mull over the question, "Do you know what spiritual life is?"

My interaction with people around the world—Bible teachers, pastors and laypeople—has revealed a big void in their knowledge of what constitutes the spiritual life. The scope of this biblical exposition is not to judge anyone but rather to dissect

the question and answer it, giving the believer the opportunity to live in a manner honoring and glorifying to God. Our success in life as believers hangs in the balance of our understanding and living the spiritual life.

As Charles C. Ryrie put it, “People run on emotions rather than intellect in the Christian life, and instead of leading their thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, every billboard and each TV commercial leads them captive to the obedience of lust.”² Make no mistake; believers who fail to grasp the truth as taught herein and live by it will rob themselves of enormous blessings in time and eternity.

DEFINITION

Spiritual life is a means whereby a spirit-filled believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit and energized by His fruit to live like Christ. The spiritual life is determining what God requires of us, living in the sphere of His light—moment by moment—day in and day out. Scripture reminds us, “You are Light in the Lord; walk [live] as children of Light” (Eph. 5:8). What does it mean to live “as children of light”? The apostle Paul parenthetically explained “(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)” (v. 9). Observe the apostle’s reference to *fruit*—“for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness.” He references *fruit* elsewhere, “For the fruit of the Holy Spirit is...goodness” (Gal. 5:22). We will examine the subject of the fruit of the Holy Spirit as our study progresses.

The spiritual life cannot be lived by willpower,
self-determination and self-agonizing.

The spiritual life cannot be lived by willpower, self-determination and self-agonizing—not ever. It is the monopoly of the Holy Spirit. A spiritually encoded life requires divine power for its function. In the Old Testament, when God wanted things done for His glory, He provided the means—His power. Scripture is clear: “[it is] not by might [self-will] nor by power [energy of the flesh], but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). Scripture discredits any other way to live a victorious spiritual life. It is a waste of money, time and effort to buy any formulaic book on how to live the spiritual life. Scripture is our guide. The Holy Spirit is the power source. It cannot be emphasized enough. The spiritual life is not about a formula; it is all about the Holy Spirit’s empowerment. This brings up the question, how did saints of the Old Testament obey God’s law since the Holy Spirit did not indwell them?

GODLY LIFE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Observe the heading—*Godly Life in the Old Testament*. This is to differentiate the life of the Old Testament saints from the believers of the Church with respect to God’s mandates. “Be holy for I am holy” is a mandate for God’s people of all ages, but it is accomplished in different ways at different times. Both the indwelling and enabling of the Holy Spirit in spiritual living was absent until the birth of the Church. Godly men and women of the Old Testament simply lived a life of obedience to God’s law by willpower and self-determination to obey God’s law. They lived their life just as children live under the tutorship of their parents. They obeyed God in the energy of the flesh, in the same way you would have obeyed your parents, even as an unbeliever. That’s divine design. Their tutor was the Mosaic Law of “dos and don’ts.” God, in His fairness, never commanded them to do things that could only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Where a supernatural assignment was called for, He supplied the power—His power. This is the awesome wisdom of God.

Under the Old Testament system, for instance, God never mandated them to love or pray for their enemy. They were just commanded, “You shall love your neighbor” (Lev. 19:18). “Neighbor” included their own people, the Israelites, so by deduction it would be natural to hate your enemy.³ This was what was referred to and changed in the New Testament: “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:43-44). He never commanded them to forgive those who wronged them. Instead, He permitted a restitution of “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Ex. 21:24). In the New Testament “there is a setting aside of the former commandment” (Heb. 7:18). He commands, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). Thank God for the birth of the Church. If we had continued under the law, I wonder who would not be blind and toothless.

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

We live in a time of
high expectation from God.

The birth of the Church is the turning to a new page in God’s plan. Christ first announced its birth: “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). Then He announced the power engine of the church. “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). The phrase “you will receive power” was yet future, confirming the absence of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers at the time when the promise was made. Its fulfillment in Acts 2:2-5 signaled the birth of the Church and the Holy Spirit’s

indwelling and empowering of believers in Christ. This was a new phenomenon. The Spirit indwells us in order to accomplish that which the Old Testament saints could not—a replication of the life of God. Realize, this was an unprecedented time of human history. The indwelling of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in every believer had never before occurred; not until the ushering in of the Church. We live in a time of high expectation from God.

GOD’S REVELATION OF HIMSELF

Primarily, God revealed Himself in four ways. First, He revealed Himself through His handiwork (Rom. 1:20). “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the works of His hands” (Ps. 19:1). Creation causes the awareness of an unknown Being, who is bigger than things that were created. Second, He revealed Himself “in the prophets in many portions and in many ways” (Heb. 1:1). God connected His creation-revelation to His voice-revelation: “Thus says the Lord...” (2 Sam. 12:7) and “The Lord spoke to Moses...” (Num. 1:1). “The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream” (1 Kings 3:5). Third, He revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, God’s Son. “He who has seen Me has seen the Father [God]” (John 14:9).

The Son revealed Himself through His disciples (Heb. 1:2). These various means of God’s revelation—dreams, visions, face-to-face communication and through His Son—were compiled into writing, thus the written Word is God’s fourth revelation of Himself to man.

God is not finished. He wants to reveal Himself to the world through indwelling you. This is both scary and a privilege. It’s scary that a Holy God is using you and me as a reflection of Himself. It’s scary, knowing that our failure to allow Him to shine through us will incur divine discipline. It’s a privilege that He elected to use us as a vessel, whereby He reveals His goodness, love, grace, mercy, kindness, compassion, forgiving spirit and much more to mankind. “Let your light shine before men

in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

IMITATING GOD

The reason God indwells us is sobering. He commands us, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1). How can a mere mortal man mired by sin imitate a Holy God? The apostle Paul tells us how: “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you [and He certainly does], He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will *also give life to your mortal bodies through His [Holy] Spirit who indwells you*” (Rom. 8:11 emphasis added). In essence, the Holy Spirit who indwells us will quicken and give life to our spiritually dead bodies and enable us to imitate God. This is amazing news!

If you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ have to tell your neighbors, classmates, co-workers and acquaintances that you are a Christian, even though they see you on a regular basis, regrettably, this means you have failed to imitate God.

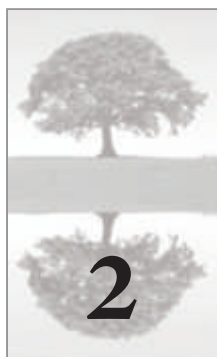
THE GOAL OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The goal of the spiritual life is God’s glory; this is the reason for your creation. He spoke through Isaiah the Prophet, “I have created [you] for My glory” (Isa. 43:7). Have you ever wondered why you are here? If many Christians knew the reason God created them, they would not “major in minors” or, as some would say, would not be “chasing rats in a burning house.” Rather, they would have an attitude of “do or die” with regard to the glorification of God. This was true of Jesus Christ in His human nature. He knew the reason He came—to glorify God the Father. Having lived a Spirit-filled life throughout His incarnation, He said, “*I glorified You on the earth*, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4 emphasis added). He pioneered the spiritual life and left “an example for you to follow in His footsteps” (1 Peter 2:21).

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS CHRIST

Begin by studying and mastering
the life of Christ.

These are big footsteps to follow; wouldn't you agree? Let there be no misunderstanding. God knew that in the flesh, you would be incapable of following in the footsteps of His Son, let alone glorifying God. Knowing you would need help, He sent His Son to indwell you. Regarding this phenomena, the apostle Paul declared, "The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but now has been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, *which is Jesus in you the hope of glory*" (Col. 1:26-27 emphasis added). This shows us the genius of God. The indwelling of Christ is God's way of saying to you, "Listen, My child: herein is the spiritual walk made easy. My Son will retrace His footsteps through you." Therein is hope—"Jesus in you, the hope of glory." It raises a big question: "How can Jesus Christ enable me to follow His footsteps?" The answer is simple. It begins by studying and mastering the life of Christ.



Overview of the *Life of Christ*

To understand the life of Christ is to solve the mystery of living the spiritual life. This endeavor requires a brand new, high-powered microscope that enables us to see clearly the slides of the biblical teaching on His life. Many Christians, having taken the wrong road, missed the footprints of the spiritual life. They have had the wrong discipleship experience. There are believers who love giving newborn babes in Christ pep talks about the spiritual life. These enthusiastic workers call their effort *discipleship*. Often, their approach is humanistic. They offer a laundry list of taboos championed to change the new believer's lifestyle. Arguably, they have good but mis-directed intentions. Our study seeks to correct this error.

By definition, a disciple is a student who subscribes to the teachings and way of life of his teacher. How can you master someone else's way of life? The answer is not hard. You do so by diligently studying and copying the individual's teachings and way of life. Is this not how the impersonators perfect their act? You cannot imitate the object of your impersonation unless you have studied them to know them inside-out.

JESUS CHRIST OUR ROLE MODEL

Jesus used His life as a role model.

You cannot live like Christ until you know Him. The question arises, “How can one know Christ?” Answer: by studying the records of His life. Jesus Christ knew this timeless principle, causing Him to do an amazing thing before He went to the cross. He presented Himself to His disciples, not only as the Messiah, but also as a role model. Having observed the life of Christ from every vantage point, four of His disciples, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, under the Holy Spirit’s superintendence, recorded accurately the life of Christ. Jesus used His life as a role model to show His disciples what constitutes the spiritual life and how one can live it. A careful observation of the Gospels reveals at least fifteen characteristics that marked the life of Christ. Anyone desiring to live like Him must follow in His footprints. There can be no shortcut to the challenge.

No. 1—PASSION FOR GOD’S GLORY

Our objective defines our focus. Jesus’ prime objective in His earthly ministry was to glorify God. It was the master key, unlocking every door during His incarnation. John the apostle, in his Gospel, painstakingly highlights God’s glory as being central in Christ’s work. The apostle was not alone. The other Gospels painted the same picture—glorification of God was of utmost importance in Jesus’ mind. This passion enveloped His lifestyle. It set Him aflame within, with an unquenchable fire moving His ministry ever forward to the glory of the Father.

He also unveiled His mission: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). He had no illusion; He knew why He was sent into the world as the God-Man. “When Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me...Then I said, “Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God”’” (Heb. 10:5, 7 NIV).

He built His work around fulfilling God’s will. He informed His listeners, “I do not seek My own will” (5:30). The statement defined His work. It protected Him from self-glorification. “I do not seek My glory” (John 8:50). He was willing to glorify God—even unto death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). Moreover, He had an appetite for fulfilling the will of God. “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me” (John 4:34). Having settled on the goal of glorifying the Father, Jesus pursued it with every fiber of His Being.

No. 2—LIVING IN THE WORD

“The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold” (Ps. 119:72). Jesus made the study of God’s Word foremost on His scale of values. “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). When one thinks of Matthew 4:4, it brings to mind Jeremiah 15:16, “Your words were found and I ate them.” Metaphorically, Jeremiah “ate up God’s Word”—he studied every bit of it. Jesus Christ lived in the Word; nothing came between Him and His study of Scripture. He not only studied the law and the prophets, He also committed them to memory, which was helpful in times of temptation. For instance, each of His replies at His temptation (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10) began with “It is written”; they were quotations from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16; and 6:13). Scripture tells us: “Your word I have treasured [stored] in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11). Jesus knew this principle and thus memorized His Father’s Word.

No. 3—GROWING BY THE WORD

Jesus, in His human nature, set His mind on spiritual growth. “Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow” (1 Peter 2:2). It is important to understand that Jesus had to grow both spiritually and physically. The Bible tells us that He was “made perfect” (Heb. 5:9). The English word translated perfect is the Greek *teleioo*, which means “to complete.”⁴ In the context of Hebrews 5:9, it simply means mature. Jesus Christ had to be matured or made complete—fully armed for the task ahead. This explains the Father’s delay in offering Him as *the* sin offering. It took thirty-three years of preparation.

There can be no increase in Godly wisdom or maturity apart from God’s Word. King Solomon tells us plainly, “The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov. 9:10). He adds, “Teach a righteous man, and he will increase his learning” (Prov. 9:9). Luke tells us that when Jesus was about twelve years old, He was found “in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). The result was that “Jesus kept increasing in wisdom” (Luke 2:52). Keep in mind, as God, “All things came into being by Him” (John 1:3). He is the omniscient One: “You know all things” (John 16:30). As Man, His knowledge was directly proportional to what He disciplined Himself to learn. The more He immersed Himself in His Father’s Word, the more His wisdom increased, and with it, His capacity to love God and man increased. This brings up the question, “Can a mere man imitate Jesus since He is God?”

JESUS AND US

My interaction with Christians around the world in my missionary travels revealed their shallow knowledge of Jesus Christ, the God-Man. Many believe that Jesus was a super human being. That assumption is a colossal error with the potential of robbing us of the challenge to imitate Him. Here’s the truth: Jesus Christ was

not a super man. He did not come down from heaven, fully armed and ready to go to the cross and accomplish the Father's plan.

Until the truth that Jesus in His human nature was a real human being sinks deep, it will be virtually impossible to live like Jesus Christ.

We experience human growth. So did He: "And the child [Jesus] continued to grow and become [physically] strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40). Human nature is marked with weariness; Jesus was "wearied with His journey" (John 4:6). It is marked with thirst; Jesus said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28), while a super man is never thirsty. Because He was truly human, He experienced sorrow: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). This is just to name a few of the human traits of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul called Him "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45). In His humanity the only difference between Jesus and us is the fact that He had no sin nature. We will fall short of His perfect obedience, but still the Bible tells us that we "must live as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6 NIV). Until the truth that Jesus in His human nature was a real human being sinks deep, it will be virtually impossible to live like Jesus Christ.

NO. 4—FAVOR WITH GOD AND MAN

Jesus' mindset was on deepening His relationship with the Father through the knowledge of His Word. Observe that "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). First in the sequence: Jesus increased in wisdom. The increase came from His daily study and application of God's Word. Second, His increased wisdom attracted God's favor. Third, He had good rapport with man. Scripture agrees with Scripture: "My son, do not forget my teaching. But let your heart keep my

commandments, For length of days and years of life, and peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and [biblical] truth leave you. Bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. *So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man*” (Prov. 3:1-4 emphasis added). Erwin Lutzer, a renowned theologian, put it this way: “We must realize that our public effectiveness is largely based on our private relationship with God.”⁵

God is good. Consider the incentives of making studying and practicing His Word your highest priority. It comes with long life, peace, favor and good standing in God’s sight and rapport with man. This is God’s way of saying, “There is no back road to the highway of My plan for your life. There *absolutely* can be no joy, peace, or divine favor apart from your love for My Word.” Anyone who thinks otherwise deceives himself and is blind to the truth of God’s Word.

No. 5—EMPOWERING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Father empowered the human nature of Jesus Christ through the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit. This empowerment is the backbone of the spiritual life. Jesus Christ, because He had no sin nature, was empowered from birth. As God, Jesus Christ did not need any empowerment, He is omnipotent (John 10:28). As man, He was powerless and thus relied on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. This explains why the Father empowered Him. “For He whom God has sent speaks the word of God; for He [God] gives the [Holy] Spirit without measure” (John 3:34). Jesus confirms, “The Spirit of God is upon Me...He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden” (Luke 4:18).

The tasks of preaching of the Gospel, setting captives free from sin, giving sight to the blind and setting free those who are downcast requires sovereign power to overrule Satan, who “is the ruler of this world” (John 12:31). He holds people captive “to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:26). The Holy Spirit provides the sov-

ereign power necessary to accomplish God's task. It explains the reason Jesus entered the ministry "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). In the same way, if you are to fulfill God's plan for your life, you must depend on the Holy Spirit. The concept will be developed as our study advances.

No. 6—UNBREAKABLE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE FATHER

The sixth characteristic observed is Jesus Christ's unbreakable fellowship with the other members of the Godhead. Fellowship is *the key* to living the spiritual life. It opens the pathway to the Holy Spirit—the power source. John the apostle stresses fellowship, both in his Gospel and his epistles. His writings unveiled continued fellowship as the secret to the Lord's success in carrying out the Father's plan. Jesus Christ's fellowship with the Father through the Holy Spirit was never interrupted. That is because of His impeccable nature, which means He had no sin nature and "committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22). This impeccability accorded His human nature constant access to the fruit of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace and much more, as we will examine later in our study. Amazingly, God has made the same power source available to us so that we can imitate His Son, Jesus Christ, who lived triumphantly in the devil's world. "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me...the Father abiding in Me [fellowship] does His works" (John 14:10).

Note: you cannot be an authentic Christian—a copycat of Jesus Christ—unless you are spiritually vigilant—that is to say, unless you are watchful of what goes in and out of your soul (Prov. 4:23), you are serious in resisting temptation (James 4:7) and consistent in seeking restoration to fellowship when you do fail (1 John 1:9). We are in a spiritual war. The sin nature is vividly alive in us—the source of inner temptation. There's a constant tug of war between Satan and the Holy Spirit to control the soul of a believer (Gal. 5:16-17). The good news is that you are the door keeper of your soul—you determine who wins the battle of

occupancy. Your volition is crucial. The more you grow in your faith, the more likely you are to stay in fellowship longer.

No. 7—OBEDIENCE

Obedience to God's Word spells out
right relationship with God.

Jesus sought to obey the Father—no matter the cost. Obedience to God's Word spells out right relationship with God and opens the gateway to receiving V.I.P. (very important person) treatment from the throne room of the Father God. Jesus Christ was completely focused on obedience to the Father's will. He lived a lifestyle of obedience. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). He fused His will to the Father's will. It is one thing to say God first; it is another thing to demonstrate it in action. Jesus Christ determined to obey the Father, even to the point of death. When He thought of the agony of the cross, He prayed, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). The apostle Paul tells us, "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." The apostle underscored what type of death Jesus died—the most demeaning, humiliating and painful death. To this end, He claimed, "I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

No. 8—HUMILITY

Jesus developed a lifestyle of humility. Humility is a mental attitude whereby one aligns His thoughts with God's, realizing that whatever the individual has become is a matter of who and what

God is—no more, no less. Jesus Christ unequivocally states, “He who humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14). How true! He is the epitome of humility. “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11). Jesus Christ, although God in the flesh, never elevated Himself. He showed us the true meaning of humility—serving others. In John’s Gospel, we clearly see humility demonstrated. Jesus Christ “poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded” (John 13:5). Ah; hold it right there.

Washing of feet is an ancient practice. It’s an unpleasant task reserved for the lowest slave in a household. The slave would take his seat at the doorway and wait for those entering the house. To truly understand this passage, we must interpret the Bible considering the time in which it was written. The condition of the road was dusty or muddy—mixed with animal refuse. Imagine the feet of one who walked miles and arrived at your doorstep. They would be filthy! In fact, by today’s standards, we would consider the disciples’ feet too filthy even for a slave to wash, much less their Master. This explained the apostle Peter’s reaction: “Lord, do you wash my feet?” (John 13:6). Today we might say, “Lord, don’t even think about it!” Peter realized the task was for a slave—not for the slave’s master. The Lord had made His point: “Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves” (Luke 22:26 ESV).

No. 9—MENTAL ATTITUDE OF GRACE

Jesus was grace oriented. Grace is an expression of a mental attitude free of ulterior motives, treating one not on the basis of their worth or status but on the basis of God’s perfect *agape* love, bestowing compassion and mercy on us the unlovely ones—”an unmerited favor.” Jesus Christ pioneered grace. The Gospel says,

“Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). It is one thing to talk about grace; it is another thing to demonstrate it. Reading through the gospels, one makes an interesting observation. The Lord never once mentioned the word *grace* in His teachings, but His life demonstrated it. On the other hand, experience has shown us that people in Christianity today who talk so much about grace often lack action. The apostle John captured Christ’s demonstration of grace in at least two instances—the woman caught in adultery and the apostle Peter’s denial of Christ.

THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY

God abhors adultery both in the Old and New Testament teachings. In the Old Testament, capital punishment was God’s mandate for one guilty of adultery—no grace—no exception. “If a man is caught having sexual relations with a married woman, then both of them must die—the man who had sex with the woman and the woman herself—so that this evil will be removed from Israel” (Deut. 22:22 ISV). The religious Jews brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus to see how our Lord would handle the case (John 8:4-6). He amazed them. Challenging them, He said, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). The response was quite astonishing: everyone but the woman left the scene without throwing a stone. Turning to the woman, the Lord asked, “Did no one condemn you?” (v. 10). “No one, Lord” was her grateful reply (v. 11). What she heard from the Lord was contrary to her expectation: “*I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more*” (v. 11 emphasis added). This was grace in action.

PETER’S DENIAL OF CHRIST

The apostle Peter had earlier testified regarding the deity of Jesus Christ, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). He knew Jesus was God in the flesh. Later Jesus was arrested and scourged by the Romans. Seeing Jesus badly brutalized beyond recognition, as per Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 52:14),

the apostle Peter changed his testimony when confronted. “He began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know the man’” (Matt. 27:73). Swearing was considered a double authentication of one’s truthfulness in their culture. That’s how far the apostle went in his denial of His Messiah. He also denied Him two other times before the cock crowed, just as Jesus has prophesied. Peter abandoned hope altogether, thinking all was lost.

Peter had denied the Lord; but the Lord did not respond in kind. The apostle Paul vividly captures the truth of the Lord’s faithfulness: “If we are faithless [as Peter was], He remains faithful [to His promise]; for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). Observe. When Jesus Christ found the apostle Peter, He did not rebuke or judge him for denying and abandoning Him at His trial. Rather, what He did was breathtaking. He invited the apostle Peter and His colleagues, “Come and have breakfast” (John 21:12). That’s grace! He had a long grace-seasoned discussion with the apostle Peter, which led to the apostle’s fellowship restoration (vv. 15-17). He then gave him a leadership role: “Shepherd My sheep” (v. 16). Are we missing something? What a trade-off! That’s what grace is about—treating one based on the character of the one giving, not on the basis of the recipient’s worth or status.

No. 10—SHARING GOD’S WORD

Jesus Christ did what Ezra the scribe did when he returned from Babylonian captivity. He “set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to practice it, *and teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel*” (Ezra 7:10 emphases added). The Lord did all these things: He gave Himself to the study of God’s Word, He practiced and preached it. “He was going around the villages teaching” (Mark 6:6). Luke recorded the same: “He was passing through from one city and village to another preaching” (Luke 13:22). Regarding the study of God’s Word, Jesus was saturated in it, and He shared it generously with all, knowing that the Word holds hope and life eternal.

Consider His encounter with His disciples on the road to Emmaus. As the Great Teacher, in just a short time, “beginning with Moses [the torah] and with all the prophets [major and minor], He explained to them [His disciples] the things concerning Him in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). He expounded the Word. He lived and taught the Word.

No. 11—MARKED BY COMPASSION

Compassion marks God’s character: “But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and merciful God. You are patient and demonstrate great loyal love and faithfulness” (Ps. 86:15 NET). Jesus Christ was a Man of compassion. It was the driving force in His dealings with people and a magnet that drew people of all ages to Him. In fact people today are still drawn to Him because of His compassion. In His encounter with sinners, His compassion shines. “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). They were helpless and hopeless. Their sad situation moved Him to plead with His disciples to “beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest [of souls]” (v. 38). Elsewhere, Mark records the Lord’s compassion in action. “And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean’” (Mark 1:40). Understand that lepers were outcast people. No one dared go close to them, let alone touch them. Jesus Christ did the opposite. “Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed’” (v. 41). It was compassion that moved Him to action.

No. 12—A MAN OF SORROW

What touched the heart of His Father touched His own heart. He was a Man of sorrow. Sorrow is the grandchild of compassion. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). A compassionate individual will not only

share the joy of others, he will share in their pain and sorrow. Isaiah the prophet called Jesus “a man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3). His sorrow was apparent at Lazarus’ grave. “When Jesus therefore saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled” (John 11:33). What caused the Lord to be deeply moved in the spirit? The weeping of others. That’s not all; “Jesus wept” (v. 35). Think of it. He knew He would resuscitate Lazarus, yet He joined them in their sorrow. Those around were moved by His genuine gesture of love: “Behold how He loved him” (v. 38). He never told anyone about His love for Lazarus; bystanders simply observed. They connected love to sorrow.

See how the Lord combined the demonstration of His love and a miracle of resuscitation to win souls to God’s Kingdom: “Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary and beheld what He had done, believed in Him” (John 11:45). Later He emphasized the power of love. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). The irony is that everyone can love, but not everyone can duplicate Christ’s selfless love. If and when you manifest His love, “all men will know that you are [His disciple]” (v. 35). Your life must preach the Gospel before your neighbor can give your message a hearing. This is a biblical principle—you are *the fifth Gospel* (2 Cor. 3:2-3).

No. 13—LOVE

Love characterized Jesus Christ in every sense. Don’t be confused. Recall, Jesus in His human nature was not a super man. As God, He “is love” (1 John 4:8), but as Man, He mastered the application of *agape* love, the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Knowing that the same fruit was available to His disciples, His challenge was simple: “Love one another, even as I have loved you” (John 13:34). How did He reach the pinnacle of loving God and man with such intensity? The answer may surprise you.

You cannot have a genuine love for others...
until you love God more than life itself.

Jesus Christ first had an unparalleled love for the Father—the driving force for His love for others. He hinted at this in His Sermon on the Mount: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37 NIV). When your life is centered around your personal love for God, it will move you to “love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 38). You cannot have a genuine love for others—spouse, family members, co-workers and friends—until you love God more than life itself. Jesus’s love goes in two directions, toward His enemies and His friends.

CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS ENEMIES

It’s easy to love those you admire; it’s a nightmare to love your enemy. But it wasn’t for Jesus, who mandated, “Love your enemies” (Matt 5:44). He extended His love even to one of the soldiers who arrested Him. When the apostle Peter cut his ear off in retaliation, “Jesus answered and said, ‘Stop! No more of this.’ And He touched his ear and healed him” (Luke 22:51). That’s love!

CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS DISCIPLES

Jesus had a two-fold love for His disciples. He had a heartfelt love for those who obeyed Him. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him’” (John 14:23). He also had an unfailing love, even when His disciples failed Him by abandoning Him. “He himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5 and Deut. 31:8).

Action reveals love. Love without action is not love at all; it is like the empty words of a user—the ploy of “I love you because I want something from you.” Jesus Christ loved the Father: “I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:31). His love for God moved Him to action: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). The apostle John later challenged God’s children:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. *And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.* If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18 NIV emphasis added).

How can an ordinary believer show his love for his brother and therefore God? By giving from what he has. Remember, in Matthew 10:42 there is a reward for giving just a cup of cold water. God gives to us and we are to give from what we have, be it little or plenty. Not to do so demonstrates that you have no love for your brothers and sisters and *ultimately* no love for God who first gave to us.

No. 14—SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ stressed the importance of forgiveness (Matt. 6:12-15). There He taught that lack of forgiveness will hinder a believer receiving forgiveness from the Father, thus interrupting one’s spiritual life. “If you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive you your transgressions” (v. 15; see also 18:21-35). Lack of forgiveness means one is harboring iniquity in the heart. This is a spiritual hazard. Scripture is clear: “If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18 NLT). Jesus not only taught His followers to forgive, He demonstrated it. He forgave,

even those who crucified Him: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

No. 15—PRAYER WARRIOR

Prayer was central in Jesus’s life and ministry. The Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John gave many accounts of His lifestyle of prayer. In Luke’s account, it is noted that Jesus had a long night prayer vigil with His Father before He assembled His team. “He went off to the mountain to pray, and *He spent the whole night in prayer to God*. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles” (Luke 6:12-13 emphasis added). Mark informs us that Jesus started His day with prayer: “In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there” (Mark 1:35). Matthew tells us that He ended His day’s work with prayer. “After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone” (Matt. 14:23).

In times of crisis, He prayed. For instance, when John the Baptist was beheaded, “He withdrew to a lonely place by Himself” (14:13). When He faced death on the cross, “being in agony He was praying fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44). When He thought of the future ministry of His disciples and their suffering, He offered what’s known today as the High Priestly prayer (John 17). There He prayed for Himself, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee” (v. 1). He prayed for His disciples, “keep them from the evil one” (v. 15).

His disciples were so intrigued, they asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). In Matthew, Jesus taught them a model for prayer (Matt. 6:1-15). It is not for recitation as many churches do today. Nowhere did the apostles recite it in their prayer meetings. Rather, it’s a model on how to approach God in prayer.

Talking to His Father at the end of His earthly ministry, He

said, “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4). His work was crowned with glory! He has empowered us to mirror His life on earth. How can this be accomplished? The answer awaits us in the next section of our study.

Father, may Your Word be alive to us. In the wonderful name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.



PART II

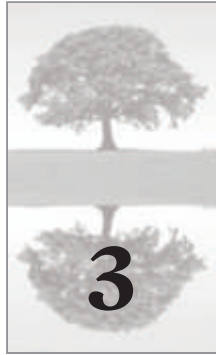
The Ministry of the Holy Spirit



Part Two answers the question, “How can a Christian truly live the spiritual life and glorify God to the maximum?” It underscores the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the core power source for living the spiritual life.

It contains the following topics:

- **Why Are You Indwelt by the Holy Spirit?**
- **What Is the Means for Living the Spiritual Life?**
- **Understanding the Conflict Between the Sin Nature and the Holy Spirit**
- **The Impeccable Life of Christ**
- **Reflecting the Life of Christ**



Why Are You Indwelt by the Holy Spirit?

The quest begins here “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep” the spiritual life is (Eph. 3:18 NIV). The answer to our question, “Why are you indwelt by God’s Spirit?” ought not to be taken lightly. In Christianity today, many have missed one opportunity after another to impact their world for Christ. Sadly, they live their life unaware of what God has done for them at salvation and have no knowledge as to why after salvation He gave them the indwelling of Himself, His Son and His Holy Spirit. Pause for a moment. Have you honestly asked yourself, “Why did God elect to have His Spirit indwell me? What is His purpose in doing that and what is my purpose in life?”

Satan continues to blindfold the weak. When the question of why the Holy Spirit indwells believers is asked, surprisingly, often the answers do not relate to God’s purpose. Some respond, “The Holy Spirit indwells me so that He can give me the power

to speak in tongues.” Others answer, “The Holy Spirit’s indwelling empowers me to perform miracles.” These two answers focus on the temporary spectacular gifts of the Holy Spirit. This subject has received attention in *The Spiritual Gift of Tongues*⁶ and *Signs and Wonders*.⁷ I invite you to read them, or reread them if necessary.

There’s a reason why God elects to allow His Spirit to indwell you. Time is running out. You ought not allow Satan to rob you of God’s richest blessing due to failure to function in the Holy Spirit’s empowerment. The truth of the matter is we cannot relate to the Holy Spirit’s ministry until we grasp the fundamental truth regarding His indwelling. As we mentioned in chapter one, this phenomenon was new. No one, repeat, no one, in all of human history until the Church, had experienced the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Some have asked, “Why is there a sudden shift in the unique plan of God?” The apostle Paul “got it.” He understood the reason for the shift in God’s plan, and His passion was that believers of his day and beyond would become conscious of the opportunity God has given them. His prayer contains the answer to our question:

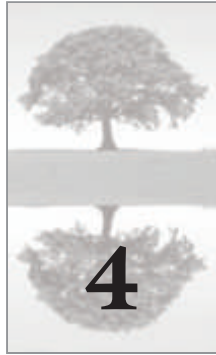
“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power *through His Spirit* in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is *the breadth and length and height and depth*, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:14-19 emphasis added).

There we have it in black and white—a heartfelt prayer of the great apostle. The sublime truth is when you comprehend “the

breadth and length and height and depth,” when you come “to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,” your world will flip upside down. Why does the Holy Spirit indwell you? The answer will be covered extensively in my upcoming book, *The Dynamic Power of the Holy Spirit*.⁸ That said, here are three reasons, which are tailored for this study. The Holy Spirit indwells you:

- For the preparation of your body as a temple so that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit Himself may indwell you. “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1 Cor. 3:16; Col. 1:27).
- That He may empower you to fulfill God’s plan for your life. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).
- That He may through you produce His fruit and thus enable you to reflect the life of Christ. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22).

Having nailed down three major reasons why the Holy Spirit indwells us, the task confronting us is to determine how this God-ordained means for the execution of His plan in the devil’s world actually works in real life.



What Is the Means for Living the Spiritual Life?

God in His infinite wisdom has provided us with a dual power source for living the spiritual life: the power of the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit.

THE WORD

Scripture declares, “For the word of God is living, and powerful” (Heb. 4:12 KJ2000). Jesus Christ is dogmatic: “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and [by means of biblical] truth” (John 4:24). There can be no true worship of God apart from the knowledge and presence of His Word in the soul. God’s Word is God’s language; through it we worship. That’s why Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, devoted His entire life to learning God’s Word. By accumulating the Word—“the mind of Christ”—in your soul (1 Cor. 2:16), you would come to reason like Jesus. God’s Word also helps you to

keep from sinning. “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11 ESV).

Through God’s Word, we are able to formulate thoughts compatible with His thoughts and take actions He approves. We call this spiritual capacity. The Psalmist asks a question, then answers it: “How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word” (Ps. 119:9 NIV). When you spend ample time in learning and putting God’s Word into practice, the result is spiritual capacity. It is the result of being edified by the Word—it makes you “complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17 ESV). Spiritual capacity defines your worship and service to God. The Word of God matures you to know and enables you to perform God’s will. The Bible tells us, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17 ESV).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the power for understanding the Word. “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8 RSV). “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit” (John 4:24). What Jesus said demands every worshipper’s undivided attention: “If you wish to worship God, you must do so only by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Apart from the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit, there can be no true worship in the Church Age. God has relocated temple worship. Our souls are the worship center, and “we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16). He indwells us so we might fellowship with Him.

It will be of great benefit to you if you take time to carefully study the following diagrams, drawn in light of a thorough scrutiny of Scripture, which speaks of the human “spirit...soul and body” (1 Thess. 5:23). Scholars and Bible teachers have wrestled with the relationships between soul and spirit, mind and

spirit, and even heart. However that is not within the scope of this work. The task here is to shed light on the relation between the body and soul. There is a separation between the two. Scripture makes distinctions.

THE BODY

The body came from God in the creation of man in the garden. “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground” (Gen. 2:7). Job said, “I too was formed from the clay” (Job. 33:6). The body is made up of the chemicals of the soil. There are many other intricate parts and pieces involved in the wonderful work of God. King David sang, “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.” (Ps. 139:13-14). Observe David’s reaction: “My soul knows it well.” His soul was amazed at how God designed his body.

Keep in mind, man’s body in the garden was created with no defect or sin nature—it was perfect (Gen. 1:31). Sin entered the body when man sinned against God. Simultaneously, sin filled man’s soul and makes worship of a Holy God impossible. That said, let us consider four things regarding your body as a believer in Christ.

- Your body has a “mortal nature”—it cannot inherit God’s Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50, 53).
- Sin indwells your body. “Sin...dwells in me” (Rom. 7:17).
- God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit indwell your body (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Col. 1:27).
- Upon death, the body returns to the chemicals of the soil and the soul-spirit returns to God. “The dust [the body] returns to the earth as it was [originally], and the life’s breathe returns to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7).

THE UNBELIEVER

(Slave to the Sin Nature)

THE BODY

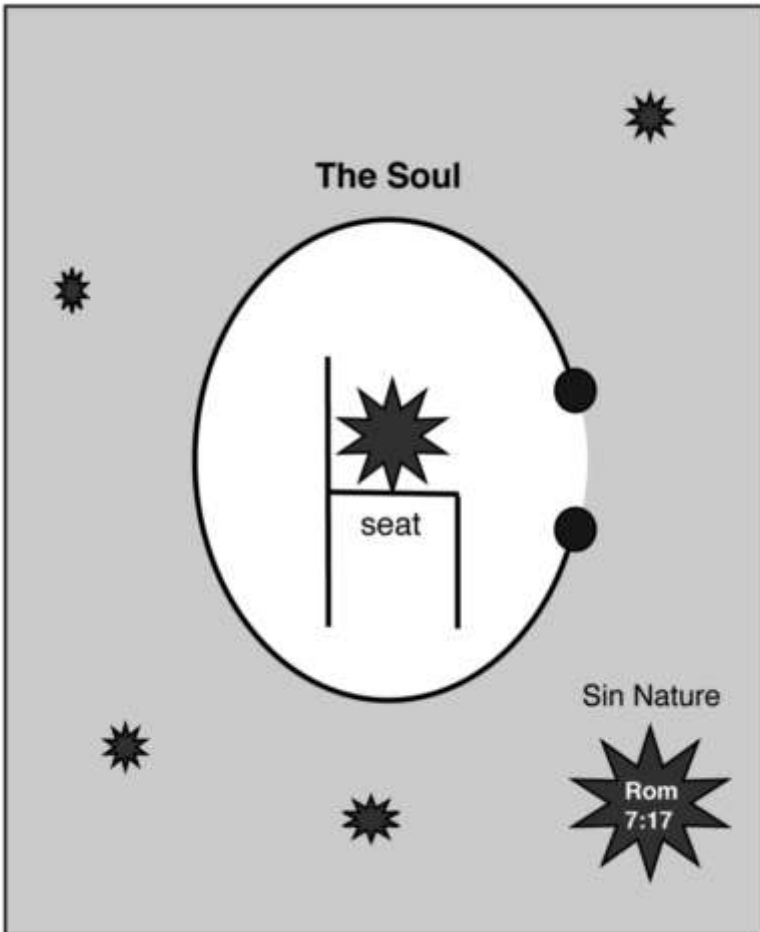


DIAGRAM NO. 1

THE BELIEVER

(Temple of God)

THE BODY

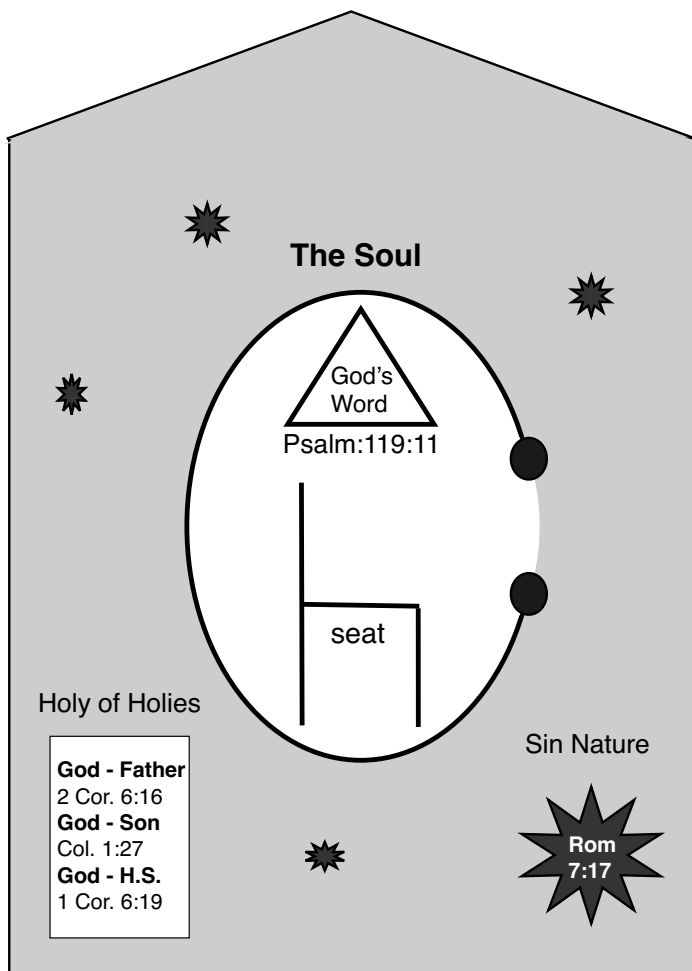


DIAGRAM NO. 2

THE SOUL

The soul is the real man. God took two steps in the creation of man. First, He created the body. “The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground.” Secondly, God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [soul-life]; and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). It was “the breath of life” that made man a “living being.” With regard to the worldwide flood, Moses wrote, “All that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died” (Gen. 7:22). Job claims, “The breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). The soul-life sustains the body. Its absence leaves the body empty. The soul consists of the will, mind and intellect. Sometimes, soul is used interchangeably with the word *heart*. “Watch over *your heart* with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23 emphasis added). “I have stored up your word in *my heart*, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11 ESV emphasis added). That covers the brief explanation of the soul.

All functions, spiritual or carnal,
take place in the soul.

Bury this vital point in your soul: all functions, spiritual or carnal, take place in the soul. The body is simply a house. The apostle Paul refers to our body as a tent: “For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands” (2 Cor. 5:1 NLT). The source of our condemnation is not what goes on in the body; it is what occurs in the soul or the heart. Jesus Christ made the distinction: “It’s not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart” (Mark. 7:15 NLT).

BODY AND SOUL DIAGRAMS

In light of this, diagrams one and two contrast the unbeliever and the believer. They are used to illustrate our points. It will benefit you to re-examine the elements of the drawings. Immediately you can see the dramatic changes made in the believer.

- **The Square** illustrates the unbeliever's body, indwelt by the sin nature. Without the Holy Spirit, the unbeliever is a slave to sin.
- **The Temple** represents the believer's body, consisting of a temple of God—"Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19)—and also the sin nature: "sin...dwells in me" (Rom. 7:17)
- **The Circle** represents the believer's soul. It consists of a chair (seat of operation), a triangle (a symbol for God's Word) and a gate.

Now, picture yourself in a house with a living room and a special room for an office. In the office are your library, computer, phone and other things pertaining to office work. It is your work station. Any time you need some kind of work done, you go to the office. When the task is completed, you return to your living room. Similarly, the body is like a living room, where the Holy Spirit and the sin nature permanently dwell. The Holy Spirit is said to "be with you forever" (John 14:16). The circle, your soul, is like an office where both the sin nature and the Holy Spirit want to gain access and take command.

Only one worker, the sin nature or the Holy Spirit, occupies the soul at any given time. They do not work together in one place—they work independently. When the Holy Spirit occupies the soul, the believer is said to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 5:18); and when sin occupies it, the believer is said to be filled with sin. "Ananias, why has Satan *filled your heart* to lie to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3 emphasis added). Satan does not

indwell a believer; but he operates through the influence of the sin nature. The tug of war between who enters the soul creates a great tension in the soul.



Understanding the Conflict Between the Sin Nature and the Holy Spirit

Do you know why evil often overcomes you to do things contrary to God's mandate? The apostle Paul was frustrated. "For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (Rom. 7:17). The apostle was honest. He gave us a picture of the conflict of the soul. His portrayal underscores the spiritual battle that has been ongoing since Adam's original sin in the Garden of Eden. Your soul is a war zone. The apostle Peter warned, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8 ESV). The devouring takes place in the soul. Elsewhere believers are admonished, "Do not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:27). This study will enable us all to better defend our ground in this spiritual conflict.

BATTLE TO CONTROL THE SOUL

THE BODY

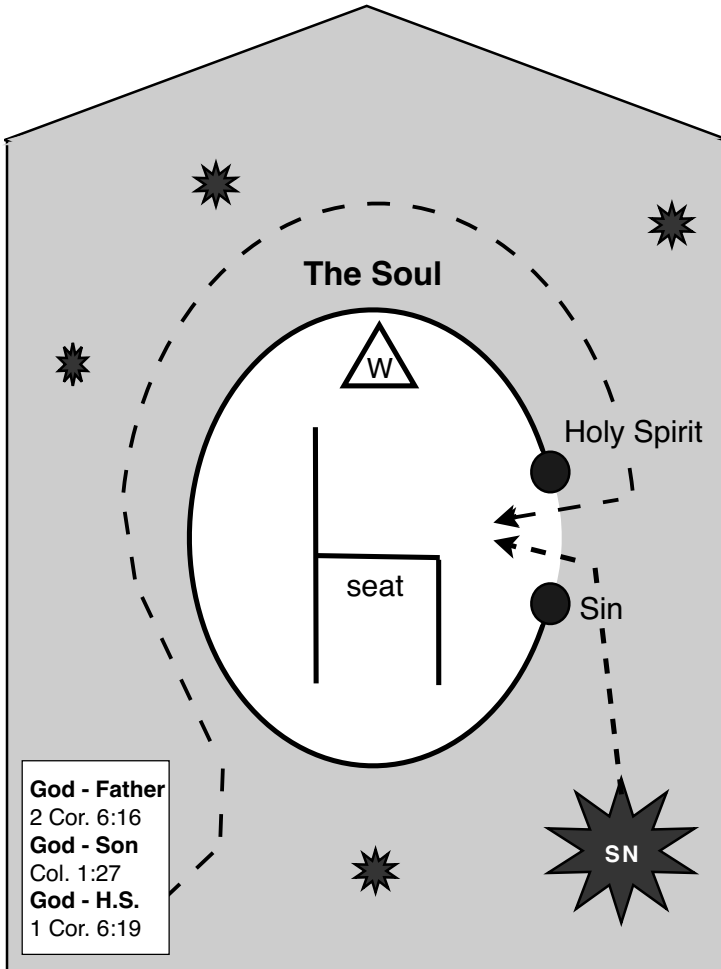


DIAGRAM NO. 3

Examine the third diagram carefully. Picture the Holy Spirit at the gate of your soul and the sin nature at the same entrance. Bear in mind, the devil cannot indwell a believer but can operate in the believer's soul through the influence of the sin nature. He feeds our thoughts with evil. Not only does he work on the mind but on our eyes and ears as well. He desires occupancy of the soul. Outside of the soul, Satan via the sin nature is powerless; he cannot cause you to sin against God. In the same way, the Holy Spirit's operation is halted until He assumes control or fills the soul of the believer. It cannot be stressed enough: both the Holy Spirit and the sin nature want access to your soul. Listen to the apostle Paul:

“So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions” (Gal. 5:16-17 NLT).

Both the Holy Spirit and the sin nature
want access to your soul.

Do we understand the seriousness of the spiritual warfare? Satan wants to ruin our spiritual life. He wants to dismantle the command post of our souls and make us miserable. It explains the conflict between “the sinful nature” and “the Spirit.” They both want entrance into the soul, in order to occupy the seat of operation. Wait. The good news is that every believer is in charge of his soul. He opens the gate of his soul to whomever he wishes—the sinful nature or the Holy Spirit. You are in charge of

what comes in and out of your soul. King Solomon admonishes, “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (Prov. 4:23 NLT). This teaching agrees with all the imperatives of command in Scripture—the “Do not...” passages (Eph. 4:27, 30; 1 Thess. 5:19 etc.)

THE FRUIT OF THE SINFUL NATURE

Understanding and mastering this section is critical because it holds an important key for unlocking the mystery of spiritual failures. Christians nowadays seldom talk about the fruit of the sinful nature. Some have not even heard there’s such a thing as fruit of the sinful nature. It is what the apostle Paul describes in Galatians as “the deeds of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19), which are these: “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you.” Many think that all there is to talk about is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Some even react negatively when the issue is discussed, saying, “We are not interested in any teaching about Satan; teach us more about the power of the Holy Spirit. We want to feel His power.” By developing such an attitude toward the whole realm of God’s Word, many have had their spiritual boat wrecked by the devil, the one whose devious schemes they failed to understand. We must know the schemes of our enemy to defeat him. “No advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11).

SIN CONTROLS THE SOUL

THE BODY

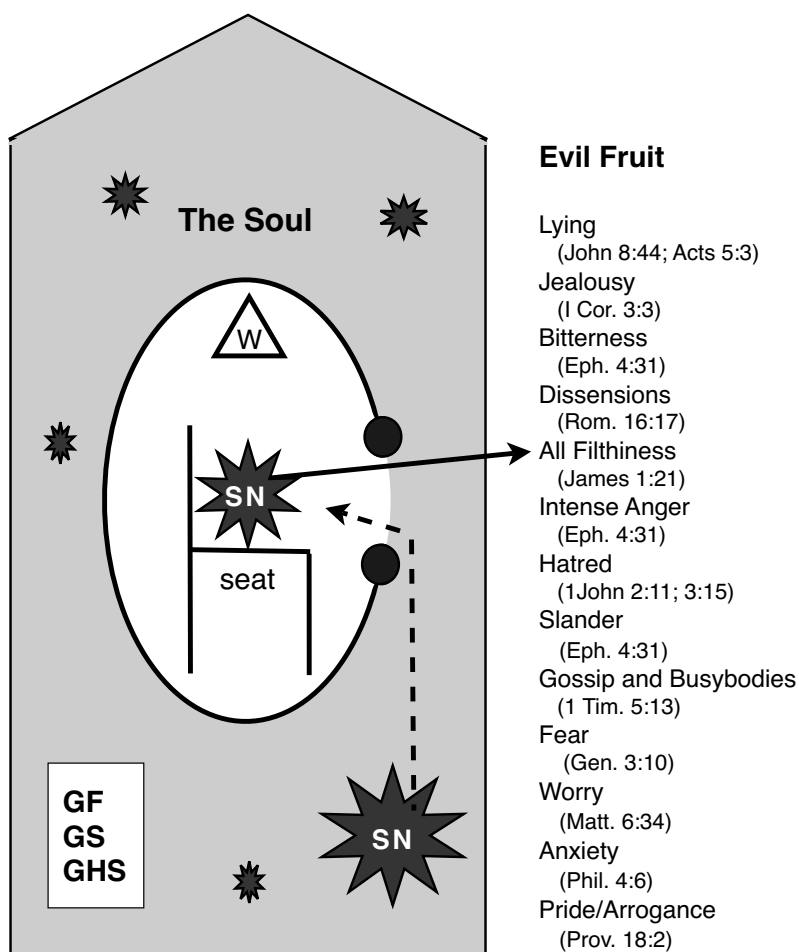


DIAGRAM No. 4

SATAN'S OBJECTIVE

Satan's primary objective is defined as: to hinder the Holy Spirit's ministry in your life and thus render you powerless and worthless in the spiritual arena. Launching an unceasing battle to control your soul, Satan uses the sinful nature as a vehicle. He uses it to send a barrage of assaults on your mind, eyes and ears, feeding you with thoughts unfit for holiness. If he captures the soul, the believer ceases to function under the influential power of the Holy Spirit. At that juncture, the stored Word in your soul is frozen—totally inactive (because it takes the H.S. to access it). The believer becomes powerless and irrational. He cannot do a single act of good of intrinsic value, which is the good done through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is carnal.

Whatever unbelievers can do,
believers can duplicate under the
influential power of the sinful nature.

The apostle Paul vividly describes believers under the influential power of the sinful nature. Read this carefully: "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still *worldly—mere infants in Christ* (1 Cor. 3:1 NIV emphasis added). Note whom the Apostle was addressing—Christians! The idea that born-again believers cannot bear worldly fruit is foreign to Scripture. Whatever unbelievers can do, believers can duplicate under the influential power of the sinful nature. King David in the Old Testament was a perfect example that believers given to the control of the sinful nature can shock themselves and those in their periphery. Ananias and Sapphira are an example from the Church Age. The apostle Peter's question was pointed: "Why has *Satan filled your*

heart [soul] to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (Acts 5:3 emphasis added). Ananias couldn’t lie to the Holy Spirit until his soul was occupied or filled with the sinful nature.

THE CARNAL CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS

Just as the sinful nature filled the soul of Ananias, inducing him to lie to the Holy Spirit, so also the Corinthian believers lived under the influential power of the sinful nature. The Apostle could not speak to them “as people who live by the Spirit” or better, as people who were “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Many of the church members were carnal believers to the core. They had been lured by “the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:26). Satan had blocked the Corinthians from living the spiritual life. He held them captive to do his will even though they were still church-goers. One can be an active church member, as the Corinthian believers were, and still be “held captive by him to do his will.”

The apostle Paul goes on to list some of the fruit of their sinful nature: “For you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren’t you living like people of the world?” (1 Cor. 3:3 NLT). The two fruit mentioned in the passage, *jealousy* and *quarreling*, are just a tip of the iceberg compared to the other fruit, such as judging of other believers (1 Cor. 4:5), arrogance (v. 18), incestuous behavior (5:1-5), lawsuits (6:1-7), participating in prostitution (6:15-16), immorality (v. 18), or the marriage dilemma (7:13-17). The list goes on and on. What is the antithesis of this evil fruit?

THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Years back a dedicated God-loving servant, who had a big congregation in Amsterdam, hosted me for a national conference. What he learned there was such an eye-opener for him that he asked if he could visit me in America. I gladly told him, “Yes!”

HOLY SPIRIT FILLS THE SOUL

(Abiding in Christ)

THE BODY

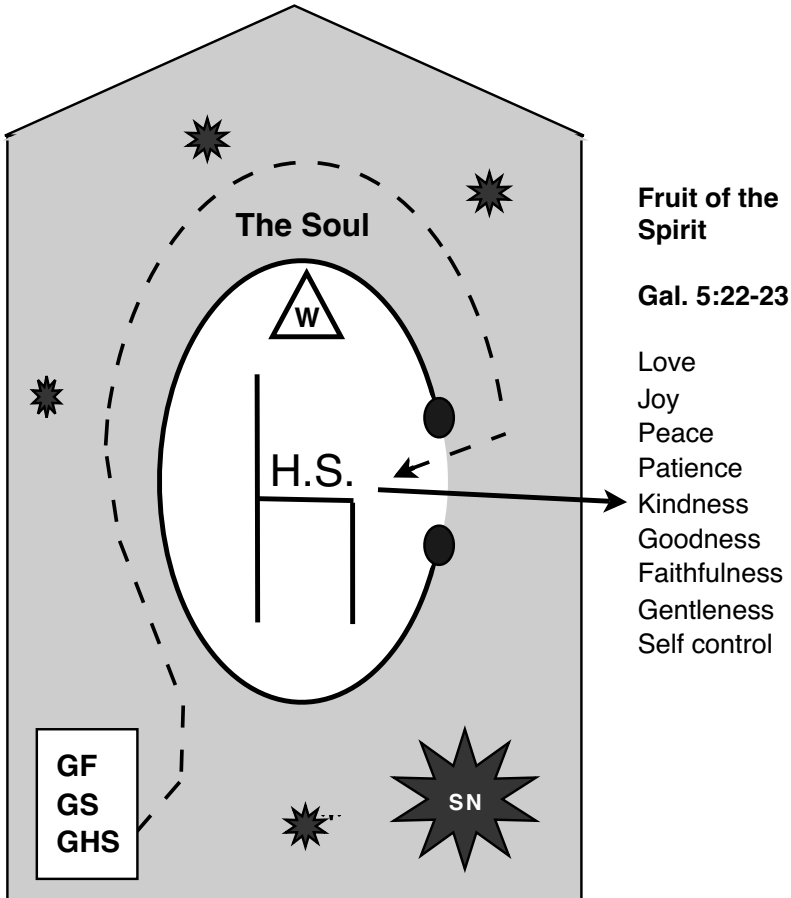


DIAGRAM NO. 5

He took my offer and came with a notebook full of questions. We spent the whole day in my office handling those questions—one by one. When we were finished, the truth of God’s Word hit him right between the eyes. On our way back to his hotel, with excitement, he phoned his pastor friend in Australia and said to him, “Brother, listen: there comes a time in everyone’s ministry that one needs to sit down and reexamine what he thinks he knows and practices....”

Another minister, a director of the pastors’ alliance in Zambia had a similar reaction. As my host, he added his name to the roster as a co-speaker. After my first section, he came to me and said, “I would prefer to give you more time; take my allotted speaking times.” At the end of the conference, he stood before everyone. He took his Bible, put it under his arm and said, “It’s amazing how we can carry our Bible around for years and don’t really know the enormous truth it contains....” The challenge is to pick up your Bible and open it as we reexamine together the sayings of the prophets, “Thus says the Lord....”

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many have majored in traditions
instead of the infallible Word of God.

We have two important questions in this portion of our study. First, what actually does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Second, what happens when one is filled with the Holy Spirit? The answers to these questions have eluded many Christians, and consequently they have missed the mark of a successful spiritual life. If you pause long enough to examine some practices in

churches today in light of what the Bible teaches, you will understand the reason why many have drifted away from God's plan for the Church. One obvious reason is they have not thoroughly examined God's Word. Many have majored in traditions instead of the infallible Word of God. Some have become hard headed, so to say, refusing to adjust, fearing adjustment to the truth may cause their denominational foundation to crumble. It's better for a faulty foundation to tumble now than to have Jesus Christ, the Master Builder, demolish it later with calamitous consequences. Now, to answer the two questions about the filling of the Holy Spirit and its result.

FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

It's of paramount importance to state what the filling of the Holy Spirit is not. It is not speaking in tongues. As shocking as this may be to some, let us open the Scripture together. There are about eighteen passages regarding "the filling of" or "being full of" the Holy Spirit. Of these Scripture citations, about eight of them were before Pentecost. In Exodus 31:3, we read, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship." In this passage, Bezalel did not speak in tongues. Elsewhere we read, "I am filled with power—with the Spirit of the Lord—and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act, even to Israel his sin" (Mic. 3:8). Nowhere in these Old Testament passages did either Bezalel or Micah the prophet speak in tongues, though both were filled with the Spirit.

Opening the New Testament, there are numerous passages. A prophecy was made about John the Baptist that he "will be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:35). Elizabeth "was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41). Her husband, Zacharias, also "was filled with the Holy Spirit" (1:67). What's more, Jesus Christ was "full of [filled with] the Holy Spirit" (4:1). They had no speaking in tongues experience. Only in Acts 2:4 do we read of both the filling of the Holy Spirit and speaking in foreign lan-

guages occurring simultaneously. “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [known languages], as the Spirit was giving them utterance.” Thereafter, on many occasions, Christ’s followers were filled with the Holy Spirit with no tongues experience.

The apostle Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit” when he addressed the religious elders and scribes of Israel (Acts 4:8). The disciples were filled when they had gathered to pray after being persecuted: “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were *all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness*” (Acts 4:31 emphasis added). The apostle Paul was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:9). Other passages abound, (Acts 6:5; 7:55; 13:52; 11:24). In these recorded passages, there was no speaking in tongues experience. To say that the filling of the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues is to allege that Christ spoke in tongues—for He was also filled with the Holy Spirit. If the filling of the Holy Spirit is not speaking tongues, then what is it?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT?

It simply means that the Holy Spirit has taken total occupancy of the believer’s soul, providing divine assets that enable the believer to fulfill God’s plan. When filled, the Holy Spirit helps us recall God’s Word stored in our souls, provides insight into God’s will—ultimately enabling us to produce the Life of Christ. Remember, both the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit reside in the believer’s body. They only accomplish their task when they independently (one or the other) occupy the soul of the believer. Remember, there’s only one occupant at any given time. The soul is never unoccupied, and there’s no neutrality in the spiritual life. It is absolute—one is 100 percent filled with the sin nature or 100 percent filled with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit enters the soul, He is poised to enable us to carry out

God's plan with divine power. "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts. 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain'" (Zech. 4:6-7). Mighty mountains refer to obstacles in God's program.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BELIEVER IS FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Let us examine Scripture together and uncover the result of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind, divine work requires divine power—no exceptions. God through His Spirit supplies believers with divine tools to accomplish His work. For instance, when Bezalel "was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ex. 31:3), it was to provide him with God's wisdom, divine knowledge and understanding in "artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze" (v. 4). When Micah the prophet was filled with the Holy Spirit, it was to provide him boldness and courage to speak truth to Israel (Mic. 3:8). Remember the apostle Peter, the *commander*. Without the Holy Spirit's influence, he categorically denied knowing Jesus—ever. It was the filling of the Holy Spirit that changed everything. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter boldly and fearlessly declared the gospel, resulting in 3,000 souls coming to Christ in one day (Acts 2:4, 14-41).

Divine work requires divine power.

The same influential power experience was true of the saints. "And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to *speak the word of God with boldness*" (Acts 4:31 emphasis added). In the same way when you scrutinize other

passages, you discover God working through ordinary men and women to produce an extraordinary outcome. Here we have an example from the book of Acts.

“Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ‘You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.’ Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand” (Acts 13:9-11 NIV 1984).

Observe five things. First, the apostle was filled with the Holy Spirit (13:9). Second, he boldly challenged Elymas (v. 10). Third, he let Elymas know that it was the Lord who was against him (v. 11). Fourth, he pronounced judgment (v. 11). Fifth, immediately the pronouncement came true (v.11). Amazing! That’s the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul.

FOCUSING ON THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I suggest you go back and reexamine the fifth diagram. It is an illustration of one aspect of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. Other ministry, as we have noted, includes, but is not limited to: supply of wisdom, boldness, courage, knowledge and more. He manifests these spiritual assets only when the believer is filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit. When one is filled with the Holy Spirit, one enjoys the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (discipline). One needs this fruit to live a holy life, reflecting the life of Christ.



The Impeccable Life of Christ

We need to do three things before tackling this exciting section of our study. First, erase any thought that Jesus was superhuman. His human nature was like our own, possessing soul (John 12:27), human spirit (John 13:21; 19:30) and body (1 Peter 2:24). Second, dive into the lesson with your undivided attention. Study it as if your life depends on the information, as your spiritual life certainly does!

Third, approach the work with an inquisitive mind, asking questions such as these: If Jesus was truly human, in His incarnation, how did He live a perfect life? Is it possible to truly imitate Christ as the apostle Paul admonishes, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1 GW)? Understanding this chapter is critical to unlocking the gate of living the spiritual life. Learn the secret of Christ’s triumphant living. It’s your life!

Father, please recall the prayer of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17). So set us apart by means of Your truth. In His name. Amen.

THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRIST

Gazing into the unique plan of God requires one to consider the council of the Triune God. In this eternal council, the Father is the Chief Architect, the Son is the Master Builder and the Holy Spirit is the Chief Power Provider. This unique division of labor is unchangeable. “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89). The Son was and still is the only way of obtaining salvation: “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Salvation in Yahweh (the Lord Jesus Christ) can be traced back to Adam and Eve, who put their faith in Him (Gen. 3:15; see 4:1, 25). The same was true of Abraham. He “believed the Lord [Yahweh/Jesus Christ], and it was credited to him as righteousness” (15:6 ISV)—“Faith alone in Christ alone.”

The Holy Spirit was, and still is the source of power, wisdom, guidance and more for the fulfillment of the Father’s plan. It was applicable in both Testaments—Old and New. We noted how God gave Bezalel an assignment and filled him with the Holy Spirit (Ex. 31:3). It was true of a handful of people God used in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the Spirit’s role was unchanged. He filled John the Baptist and empowered Him. He did the same with Jesus. He empowered Him. Paul Enns confirmed, “At Jesus’ Baptism, the Holy Spirit came upon Him to endue Him with power for His public ministry.”⁹ We should not miss this. Reflect on this question: why did Jesus read Isaiah 61:1 at the onset of His ministry?

THE IMPECCABLE LIFE OF CHRIST

THE BODY

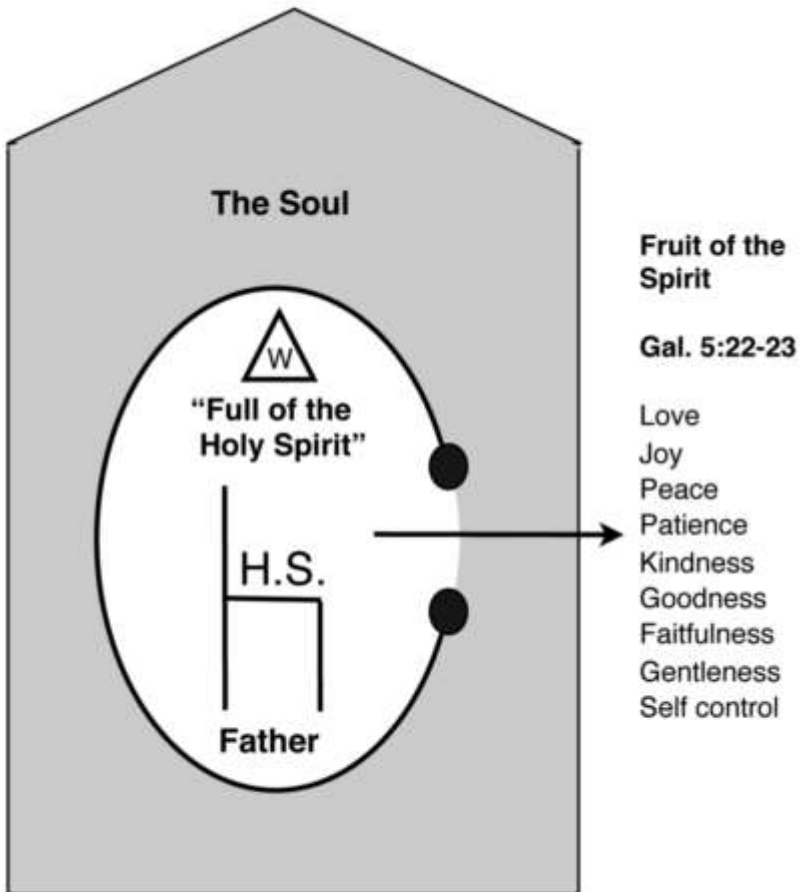


DIAGRAM NO. 6

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18; see Isa. 61:1 NET)

To know Christ and copy Him
is to live the spiritual life.

Jesus Christ, in His humanity, lived impeccably, honoring His heavenly Father at every turn and crossroad of His life on planet earth. He is our role model and the pioneer of the spiritual life. To know Christ and copy Him is to live the spiritual life. He has set the bar of the spiritual life, leaving His followers with footprints in “the sands of time” to guide them. How did Jesus live a life of impeccability without a misstep? There are several reasons:

1. As the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), Jesus was born perfect with no sin nature.
2. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit from day one of His incarnation and never lost fellowship with the Holy Spirit and the Father—not once.
3. He stored the Father’s Word in His soul: “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11 ESV).
4. He kept His eyes on the Father’s plan. “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34).

5. He relied on His Father. “I can do nothing on my own accord”; “the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 5:30 ISV; 14:10 ESV).
6. His eyes were on the prize. “Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2).
7. God’s Word was His delight. “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).
8. He set His mind on glorifying His Father—never on Himself. “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing” and “have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do” (John 8:54; 17:4 NIV)
9. He kept His knees bent at the altar of prayer. “At evening He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet” (Luke 21:37; see also 22:39).

In part one of our study, we noted fifteen traits in the life of Christ. You may want to review those traits and review the sixth diagram closely. Observe that His body contains no sin nature. It shows the indwelling of the Father and the Holy Spirit in the soul of Jesus Christ. The uniqueness of the indwelling was due to the absence of the sinful nature. Jesus constantly made references to the Father indwelling Him: “The Father is in me, and I in the Father” (John 10:38; see also 14:10, 11). The fellowship and rapport between the Godhead undergirded the spiritual life of Christ. His perfect life is the role model for our spiritual life. Graciously, God has accorded us the same assets that advanced His Son to maximum glorification of the Father. This brings us to the question, what does it mean to reflect the life of Christ?



Reflecting the Life of Christ

We've arrived at the epicenter of our study. Chapter Seven zeroes in on one important question: "How can an ordinary believer reflect the perfect life of Christ?" Many have tried but failed miserably in the struggle to live the spiritual life. A good number have become discouraged and abandoned their effort altogether, claiming, "Living the spiritual life is not possible." It breaks my heart whenever I meet believers who have become casualties on the battlefield. Let me be personal. Are you truly reflecting the life of Christ? Can the traces of His character as delineated in Chapter Two be found in you? God is "patiently waiting to be gracious to you" (Isa. 30:18)

How can an ordinary believer
reflect the perfect life of Christ?

Keep in mind, you are “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17) and “your life is hidden in Christ” (Col. 3:3). The apostle Paul wrote, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Think of it: “we were all baptized into one body”—the body of Christ. Some fellow Christians claim that “baptism of the Holy Spirit” is speaking in tongues, based on 1 Cor. 12:13. That’s an improper interpretation of Scripture.

OVERCOMING A FALSE CONCEPT OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

In 1902 it was written that “Evils must be reaped in the next generation should the church fail to arise to her responsibility as to the teaching of the unadulterated Word of God in the present one.”¹⁰ We are long past the next generation of 1902. I am afraid that the Church may already be at the harvest. When one examines the rest of 1 Corinthians 12, it becomes apparent that baptism of the Holy Spirit is not speaking in tongues. For instance, the apostle Paul, in verses 29 and 30, demonstrated that not everyone has the same gift. “Are all apostles?” (v. 29). The word construction in the original language tells us that the expected answer is “no.” “Do all speak with tongues?” The answer would also be “no.” It means not everyone had the spiritual gift of speaking in different languages.

On the other hand, looking carefully at 1 Corinthians 12:13, we discover that the apostle Paul includes every believer in the baptism: “We were all baptized.” What then is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? J. Dwight Pentecost gives the answer: we have been “identified with Jesus Christ and a union has been formed with Him.”¹¹ *Baptism* means “identification.” This clarification is important. One has to remove any cobweb of falsehood before one can live the spiritual life as God intends. Diagram No. 5 illustrates union with Christ; relying on the Holy Spirit is to abide in Christ. You are in Christ and He in you (John 14:20).

THE BELIEVER RELECTING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

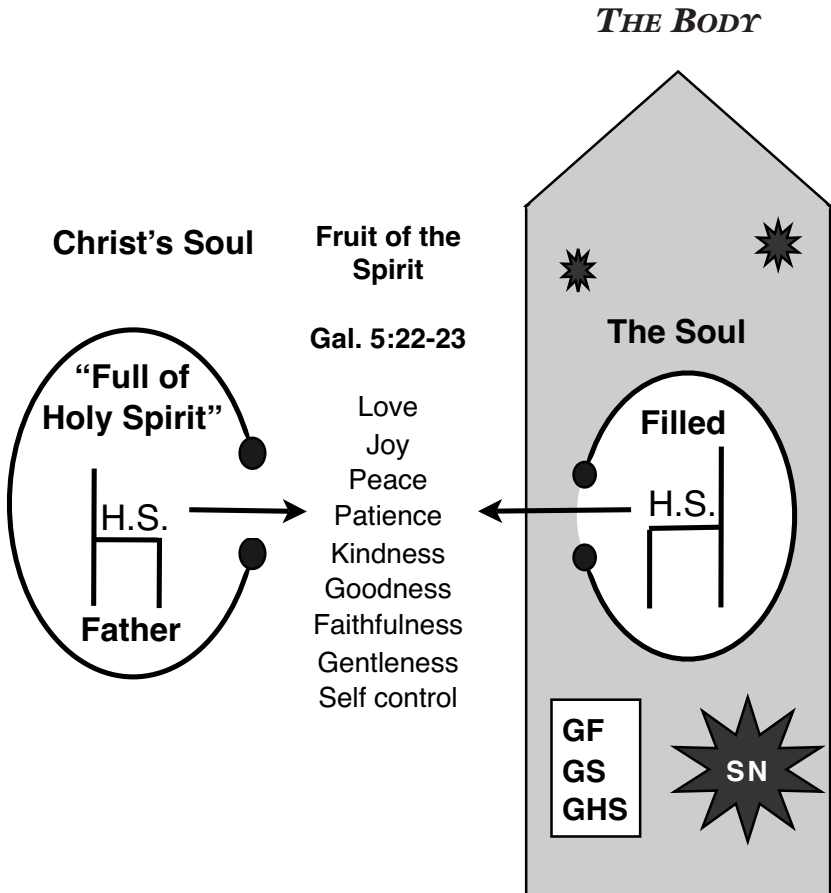


DIAGRAM NO. 7

Because He is in you, He can live His life through you. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

As you go through the spiritual journey, be watchful for falsehood, no matter how minute. H. Ironside, one of the greatest Bible teachers of all time, said it this way:

“Error is like leaven, of which we read, ‘A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.’ Truth mixed with error is equivalent to all error, except that it is more innocent looking and therefore more dangerous. God hates such a mixture! Any error, or any truth-and-error mixture calls for definite exposure and repudiation. To condone such is to be unfaithful to God and His Word and treacherous to imperiled souls for whom Christ died.”¹²

Reflecting Christ’s life has been and still is a big challenge in Christianity. The difficulty for many desiring this life is compounded by an inaccurate presentation of the subject matter. Some have been subjected to a series of taboos as a means of living like Christ. Others are told to “crucify self,” with little or no explanation as to how one can crucify himself. Still others have been yelled at from the pulpit: “Yield, brother...sister—yield your body to the Lord!” Many leave the church wondering how they can “crucify themselves” or “yield their body to the Lord”? Confusion reigns. Wonder no more. God keeps His Word: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). God is under obligation to provide sound biblical teaching to those who are hungry for truth.

In reality, reflecting the life of Christ is easy. That is because God makes it easy on us by supplying everything we need to live such a life, honoring to Him. Jesus Christ agrees: “Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*” (Matt 11:29-30 NIV emphasis added). God is ever ready to supply whatever you need to succeed in your quest to glorify Him. Consider, for instance, a

heartfelt invitation: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5 ESV).

BASIC FUNDAMENTALS IN REFLECTING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

There are five basic fundamentals in reflecting the life of Christ—total reliance on the Holy Spirit, mastering the life of Christ, feeding daily on God’s Word, desiring to glorify God and a lifestyle of prayer. Would you repeat with me the five things: total reliance on the Holy Spirit, mastering the life of Christ, feeding daily on God’s Word, a passion to glorify God and a lifestyle of prayer. You may want to close the book for a moment and try to repeat them from memory. This will assist you to keep them at the forefront of your mind.

No. 1—TOTAL RELIANCE ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

Something extraordinary has taken place in the time of the Church. For the same reason the Father and the Spirit indwelt the Son—to provide power—the Father, Son and Spirit indwell you. It has never before happened in history. Christ championed the spiritual life, tested it and then He released it to the Church on the day of Pentecost.

The spiritual life is not lived by
self-determination and willpower.

Contrary to the view of many, the spiritual life is not lived by self-determination and willpower. It is not our power but the Holy Spirit’s power available to us to do God’s will. The Holy Spirit empowers us, but we use our free will to chose to follow

God or to follow the sin nature. The apostle Paul makes this truth known: “I have been crucified with Christ; and *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 3:20 emphasis added). At the moment of salvation, God sends His Holy Spirit to carry out His plan through us. Let this truth sink deep.

Spiritual life is the monopoly of the Holy Spirit. This truth is captured in Jesus being “[filled with] the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1). The Holy Spirit was given to Jesus by the Father in full measure (John 3:34). Wherever He went, whatever He did, the Holy Spirit accompanied Him. He was never alone. To rely on the Holy Spirit is synonymous to abiding in Christ. “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for *apart from Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5 emphasis added).

What does it mean to abide? The NASB translates the Greek verb *meno*, “abide.” Other translations such as ESV, ISV, NET Bible, and NIV translate the same word, “remain.” They are the same. The main idea is *fellowship*. John the apostle later developed the concept in his epistles. John used this word forty times in his Gospel, eleven times in chapter 15 alone, and twenty-seven times in his epistles. It’s an important word in his theology. The word simply means “to stay in fellowship.” Refer to the fifth diagram. There you will see a picture of the Holy Spirit occupying the believer’s soul. That’s what it means to be in fellowship—the Holy Spirit taking the command post of your soul. It is synonymous to being “filled with the Holy Spirit.”

In essence, Jesus is saying in John 15:5, “You need to remain in fellowship with Me in order for My Spirit to produce His fruit through you.” Pentecost put it succinctly: “The Holy Spirit indwelling the child of God reproduces the life of Jesus in that believer, and Christ in the believer, manifests His life through that believer.”¹³ Another scholar added, “Fruitfulness is the result of the Son’s life being reproduced in a disciple. The disciple’s part is to remain [in fellowship].”¹⁴ It boils down to this: to live the life

of Christ, you must depend on the Holy Spirit. This explains these strong imperatives: “Stop grieving the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 4:30) and “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19).

When the believer fails, he should immediately acknowledge his sin to God to be restored to fellowship. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

NO. 2—MASTERING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Knowledge of the Gospels is your gateway to mastering the life of Christ. One’s knowledge of the original is always a prerequisite to one’s effort to copy it. The Gospels hold the treasure of the life of Christ. Pause for a moment. Are you truly living the spiritual life? I mean truly? If not, you need to get with God’s program—before He lowers the boom of His discipline. On the other hand, if you have come to understand that you need to live in a manner honoring to God, I suggest you postpone any Bible reading plan you may have. First, devote your time and effort to the Gospels. Second, read through the New Testament at least once.

Begin with Matthew and read it at least four times. Do the same with Mark, Luke and John. Then go back and read each of the four gospels through at least three times more. Some have asked, “Do I have to read them seven times?” and some even react, stating, “That’s too much reading!” This goes to the heart of the problem. We must get rid of our instant fix, drive-through mentality—hurriedly rushing through Scripture—if we have any aspiration of becoming like our Savior. It takes discipline, time, effort and tremendous sacrifice. The supreme motivator is spiritual hunger. A strong desire to know Christ pushes aside laziness and changes priorities. “That I may know Him” was the apostle Paul’s passion (Gal. 3:10).

Great Bible teachers, both Old and New, have recommend reading each book of the Bible many times. Tim Lahaye, in his book *How to Study the Bible for Yourself*, said, “One of the best

ways to get to know a book of the Bible thoroughly is to read the entire book every day for 30 days.”¹⁵ This suggested reading plan applies to shorter books, those fewer than six chapters. The rewards of adhering to such a plan are revealed in James Martin Gray’s recounting of his life-changing experience. He met a fellow Christian and observed his life, full of peace and joy. He wondered why he couldn’t be like him. One day he asked the man his secret and he replied, “Reading the epistle to the Ephesians.” The man told Gray that he had read it some twelve or fifteen times, all at once and when he was finished, “I was in possession of Ephesians, or better yet, it was in possession of me, and I had been ‘lifted up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ in an experiential sense in which that had not been true in me before, and will never cease to be true in me again.”¹⁶

The Bible was written by ordinary men
for ordinary people.

Bible teachers and students agree. Something new is learned every time the Bible is read and reread. Remember, the Bible was written by ordinary men for ordinary people. God wants us to understand His Word, so He chose to use men who were mostly uneducated farmers, shepherds, and fishermen, communicating in street language. One does not need to be a rocket scientist to know the Bible. Men of high learning often miss the nuggets of truth the Holy Spirit seeks to communicate, their pride getting on the pathway of His teaching. “He teaches the humble His way” (Ps. 25:9). You don’t need to have a degree in the original languages before you can understand your Father’s message. Admittedly, there are things that need much digging before one can get to the

core. Experts can help. But for the most part, everyone can read the Bible for themselves. Many have been saved by simply reading a Bible. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and You will be saved” (Acts 16:31) needs no exegeting. Neither do many other verses like “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17) or “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Men have died for the crime of possessing a Bible; many around the world still do. The enemy wants you to ignore this stronghold of God’s truth. I urge you to read your Bible and to read it prayerfully.

The Lord, when He was twelve years old, spent three days “in the temple” apparently without food, “sitting in the midst of teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). He just couldn’t get enough of God’s Word. It cannot be stressed enough. Avoid hasty reading. As you read each book, observe what the author recorded about Christ. Write down striking remarks. Commit to memory some verses that catch your attention, for example, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4) and “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34) and more.

No. 3—FEEDING DAILY ON GOD’S WORD

You must cultivate the habit of feeding your soul on God’s Word. There’s no cutting corners. God’s Word must be your delight, as it was Job’s: “I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). If Job treasured God’s Word when he had no Bible, you and I who have the Bible should eat it up like Jeremiah: “When I discovered your words, I devoured them” (Jer. 15:6 NLT). The Psalmist declared, “I have stored what you have said in my heart, so I won’t sin against you” (Ps. 119:11 ISV). By feeding on God’s Word daily as Jesus did, it accomplishes the following:

- It helps you renew your mind and protects you from the thinking and lifestyle that the world offers. “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God *transform* you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rom. 12:2 NLT).
- It equips you to serve God better. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and *training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God *may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17 NIV emphases added).
- It guides you in a dark world. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).
- It empowers you to resist sin. “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11 NIV). Evangelist Dwight L. Moody said this: “The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible.”
- It helps you develop spiritual capacity—a magnet for overflowing blessing. “The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon” (Ps. 92:12).

The Holy Spirit operates on God’s Word. By storing it in your soul, as illustrated in the fifth diagram, you will be able to mix God’s Word with faith when the Holy Spirit fills you. Remember, God’s Word in your soul is only effective and applicable when the Holy Spirit fills you. It cannot help you in carnality.

No. 4—A PASSION TO GLORIFY GOD

A spiritual sense of destiny stems from coming to know why God stationed you here on planet earth. The Lord tells us, “All who claim me as their God...I have made them for my glory” (Isa. 43:7 NLT). Jesus Christ knew this from the beginning: “You prepared a body for me. Then I said, ‘See, I have come to do your will, O God.’ In the volume of the scroll this is written about me” (Heb. 10:5, 7 ISV). His life was for God’s glory. He knew nothing else. He lived for God’s glory and was consumed by God’s glory, and ultimately He died for God’s glory. When the same is true of you, when your passion is to glorify God, it will judge and control your thoughts and actions. The thought “for His glory” will consume you.

It seems as though Christians today have lost their bearing as to why they are here: “for the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:12). They have substituted God’s glory with self-glorification, power and approbation lust. When one’s mission and sense of destiny is redefined, it will change the person’s scale of values forever. This is the right time to ask, what is your goal as a believer? If your aspiration as a Christian is to live like Christ, your goal must parallel His goal during His earthly ministry, which was to glorify the Father. Are you glorifying God?

No. 5—A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER

A lifestyle of prayer is the fifth and the last installment on our list of what it takes to be like Christ. As we noted earlier, prayer was central to Jesus’ ministry. He immersed Himself in it. He was so effective that His disciples envied Him and petitioned, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). He did. “And He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be Your name”’” (v. 2). A mistake is being made in many churches today, thinking that’s what we are supposed to pray. The so-called Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:2-4; Matt. 6:9-13), is not really His prayer. It was a model for prayer. It is *how* we are to pray. It was not intended to be recited.

JESUS—TEACHING HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY

The Lord taught His disciples where prayer should be directed—to the Father, “When you pray, say: ‘Father....’” He also taught them the basic principle of respect: “Hallowed be Thy name.” Recognize God. Acknowledge His majesty and awesome power when you are in His presence. Honor Him. In that model, Jesus also emphasized the importance of fellowship. He cites one often-ignored sin, lack of forgiveness, to alert them that not taking care of this sin could hinder their prayer (Ps. 66:18). These are a few of the points contained in that prayer model.

THE DISCIPLES PRAYING LIKE JESUS

Devote stresses the idea of passion,
discipline and unquenchable commitment.

The disciples latched on to this basic truth. Prayer was one of the four things associated with the early church: “And they were *continually devoting* themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42 emphasis added). The original word translated *devote* in our English Bible stresses the idea of passion, discipline and unquenchable commitment. In fact, prayer was central in life and ministry of the disciples who, “with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). Imitating Jesus Christ in time of crisis, the disciples prayed (Acts 4:24-31; compare Luke 22:39-41). Imitating Jesus in time of decision making, they prayed (Acts 1:15-25; compare with Luke 6:12-13).

PAUL—IMITATING JESUS IN PRAYER

The apostle Paul, who challenged the church to “be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1), redefined and took the importance of prayer to a new dimension. He was a prayer warrior. Imitating Jesus, the apostle prayed for individuals: “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers” (Philem. 1:4; compared with Luke 22:31-32). Imitating Jesus, the apostle prayed for the brethren at large:

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience” (Col. 1:9-11 NIV emphasis added. Compare with John 17).

The apostle Paul mandated the Church, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2) and to “constantly pray” (1 Thess. 5:17 NET Bible). If you desire to follow in the footsteps of Christ, you must reevaluate your prayer life. The Church is drifting. Stand in the gap.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah said, “I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth” (Isa. 62:6-7 NIV).

Scripturally, the same principle that applied to Israel in the past applies to the Church today. God could be saying to you and me today, “I have posted watchmen on your walls, the church; they [prayer warriors] will never be silent day or night. You [believers] who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest and

give him no rest till he [God] reestablishes the church and makes her the praise of the world.”

“Arise and pray!”



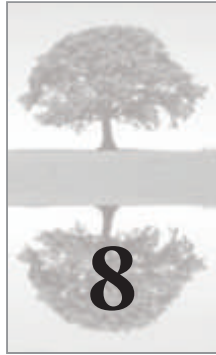
PART III

The Secret of Blessing or Cursing



The last section of our study is designed to challenge the believer regarding his life and mission on earth. This section hinges on one question: “Is glorifying God your objective in life?” This section contains the following:

- **What Is Your Priority in Life?**
- **Avoiding Deception**
- **Spiritual Self-Evaluation**
- **Impact of the Spiritual Life**
- **Reflection**



What Is Your Priority in Life?

Priorities define a person. What's your priority as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? What is at the top of your scale of values? What kind of a Christian are you—an authentic one or a superficial one? You may want to pause and think about these questions. This section has been designed to challenge anyone desiring to glorify God in the little time we have on the planet. Sadly, we live in a time of great distraction, which is the number-one enemy in the pursuit of the spiritual life. Jesus warned against distraction in His day.

When Mary and Martha had the privilege of hosting Jesus Christ in their home, it provided an opportunity to uncover distraction—a major pitfall of the spiritual life. Jesus used this opportunity to cast light on what is really important in life. He sharply rebuked Martha for interrupting Mary's time of feeding on God's Word. Here's the rest of the story in Luke 10:38-42:

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’

“‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed, or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’”

Jesus Christ encouraged hospitality. Martha responded in kind by showing great hospitality to Him. Speaking for myself, if Jesus Christ were to stop by my house today, I would stop everything and shower Him with hospitality. Wouldn’t you? That’s exactly what Martha did. But the chore was overwhelming; she needed an extra hand from her sister. Martha complained to Jesus, hoping her sister would listen to Him better than her. The response she received was heart wrenching—probably not what she expected. Perhaps it brought her cooking efforts to a halt. I hope it did.

The doubling of words in Hebrew culture is very significant. By doubling her name, “Martha, Martha” in essence, Jesus was telling her, “Stop everything you are doing right now and give your undivided attention to what I am about to say.” Put in another way, “Stop whatever you are doing now—it is not as important as you think!” Having gotten Martha’s attention, Jesus proceeded to give her a short but pointed crash course on priorities. He rebuked her: “You are worried and upset about many things.”

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, Martha had failed the test of putting the study of God’s Word at the top of her scale of values. She rationalized that making the Lord comfortable and showing Him the best hospitality experience ever would be a good substitute for listening to His teaching. She may have reasoned, “Well,

Jesus must be starving—serving Him my mouth-watering juicy steak with tossed salad, topped with my homemade special salad dressing will generate the energy He needs to teach us God’s Word later.” Don’t be guilty of judging her. She had nothing against God’s Word. She just had her priorities backward: main course first, dessert second and listening to God’s Word last.

Your life will be tagged “a wasted life”
unless you have the right priority.

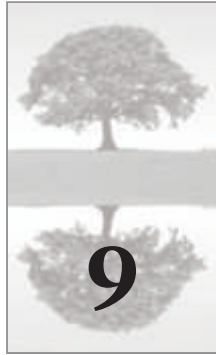
Having gotten Martha’s attention, Jesus Christ defended Mary: “But few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Food enters the body and it’s excreted. The body enjoys the temporary stamina it provides and then grows hungry again. On the other hand, “the word of God abides forever” (Isa. 40:8). The spiritual strength it provides is inexhaustible. The spiritual capacity it gives enables one to give maximum glory to God and to receive abundant blessing. King Solomon was right: “Nothing you desire compares with it” (Prov. 3:15). “It is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (Ps. 119:72).

Your life will be tagged “a wasted life” unless you have the right priority—putting God first at every step of your life’s journey. The same goes for me; we cannot get around it. Pentecost said:

“The man whose life is disciplined by the Spirit of God and the Word of God does not give himself to something of secondary importance. Recognizing that he does not have time for both the good and the best, he approves the things that are superior. This discipline that enables a man to approve the superior things comes through the saturation with the Word of God.”¹⁷

If Jesus Christ placed a higher premium on God's Word than on receiving hospitality, then you and I need to sit up and take note. We shouldn't let what we consider good things rob us of eternal bliss.

This is such a universally important matter that we find many theologians commenting on it. One Bible teacher summarizes it beautifully: "God has not blessed us with our families, friends, jobs, abilities and other gifts to give us an excuse to abandon a close walk with Him. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5)."¹⁸ Dwight L. Moody said, "Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter."¹⁹ Ironside crowned it: "Time is given us to use in view of eternity."²⁰



Avoiding Deception

Is Jesus Christ reflecting His life through you? You may want to pause and inventory your life before answering “yes” or “no.” Remember, this book is written to challenge us all regarding our spiritual lives. The truth is that time is not on our side; we are closer to the finish line than when the race first began—some are just a few steps away and some have already arrived. As you know, Satan is the father of deception. He skillfully deceived Eve in the garden (1 Tim. 2:14). Knowing that deception yields fruit, he has cloned it and lured us to adopt and nourish it. The issue is not whether we have the seed of deception; the question is whether it takes us hostage.

By nature, people employ self-deception to convince and justify themselves that they are on the right track. Are you on the right spiritual track? If not, derailment is on the horizon. Change to a new track in a hurry. The apostle Paul was aware of the looming danger caused by the craftiness of the evil one. He expresses fear for the faithful, “But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray

from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). “I am afraid” is the Apostle’s heart wrenching expression.

Satan has indeed succeeded in deceiving the church where it counts most—application of God’s Word. He has craftily twisted direct mandates to believers and labeled them legalism. Ryrie said, “Not to obey the law of Christ is lawlessness not liberty...it cannot be emphasized too strongly that having to do something is not legalism...Under grace we have to do certain things. We are expected to keep the positive commands; we are obliged not to violate the negative ones...Right living is letting the glory of God motivate every action and letting the spirit of God empower us, including those things we have to do in order to conform to the law of Christ.”²¹ Those who have been deceived by his lies are not only unfruitful, they attack others who are fruitful in obeying God’s Word. They label God’s obedient children *legalistic*. What a sad day in the church! It’s easy for one’s mind to be led astray from “devotion to Christ.” Knowing the implications for our spiritual life, let us examine some ways Satan deceives us today.

WAYS SATAN DECEIVES US

Satan is a genius. We give him far less credit than he deserves. He knows subtle ways to lead believers “astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” As we endeavor to scrutinize his deceptive ways, you have the right to ask, “Have I bought into Satan’s lies like Eve did?” To answer the question, it would be helpful to re-examine pertinent biblical truths regarding some of your beliefs and practices.

Satan knows subtle ways to lead believers “astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

Realizing many Christians are already in Satan's domain, the apostle Paul exhorts Timothy, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:24-26 emphasis added). That said, here are Satan's five most deceptive lies he uses effectively in the church, keeping a multitude of believers in captivity to "do his will."

DECEPTION No. 1:

ADHERING TO GOD'S MANDATES IS LEGALISM

This is Satan's number one deceptive tool. He knows if he succeeds in disarming Christians from allowing Jesus Christ to permeate their thoughts and actions, he has won a major victory. I have heard many Bible teachers who, under the banner of grace, oppose the idea of asking believers to adhere to the commands of Scripture. These teachers say, "It is legalism to ask one to obey these mandates found in God's Word." They believe we don't have to do anything in Christendom—Christ has done everything for us. Charles Ryrie wrote extensively on this subject:

"The impression is given that Christ does it all almost apart from me. I am supposed to retire and then Christ will live out His life in me so that I am assured of spiritual victory if only I can keep out of the way enough...Even though the action stems from the new nature or the renewed mind, and although it is His power which enables the act to be performed, still I do it, and the Lord acknowledges that by giving me a reward. Otherwise, if He does it all apart from me or through a completely passive me, then he ought simply to reward Himself at the judgment."²²

This is not a biblical position. Some assert that “Dos and don’ts are for the Mosaic Law and for the Old Testament saints” The problem with such a position is that the epistles to the church are full of imperative moods of command. The imperative demands that one do something. For example, Jesus Christ tells the believers at Laodicea to “repent [have a change of mind]” (Rev. 3:19).

Jesus used the word *repent* in the imperative, signaling a direct command needing action from the recipients—the church. In the context, the church had become “lukewarm” (Rev. 3:16) and arrogant (v. 17). Jesus Christ, the Judge, stands knocking at the gate of their soul with discipline, hoping they would welcome Him for fellowship (vv. 19-20).

The Bible is filled with so many more imperatives such as: “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you” (John 15:12); Do not forsake the assembly of yourselves together (Heb. 10:25). “Do not speak against one another” (James 4:11); “Be kind to one another” (Eph. 4:32); “Bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2); “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30); and “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).

DECEPTION No. 2:

CHRISTIAN LOVE NEED NOT BE OVERT

One camp of believers attacks the other for their outward manifestation of Christ’s love, labeling the group as just “a social club.” This is not a hypothetical case. It is happening among Christians. What the accusing group fails to realize is that the master deceiver is hiding behind the curtain, cunningly leading them “astray from...purity of devotion to Christ.” Consider the mandate of Scripture, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). By

this love, unbelievers will know “that you are My disciples.” The question arises, how can unbelievers know that the expression of love among believers is identical to the one Christ had for His followers if their love is concealed? The apostle John replies,

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” (1 John 3:16-17 NIV).

Love is a thought that produces action. Inactive love is not biblical love. Action proved Christ’s love for the Church: “He laid down His life.” The apostle charges us, “we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.” He goes on: “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (3:18 NIV). King Solomon, the wisest man tells us, “Better is open rebuke than hidden love” (Prov. 27:5 ESV).

DECEPTION No. 3:

CHRISTIAN SHARING IS SOCIALISM

Unbeknownst to many, Satan has deceived them into believing that sharing what one has with those who don’t is socialism or merely the “social gospel.” Getting some believers to label an act of compassion “socialism” is one of Satan’s great successes in his deception campaign. Socialism is an abhorrent evil and has many tentacles, of which one is a state owned, managed and distributed public economy. Believers who associate the term with compassion refer to the incident in Acts 4:36-5:1-10 where believers “would sell [their land or houses] and bring the proceeds of the sales, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need” (Acts 4:35). This is an incorrect equating of the terms *compassion* and *socialism*. Examining the text, not everyone sold their property.

David Jeremiah, in one of his teachings I heard on the radio, countered those who use Acts 4:35-5:1-10 to make a case for the social gospel. He remarks that not every believer sold their house, for they met in people's homes for church services. In light of his remarks, it's not proper to lay a dogmatic, doctrinal foundation based on this one passage. The Bible never commands believers to sell their properties and give the proceeds to the church. What happened in Acts was a one-time event during the formation of the early church. There's no repeat of such a practice. What's more, it was a voluntary act of compassion.

God desires that we help the less fortunate. "And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God" (Heb. 13:16 NLT). Sharing with others what one has is Christ-like. "Jesus said to them [His disciples], 'Come and have breakfast'" (John 21:12). He shared with His disciples. The apostle Paul did the same—he shared. "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me" (Acts 20:34).

DECEPTION NO. 4: DOING GOOD DEEDS IS LEGALISM

The church seems to be dormant because it has many stagnant believers who have bought into Satan's lie that doing good deeds is legalism. They refuse to do anything in the church that can be labeled "good deeds." They are deceived from recognizing the dividing line between human and divine good. Human good is not produced by the Holy Spirit in you, but by your own energy. Divine good is produced by the Holy Spirit and is mandated. "Do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:16). Elsewhere, the apostle Paul instructs Titus, "show yourself to be an example of good deeds" (Titus 2:7). Pointedly, the Apostle reveals God's purpose in salvation, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Good deeds are mandated and accomplished through the influential power of the Holy Spirit, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose” (Phil. 2:13 NIV).

DECEPTION NO. 5:

FOLLOWING CHRIST’S FOOTSTEPS IS LEGALISM

Some Bible teachers have argued that believers cannot be asked to follow in the footsteps of Christ, giving two reasons. One, no sinful man can actually follow in the footsteps of Christ, who was impeccable, that is, without the sin nature. Two, asking believers to follow Christ’s footsteps is tantamount to legalism. If you said, “What?!”—know that I had a similar reaction. The apostle Paul challenged the Corinthian believers, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). The apostle Paul believed following Christ’s footsteps was doable through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

The question arises, are you trapped in any of these deceptions?

ORIGIN OF FALSE THEOLOGY

Self-evaluation starts with soul searching. Examine your beliefs and see if they match those of the Bible. A serious student asked, “How does falsehood enter the church?” I submit two ways. 1. Scripture is being fulfilled. “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times *some will fall away from the faith* [biblical truth], *paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons*” (1 Tim. 4:1 emphasis added). When prophecy indicates “some,” it can include anyone, so self-evaluation is critical. 2. Deviation from the apostolic teachings. By contrast, in the early Church “Believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). They did so, because the apostles were the only link between

the Church and Christ. They were the custodians of the doctrines for the time of the Church. Jude reminded his audience to “Remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles” (Jude 1:17). They were the builders of the Church’s foundation (Eph. 2:20).

The apostle Paul was emphatic: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we [the apostles] have preached to you, he is to be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). Having searched Scripture thoroughly, there’s no indication that the apostolic way of life or teaching would change after their death. Where a shift was anticipated, such as discontinuing of temporary gifts, the Holy Spirit alerted us. “Love never fails; but if there *are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away*” (1 Cor. 13:8 emphasis added). Based on prophecy, Bible students anticipated the halting of temporary gifts, when “that [the canon] which is perfect [complete] comes” (v. 9). The Bible was completed around A.D. 96, therefore temporary gifts ceased.

Love never fails.

These were the only changes that took place in the Church. Other spiritual instructions remain unchanged. If the apostles laid down principles for the Church, ranging from encouraging Christian affection, even to the extreme of kissing “one another with a holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16) to bearing “one another’s burden” (Gal. 6:2) and “encourage one another” (1 Thess. 5:11), when and how did we deviate from these truths?

HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN COMPASSION

Intrinsic good should be the mark of Christianity. Only Christians can produce it because it is the divine good that results from the

filling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ was full of intrinsic good. Wherever He went, “He went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He mixed the preaching of the good news with acts of good deeds. He healed the sick (Mark. 1:34), cleansed the lepers (Luke 17:11-19, raised the dead (John 11:39-44), fed the hungry (John 6:10-12) and so many more (John 21:25). No doubt, these acts of goodness magnified His ministry and brought many to His cause. This goodness was His calling card that set Him apart, and so should it be of every Christian.

We cannot impact our world by being stone faced, uncaring and uncompassionate. The disciples of Jesus Christ, after His death and ascension, continued where the Lord left off—they too mixed their gospel message with good deeds. “I don’t have any silver or gold for you. But I’ll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!” (Acts 3:6 NLT). The apostle Peter gave the beggar what he had. When he said, “I don’t have any silver or gold,” that was the case. Surely if Peter had possessed any money, he would have given it to him. He gave him what he had and something more precious—the gospel and the ability to walk again. That’s a good deed!

When the leaders extended “the right hand of fellowship” to Paul and Barnabas, good deeds were a part of the welcome package—“They only asked us to remember the poor” (Gal. 2:9-10). The other apostles told them what they told us: “Do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:16). Dorcas, one of the Lord’s followers “was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did” (Acts 9:36). When she died, the widows she impacted wept bitterly, “showing all the tunics and garments” Dorcas had made for them (v. 39).

Great believers of old, Charles Spurgeon, George Whitefield and George Müller, just to name three, all partook in good deeds: caring for the widows, orphans and more. Moreover, Scripture exhorts, “Let us not lose heart in doing good” (Gal. 6:9). How did the Church today become so cold regarding good deeds?

DEPARTURE FROM GOOD DEEDS

It may surprise you to find that the apathy toward good deeds among many Christians today is not ancient—it's recent. I found a companion in Eric Metaxas. In an article, he cited how William Wilberforce, a committed Christian, changed the world of his day—by doing good. His work affected society—socially, economically and more. His good deeds came from his deep love for the Bible and his adherence to the truths he found therein. As with every good thing, people got carried away and eventually they majored only in good deeds, leaving the gospel behind; the era of “do goodism” alone began. Those concerned that the gospel had been removed from this equation of good works plus the gospel message reacted. In their defense of truth, they went too far, abandoning the idea of good deeds entirely and majoring “exclusively on evangelism and on theological fundamentals, calling themselves ‘Fundamentalists.’”²³ That's where the beautiful marriage of good deeds accompanied by gospel truth ended—with “do goodism” swinging too far to the left and “fundamentalism” too far to the right, resulting in a chasm between the two. Today Christianity is suffering because each half is incomplete without the other. They are two halves of one whole. One seems warm—but has no eternal merit. Yet the other with eternal merit seems uncaring. As of now the church is stuck and stagnating in this quagmire.

What does this mean to you? It means this: if you are one of those who react negatively to good deeds or think it legalistic when people perform acts of good deeds, it could be because you inherited your reaction from what happened in the 1920s, as Metaxas uncovered in his research. The challenge: we need to return to the Christian root—balancing fundamental truths with acts of good deeds “for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

Erwin W. Lutzer, in his book *When a Nation Forgets God*, wants us “to think for a moment what the power of the gospel accomplished in the early centuries. With no political base in

Roman government, without any majority in the culture, the gospel changed the spiritual and moral climate of the Roman Empire.”²⁴ He went on to say that Christianity competed with paganism and, for the most part, won the hearts and minds of the populace. These followers of Christ were radicals in every sense of the word—“radically committed to community in worship, radically committed in serving their pagan neighbors, and radically committed to living out the implications of their redemption.”²⁵ We cannot isolate ourselves from the destitute and simultaneously win them over to Christ. He did not isolate Himself, He ate with sinners.

This kindness and reaching out is the Christian calling card to reach others, from the destitute to the cultural elite, the poor and the poor in spirit. Nabel Quereshi, in his book *Looking for Allah, Finding Jesus*, said that his conversion from Islam to Christianity began when a fellow student took a personal interest in him. His friend’s genuine care and concern opened up a dialogue between the two men who were both seeking to serve their God.

Kindness and reaching out is the
Christian calling card.

On a more personal note, my team and I were deeply moved by the love displayed by Christians in Pakistan. A church of believers from the lowest class, street sweepers making about two dollars per day, pooled their funds to buy a Christian family out of indentured servitude in a brick factory. Their debt had been incurred because of their production shortfall. The believers paid their debt, provided clothing and housing and found them jobs. What a real-life picture of imitating Christ, of paying a debt for them they could not pay. We were stunned by the

story and were even more stunned when we discovered that those generous believers did not have a lot of Bible knowledge (which is hard to come by in a country with a Christian population of only 2 percent). They may have had little knowledge, but they were applying 100 percent of what they had. They dramatically impacted the family they helped as well as all who witnessed this outpouring of Christ's love. Though we had come to teach and encourage them, in fact they encouraged us through their sacrificial demonstration of their love for Christ.

The Gospel, wrapped in the warmth and compassion of Christ, is powerful and will change culture and lives—individuals, families, countries.

Think about the Lord's command, "Love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 15:12). How did He love them? Did He feed them when they were hungry? Did He come to their aid when they were in danger? Did He defend them when they were in trouble? Did He encourage them when they were discouraged? Did He pray for them when He knew the implication of their future ministry? Was His love for them concealed? How actually did He love them? Take time to respond and reflect. Ask yourself, "Am I loving as Jesus Christ loved?"



Spiritual Self Evaluation

Having dealt with Satan's deceptions and falsehood, we are poised to answer the real question for this segment of our study. Are you living the life of Christ? This question needs not be brushed aside; after all, your spiritual life has an impact on many fronts—you, your family members and your nation. Scripture is lucid. Jesus Christ has left “an *example* for you to follow in His footsteps” (1 Peter 2:21 emphasis added). The word translated *example* in the NASB and most other Bible versions is an interesting one—it is the Greek word *hupogrammos*. The Darby Bible translates the same word as “a model.” This is a rare Greek word that only occurred once in Scripture. A.T. Robertson defined it as “a writing-copy for one to imitate.”²⁶

Another commentator agrees: “It means a copy set by a writing or drawing master, which was to be exactly reproduced by his pupils.”²⁷ If, and only if, Scripture is unchangeable, then the passage applies to every Christian of every age. The apostle Peter declares, “You have been called for this purpose” (2:21).

The question is, what purpose? Following in Christ's footsteps! Look at Christ, the original, to evaluate yourself. Are you copying Him well? Grade yourself and determine whether you pass the test. "Test yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail the test" (2 Cor. 13:5).

Are you living the life of Christ?

Charles Spurgeon in his sermons often asked, "What would Jesus do?" He used this question to compel his congregation to look at the life of Christ and follow in His steps. True, over the years some have turned it into a slogan and used it to promote some dubious theologies and merchandizing schemes, but that does not discount the question. "What would Jesus do?" is still a valid test question. Spurgeon went on to say,

"What Jesus loves, we love; what Jesus hates, we hate; what Jesus seeks, we seek; what Jesus shuns, we shun. This is true friendship when there is but one heart in two bodies, and when one heart in the twain produces with undivided strength one object."²⁸

TESTING OURSELVES— COPYING CHRIST'S EXAMPLE

No. 1—PASSION FOR GOD'S GLORY

In our study of the overview of the life of Christ, Jesus' passion for God's glory was unequalled. Are you tracing His passion for God's glory? Realistically, is glorifying God your thrust in life? As you evaluate your life, know this: anyone who does not follow in the footsteps of Christ has no right to claim they are living the life of Christ. As Ironside put it, "Christianity is Christ!"²⁹ An authentic Christian lives like Christ.

No. 2—LIVING ON THE WORD

As previously noted, Jesus made the study of God's Word foremost on His scale of values. He stayed the course. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Jesus Christ lived in the Word. He was not distracted. Are you following His footprints? Do you place the highest premium on studying God's Word? The Psalmist and Jesus can rightfully claim, "Thy word I have treasured [stored] in my heart" (Ps. 119:11). Is this true of you too?

No. 3—GROWING BY THE WORD

Are you making any spiritual progress? Jesus in His human nature set His mind on developing His spiritual capacity, as we have noted. He was "made perfect" (Heb. 5:9). Note, the English word translated *perfect* is the Greek word *teleioo*, which means "to complete."³⁰ In the context of Hebrews 5:9, it simply means "mature." What's your goal as a Christian? God uses prepared vessels (2 Tim. 2:20). Right now can God declare you "adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17)? The answer is a matter between you and the Lord. Remember, Christ has left "an example for you to follow in His footsteps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

No. 4—FAVOR WITH GOD AND MAN

Inventory your life. Honestly, can you humbly say, “God has been so good to me. He has also caused me to have tremendous favor with man”? This was true of Jesus in His humanity, as previously observed. “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). There can be no favor with God until one bonds one’s life with the “Word of life.”

No. 5—EMPOWERMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Do you give serious thought to the implication of Christ’s mandate to His followers, “You are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49)? Jesus had uninterrupted power from on high, as already delineated. Following in His footsteps, are you in touch “with the power from on high”? Are you operating on your wisdom and power or on the wisdom and power from on high, as Jesus did?

No. 6—UNBREAKABLE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE FATHER

Remember how Jesus Christ in His humanity had an unbreakable fellowship with the Father through the Spirit. Are you an authentic Christian—one who acts like Christ? Are you alert moment by moment ensuring fellowship with God? We cannot have unbreakable fellowship like Christ had because of our sin nature; but we can stay in fellowship longer by guarding our thoughts, words and actions. When we fail, we should quickly name our sins and be restored (1 John 1:9). To claim a Christ-like life is to walk in fellowship. Do you constantly walk in fellowship?

No. 7—OBEDIENCE

Jesus Christ was obedient, even to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). If the Son of God humbled Himself to obedience, how much more should we follow His example by obeying the commands

of God? There are over 1,000 imperatives in the Bible, some passive (meaning something acts on the object) and some active (meaning you, the subject, act on something). For example, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think” (Rom. 12:2 NLT). The verb *copy* or *conformed* (NASB), as Kenneth S. Wuest points out, is the strongest expression of a negative command, “do not.” We might say, “Stop now,” referring to “the continuation of an action already going on.”³¹ Notice that this is a two-phase command: 1. Stop molding yourself after the pattern of this world—its lifestyle, habits and mannerisms. The fulfillment of the mandate requires the believer’s daily volition. You fulfill the action. 2. “Let God transform you” or “Be transformed” (NASB) is the other half of the imperative, with God doing the work. Robertson points out that the command is in the present passive imperative.³² Though a command, you are not the one to fulfill it—God will. He transforms your mind through His Word. We might say it this way: “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.” It is God’s Word that transforms you. The question is, are you obedient to this mandate? “I have kept My Father’s commandments” (John 15:10). Are you following in Christ’s footsteps? Obedience is not legalism; it is spiritual response.

No. 8—HUMILITY

Jesus Christ is the epitome of humility. He is God, but He did not use His divinity as a point of debate with the Father; He simply obeyed. He expressed humility by washing His disciples’ feet—a lowly job (John 13:5). “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). If you say, “I am a humble person,” you probably just failed the test of humility. “Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips” (Prov. 27:2). E.M. Bounds

rightly said, “Humility keeps itself from the public gaze...it never exalts itself in the eyes of others or in the eyes of itself.”³³ Have you heard more than a dozen people say to you, “You are a very humble individual?” Note your answer on your self-evaluation.

No. 9—MENTAL ATTITUDE OF GRACE

We have said that grace is an expression of mental attitude, free of ulterior motives, treating one not on the basis of one’s worth, but on the basis of *agape* love, compassion and mercy—“an unmerited favor.” Jesus Christ pioneered grace: “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Jesus Christ showed grace to a woman caught in adultery (John 8:4-6). He showed grace to the apostle Peter, who categorically denied ever knowing Him (John 21:15-17). His life was full of acts of grace. As Christ’s follower, how do you treat people in your periphery? Can people around you sense your mental attitude of grace?

No. 10—SHARING GOD’S WORD

Sharing God’s Word was the Lord’s passion. Like Ezra, He “set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to practice it, *and teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel*” (Ezra 7:10 emphasis added). “He was passing through from one city and village to another preaching” (Luke 13:22). How passionate are you regarding the Great Commission? “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them” (Matt. 28:19). Are you witnessing and sharing Christ with your family members, and those around you? Are you passionate about missions, praying for and supporting those on the mission field?

No. 11—MARKED BY COMPASSION

Help me answer one Bible student’s question: “Is it possible to be a compassionate individual and not manifest it overtly?” The life of Christ was seasoned with acts of compassion—one after another. He felt compassion for the multitude. He

taught, healed and fed them (Matt. 13:14-21). On another occasion, He showed compassion to a leper, touching him and healing him: “Be cleansed” (Mark 1:40-41). The followers of Christ followed His footsteps. For example, the apostles Peter and John were moved by compassion when they saw a helpless beggar. “Peter said, ‘I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!’” (Acts 3:6). The Book of Acts was a compilation of the acts of the early Church. It was full of acts of compassion. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, is your life truly marked by compassion?

No. 12—A MAN OF SORROW

Having carefully scrutinized Scripture, it reveals that God’s heartbeat was His Son’s. Jesus was “a man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3). What touched the heart of His Father touched His own. He shared in people’s pain. What about you? “Weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). Does other people’s pain and suffering affect you? Like Christ, do you express sorrow or do you judge and criticize them in their plight?

No. 13—LOVE

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Explained in street language, it means, “Keep on loving one another with the love of God.” How? In the same way Christ has loved you in the past and continues to love you in the present. But here is the catch. You cannot pass the test of love until you grasp Christ’s love for you. How has He loved you? Stop and reflect on the immensity of Christ’s love for you. Do you love in the same way? You cannot love your brother or sister and at the same time take part in destroying him or her through maligning, judging, gossiping and other such behaviors. Do you take pain or pleasure in the suffering of others?

No. 14—SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS

The apostle Paul exhorts, “Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you” (Col. 3:13). The passage calls for reflection. Two questions emerge: what’s the degree of your offense against Christ, and how did He forgive you? Your offense is insurmountable—a debt you can never repay—not ever. Jesus Christ wiped your debt clean. He casts your “sins into the depths of the seas” (Mic. 7:19). Moreover, He made an unbreakable promise to you: Your “iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:12 KJB). With the truth of your experience of Christ’s forgiveness seared on your soul, now comes a quiz: do you forgive others who have wronged you, in the same way Christ forgave and continues to forgive you? That’s His demand. That’s the test of a Christ-like life.

No. 15—PRAYER WARRIOR

Jesus Christ was a Man of prayer, as previously taught. He prayed for everything and for every occasion. He prayed before His ministry began. He prayed before selecting His special disciples. In times of crisis, He prayed. He prayed for His disciples. He prayed even for those who hated Him. “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). The early Christians copied Him: “They devoted themselves...to prayer” (Acts 2:42). On a scale of one to ten, with ten being praying like Christ “without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17) how would you grade yourself?

THE END OF SPIRITUAL SELF-EVALUATION

The most important moment has arrived. We have come to the end of our spiritual self-examination. You may want to tally your result. If you have a perfect score, thank God for His grace in your life. Let the words of Jesus Christ be an encouragement to you. “Behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book...My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:7, 12). But if you find your score is not perfect, do not dismay. Rather let this be the turning point if you have been off track or an encouragement to keep growing if you are a new Christian. Ryrle explains:

“A new believer can be Spirit controlled, but the area of control will be expanding in the normal process of Christian growth...Whereas the new Christian may lack the time to become spiritual [living the spiritual life], the believer of longer standing may be lacking in yieldedness. And without complete and continued control by the Spirit, he cannot be spiritual [living the spiritual life].”³⁵

Wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, this is the perfect time to begin to focus on living your spiritual life to the fullest.

LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE IN YOUR HEARTS

Christianity today is in a gloomy state. Some time ago, I had a conversation about the spiritual life with a well-known Bible teacher. He told me that in the spiritual life, a believer does not need to deal with all his sins at once. He gave me an example: a believer who may have been seriously wounded by another may not yet be ready to forgive that person wholeheartedly. He went on to say that such a believer can confess

other sins and withhold the confession of the sin of bitterness until he's ready to deal with it. What shocked me was his belief that God will graciously forgive and restore to fellowship a believer with unconfessed bitterness. Such a position is not supported by the Bible.

We should not belittle the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit. His ministry is absolute. If He controls our lives, He will make us spiritually whole. A believer lacks truth who claims to hate his brother and simultaneously claim fellowship with God. Consider the apostle John's position: "If anyone claims, 'I am living in the light [in fellowship],' but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness" (1 John 2:11 NLT).

It boils down to this:

1. You cannot live the spiritual life without being powered by the Spirit.
2. You cannot be powered by the Spirit and not live like Christ.
3. You cannot live like Christ without producing His character.

The goal of the spiritual life is defined—that Christ may be formed in us. The apostle Paul states it plainly: "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). That leads me to ask, how can Christ be formed in you and for what purpose? His peace is formed in us through staying in fellowship and reflecting on His Word. Scripture states it clearly: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (Col. 3:15-16 NIV). The question, "How?" is resolved in the next verse, "Let the message of Christ [biblical truth] dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (v. 16). Peace is the product of God's Word: "Greater peace have those who love Thy word" (Ps. 119:165).

Adam Clark said this:

“Let the peace of Christ judge, decide, and govern in your hearts, as the brabeus, or judge, does in the Olympic contests. No heart is right with God where the peace of Christ does not rule; and the continual prevalence of the peace of Christ is the decisive proof that the heart is right with God. When a man loses his peace, it is an awful proof that he has lost something else; that he has given way to evil, and grieved the Spirit of God. Where peace rules, all is safe.”³⁴

You say, “What difference does it make if I have a mediocre spiritual life?” It makes a huge difference! Your eternal blessings depend on it. What’s more, superior blessing for you, your family and your nation depend on your spiritual life. A poor spiritual life begs for personal and national calamity.

“The word of the Lord came to me, ‘Son of man, suppose a country sins against me by being unfaithful, and I stretch out my hand against it, cut off its bread supply, cause famine to come on it, and kill both people and animals. Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, declares the sovereign Lord’” (Ezra 14:12-14 NET).

We are now ready to examine the impact of spiritual life on a nation.



Impact of the Spiritual Life

Your spiritual life matters. It's two sided. It is a source of overflowing blessing for you and your nation when lived out as God intends it. On the other hand, things will fall apart for you, your family and your country when you neglect your spiritual life. Some may wonder, "How can my spiritual life affect other people?" For the answer, we turn to Scripture. God has made you His light bearer (Matt. 5:14). On your lampstand, Jesus Christ, the "light of the world" (John 8:12) shines. You "are the salt of the world" (Matt. 5:13). God seasons and preserves the world through you. What's more, you are an ambassador of the heavenly Kingdom (2 Cor. 5:20). God has set you apart as a vehicle of blessing to the world. If you abide in Him, blessings will overflow through you; if you don't, God will send discipline. Simplified, God deals with the world through an agent—you.

The ramifications of living the life of Christ are immense! The day this truth registers with Christians, it will be “the game changer” in turning our world upside down for Christ. Our world is decaying morally by the hour, evil is skyrocketing, and life is becoming more dangerous than ever. On top of that, there’s “terror by night” and “the arrow that flies by day” (Ps. 91:5), terrorizing the world. You wonder, “What’s going on?” In bewilderment, Bible teachers have risen, explaining the world chaos in terms of “the end time.” Interesting!

“The end time” theory as a theological way of explaining current world trends is a misreading of present-day disasters, covering up spiritual inadequacies and their calamitous consequences. I am convinced that what is happening in the world—social unrest, political chaos, economic downfalls, the so-called climate change and such—are results of spiritual failure on behalf of Christendom. Theologians and Bible teachers must not explain away this truth. The bar of the eternal justice of the supreme court of heaven is ever ready to mete justice in full measure when the rules and order of heaven are violated.

Two prominent past presidents of the United States held this same opinion. Jefferson lamented, “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice will not sleep forever.”³⁶ Washington warned, “The propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which heaven itself has ordained.”³⁷ Look around you. How can a nation that turns its back on God, passing laws in violation of His divine order, expect “the propitious smiles of heaven”?

GOD’S JUSTICE

Justice is one of God’s many attributes: “You are just” (Neh. 9:33). It “is the foundation of His throne” (Ps. 89:14). Believers often get carried away by the uplifting wind of God’s love, forgetting His justice. He deals with man from both attributes—

love and justice. Keep in mind that sentimentalism negates justice. Rule out the idea that God is sentimental. Whatever violates God's righteous standard, His justice responds according to the requirement of divine mandates. "There is no partiality with God" (Rom. 2:11). No one can circumvent His justice and get away with it. Consider His way; He gives man a choice. "Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster" (Deut. 30:15 NLT); or between "a blessing and a curse" (Deut. 11:26). "You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. But you will be cursed if you reject the commands of the Lord your God and turn away from him" (Deut. 11:27-28 NLT). The spiritual life has impact on two fronts—obedience and disobedience of God's Word. One should not underestimate the power of choice. Everett F. Harrison rightly stated, "Normal life includes the capacity for making decisions, and one is responsible for his choices."³⁸

THE IMPACT OF DISOBEDIENCE

God is a God of no nonsense. He means what He says. "You will be cursed if you reject the commands of the Lord your God and turn away from him" (Deut. 11:28 NLT). It's wishful thinking to expect God's blessing when you and I disobey Him. The consequence of turning our back on God is enormous—calamity upon calamity. He orchestrates every kind of disaster as His way of saying, "Listen; you cannot disrespect Me and escape My justice." He tells Isaiah, the prophet, "I am the Lord, and there is no other...causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these" (Isa. 45:6-7). The study of this section will focus on two areas of the impact of disobedience: personally and nationally.

No. 1—CALAMITY ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

Remember, our God is a personal God. He deals with us individually. That's to say, God is concerned about you. He

superintends every minute detail of your life—nothing escapes His attention. He rewards your obedience to His mandates and disciplines your disobedience. You have a choice. The appeals of the Bible to man's will clearly imply that man has the real possibility of making free will moral choices. King Solomon is selected as a perfect example to illustrate the impact of disobedience on an individual.

OVERVIEW OF SOLOMON'S LIFE

Solomon's spiritual life began well. In 1 Kings we read, "Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David" (1 Kings 3:3). As a result of walking on the path of obedience, God rained blessing upon him. He was drenched with blessing. God told him, "I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days" (v. 13). God added a stipulation: "If you walk in My ways...I will prolong your days" (v. 14). "If"—Solomon's future hung in the balance with that little word *if*. *If* he remained obedient, blessing was ensured, but *if* not, calamity awaited him.

SOLOMON CHOSE TO DISOBEY GOD

Solomon carelessly drifted from God. Analyzing how he drifted is not within the scope of this present work. Scripture uncovers Solomon's failure: "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women...from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, 'You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they shall surely turn your heart away after their gods'" (1 Kings 11:1-2). The final sentence of this verse is chilling: "Solomon held fast to these [women] in love" (v. 2). He disobeyed God and married foreign women. They "turned his heart away after other gods" (v. 4). Solomon had turned his back on God who would respond according to His justice. "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges [skins alive] every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6; see Prov. 3:12).

SOLOMON EXPERIENCED CALAMITY

God keeps His Word: “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, *if* you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God...and the curse, *if* you do not listen” (Deut. 11:26-28 emphasis added). Obedience brought tremendous blessing to Solomon, according to God’s promise. Likewise, his disobedience triggered the justice of God to respond with an equal measure: “Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord” (1 Kings 11:9). The worst experience any believer can have is to be the object of God’s anger. “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hand of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). God choreographed calamity for Solomon incrementally. Solomon placed an order for trouble by disobeying God. The Supreme Court of Heaven Postal Services delivered his order, one package after another.

First Package: “The Lord raised up an adversary to Solomon” (1 Kings 11:14). Scripture is all about truth. The Lord was responsible for Solomon’s calamity—He tailored an adversary suitable for Solomon’s disobedience. God’s first choice was “Hadad the Edomite.” Interestingly, the word rendered *adversary* here is the Hebrew masculine noun, *Satan*—“the arch enemy of all good.”³⁹ Adversary in this context is a person who makes war, punctures any balloon of tranquility and raises hell fire within the individual’s soul.

Second Package: “God also raised up another adversary to him...*he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon*” (1 Kings 11:23, 25 emphasis added). Observe. The second adversary was a thorn, not only to Solomon, but also to Israel. It demonstrates the fact that both blessing and cursing run through the conduit of God’s chosen vessel. Solomon was God’s vessel. He had already blessed the nation because of him. Now the country

shared in his discipline. No one should miss this point of truth—“By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked [believer] it is torn down” (Prov. 11:11). This principle applies to citizens as well as their leaders.

Third Package: God raised Jeroboam, and he “rebelled against the king” (1 Kings 11:26). That’s not all; because of Solomon’s disobedience, God divided Israel in two, giving Jeroboam “ten pieces” (v. 31). That’s the beginning of Israel’s division—the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Don’t buy into Satan’s lie—that you are just an ordinary believer—that your spiritual life matters little. On the contrary, you are an extraordinary individual because of Him who indwells you. He has deposited His blessing in you, and through you, He administers it, “Jesus in you the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

No. 2—CALAMITY ON A NATIONAL LEVEL

There is always grace before judgment (1 Cor. 11:31). National alarms go off repeatedly before disaster hits. It was true in Israel’s day, as we read, “God of their fathers, sent word to them *again and again* by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people” (2 Chr. 36:15 emphasis added). God’s alarm has been sounding in every country. Many have written books detailing our national spiritual failures, warning of pending judgment. This book is one of them. But when ignored or explained away, saying, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14), God responds accordingly. It happened in Israel’s time: “They continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy” (2 Chr. 36:16). He sent calamity their way (vv. 17-18).

A review of Scripture and historical records show a correlation between evil reaching its peak and calamity on a national level. Keep in mind, God designed the spiritual life as a restrainer for keeping evil in check. As long as the restrainer of the spiritual life is operative, evil activities are kept at the lowest level. But when the restrainer is removed, evil overflows, engulfing every area of life, producing all kinds of abominable deeds, affecting every sector: political, racial, social, gender and economic. It happened in Israel in the Old Testament, particularly when judges ruled the nation. They had a roller-coaster life experience in relation to obedience and disobedience. Whenever they turned their back on God, He responded with discipline.

Consider two accounts in the Book of Judges: “And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth” (Judg. 3:7). Justice was meted out: “Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of...[a foreign king]; and the sons of Israel served...[him] eight years” (v. 8). They were slaves for eight years.

The second account, “Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. Israel was brought very low” (Judg. 6:1-2, 6). Take note: in both cases, God brought disaster upon Israel. This applies not only to a nation but also to the individual’s life experience. King Solomon captured it beautifully. After his roller-coaster experience, he wrote, “In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other” (Eccl. 7:14). Simplified, God brings both prosperity and disaster. For an in-depth study on this topic, see *Disaster, God’s Warning Bell*.⁴⁰ If you are to gain extra knowledge and appreciate the study, you are challenged to read the first twenty chapters of the book of 2 Chronicles. There you will see the correlation between disobedience and disaster and obedience and blessing graphically portrayed.

GOD RAISES ADVERSARIES

God cannot keep silent when His righteous standard is violated. He will act accordingly. Recall Solomon's experience as previously taught: "The Lord raised up an adversary to Solomon." This was true in the days of Israel. "Israel was without the true God" (2 Chr. 15:3). In reply, "God troubled them with *every kind* of distress" (2 Chr. 15:6 emphasis added). You cannot appreciate the truth therein until you understand that God is in total control of what is happening in the world, even this minute. God is sovereign. He rules the affairs of man. To argue otherwise is to deny God's sovereign power. In light of this, observe the dissection of the phrase, "every kind of distress."

DISTRESS OF POOR LEADERSHIP

God is in charge; kings are not.

God appoints leaders. "There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom. 13:1; see also Dan. 2:21). If all leaders are from God, why then are there bad leaders in this world? God installs bad leaders and uses them as punishment for nations that have turned their back on Him. "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hands is My indignation, I sent it against a godless nation and commissioned it against the people of My fury" (Isa. 10:5-6). There's always a connection between bad leadership and its subjects. Self-righteousness exalts self and puts others down—never sees its own error, but that of others. We judge, malign and criticize our leaders, but never pause to examine ourselves. God is in charge; kings are not. "He removes kings and establishes kings" (Dan. 2:21). Bad leaders will continue their cycle of leadership until there's a

spiritual restoration. “The Lord raised up an adversary to Solomon.” “God troubled them with *every kind* of distress.” In every case, God was the subject, the author of the trouble.

DISTRESS OF TERRORISM

The same way “He makes the winds [hurricanes] His messengers, flaming fire His ministers” (Ps. 104:4), God uses terror as a ministering agent. He commissions it “against the people of His fury” (Isa. 10:6). Are you surprised? The major problem in Christianity today is ignorance of who and what God is and knowledge of Him and His operations. This lack of knowledge often leads to humanization of God.

Consider Moses’ account. Through him, God warned Israel, “If you do not obey Me...I will appoint over you a sudden *terror*, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away” (Lev. 26:14, 16 emphasis added).

Read it again, “I will appoint over you...*terror*.” Can God really raise terrorism? That’s what He said He will do if His children refuse to obey Him. Does the passage describe what’s happening today? If so, who is responsible? Admittedly, it’s challenging in every generation declaring truth as God intends. Many resort to euphemism and compromise. Consider God’s Word to Isaiah, the prophet: “Your righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (Isa. 64:4). The original Hebrew word euphemistically translated “filthy garment” should have been rendered “menstrual cloth,” which conveys the message more powerfully. If there’s any hope of restoration, we must consider the whole realm of God’s Word and accept “it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13). Hear me loud and clear: I would rather die than compromise even one iota of the infallible Word of God. “When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?” (Amos 3:6 NIV). When man disobeys, God will respond. And sometimes He uses an evil agent in the process such as we saw with Assyria and Babylon in the Old Testament.

ECONOMIC DISTRESS

Recall our passage in 2 Chronicles 15:6, “God troubled them with *every kind of distress*.” Economic disaster is another tool in God’s arsenal of distress. God tells Ezekiel the prophet, “If a country sins against Me...I will stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread” (Ez. 14:14). No good Bible student would argue God’s hand on the worldwide economic woes. He said it already, “I will...destroy its supply of bread.” In the time the Bible was written, agriculture was the sole means of economic sustenance. To destroy agriculture was to destroy the national economy.

God made true on His Word when Israel sinned against Him. Consider His indictment carefully: “Therefore, *because of you* the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce...I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands” (Hag. 2:10-11 emphasis added). “Because of you [God’s children] the sky has withheld its dew.” Imagine, Christians have joined in calling for regulations on climate. But how can one regulate something over which he has no control? When God says, “I called for drought,” how can your regulations change it? Solomon asks, “Who is able to straighten what He [God] has bent?” (Eccl. 7:13). No one!

As the world’s light bearers, we don’t need to count ourselves out as the reason for the economic downtrends. Our world is desperately looking for a solution to its dilemma. Where is help? Reflect on the teaching that when a believer’s life is honoring to the Lord, he becomes a channel of blessing to those around him and they to him (Prov. 11:11). There is help.

FRANTIC SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Before our eyes, world leaders frantically search for solutions to curtail terrorism and rebuild the economy, but their efforts fail time and again. God’s Word comes afresh to mind: “Who is able to straighten what He has bent?” (Eccl. 7:13). To put the passage

in street language, “Who in the world is able to fix what God has broken?” Only God can fix what He breaks. But man persists in trying. We will look at these two solutions—human and divine.

HUMAN SOLUTIONS

This is the arena where politicians have fought fierce battles, everyone promising paradise. Most politicians enter the arena with goodwill and good intentions. Goodwill and good intentions are no match to straighten “what God has bent.” Some Christian politicians have even thrown a few of God’s words into their campaign message, but there’s a problem. A voice without an audience is an empty voice. The people are not looking to God; so they do not pay attention to His Word even when mixed into political speech. Consequently, evil continues to reign; the tentacles of terrorism continue to branch out in different directions, with different names. I stand amazed at the faithfulness of God’s Word. God further added, “If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins” (Lev. 26:21). What’s more, “I will also break down your pride of power” (v. 19). Where then is hope?

DIVINE SOLUTION

The solution is spiritual and not political. There can be no other solution in restoring hope than the divine solution. The Psalmist asked, “From where shall my help come?” (Ps. 121:1). His answer, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (v. 2). You and I need to pause and examine our spiritual life. Stop and ask yourself, how is my spiritual life? Am I part of the problem or the solution? The answer is a matter between you and the Lord. Scripture is apt: “[If] My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chr. 7:14). Confession, restoration to fellowship and living the life of Christ brings enormous blessing to everyone.

Joe Battaglia warns us:

“Jesus wants His followers to lift *Him* up...and nothing else. He is not concerned with political agendas. He points to Himself as the Savior with all humility and exhibits power by going to the cross. Jesus wants us to understand that the only hill worth dying for is Calvary. When we set up other hills we miss the mindset of Jesus.

“If you want to fight the Culture War, leave Jesus out of it and leave His Word out of it too. Otherwise, those who might really see Jesus in you will get confused about the gospel when you raise the flag or any cause higher than the cross.”⁴¹

This brings us to the next subject—the impact of obedience.

OVERFLOWING BLESSING OF OBEDIENCE

God is serious about obedience. It attracts blessing beyond measure. What happens when children obey their parents? They enjoy parental special treats. What happens when those under authority obey their master? They enjoy their master’s praise and reward. If these two examples hold true in the human realm, how much more will it hold with God when we obey Him? The song writer Daniel B. Towner summarizes it best: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”⁴² God means what He says: “You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord” (Deut. 11:27 NLT).

Blessing comes in many categories and is more than the material, more than the typical desires of the sinful heart. Material, relationship, professional, and other “worldly” blessings may be withdrawn by the Lord for His glory, to tell the world that our lives do not depend on external prosperity in order to fulfill God’s design for our lives. Spiritual blessings are the ones that are most important, and are never withdrawn.

Understand this: true blessing comes from God alone. It is a colossal mistake and even sinful for a believer to join non-Christians in search of a pseudo messiah, believing he will save them from economic woes and national chaos. “Cursed is the one who trusts in man” (Jer. 17:5). They hope in governmental policies for a better life. These are easily won by politicians, who sugar coat their speeches—making promises only God can deliver. Non-Christians’ reliance on governmental policy for national prosperity is forgivable. But a believer, looking to the government for a better life? That’s unforgivable. It cannot be over stressed. Obedience to God is a source of blessing—individually and nationally.

It was true in Old Testament times. Recall that Judah’s disobedience of God in Haggai’s day resulted in ruination of their agricultural economy. “Therefore, *because of you* the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce...*I called for a drought* on the land” (Hag. 2:10-11 emphasis added). In their hardship, they turned to God. “The people...obeyed the voice of the Lord their God” (Hag. 1:12). Their obedience turned cursing into blessing. The moment they obeyed God, He assured them, “from this day on I will bless you” (2:19). What a message of hope—I will bless you.

BLESSING BY ASSOCIATION

Your spiritual life has a great value.

Pay close attention to this section. Blessing by association is a biblical principle that many Bible communicators shy away from, either purposely or because they do not know what the Bible teaches about it. This truth is important. You ought not to minimize the impact of your spiritual life. Its impact goes beyond the grave (Prov. 20:7). Spiritual life lived to the maximum draws

overflowing blessing on many fronts. God blesses you beyond belief. He goes further, to bless those around you—children, family members, friends and more. Believers and unbelievers alike enjoy great blessing because of your spiritual life. Worded differently, your spiritual life has great value. The point of blessing by association is made using two great believers, Abraham and Joseph, plus Ishmael, an unbeliever.

ABRAHAM’S OVERFLOWING BLESSING

Abraham’s spiritual life is a reference point in Scripture. His name was mentioned in the Bible more than any biblical figure. That said, consider his enormous blessing: “Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold” (Gen. 13:2). God blessed him beyond his wildest dream. That’s grace. God did not end there. He promises to cause Abraham’s blessing to overflow for even those who were not yet born—his descendants: “I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and *by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws” (Gen. 26:4-5 emphasis added). Note the reason for his blessing beyond belief: “because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.” God blessed Abraham beyond measure. Israel today is still under God’s covenant of blessing because of Abraham—blessing by association.

JOSEPH’S OVERFLOWING BLESSING

Joseph was a great believer, a man who feared the Lord. Scripture gave us a hint of his spiritual integrity. “Now Joseph was well built and handsome...his master’s wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me’” (Gen. 39:6-7). His spiritual life was revealed to us by his action: “He refused and said to his master’s wife...‘How then could I do this great

evil and sin against God?” (vv. 8-9). See who he’s afraid of—God. Consequently God showered him with blessing. He became Egypt’s prime minister (Gen. 41:38-42). Consider his overflowing blessing: “It came about that from the time he [Potiphar] made him [Joseph] overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house on account of Joseph; thus the Lord’s blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field” (v. 5). Notice: “the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house on account of Joseph.” You should not miss this: Potiphar was an unbeliever. He was blessed because of his association with a believer whose lifestyle was pleasing to the Lord.

ISHMAEL’S OVERFLOWING BLESSING

It makes sense to explain the concept of a believer sharing in God’s abundant blessing; what makes one to pause and ponder is God’s blessing of an unbeliever. Though Ishmael was Abraham’s first son, he was not the son of promise, not the son of Abraham and Sarah. He was the son of Abraham and Hagar and as such became the father of the Arab nations. He was blessed because he was related to Abraham. But what’s even more intriguing is the blessing of Arab nations because of Ishmael. “As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation” (Gen. 17:20). There’s hardly a single Arab nation which does not enjoy tremendous blessing today. Their blessing has nothing to do with their spiritual life. They have none. Rather, it has to do with the faithfulness of God’s promise to bless Ishmael and his offspring. Surprised? That’s the epitome of blessing by association. Ishmael was associated with a biblical spiritual giant—Abraham.

OVERFLOWING BLESSING BEYOND THE GRAVE

The blessing of obedience can be compared with an oil well. It outlasts its owner. God's abounding grace for you is carried over to your associates. What's more, upon death, He cares for your loved ones—that's grace at its peak. "A righteous man who walks in his integrity, How blessed are his sons after him" (Prov. 20:7). Note the words, "after him." The Psalmist sang "the generation of the upright will be blessed" (Ps. 112:2). This is God's unchanging covenant. It explains the residual blessing of Great Britain. They are still drawing from the oil well of their spiritual fathers. The same is equally true of America. The greatest legacy anyone can leave behind for their loved ones is a life of spiritual integrity. Its worth is immeasurable!

The greatest legacy anyone can leave behind for their loved ones is a life of spiritual integrity.

SECRET OF NATIONAL BLESSING

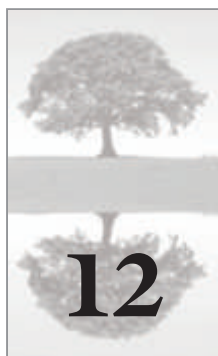
Your spiritual life is the secret of the blessing of your nation. It cannot be overemphasized: our spiritual life has enormous value. When God is the center of our life, things will fall in place for us and for our nation, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 33:12). "Righteousness lifts up a nation, but sin is a disgrace in any society" (Prov. 14:34 GW). "By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted" (Prov. 11:11). This is the teaching of God's Word. We cannot circumvent it!

INVISIBLE HEROES

Don't be deceived, thinking, "God cannot use me." God is still in the business of using one man, one woman. We often think

that gone are the days when God used individuals like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Esther and Daniel, just to name a few of the Old Testament giants, to change their world. True, it was thousands of years ago when God used them, but in recent memory, God used D.L. Moody, John Wesley and Charles Spurgeon, just to name three, as a source of blessing to many. Scripture tells us, “If a man cleanses himself...he will be a vessel of honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21). God is still searching: “For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His” (2 Chr. 16:9). Observe what the Lord is looking for in a person: one “whose heart is completely dedicated to Him.”

Would you pray with me? Father, make me a vessel of honor and use me “for every good work” for Your glory. In the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.





Reflection

My beloved, the most important time of all has arrived—time to reflect on our spiritual life. The importance of reflection and self-examination was acknowledged even by Socrates, the Greek philosopher, who famously said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

This book addresses the major issue of our time. We pray that it will change lives and give glory to whom it’s due—the Holy Spirit, who opens our eyes and challenges us to the truth of the unchanging Word of God. Along the journey, He enabled the humble “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep” the spiritual life is (Eph. 3:18). He caused the meek to realize the enormous impact of the spiritual life and that Christians are the *conduit* of blessing or cursing for this world.

The world experiences tremendous blessing—prosperity, peace and tranquility—when the spiritual life of believers worldwide

shines. However, it experiences great turbulence when Christians no longer reflect the life of Christ. Think of it. God has made us extraordinary, special people by the virtue of the indwelling of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is new, especially for the Church! You are His vessel. It is an honor and a privilege that He has chosen to reveal Himself to the world through you, “Jesus in you the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

Pause and meditate. Is God fulfilling His purpose through you? As a Christian, do you realize that your “days are numbered” and that you “cannot live longer than the time” He allocated (Job 14:5 NLV)? Are you concerned that each passing day subtracts one day from your allotted years? Someone once said, “Death is a deadline.” Are you concerned that today could be your deadline for the assignment God gave you? If it is, can you say like the apostle Paul, “I have finished the course” (2 Tim. 4:7)? What do you consider to be the most important thing in your life? Remember the words of Ironside, “Time is given us to use in view of eternity.”⁴³ Consider what God has done for you.

CHRIST’S PRESENT MINISTRY

I have purposely reserved this section for last. Your salvation is a stepping stone to the awesome plan God has for you. A Bible student asked, “What is Jesus Christ’s ministry today?” His ministry is many! Jesus’ role for the Church never ceases. He’s on the same level with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the formation and upkeep of the Church. “God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things *for the benefit of the church, which is His body*” (Eph. 1:22-23 emphasis added).

You are a part of His Body—the Church. As the Creator of all things (Col. 1:16-17), He shelters you with every fiber of His Being. His work for you continues, even from on high where He sits “at the right hand of God” (Rom. 8:34). Remember, He indwells you. He is involved in our lives as much as, or even more than, He was involved in the lives of His disciples during

His earthly ministry. His promise to His disciples extends to you and me: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Jesus Christ plays four critical roles in your life as a Christian—He intercedes, defends, supports and encourages.

INTERCESSOR

Reflect on Jesus’ intercessory work on your behalf. As an experienced High Priest and Prayer Warrior for the Church, “He always lives to make intercession for” you (Heb. 7:25). His unequalled suffering was an asset as a Prayer Warrior. He was made like us “that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17). The author of Hebrews tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (4:15). Because of what He “suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (2:18). He prays continually to the Father for your wellbeing. That should encourage our hearts as we endeavor to glorify God, who has done so much for us—the totally undeserving ones.

DEFENDER

Consider Christ’s unceasing defense effort on your behalf. He is your Lawyer. Thank God, we have a Voice in the unseen courtroom of heaven, where Satan unceasingly accuses the saints (Rev. 12:10). “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). In essence, this is what the apostle John was saying: “You have Jesus Christ, the Defending Attorney on your side.” What a blessing to have a Person on your side, One who has never lost and never will lose a case. The apostle exhorted his audience to endeavor to avoid committing sin. Realizing that they would occasionally stumble, he assured them that Jesus would plead their case. Reflect on what it means that He pleads your case.

SUPPORTER

Jesus Christ has made an unbreakable promise: “Lo I am with you always, to the close of the age” Matt. 28:20 RSV). What does it mean to be with you? Being with you doesn’t just mean following you around wherever you go, though it includes that too. It means, among other things, protection, provision and spiritual strength.

- **Protection:** “And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent *for I am with you*, and *no man will attack you in order to harm you*, for I have many people in this city’” (Acts 18:9-10 emphasis added). Regarding persecutions, the apostle Paul testified, “Out of them all the Lord rescued me!” **them all the Lord rescued me!**” (2 Tim. 3:11). Being “with you always,” Jesus Christ will continually shelter you from danger, visible and invisible, human or demonic, until your work is done (2 Tim. 4:17-18). Let this encourage your heart in Christ Jesus.
- **Provision:** Because Jesus Christ indwells you, He is your source of blessing. Through Him, God sends provision to you: “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19 NIV). Reflect on God’s plan.
- **Spiritual Strength:** “At my first trial no one came to my defense. Everyone abandoned me...However, the Lord stood by me and *gave me strength* so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the gentiles could hear it. I was rescued out of a lion’s mouth” (2 Tim. 4:16-17 ISV emphasis added). He told the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” The apostle responded, “Therefore I will boast all the more

gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor. 12:9 NIV). You see, as co-heir of Christ (Rom. 8:17), you share in His power. That is the epitome of God's grace.

ENCOURAGER

Jesus Christ is as close to you as your own soul, to encourage and strengthen you in your spiritual journey. He comes to your aid when you are weak and discouraged. He shares equally with God in your encouragement. This is revealed in the apostle Paul's prayer: "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort [by encouragement] and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word" (2 Thess. 2:16-17).

REFLECTING ON THE HEROES GONE BY

Many Old Testament saints have already gone to glory and met their deadline with great expectation. Enoch met a different kind of deadline. "Enoch walked with God." God was so pleased with him that at the end of his journey, He called him home alive (Gen. 5:24). Abraham walked with the Lord. He crowned him and set his feet "securely on high" because Abraham knew His name (Ps. 91:14). Moses was a dynamic servant. He had a choice between becoming Egypt's next king or serving God. He opted for God, and Moses glorified Him; consequently, God honored Moses. Recall, Moses was there, along with Elijah, at Christ's transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-3). David was referred to as a man after God's own heart because he was a man in pursuit of God's heart. He honored God. Consequently, God set David on high, beyond reach. "Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8); consequently, the Lord "promoted Daniel and gave him many gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of

Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan. 2:48). Here is proof that God honors those who honor Him (1 Sam. 2:30).

Many New Testament saints have also gone to glory. The great apostle Paul honored the Lord, leaving footprints in the sands of biblical times. Think of people you admire. When I think of the modern-day saints who have met their deadline, Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, Charles Finney, Mary Slessor, John Wesley, George Müller, George Whitefield, and many more come to mind. They impacted their world. It was reported of Charles Spurgeon that over 100,000 attended his funeral. Considering his legacy, the whole world would have come, had they had the means.

What do all these heroes both Old and New have in common? They had one thing in common, in three words—*the spiritual life*. They determined to honor God. Our God of equity and grace responded in kind. It’s not too late to enlist. You need not listen to Satan’s lie that God will never use you—that your life is a mess. It is doubtful that your life is messier than the apostle Paul, who identified himself as “the foremost of all” sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Yet God used him mightily.

THE RUGGED ROAD TO GLORY

The reward of living the life of Christ
is priceless; the cost of not living it is high.

The road to glory is rugged and treacherous. Living the spiritual life is not all roses. It possesses challenges. The apostle Paul let us know, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Know this: the reward of living the life of Christ is priceless; the cost of not living it is high. Jesus

Christ has tested all the potholes. He is “the author and perfecter of faith.” Reflect on His success. He had His eyes on the prize, “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2). The road might be rugged, but remember that the Lord and others have gone before us.

PERSONAL ASSAULTS

You have been assaulted—no doubt. Take comfort from the words of Jesus Christ who also was persecuted: “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20 NIV). Have you been abandoned by your close friends? Christ was abandoned by His disciples. Have you become the object of maligning, judging and non-constructive criticisms by those you care about the most? That’s prophetic (2 Tim. 3:1-3). “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you” (Matt. 5:11). Take courage; our Lord has “overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Many have lost hope. I ask again, have you been lambasted even by your close friends? Remember, Jesus Christ was hammered beyond belief, even betrayed by someone He loved dearly—Judas Iscariot. The apostle Paul was pressed on every side, even by his associates. He lamented,

“I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:26-28).

The apostle Paul recounted his personal experience: “Alexander the coppersmith *did me much harm*; the Lord will

repay him according to his deeds” (2 Tim. 4:14 emphasis added). What’s more, the Corinthian believers were always on his case, forcing him to defend himself. “I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody” (2 Cor. 12:11). They were critical of him, constantly accusing him. These were people he led to Christ—those for whom he risked his life, that they might have abundant life in Christ.

People always ask me, “Have you ever experienced an attack in your ministry?” You always consider yourself to be invisible until the bullet of vituperation and the public lie hit you right between the eyes. You wonder, “Why me? What did I do wrong?” Truthfully, I never thought that people, particularly fellow believers, would attack me. Hah! Wishful thinking. This does not imply perfection on my part—far from it. But I had erroneously thought that watchfulness of one’s life would shelter a person from public assault. I was wrong. No one could be more watchful than the Lord Himself, yet He was ambushed. The apostle Paul was watchful, yet he was viciously attacked. We are all in this battle together. No one is immune. Take heart!

One evening I received a phone call. The person said, “Our pastor told us today that you are teaching and promoting speaking in tongues overseas.” Honestly, I smiled and brushed off the allegation because in fact I had been teaching the very opposite. But the rumor continued to spread like a wildfire. I wasn’t disturbed, knowing it was a false charge. Then one day my elder brother asked me, “Did you call the pastor?” Though I hadn’t considered it, that prompted me to call. The pastor told me that someone had told him. See how rumors spread? Someone tells someone, another tells the other and so on. As the Lord would have it, unbeknownst to anyone, my book on the subject, *The Spiritual Gift of Tongues*, was already in progress and a couple of weeks later it was published. What did I do? I did what the Lord did: “Father, forgive them.”

That's just one allegation among many. I know you may have experienced even worse. People being people, they will do what people do—accuse, malign and judge each other. But that should not be true of you. You are different. Reflect on the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-12:

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.”

We are in “the last days.” What a time to be alive! The fact that people malign, falsely accuse you, and do many more evil things to you is proof of the infallibility and faithfulness of God's Word. God's Word must be fulfilled, but “woe to that man” who fulfills bad prophecy (Luke 22:22). It pains me, knowing that God disciplines severely those who destroy fellow believers, sowing seeds of discord, gossiping and causing others to sin. King Solomon told us, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:21). Watch your tongue. “No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their vindication is from Me,” declares the LORD” (Isa. 54:17).

We should do whatever it takes to avoid confronting the ultimate court of heaven. It is *not* worth it.

In the midst of spiritual chaos, God expects us to follow His Son's "teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings" (2 Tim. 3:11). Above all, you have been called "to follow in His example." The apostles followed. Their spiritual life and work "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Your spiritual life has equal potential to do the same. I appeal to you: if your spiritual life is stalled, jump-start it for the sake of His glory. God has done so much for us. We can never repay Him. As God's children, the least we can do for our Father is serve Him honorably.

DEFEATING DISCOURAGEMENT

Discouragement is the most potent weapon Satan uses against believers in every age. He used it against Abraham, Moses and Elijah, just to name three in the Old Testament. For instance, Elijah was discouraged beyond belief, "He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died" (1 Kings 19:4). Have you had such a thought or desire? You are not alone.

You see, Satan has discovered that discouragement works; so he re-engineers it and uses it effectively against us. Are you discouraged? Do you feel like abandoning the spiritual life, or have you already bailed out? Do not be discouraged. God knew the implication. So He commands us, "But encourage one another *day after day*, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13 emphasis added). "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11). Are you an encourager or a discourager? You have been called to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Remember, when He told His disciples to "take courage, I have overcome the world," He was encouraging them.

BEARING EACH OTHER'S BURDENS

When was the last time you bore your brother or sister's burden? The Bible mandates, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Bearing one's burden is the best way to interpret the word *encouragement*. On the other hand, how can you bear my burden when you don't even converse with me? To bear a burden, you must first know about the burden. How close are you with your fellow brothers and sisters? Remember God called you to bear one another's burdens, not to add to them.

God called you to bear one another's burdens,
not to add to them.

FINAL REFLECTION

Pause for a moment. I really mean *p a u s e*. Take a deep breath and retreat to the chamber of your soul. Do you enjoy God's peace on a regular basis? Are you going through turmoil, one crisis after another with no end in sight? Could all this be God's way of calling for your attention? Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to produce the life of Christ through you? Do you love your brother and sister the same way "as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25)? Are you mindful that your God-given assignment has a time limit?

By God's infinite grace and mercy, this book has been compiled, not as a sledgehammer, but as a tool to encourage and challenge you in your walk with the Lord. Ryrie said, "Biblical spirituality is the only genuine spirituality...all experiences of the spiritual life must be tested by biblical truth, any if any experience, no matter how real it may have been, fails to pass that test,

it must be discarded.”⁴⁴ The apostle Paul exhorted, “Test yourself to see if you are in the faith.” What’s more, when you realize the death of Christ for you, you should be awakened. When you realize the immense price that God paid for you, the life of His Son, Jesus Christ, you should be awakened and eager to serve the Lord with the new life He gave you.

As you and I are re-evaluating our spiritual life, let’s remember that our “days are numbered”—the days God ordained for us to accomplish His purpose for leaving us on planet earth. We “cannot live longer than the time” He sets (Job 14:5). If you find you have been going in the wrong direction, take heart—today is the day for spiritual restoration and renewal. As we ponder on this truth the Holy Spirit has brought to us, let us reflect on the lyrics of this hymn by Albert Osborne:

“Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me, All His wonderful passion and purity; O Thou spirit Divine, all my nature refine, Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.”

Father, as the reader looks into his own life, it’s my burning desire and heartfelt prayer that You do Your work of grace anew in him, resulting in his life bringing maximum glorification to Your name. Let’s conclude with the apostle Paul’s prayer for us:

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen”
(Eph. 3:14-21 NIV).

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Notes



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