

Obtaining Victory Over Sin!

- **Why does temptation seem so powerful and attractive?**
- **Why doesn't God just curtail Satan's power?**
- **When does Temptation turn into a sin?**
- **Why doesn't God dull our desires for wrongdoing?**



Every day we face the oldest human dilemma
--- the choice between good and evil.

This study shares detailed principles on how to say "No"
to sin and "Yes" to God

It also reveals the road to freedom from that stubborn
habit that is causing so much trouble.

Obtaining Victory Over Sin

Don't let anyone tell you that it is easy to find an answer to the problem of some stubborn habit that has entwined itself around a person's life. It is a spiritual problem, therefore needs spiritual answers that are found only in God's Word.

The reader is encouraged to take practical steps and apply what he learns – steps such as: taking a personal inventory – praying for specific insight – and – developing study habits that will assist him in achieving victory over stubborn habits.

There is no shortage of books in the “*self-improvement*” category however, this study will not fall into the group, but rather, is are lessons enabling us to become what God created and redeemed us to be.

Some thoughts contained in this study may be controversial, but it is hoped that the reader will be stimulated to consider the reason for stubborn habits. We will look into God's Word and see what it says about “*self*” and “*the flesh*” – and what appears to be incurable desire to put our interests above God's. We will reconsider the balance between human responsibility and human vulnerability due to heredity and environment.

We've all wished for the miracle that Seneca cried out for:

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a Roman philosopher (4 B.C. to 65A.D.) wrote, “*Oh that a hand would come down from heaven and deliver me from my besetting sin.*”

Sinful habits begin innocently enough – however, if we do not master them, they will surely master us! The cycle of temptation is vicious:

- enjoy forbidden pleasure,
- feel guilty,
- determine never to do it again,
- take pride in moments of self-control,
- then fail once more!

Stubborn Habit



Each time we repeat the pattern the ruts are cut a bit deeper -- and the chain pulls tighter.

We perhaps excuse our behavior because, “*After all, we're just human,*” so we become pessimistic, maybe even defiant, but soon find ourselves victimized by a sin that refuses to budge. This behavior pattern becomes so familiar that eventually we don't even want to change. As we settle into an uneasy smugness, we come to feel at home in our hanger, lust, worry, gluttony, laziness, bitterness, or selfishness.

Is it possible to be delivered from the “*one-step forward and two-backward*” routine? At times, the answer seems to be “*No*” - despite our sincere attempts at yielding our self to God. We retain certain weaknesses -- (“*sins*” is a more honest word) - until we conclude that we would simply have to live with them. After all, we decide - “*no one is perfect!*”

However, when we are honest with our self we realize that our failures are no credit to Christ, who won the victory over all sin - and sins - by His death and resurrection. And, after all, Christ Jesus did promise that we could be “*free indeed.*”

Hallelujah -- God’s Word gives a guide whereby the most persistent of sins can be dislodged and we can be free from even the ones ingrained so deeply within the crevices of our soul.

Imagine a city that is constantly being attacked at a vulnerable point along one of its walls. The enemy habitually exploits the same weakness - with startling success. Don’t you think that the inhabitants would rebuild the defective fortification in preparation for the next assault? Yet countless Christians repeatedly succumb to the same temptations without a constructive program for strengthening their defenses. They have accepted failure as a way of life, reasoning, “*That’s just the way I am.*”

God has a different plan and He has given us a message of deliverance and hope. True, there are no easy miracles. Our success is neither instant nor automatic. Superficial answers and so-called easy solutions only lead to false expectations that, in turn, spawn disappointment and unbelief. Applying Biblical principles take time and discipline. However, study progress is possible. Even long-established and sinful behavior patterns can be replaced by wholesome attitudes and actions.

God sent His Son down from heaven to deliver us from our besetting sins. I would like for us to consider a step-by-step route to the freedom Christ has provided for “*whosoever will.*”

Lesson 1

WHY TEMPTATION?

Why are wrong desires so powerful? We can’t help but wonder -- when we are crushed by guilt over a transgression of God’s Word - “*Why can’t we trust our self?*” We don’t want to live a defeated life. We promise our self that we wouldn’t do it again - but here we are again!

These are honest questions that deserve an answer. Why is temptation so attractive, unrelenting, and powerful? Why doesn’t God adjust the degree of our temptations so that the scales would be tipped more generously in favor of holy living?

Does it seem to you that the Christian life seems to be needlessly difficult at times? It would be easy to assume -- Surely God (Who possesses all might and authority) could make it easier for us who love Him and desire to always do what is right. Since so many believers succumb to one sin or another, some even ending in ruin, it seems logical that God would keep a step ahead of us, diffusing the land mines along our path. If you are wondering how God could do this, consider these suggestions.

1. Why Doesn't God Prohibit Satan From Tempting Us?

God could eliminate the devil. In fact, if He had done that at the time of Creation, chances are that Adam and Eve would not have plunged the human race into sin. Most likely our first parents would have obeyed God without pausing to consider the fruit of the forbidden tree.

Adam and Eve were created free-willed agents, we are aware of that, but why couldn't God give them the opportunity to choose without outside interference? The serpent that came to them was beautiful, spoke with authority, and promised a better life. As far as we know, Adam and Eve had not been told about the existence of Satan, and so were quite unprepared for this abrupt encounter. If the serpent had been barred from the Garden, it certainly seems that Adam and Eve would have been more inclined to obey God. They might have chose not to eat from the forbidden tree.

The presence of Satan in the Garden and his activity on our planet tips the scale in favor of evil choices. This, of course, does not mean that we must follow his sinister suggestions; but if he were banned from the earth, we certainly could resist temptation much more easily.

Much of the evil in the world, including our own struggles, can be traced to the interference of unseen spiritual forces. If God were to annihilate the devil, or at least confine him to the pit, we could take giant steps in our walk with Christ. No more of the one-step-forward, two-backward routine! Our battle with temptation would be minimized and we'd be more inclined to resist the enticement of sin. Why doesn't God just obliterate Satan?

2. Why Doesn't God Just Prohibit Satan From Tempting Us?

A second suggestion to minimize the casualty toll in the Christian life would be for God to dull the arrows of temptation that harass us from inside. James wrote, "*But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust*" (James 1:14). Could not God dampen those passions to make moral purity more easily within reach?

You and I were born with a "*sinful nature*" that combines response to outward stimuli with its inner twisted passions of greed, selfishness, anger, rebellion, and lust. Every honest Christian admits to being overcome by one or more of these desires at some point in his or her spiritual pilgrimage. Surely God, who knows our frailty, could dampen those passions just a bit. Then we'd be more likely to be victorious, and a credit to our Redeemer.

We've all heard someone say, *"I know what I ought to do, but I just can't to it. I've tried. I've asked God to help me -- but still I have failed."* Paul wrote about his own struggle, *"For that which 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"* (Romans 7:15). The church reformer, John Knox, wrote these words before he died, *"Now, after many battles, I find nothing in me but vanity and corruption. For in quietness I am negligent, in trouble impatient, tending to desperation; pride and ambition assault me on the one part, covetousness and malice trouble me on the other; briefly, O Lord, the affections of the flesh do almost suppress the operation of Thy Spirit."* – If this man of God had such struggles, is there any hope for the rest of us?

3. Couldn't God Rearrange Our Schedules Away From Places of Temptation?

Even if God does not prohibit Satan from tempting us, couldn't He guide us away from the place of temptation? Wouldn't that protect us from circumstances that provoke us to sin?

Doesn't it seem that those in Scripture who fell into sin did so because of the fact that they were in situations where the temptation was?

- Didn't David sin with Bathsheba because she happened to be taking a bath where the king could see her as he was resting on the rooftop? Couldn't God have arranged for her to take her bath two hours earlier, or an hour later? Surely a sovereign God would have no difficulty in rearranging the schedules of His finite creatures.
- Didn't Achan sin because he saw a Babylonian garment left unattended after the siege of Jericho?
- Didn't Abraham lie about his wife being his sister because there was a famine in the land and he feared the king might take his life if he knew beautiful Sarah was his wife?
- Didn't Samson divulge his secret because of his attraction to the charming Delilah?

God does not shield us from circumstances that provoke us to sin. Remember it was the Holy Spirit who led Christ into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to pray, *"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"* (Matthew 6:13). We are to, in praying, ask God to preserve us from situation where we might be vulnerable to sin. -- Yet, at the same time, realize that God, as He sees fit, will allow circumstances that potentially could provoke us to sin.

This, of course, in no way suggests that God causes one to sin – He never tempts us as Satan does. James explains, *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone"* (James 1:13). We can never blame God for what *we* do. If we sin, it is because of our carnal, sinful nature; therefore *we* are responsible! The problem is, (though, perhaps, unintentionally on our part), we find ourselves in situations that are an outward stimulus to sin.

Illustrations of this inclination:

1. A woman trying desperately to break the habit of smoking said that she was making progress until she was employed in an office where everyone smoked. In an atmosphere drenched with the smell of smoke, she fell back into her former habit.
2. After meeting a former boyfriend, a married woman discovered that she had deep emotional feelings for him. Consequently, she began to think she had married the wrong man, and felt trapped. Now she asks, "Why did God, who knows how weak I am, allow us to meet again?"
3. A homosexual admitted that he had begun his sexual relationships with other men when, at the age of 12, he were seduced by an older homosexual. So began a long struggle with abnormal behavior. Could not God have protected him from his experience?
4. Alcoholics, trying to stay dry, often slip back into drunkenness because of pressure from peers who are addicted to the bottle.

And, so it goes . . .

And what about the more subtle sins of the mind? Yes, Christ taught that evil originates in the heart, but our environment provokes many of our struggles with evil thoughts. All around us are stimuli that draw out the worst in us. Without taking us out of the world, God could lead us to circumstances less conducive to evil passions, covetousness, and anger. If at least some of the chuckholes were removed from our path, the possibility of blowouts would be lessened.

But God has not shielded us from the places or the power of cruel temptations. (1) Satan has access to our lives; (2) our sin nature is unrestricted, and (3) often without warning we find ourselves in situations that contribute to outward or secret sin.

Why is Temptation So Powerful?

REASONS FOR TEMPTATION

1. A Test of Loyalty

As might be expected, God has a purpose in allowing us to be tempted. To begin, let's remember that temptation, with all of its frightful possibilities for failure, is God's method of testing our loyalties. We cannot say that we love someone until we have had to make some hard choices on their behalf. Similarly, we cannot say we love God until we've said "No" to persistent temptations.

Take Abraham as an example. God asked him to slay his favorite son. He was strongly tempted to say "No" to God. The altar he built was probably the most carefully constructed one ever built. As he worked, he surely thought of numerous reasons why he should disobey God: Isaac was needed to fulfill God's promise, Sarah would never

understand, and above all, how could a merciful God expect a man to slay his own beloved son?

Of course, you know how the story ended. Abraham passed the test; the angel of the Lord prevented him from stabbing his son. Notice God's evaluation of the incident – *"Now I know that you fear [reverence] God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me"* (Genesis 22:12).

How do we know Abraham loved God? *Because he chose to say, "Yes" when all the powers of hell and the passions of his soul were crying, "No!"* This fierce temptation gave Abraham a striking opportunity to prove his love for the Almighty.

Let's consider the situations mentioned earlier: What about the woman who seemingly could not resist falling in love with another man? Or the alcoholic tempted by his friends to revert back to his old habits? Or the young man surrounded by the wrong crowd? The question was, *"Why doesn't God shield these individuals from these circumstances that bring such strong temptation?"*

The answer is simply that – because we are free-will individuals – not robots that operate on mechanics; or animals that live by instincts – but we were created *"in the image of God"* – therefore, God allows us the luxury of difficult choices so that we can prove our love to Him, to our self, and the whole universe. These trials and temptations are our opportunities to choose God rather than the world.

The real question is, *"Do we love God?"* What happens when we are confronted with a tough decision – such as whether we should satisfy our passions or control them? Our response to temptation is an accurate barometer of our love for God. One of the first steps in handling temptation is to see it as an opportunity to test our loyalties. Listen to the sobering words of 1 John 2:15, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. **If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**"* Every temptation leaves us better or worse – neutrality is impossible!

That's way God doesn't exterminate the devil. Admittedly, the presence of wicked spirits in the world does make our choices more difficult. But think of what such agonizing choices mean to God. We prove our love for God when we say *"Yes"* to Him, even when the deck appears to be stacked against us.

What it boils down to is this: Do we value the pleasure of the world or those that come from God? The opportunities for sin that pop up around us – the sinful nature within us – and – the demonic forces around us – give us numerous opportunities to answer that question.

2. Transformed Passions

A second reason God does not make our choices easier is because *temptation is His character development program*. Sinful habits are a millstone about our necks – a

blotch on our lives. But that's only half the story! Our struggles with temptations – and, yes, even our sins – are used by God to help us climb the ladder of spiritual maturity. If we see our sinful struggles only as a *liability*, we will never learn all that God wants to teach us through them.

Talent is formed in solitude, but character is formed in the storms of life! God wants to do something more beautiful in our life than simply give us victory over a sin. He wants to replace that sin with the positive qualities of a fruitful life.

Temptation is God's magnifying glass – it shows us how much work He has left to do in our life. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God let them become hungry and thirst; on one occasion they were without water for three days. They became disappointed with their slow pace of travel; they were impatient with Moses' long rendezvous on the mountain. Why didn't God meet their expectations? Listen to Moses' commentary. God did all this "*that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not*" (Deuteronomy 8:2b).

There it is again – God allowed the Israelites to suffer temptation to test their loyalties and to bring out their latent sinfulness. Temptation brings out the best or the worst in us. The Israelites didn't realize how rebellious they were until they got hungry. Temptation brings the impurities to the surface. Then God brings the siphoning process.

Sometimes God teaches us these lessons by letting us suffer the consequences of our own sin. James wrote, "*We are enticed by our own lust.*" The word "*entice*" is translated from a Greek word that carries with it the imagery of a hunter who puts out bait for wild animals. The mouse can see no valid reason why he should not eat that piece of cheese. Since his knowledge is limited, he cannot predict the future and he doesn't understand traps. So he eats, and suffers a fatal outcome. Some of us, thinking we can predict the consequences of our actions, assign a more serious result to overt sins than to those confined to thought and imagination. But even the sins of the mind exact their toll, and ultimately we no longer control the sin – it controls us! In time God may dry up our fountains of pleasure and ambition so that we will turn to Him in repentance.

When we "*repent*" – (turn from the sin) – God leads us to something better. He wants to develop within us the rich character qualities called the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, and peace – to name a few. God's purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). To accomplish this, our character deficiencies – ("*sins*" is a better word) – must be brought to the surface so that we can be changed.

Temptation means risk. The potential for devastating failure is ever with us. But precisely because the stakes are so high, the rewards of resisting are great. We cannot say, "*No*" to temptation without saying "*Yes*" to something far better.

3. Strength for Our Weakness

And finally, in considering reasons why God allows us to be tempted, God uses our sins to show us His grace and power! The depressing effect of sin is offset by the Good News of God's grace. Paul writes in Romans 5:20, "*And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*"

Paul was given a "*thorn in the flesh*" -- in order that he would "*remain humble*" (2 Corinthians 12:7). It seems that, as a result of his experiences of being transported to the "third heaven" -- where God dwells, -- he struggled to resist the temptation of "*being lifted up with pride.*" He asked God three times for deliverance from this "*thorn in the flesh,*" however, God answered, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*" (verse 9). Paul, knowing that it provided an opportunity for God's power to rest upon him responded, "*For when I am weak, then am I strong*" (verse 10b). If we are beset by an especially obstinate sin, we may be on the verge of seeing God's grace displayed in our life. Even though, we may now be presently preoccupied with the struggle that we are in -- accepting the principles of God's Word, we can soon be occupied with our God and His great grace toward us.

God is interested in striking at the core of our motivations. He is not interested in merely applying a new coat of paint -- imposing a new set of rules. He wants to rebuild our minds and give us new values. The most important part of us is that which nobody sees, except God. That is where He wants to begin His work!

Think about a particular sin of yours -- one that doesn't move off center stage and occupies a great deal of your attention when concentrating on holy living. It could be an obvious sin, such as, drunkenness, gluttony, or some kind of misconduct sexually. But, it just might be a very private sin -- one that no one but you and God are aware of -- a sin of the mind -- pride, anxiety, fear, bitterness, or unforgiveness. It could be that your imagination is X-rated at times. Perhaps, you have some personal quirk, a feeling of deep-seated inferiority, or an uncontrollable temper. Whatever it might be, let the Holy Spirit bring it to your attention at this time of study.

Whatever it is, God can deliver you from that sin. You and He can track it down, route and exterminate it. Sin need not have dominion over you. You can be sure that God will never take from you something that is good. Rather, when you are ready, He will remove the old sin and replace it with something far better. He will tear down your fortress so that He can build a palace in its place.

Are you ready for such a transformation? I believe that the following study will help you to answer that question.

Getting Practical

1. Take an inventory of our life by asking, "*What is my most persistent temptation and why is it so difficult to say 'No' to this temptation and 'Yes' to God?*"

2. Read the story of Christ's temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) and list all the reasons why Jesus might have found it ways to give in to Satan's suggestions. Think about what the consequences of such an act would have been. Contrast this with how the Israelites acted when they were hungry (Exodus 15 and Number 11). What can we learn from the contrast between Israel and Jesus Christ?

3. Before continuing in this study, spend some quiet time in prayer with your special temptation or sin in mind. Ask God for wisdom in the following areas:

- (A) that you will be able to properly identify the *cause* of your defeat
- (B) that God will give you wisdom in planning a specific course of action to overcome the problem
- (C) that you will have the persistence to follow that action to its completion

4. Take a few moments of each to thank God for what He is going to do in your life and, particularly, how He is going to show His strength and grace at the point of your weakness.

Lesson 2

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Three Biblical Principles

Can God change people?

Of course God can, however, God always brings about change on His terms. Before we can take steps toward a positive change, there are three basic conditions we must accept. If we falter in accepting any of one of them, we will not progress toward freedom from our sinful habit.

What are these essentials?

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE

First, *we must believe that God is good!* Because of all the evils that exist in the world, at times the goodness of God is a difficult concept to accept for some people. Yet, unless we wholeheartedly believe that God is always a good God, we are paralyzed in our Christian growth.

It is not surprising that Satan's first temptation for mankind in the Garden of Eden was to cause man to doubt the goodness of God. His words to Eve, given in Genesis 3:4-5, are, "*You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it – [the forbidden tree] -- your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" Satan's point was: "*God is restricting you because He doesn't want you to achieve your*

potential! You have the inherent right to be like Him – but He won't let you – He isn't on your side at all!"

Satan convinced Eve to believe that God did not have her best interests at heart – that He would hold her back from developing her potential. Eve believed the lie!

Today, Satan uses similar strategy to make us dissatisfied with God's will for us. Our anger at circumstances -- and our rebellion against God's commandments -- stem from our lack of confidence in God's goodness. A single girl just might ask, "*How can God be good? If He were, He'd give me companionship. Doesn't He know how lonely I am?*"

A playboy might reason, "*Why should God restrict me from pleasure? When I'm hungry I eat; when I want pleasure I have sex. A God who cramps my lifestyle isn't good. And if He were, He'd see that I find somebody to really satisfy me.*"

An alcoholic could complain, "*If God were good He'd give me a decent job. After all, wasn't it financial pressure that drove me to drink? Why doesn't God get me out of this mess? It doesn't appear to me that God is good!*"

A woman, who needed to confess the sin of bitterness, responded, "*If God loved me, why did He allow my parents to treat me like they did? A good God would never have allowed this to happen!*" Did she get rid of her bitterness? No! She couldn't forgive her parents because she couldn't "*forgive*" God!

When one worries, it is because they doubt God's goodness, fearful that God will bring circumstances into their life that is not in their best interests. If one is greedy or covetous, it is because they doubt whether God is being fair with them.

When one experiences uncontrollable anger, they are rebelling against God's will for their life.

If there is some sin that we just can't seem to give up, when the true state of affair is realized -- growing in the roots of stubbornness is, doubting God's goodness. We do *not* trust God to do the best for us, because we think that our way is better.

Returning to the story in the Garden of Eden, notice how Satan focused on a restriction and used it to blind Eve to God's blessing. There was *one* tree she should not enjoy, however, there were hundreds – perhaps thousands – she could take pleasure in. Did Satan point out the many trees she was permitted to eat from? No! He focused on one negative – and Eve forgot God's generosity and grace. And it is that way today. Satan will urge us to focus on one issue, one aggravation, or one restriction. At that moment, in that situation, Satan will try to convince us that God's way is not really the best way, but takes second place to what the devil offers us.

Do you doubt God's goodness? Are you fully prepared to accept that the will of God is perfect and acceptable? What would you think if God did take away that one desire, that one weakness? If God delivered you from all sensual thoughts, wouldn't you feel cheated? If God denied you of what you a convinced would be pleasure, do you feel ripped off? If you became victorious over some habit you deem sinful, would you be resentful because you are denied a bit of pleasure?

Are you beginning to understand why we cannot begin to break a sinful habit unless we have a firm conviction of God's goodness? The reason is simple: if we doubt God's goodness we will not really want to change! As long as we have the notion, or skepticism, that God's way is robbing us -- rather than enriching us -- we will have no desire to change.

The most frustrating problem in helping those who come for counsel is simply that most people do not really want to change. They are willing to make minor adjustments - particularly if their behavior is getting them into trouble! But most of them are comfortable with their sin as long as it doesn't get out of hand. Many often prefer to have God keep His activity in their lives to a minimum.

What causes this lack of enthusiasm for getting rid of sin? *We are afraid that some worthwhile pleasure will pass us by!* We question whether God's way is indeed the best.

If one doubts God's goodness, they will not only resist change, but will also fear it. Many simply cannot give their future to God because they fear that God might require them to give up some life plan they seek to accomplish. They doubt whether God's will for them is really the best.

Countless Christians resist surrender to God, frightened at what God might ask them to do. He might lead them to the mission field -- have them to remain single - or require that they give up their love of money -- or pursuit of some sinful pleasures.

When we doubt God's goodness, and hug our sin tightly to our bosom, afraid that God will rob us of our crutch, our pastime, or our pleasure. Occasionally we are stirred to give up our sin, but soon find we can't risk the loss.

But is our way really better than God's? Was Satan the good guy in the Garden of Eden? Or, was God the villain? Jesus put the matter straight, when He speaks of Satan's activity in John 10:10. He said, "*The thief - [Satan] - comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.*" To believe our way is better than God's way is to take our place with, and even and believe Satan's lie. No matter how many pleasures Satan offers us, his ultimate intention is to ruin us. ***Our destruction is his highest priority!***

On the positive side – if we accept the fact that God is good – two results will follow; **(1)** we can surrender to God without reservations of fear of being gypped, and **(2)** we will thirst for change, knowing that the watering holes of the world cannot compare with the refreshing water that Christ promises. Are we prepared to accept what we know, deep down in our self, that God’s plan is perfect? If so, we will be prepared to part with our sin, knowing that God will replace it with something better. We will have passed the first test as a candidate for radical change.

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE

What is the second essential truth we must accept? It is that *we are fully responsible for our behavior!* All of us are born with a propensity to avoid blame. Children display a remarkable ability to shift responsibility to others. Any parent cannot help but notice how children seem to be born with a nature that spontaneously, creatively, almost ingeniously invent excuses for their misbehavior.

It began with our first parents in the Garden of Eden. God asked Adam, “*Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*” The question was straightforward, and could have been answered in one word – “*Yes!*” But Adam responded, “*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate*” (Genesis 3:11-12).

Notice the exact words Adam answers God with. What Adam really said was, “*It’s Your fault that I’m stuck with this weak-willed woman You created.*” So Adam blamed both God and his wife before he admitted that he also was party of the deed.

Notice his logic – (1) God created the woman, (2) the woman ate the fruit, and then (3) gave it to him. Adam suggests that if God had not created Eve -- or, if Eve would not have disobeyed – he would not have sinned. Therefore, he was not blameworthy. In accepting responsibility, Eve fared no better. She said, “*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*” (Genesis 3:13) She wasn’t responsible either.

Someone wittingly said, “*Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the serpent; and the serpent didn’t have a leg to stand on!*” – No one was responsible – they both implied that it was God’s fault!

Is there any truth in their reason?

It was true that God created the tree, the woman, the man, and even Lucifer -- who became the devil. -- It is likewise true that God could have created a garden without this forbidden tree and could have barred Satan from entry. Yes, a sovereign God could have done it all differently – *But Eve made a choice and so did Adam!* Thus, from the very beginning God made it plain that everyone must bear the full responsibility for his decisions. The serpent also got his due -- each made a choice, each deserved blame. In the Garden, the matter of human responsibility was settled forever – each individual must take responsibility for his choices.

One needs to be extremely sensitive when thinking along these lines. There are those who have suffered physical and emotional abuse and feel justified with their feelings, actions and lifestyle as a result of being abused. Others have simply followed a life of sin due to the warped values of their parents. To some extent, we are all products of our heredity and environment. But even allowing for these facts – we know that civilized society cannot long exist unless there is an assumption of individual responsibility for one's actions.

Romans 14:12, *“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”*

We are all accountable to family, employer, society, church, and ultimately to God. Every mature person needs to stop blaming and begin taking full responsibility for what he is – past, present, and future!

A prominent American said of the one who assassinated Robert Kennedy, *“We should not blame him, it was society that produced him.”*

I cannot over exaggerate the harm that has resulted from the teaching of Sigmund Freud – the teaching that those who behave badly are not responsible, because they are sick. Freud taught, *“We would not hold people responsible for catching the flu, measles, or having cancer, therefore we should not hold those who misbehave responsible. We have hospitals, not prisons, for the physically sick, simply because they bear no moral blame for their illness.”* The reprehensible Freudian implication is clear – if we are not responsible for physical illness, why should we be blamed for crimes that are only a symptom of mental illness?

To say that a rapist, murderer, or thief is sick -- is to conclude that he should not be subject to punishment. After all, he simply caught a strange disease -- he is the victim of forces beyond his control.

One television interview with a doctor, argued that the peculiarities of our behavior stem from our birth experience. If a baby is born in a noisy, bright, and seemingly unfriendly delivery room, he will develop hostility in his adult life. It follows that no one should be blamed for hostility.

If a teenager is in trouble, it's the parents' fault – they were too strict or too lenient. Or perhaps it was his environment – he was brought up in a wealthy home. After all, everyone knows that wealth spawns boredom and boredom breeds crime. Or the teenager's problem stems from the fact that he came from a poor home and is not responsible because of poverty. After all doesn't poverty drive a person to drugs, sex, and crime? Even in a prison, it is hard to find a person who considers himself guilty.

The schools of modern psychiatry based on this unbiblical principle have fared poorly in helping with emotional problems. Such psychiatrists have become

professional “*excuse finders*,” shifting through the rubble of the past, the pressures of the present, and the anxieties of the future, searching for a doorstep where the blame can be placed.

How contrary to the Scriptures! The Bible calls each individual a sinner. We are fully responsible for our choices. That’s a tough pill to swallow, but it is basic to our hope that God can change us. After all, if we are responsible, we are in control of our choices. We can change! And we can choose to let God change us!

Let’s consider the serious problem of homosexuality as an example. Our society proclaims they are just “*born that way*” -- these desires begin at puberty. Okay, they admit, maybe there were factors in their home and environment that were conducive to their thinking and behavior, but they are not responsible. And our culture bought the abnormal thinking that some are born homosexual. In other words – “*they are predestined to be that way*” – God is to blame!

Can one change to heterosexual feeling and behavior? Not if he blames his environment or his genes for his actions. Listen to the words of one individual who had lived the lifestyle of homosexuality, “*For years I believed that I could never change because I was a homosexual by constitution, not by choice. I took no responsibility for my behavior. But as I began to read the Scriptures, I began to believe God could change me. The first step in that direction was when I took full responsibility for my homosexual behavior. No excuses; no alibis.*” And there are countless others who could say the same thing today.

Alcoholics are known for their ability to avoid responsibility for their behavior. The wife, the boss, their friends, or their neighborhood is to blame!

However, the Bible teaches that each person is responsible. No one can make you promiscuous, or give you an ulcer. These behavioral patterns are not caused by circumstances, but rather by *our response to circumstances*. And even in those instances where we are propelled by passions seemingly beyond our control, we still do the choosing. Hence, we are accountable.

The doorway to hope begins to open as we take responsibility for our sins, admitting our guilt. When we call something sin, there is the possibility of deliverance – for Christ came to call sinners to repentance.

To call homosexuality a sickness, for example, does not raise the client’s hope. But to call homosexuality a sin, as the Bible does, is to offer hope!

When we assume responsibility for our sin we find that we are then a candidate for God’s mercy and power. Assuming responsibility also restores our God-given dignity. God did not create us as victims of our circumstances, or even as the slaves of our genetic makeup. We can rise above our past and need not be pushed into any mold – whether it be one of environment or heredity.

Like Adam and Eve we are all tempted to say to God, “*I blame the parents whom You gave me,*” -- or, “*the friends You gave me,*” -- or “*the passions You gave me.*” Many people have spent a small fortune for professional counseling to explore problems that they could have solved if they had been willing – and helped – to accept responsibility for their actions. If we are trying to explain why our situation is unique, complaining that others just don’t understand how badly we are mistreated or why we were caught in a particular habit, then we probably have failed the second test for admittance to God’s character-changing program. Only the person who says, “***I have sinned,***” reaches to receive God’s mercy and grace.

THE THIRD PRINCIPLE

There is one more proposition to accept to begin working on that stubborn habit. It is simply ***we must believe that deliverance is possible!*** To Adam and Eve, who sinned so flagrantly, God made a promise that Satan’s power would be crushed. God said to the Satan, “*I will put enmity – [make enemies, or create a feud] – between you – [Satan] – and the woman, and between your seed – [Satan’s kingdom] – and her seed – [“her seed **alone**” – or – virgin birth]; He – [One born of the virgin – Christ Jesus] – shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel”* (Genesis 3:15) This message was clear; in the conflict, Satan would only nip Christ’s heel, whereas Christ would bruise the serpent’s head. Victory over sin and Satan is a possibility for every believer.

The New Testament is above all else a Book of hope! It details how God fulfilled this promise given at the very beginning – right after man’s fall – in Genesis 3:15 – There is no sin – no, not one – that must of necessity crush us. God has dramatically provided a way of escape.

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In this verse we notice two facts:

(1) We cannot plead that our case is unique or special!

True, no two situations are identical, but our basic struggles against the passions of the world, our sinful nature, and Satan are the same as those others have faced. We can take comfort in the fact that we are experiencing a temptation that someone else has already faced – successfully! For instance, Joseph did not succumb to lust; Moses conquered pride; and Elijah overcame depression.

But what of people involved in the stubborn sins of idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness or kleptomania? The New Testament church at Corinth had these kinds of people – who had been freed from their sin. Paul listed the above sins and then added, “*And such were some of you; but you were*

washed, – [cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ] – *but you were sanctified*, -- [separated from sin and separated for God's use] – *but you were justified* – [declared righteous by a holy God] – *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God*" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Our situation is not unique! Someone has already faced our problem victoriously!

(2) God will give us the resources to cope with all temptation

A faithful God does not expect us to do what we cannot do – He supplies the needed strength. If we say, "I know what I must do, but I just can't do it," what then can we do?

Do you remember the story of the battle between the Children of Israel and Amalek? When it was time for the battle, Moses said, "I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand...So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set." After this battle, we are told that, "Moses built an altar, and named it, 'The Lord is My Banner'" (Exodus 17:9-15).

If we truly believe that we can't do what we should, then we need help from the people of God. We need someone to hold up our weak arms, to help us walk a straight path, to comfort, to give strength, to pray for us. But if we say, "I can't" and let it go at that, we are calling into question the integrity of God's character or the validity of our own faith.

Why is it so essential for us to believe the victory over our sin is possible? Simply because *no one can win a war he believes can't be won!* To go to battle believing in advance that there can be no permanent victory, is to succumb to the enemy before the campaign gets under way.

We Christians have often conceded to the enemy by assuming that some sins cannot be dislodged. Such unbelief breeds pessimism, disobedience, and despair. The teaching of the New Testament is that all things are possible with God to those who believe.

Name your sin right now and say, "Thank You, God, that deliverance from it is possible!" God has had a vast amount of experience in delivering His people from temptation. Peter wrote, "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment from the Day of Judgment" (2 Peter 2:9).

The questions we face are: **(1)** Are we prepared to believe that God is good? **(2)** That we are a responsible person? And, **(3)** that we can win victory over that stubborn sin?

Getting Practical

1. Study carefully the foregoing principles, realizing that they are three necessary conditions we must accept if we want to say “No” to temptation and mean it.

2. Affirm your acceptance of these basic truths:

(A) ***God is good*** --- read the following verses Exodus 33:19 and 34:6; Psalms 27:13; 31:19; 34:8; 65:4; 86:5 106:1; 107:8-9 & 145:7; James 1:17

(B) ***You are fully responsible for your behavior***. David could have sought to find excuses for his sin with Bathsheba, but read his prayer of repentance in Psalm 51. Ask yourself, “What evidence is there that David finally took full responsibility for what he had done? What evidence is there that David realized that sin is more serious than simply whether one hurts someone else?”

(C) Read Romans 1:18-32 and trace the spiral of sin by asking, “*Why is man responsible for his behavior?*”

3. Deliverance is possible. What sin do you think is the most difficult to overcome? Read Luke 1:37; John 8:32 and Hebrews 3:12. Why do you think that we so often fail in tapping God’s resources?

4. Think of Biblical illustrations of those who successfully resisted temptation, then ask yourself, “*Why were they successful?*”

Lesson 3

WHAT ABOUT GUILT? OR PUTTING OUR PAST BEHIND US

*“For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: ‘It might have been’”*

-- John Greenleaf Whittier

“***It might have been,***” certainly, has a way of catching up with us. We’ve all known how painful regret can be – especially when lives are deeply affected.

- A teenager blows his mind on drugs;
- An alcoholic leaves his wife and children;
- A Christian’s life is wasted in the pursuit of greedy ambition.

These situations, and dozens like them, trigger painful regret.

Regardless of how sheltered or permissive our past, all of us have had regrets accompanied with feelings of guilt. “*If only I had not met so-and-so*” – “*If only I had made different choices*” – ***If only . . .***”

We must deal with our past before we can experience freedom in the future. The sin that troubles us today sank its roots into our life yesterday. We cannot break our sinful habits until we have a new beginning.

Satan is particularly adept at using our past to ruin our future. His weapon is the illegitimate use of guilt feelings. Sins multiply in the soil of discouragement. One offense easily leads to another. We are caught in a vicious circle until we realize that our past need not control our future. God promises a new beginning.

Old regrets from the past keep going round and round in our mind – repeating over and over in our thoughts like a broken record. We become trapped in one sin or another. Sinful habits have a domino effect – Satan whispers, *“Since you did it once, you might as well go all the way as often as you like.”* That’s why some Christians question whether God can change them. They believe they cannot live differently in the future because of the past.

Satan delights in this kind of logic. He wants us to think that we have gone too far, that since the past cannot be reclaimed, we might as well give up. Satan has two lies that he plies at two different stages. Before we sin, he tells us that one slip does not matter; it is a trifle; we can easily recover ourselves again. After we have fallen, he tells us that it is hopeless; we are given over to sin, and need not attempt to rise.

Both of these notions are false! ***One sin does matter!*** Even one fall can cause us to lose something that can never be recovered. An exquisite vessel can be broken and mended, but it will never be the same. Also, one sin leads to others. It’s like climbing up an icy hill. Even as you attempt to rise, you fall again.

But when we do fall, we dare not accept Satan’s second lie, namely, that there is no use in attempting to rise. Our enemy wants us to believe that since the past cannot be reclaimed, there is no way to break with its power. Can we have a new beginning? In one sense, No, since the past cannot be relived. Virginity cannot be recovered; ruined health from nicotine, drugs, or gluttony will have to be accepted. Some broken homes may never be pieced back together. But in a deeply profound sense, we can have a new beginning. God offers two precious commodities: **(1)** genuine forgiveness, a blotting out of all our sins – past, present, and future; and **(2)** the assurance that our past need not control our future. The cycle of sin can be broken,. We can rise again!

Listen to God’s promise to a nation possessed with violence, deceit, and sensual corruption. *“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they will be like wool”* (Isaiah 1:18).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF GUILT

To deal with the past is to deal with guilt. Guilty feelings can be like a millstone around our neck, keeping us tied to our sins and wedded to past failures. Sometimes

our conscience may trouble us, rehearsing the sins of our past in vivid detail. Or we may just have a vague feeling of guilt, a confirmed suspicion that we've blown it again and will always be a second-class citizen in the kingdom of heaven.

Living with guilt is like trying to drive the car with the brakes on. Guilt feelings can produce many serious consequences:

1. Physical illness is often caused by suppressed guilt. Some doctors have estimate that nearly one-half of their patients could be released if they could be told with authority, "***You are forgiven.***" Christian Psychologist Gary Collins has written, "*The mere energy of keeping the guilt out of one's mind can put a strain on the body and cause it to break down.*"
2. Unresolved guilt causes depression. There's that nagging feeling that, "*We've blown it,*" and since we cannot retrieve the past, there is little use trying to live a fruitful life and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness are generated.
3. Guilt is often the cause for lack of faith in God. 1 John 3:21 states, "*Beloved if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.*" I've discovered that perhaps the most widespread cause for doubt -- is guilt! A person who feels impure will struggle with trust in God.
4. Guilt causes people to punish themselves. For example some parents whose children have gone astray *do not want to be free of guilt.* Those who have made a study of this tell us that parents whose children turn out wrong, sometimes believe they must pay for their children's behavior, and that guilt is the price of the ticket. Others take this a step further and interpret every tragedy as God's way of punishing them. Some even go so far as to actually long to become physically sick so that they will have the satisfaction of paying for their sins. Such guilt feelings are never appeased.
5. Guilt often causes people to do good works. A husband brings his wife flowers in the evening because he has shouted angrily at her that morning. Others give money to the church or are extra kind to a needy friend, hoping to atone for their wrongdoing. Some children who have rebelled against their parents become burdened for social concerns and, may even give their life to work in the ghetto - or some similar situation. Rather than ask their parents' forgiveness, they unconsciously assume that their sacrificial spirit will balance the books.

However, good works never erase guilt. Good activity can suppress guilt, can help one to deny it, or to buy time with their conscience, but the guilt will soon surface in another form.

Resolutions to be more careful next time, or even the determination to become a self-sacrificing slave, can never erase the strain of guilt. Until a remedy is found that can be applied to the guilt directly, it is there to stay. Fortunately, God has not left us without hope.

God's Principles for Handling Guilt

God's will for us is that we be free from all forms of guilt. He who is rich in mercy anticipated our moral and emotional entanglements. Fortunately, God is never taken by surprise. He offers us freedom from a nagging conscience. May I suggest three steps toward finding this freedom?

1. Identify the cause of our guilt feelings.

Often this can be done easily – an immoral habit, cheating on income tax – (or other acts of dishonesty), harsh angry words to someone – these sources of guilt are quite easy to identify. Some have found it helpful to list their causes of guilt on a sheet of paper and then deal with each one specifically to put it behind them, once and for all.

I should warn you that it is possible to experience “*false guilt*,” and bring torment upon one's self for matters that are beyond their control. For instance, a woman and her three-year-old daughter stood at a curb, waiting to cross the street. The child asked, “*Mother, can I go now?*” Absentmindedly, the mother answered, “*Yes.*” Seconds later, she watch in horror as her three-year-old daughter was crushed to death by an oncoming truck. The horror of that event will never be erased from this mother's mind.

She was plagued with guilt, an incredible feeling of regret and anger at herself. These feelings came because this mother could not forgive herself. God does not convict us for an error in judgment, but rather for consciously choosing to sin. This mother needed to forgive herself and to realize that self-incrimination is not what God desires.

To deal with guilt feelings, we need to bring them into the open where we can deal with them. Then ask our self honestly, “*Why do I feel guilty?*”

2. Realize that God's remedy for sin is complete!

In Christ, God anticipated all of our feelings, discouragements, and failures. Christ's death on the cross included a sacrifice for all our sins – past, present, and future. Every sin we will ever commit has already been paid for. All of our sins were future when Christ died 2,000 years ago. There is no sin that we will ever commit that has not already been included in Christ's death (See Colossians 2:13)

God does not find it hard to forgive. It is not as though He regrets giving us a second chance. The price for forgiveness has already been paid, and God wants us to accept it freely.

An atheist once asked Billy Graham, “*If Hitler had received Christ on his deathbed, would he have gone to heaven, whereas someone who lived a good life but rejected Christ would go to hell?*” It was a trick question. It was asked in such a way as to make the Gospel appear ridiculous. But the answer is “*Yes!*” If Hitler would have accepted Christ, God could have forgiven him completely, because

Christ's death included all of Hitler's sins! God values Christ so much that He could accept Hitler with Christ's merit, but He cannot accept the best person without Christ's merit! Visualize the worst sin imaginable – I tell you on the authority of God's Word that Christ died for *that* sin!

Jesus' last word from the Cross was when He cried – "*It is finished!*" – This phrase is translated from just one word in the Greek – "*tetelestai*" -- It is a word used in business transactions. When this word was written across a bill, it meant, "*Paid in full!*" It means that we need never try to make up -- or pay for -- our sins on our own. Christ's death paid for our sins *in full!*

When God forgives us, our sins are blotted out so completely that He does not remember them; He never holds them against us again! The sins we confessed yesterday will never again be a barrier between us and God -- unless we refuse to accept God's forgiveness or doubt the value of Christ's sacrifice.

To illustrate, Let's say that you are working on a computer to find answers to a problem. What happens if you get your information confused and make an error? You press the "*cancel,*" or "*delete,*" button and all the information is eliminated. Now you can begin your calculation again without trying to sort out previous mistakes. The previous information is lost forever – somewhere out there in cyberspace, never to be retained! That's what happens to our sins when God forgives us. Perhaps consequences might remain, but the guilt, the legal condemnation for the offense, is gone forever!

Because of the completeness of God's forgiveness, we need never confess the same offense twice. Of course, if we commit the same sin again, we must confess it again to be restored to fellowship. However, once a specific sin has been confessed to God, determine, on the basis of God's own Word, that you do not have to confess it again, even if guilt feelings should emerge.

A woman who confessed that she had committed sin, said that she still felt so guilty about the whole thing. When she was asked if she had confessed it to God, she answered, "*Oh yes, I've confessed it a thousand times.*" She was asked, "*Do you believe that God has forgiven you?*" Her answer, "*I'm not sure.*"

What was this woman really saying? Quite unintentionally, she was denying that God had included her sin in Christ's death.

Why do people constantly reconfess the same sins? Sometimes, it's because they cannot believe that God would actually forgive so freely – surely they must suffer guilt first. Or it may be that they doubt whether they were sincere when they confessed their sins the first time. Maybe they have never experienced forgiveness from any one in their life before and just do not know how to receive God's precious grace of forgiveness. Whatever the cause, Satan is winning a victory when we refuse God's forgiveness.

The Bible presents Satan as "*the accuser of the brethren*" – and just when is he actively in this business? Revelation 12:10, referring to the time when Christ will rule the world, states, "*for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which*

*accused them before our God **day and night.***" Satan brings our sins before God -- and before us as well.

Satan delights in having believers confess the same sin over and over! He suggests to our mind, *"Why don't you confess that sin again?"* The next day he comes to us and says, *"You probably were not sincere enough, so you better confess that sin once more, and this time really mean business."* And so it goes, we are trapped by our own unbelief and become the victim of our own emotions. The result is that we do not have the love, joy, or peace, God intends us to have. We miserably sit on the shelf labeled *"**Unsure of Forgiveness**"* – a shelf already populated by scores of spiritually paralyzed saints.

How do we avoid this trap? The secret is to *thank God for our forgiveness -- **even though we may still feel guilty.***

Here's a suggestion:

**Use our guilty feelings as a reminder
to give praise to God for His forgiveness!**

Read Psalms 32 and 103 and recite them with thanksgiving to God when those guilt feelings surface. This will become a great stepping-stone in your life, for you will learn to walk by faith, not be emotional sight. And soon your feelings will catch up with your theology!

God promises us cleansing as well as forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 reads, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins **and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**"* Forgiveness refers to our legal standing before God -- cleansing is the subjective work of God whereby we are actually made clean.

A man who had been freed from his lustful thoughts tells how he would often find himself in situations beyond his control and he would be overcome with intense sexual desires. He tells how he would confess his sin, several times over and over again. But he discovered that, even after confession, these desires would continue. He found that rejecting sensual thoughts did not stop lustful passions that had been set in motion. However, he discovered that the antidote to his problem. He said that merely accepting God's forgiveness did not seem sufficient – but that he had to also accept God's cleaning. The way he put it was, *"When I determined to accept God's cleaning, I could feel the lust leave my body!"*

3. Finally, as far as possible, experience the healing of all personal relationships

The severest guilt feelings usually attack when we have wronged others. We can accept our own hurt more easily than, that of our family or friends. Here again, forgiveness is the only way to freedom. A telephone call or a casual meeting with that friend is often needed to satisfy our conscience. And what if they will not forgive us? If we have approached them in the right spirit, then we can be satisfied that we have done what we could to mend torn relationships – and we leave the results, and outcome, with God.

ACCEPTING GOD'S GRACE

God's grace is greater than our sin, whether the offense be big or small. A well-known Christian, driving too fast in the rain, caused an accident in which his companion was killed. Regret and wounds of guilt erupted in his heart. After receiving good Christian counsel, he realized how wrong it would be to spend the rest of his life in the prison of self-incrimination – and chose to forgive himself, realizing that God had already forgiven him. *“That night,”* he said, *“I saw more clearly than ever before that the purpose of the Cross is to repair the irreparable.”*

John Newton had godly parents but was orphaned at the age of six. A relative who rejected the boy's Christian heritage adopted him. At an early age, Newton became an apprentice seaman. While enlisted in the Royal Navy, he deserted and went to Africa for one purpose – to sin to his fill.

He became a servant to a wicked slave trader. Eventually, Newton escaped to the coast. There he attracted a ship by building a fire. Because he was a skilled navigator, he was soon made a mate on the vessel that was making its way up the coast of Africa to England.

On one occasion, he opened the casks of rum and distributed the liquor to the crew so that all the members became drunk. As the ship made its way to Great Britain, it was blown off course. When the ship began to flounder, Newton was sent into the hold to man the pumps along with the slaves who were being transported. The truth he had been taught as a child came home to him and he cried to God out of the hold of that ship. Later he wrote:

*“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see!”*

If God is able to forget our past, why can't we? Scripture declares that He throws our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19) and, as one preacher put it, *“He then puts up a sign on the shore that read, ‘No fishing!’”*

There is no reason for us to be trapped in the murky paths of our past life if God offers us a new beginning. Christ said to the woman taken in adultery, *“Go, and sin no more.”* Once our past is forgiven, we are free from its grip.

Perhaps you are now be at a fork in the road. With your sins forgiven, you can either return to the slippery slopes of failure – or – plant your feet on God's soil, and stand firmly on His side of the boundary line!

Getting Practical

1. List the effect of David's unconfessed sin that he attempted to hide mentioned in Psalm 32:3-5.

2. Think of actions for which we often feel guilty because we cannot forgive *ourselves*. How can we know whether our guilt is brought about by ourselves or by God?

3. Read again the account of the Fall in Genesis 3. What evidence is there that Adam and Eve felt guilty when God came to them? What characteristics of guilt are found in the Biblical record? What was God's response to their need?

4. Once we have confessed our sins, we must continually thank God for His pardon.

5. Look up these verses and recite them as an expression of praise to God for His forgiveness: Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 8:33-34; 1 John 1:9. [It would be good to memorize them].

Lesson 4

HOW TO HANDLE TEMPTATION

Getting God's Perspective

The question we need to ask our self is, "*Am I serious about breaking that sinful habit which God has been dealing with me about?*" If you are, then let's get started. It is essential that you see your problem in perspective. To begin with, I want to share four true stories that I believe will help us put various problems into perspective.

1.

George was involved in an illicit affair which he knew that, according to God's Word was wrong and desperately prayed to God for strength to break it off. He sought God earnestly that the desire he had for this relationship would dissolve. He was submerged in guilt, fear, and shame because he couldn't break the relationship. Eventually, the affair was discovered, he divorced his wife, and brought shame and hurt to both families.

2.

Ken was a truck driver who promised his wife he would quit smoking. He decided to decrease the number of cigarettes he smoked each day until he was free from the habit. He failed so many times that he gave up - convinced he could never quit and has no intention of trying.

3.

Mary was overweight. The doctor assured her that the cause was not a physical problem, but was due to her overeating. She tried several diets over a period of months. This wasn't easy for her; she unrealistically expected dramatic and immediate results. Repeatedly, she broke her promises to herself. Eventually, discouragement turned to hopelessness, and she gave up trying to lose weight.

4.

John was a man with an explosive temper. Sharp words would pour out of his mouth, uncontrollably, shattering his wife's self-confidence and affection. He over-disciplined his children, usually in a fit of anger. As a Christian, he knew better and even decided to change. Once, after a particularly sharp exchange with his wife, he put his fist through the wall. Humiliated and guilt-ridden, he asked God for deliverance from his tempter. Vowing to change did not help; neither did his praying. Months later he gave up, saying, *"I can't help myself. That's just the way I am."*

What went wrong in each of these cases? All of these people were Christians – all prayed to be delivered – yet all ended up more discouraged than when they began seeing help from God. The easy answer would be to say, *"They weren't sincere – if they were, God would have helped them."* However, they *were* sincere in their praying, in some cases, they even wept! *Sincerity in itself doesn't guarantee deliverance.*

One reason why these people reverted back to their old behavior patterns is that *they misunderstood the full extent of their problem!* True, they wanted victory, but they didn't understand how or why God would bring it about. They wanted to overcome a specific habit – for their own benefit. They wanted to be free of the symptoms of their problem, but did not want a thorough examination that would reveal deeper problems in their lives that they were unwilling to face. The habits themselves were like the tip of an iceberg. --- Let's take a look at each of these cases again!

1. First, George wanted to break his illicit relationship because he felt guilty; and he lived in constant fear of being discovered. He sought God's assistance to save his marriage and, above all, his reputation. This is understandable; we certainly can identify with such motivation. But his life needed other adjustments, as well.

To begin with, his marriage was in disarray before the affair began. He had a hot temper and begun to deeply wound his wife's spirit soon after their marriage. His proud, self-righteous spirit had strained his relationship with his two children. He was selfish, spending his free time fixing racecars. He lived as if his family was an inconvenience.

What was God's concern for this man? Did God want him to stop this forbidden relationship? Of course, but God wanted much more than that. God wanted him to humble himself, to ask for forgiveness of his wife and children, to reorganize his priorities. Attitudes had to be confessed, pride had to be broken, and selfishness had to be faced head-on. More importantly, God desired to become Number One in his life. But George wasn't concerned about such drastic treatment. To put it into perspective -- *"God wanted to give him a whole housecleaning, but George wanted only the dirt swept from his front steps."*

2. What about Ken? He wanted to quit smoking. He was a Christian, but he lived only on the fringes of spiritual commitment. His children had never heard him

pray, except for the dutiful grace at mealtimes. He was not a spiritual leader in his home; his wife taught the children the few Bible stories they knew.

No he wanted God to help him quit smoking because the doctors told him he might die of lung cancer. Could God help him overcome that habit? Yes, of course, God could. However Ken would have to yield himself fully to God – his time, property, and reputation would have to be committed to the Almighty. Ken would have to begin reading Scriptures and turning to God daily for the needs of himself and his family. But he didn't bargain for such changes. He thought God would deliver him from cigarettes and leave the rest of his life untouched.

3. Then there is Mary. She desperately wanted to lose those ugly pounds. But she did not see her problem as a genuinely spiritual one. She spoke of it as her weakness without treating it as a sin of the flesh. The Bible condemns gluttony (Deuteronomy 21:20 & 1 Peter 4:3). The Bible warns that, "*the heavy drinker **and the glutton** will come to poverty*" (Proverbs 23:21). Paul wept over those whose "*god was their appetite*" (Philippians 3:19) Those who struggle with gluttony must renew their mind, and use the Scriptures to resist Satan just as anyone who is caught in the other sins of sensuality.

Undoubtedly, God wanted to use Mary's problem to teach her valuable lessons about resisting temptation, the tactics of Satan, and above all, the remarkable power of the Word of God. But sadly, her mind was focused only on her weight. She passed up an opportunity to take some giant steps in her Christian life.

4. Finally, there is John. His problem, so he thought, was that he was born with a short fuse. And, of course, his circumstances were to blame --- if everything would go more to his liking, there would be no need to blow up, no need to put his fist through the wall. One reason John still lacks self-control is because of his unwillingness to face his underlying attitude toward God and his family. Actually, John is always angry --- angry at his employer, angry at life itself. He feels he has been gypped because he has never been the success his father hoped he'd be. Though he doesn't realize it, he is a man at war with God, rebelling against the vocation and circumstances of life to which he feels that God has allowed. Until he accepts himself and his place in the world with joyful thanksgiving, he will never learn to control his tempter. God is concerned about changing these attitudes, but John isn't. He wants victory over his temper to avoid future embarrassment and to keep his marriage intact. He wants the minimum required to maintain his life on a fairly even keel --- but no more than that!

***Isn't it true that so often we want freedom
from a particular sin without facing basic issues?***

Sinful habits are usually indicative of unresolved conflicts. We must seek underlying causes rather than treating the symptoms. God uses our struggles with sin

to diagnose our true condition. Temptation is God's X-ray machine, discovering the hidden conflicts that need attention.

What Does God Want to Accomplish?

God has a larger purpose in wanting to show us our inner self. Unfortunately, we too often clutch the smaller purpose: --- we desire freedom from sin to avoid embarrassment -- be relieved of guilt -- or to save a marriage. However, the deeper issue we often avoid is our rebellion against God. A man may be dishonest in his business practices: a woman may have a spirit of unforgiveness -- both want to be free from a nagging conscience, but they may not be willing to deal with their basic attitude of defiance of God's authority.

Genuine repentance is never easy. To confess our sins means that we agree with God that we have sinned; it also means that we agree that the sin must be forsaken. Those who confess their sins, intending to repeat the same action, are only partially repentant.

Such incomplete repentance leads to a downward spiral of repeated failure. Confession means that we admit our sin and give God permission to remove it from our life. I am not suggesting that if one repents, then commits the same sin again, that his repentance was not genuine -- (for, if that were true, none of us could ever claim forgiveness) -- because we all have truly confessed some sin -- repented of it -- and then, later, find our self committing the same sin over. But there needs to be a willingness to part with the sin, and a submission to God's verdict on the matter. Apart from such an acknowledgment, our intentions are self-centered. We are inquiring how forgiveness will benefit us instead of considering how we have offended God.

But we must not stop at this point -- God wants to draw us beyond our *repentance* for sin -- to Himself. He wants to use our struggles to lead us into godly living. His will is not merely that we be free from sin; He wants to conform us to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Delivering us from sinful habits is only a step in the process. Washing the stains from our life is His prelude to changing us into the Spirit-filled person God want us to be.

Let me tell you of a young man who was caught in the grip of a morally wrong sexual lifestyle. He was a Christian and struggled with this sin for a long period of time. Eventually God radically changed him, altering his whole life style. Now he is a godly, Christ-like, person. Through finding freedom God taught him principles of commitment that he has been able to apply to every area of his life. He memorized more than 200 passages of Scripture during his agonizing struggle. His sinful habit drove him to seek God and become intimately acquainted with the Almighty. At first, he was occupied with his problem: but then he became occupied with God.

When we are faced with what seems to be overpowering temptation, we have a choice to make. We can say, *“I’ve tried to change before and it hasn’t worked, so I’ll manage the best I can with my sin. We’re all human, you know.”* Our sin becomes a monument to the false god we have fashioned. Or, we can take a look at our sinful habit and see it as a challenge to display God’s grace and power in our life! God says to us, *“Consider it all joy, by brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect – [mature] – and complete, lacking in nothing”* (James 1:2-4).

Forget the idea that God is in the business of passing out packages of spiritual victory sent Special Delivery to the person who requests them. God is not about to hand out spiritual bandages for our sin that cost Him the death of His Son. God uses our struggle to give us a thorough housecleaning, so we will reorganize our priorities and become dependent upon His grace. There are no cheap, easy miracles! We must want spiritual freedom, not merely for our own sake, but for God’s sake, as well. Only then will we find the victory He promises.

Getting a Larger Focus

It is important that we always remember that there is a tremendous difference between temptation and sin. Choosing to pursue the temptation is sin -- but temptation itself is not sin. Even Jesus, our Lord, was tempted.

When sinful thoughts enter our mind, unwelcome and without fanfare, at that point, we have not sinned. Now the crucial test comes: how will we respond to these suggestions? Well we pursue these thoughts, entertain them, and let them be at home in our mind?

Many Christians think that victory over sin means that they will no longer be tempted. Or they think that God will change their nature so that they will no longer desire to do evil. Either way, they are wrong. Temptation is not a sin: *it is a call to battle!*

Sincere Christians struggle with wrong thoughts and desires. They, implore God to deliver them from these passions, expecting Him to change these desires so that they no longer are stimulated when temptations come. However, they are disappointed because God does not change our nature so that we are less than human. Temptation of one kind or another is universal. To pray that we will no longer be tempted is to ask that we die and go to heaven. Since we will always be tempted, we need to learn to handle temptation in God’s way.

1. As we think of that sin we want to overcome, first thank God for this temptation and the opportunity it represents in our life

I don’t mean that we are to thank God for the sin, but rather, thank Him for the temptation that gives us a clear-cut opportunity to declare our allegiance to Jesus Christ. Praise, *persistent praise*, is the first positive step toward overcoming temptation. God is glorified when we accept our circumstances as

from His hand. If we cannot thank God for our condition and even our temptation – we are reviling against Him.

One man wrestling with a fierce temptation said he could not resist it until he began giving thanks to God continually for his struggle. “Lord,” he prayed, “I thank You for this temptation; even if I should be tempted from now until the day I die, I give thanks for it to You.”

The first step in getting God’s perspective is accepting the fact that we will be tempted; and then choose to thank God for the opportunity it represents.

2. Take a tour through our life, jotting down areas that need work

We need to spend some time defining our basic attitudes. What is it that *really* bothers us? What do we really want? Are we rebelling against some person? Are we upset with our performance? – our appearance? Do we feel like a failure, a big zero? So we think that we have been shortchanged since becoming a Christian? Are we bitter against our parents – our mate – our children – our employer? Are we angry with God because He hasn’t done what we think He ought to do? We need to spend some unhurried time, taking inventory.

Close your eyes – or, whatever it takes to close yourself in alone with God, away from everything else, allow the Holy Spirit to lead you on an excursion of every area of your life, as you search out the “*hidden things*” of your heart.

Whenever we do this, we will, we, no doubt, will discover attitudes we did not know we had. We may, even, get upset with our self because it takes us so long to accomplish this project -- for instance, we may uncover dissatisfaction with our job -- lingering regrets over failure past attempts at some project -- frustration in some personal relationships. All of this affects our attitude and perspective. God will reveal to us the way to handle there attitudes that affect our relationship with Him, that bring Him honor or dishonor.

3. Reflect on our private struggles, then give our self and our problem completely to God

This means that we let go of our problem, no longer claiming our right to control – our right to bitterness. We do this, knowing that God will require us to deal with those attitudes we have uncovered. This may be a painful and long process, but it will be lastingly beneficial.

We must not be afraid of what God might demand of us. One woman who was very shy and withdrawn said she was afraid to give herself to God, because she might have to learn to be outgoing and friendly.

We can be sure that God will not demand more from us than we can do. Whatever God asks of us, He will give us the strength to do!

When we come to a stream where the bridge has washed away, it still may be possible to cross it -- not in short steps, but with one long jump. So it is when we give ourselves to God. When the bridge of blame and excuses is gone, we need to take that one long leap, without any thought of returning to a life of halfhearted commitment. Though our dedication may have to be renewed many times, we must make it clear, specific, and as final as we can, knowing God will be with us to keep us walking in His way.

4. Realize that our ultimate goal is not victory - but God Himself!

Augustine wrote in his, *Confessions*, "O Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their all in Thee." Ultimately, not even victory over sin can satisfy. Only God can do that, for He has made us to need a person-to-person relationship with Him. He is the Person in whose likeness we are made.

Copernicus, who lived 1473-1543, was the astronomer who concluded that the earth rotated around the sun, and not vice versa - as was believed up to that time. With the sun at the center of the universe, the planetary motion could be explained more easily. The complicated equations needed to explain the movement of planets were simplified by this new theory.

God wants us to have our own "*Copernican revolution*." He longs to be brought from the circumference to the very center of our life to make our life meaningful and rewarding and to give us the beautiful simplicity of life that serves a sovereign who is both Creator and Redeemer. The victory over sin that we seek will come from our relationship with God. When we seek to know God and to love Him with our whole mind, heart, and soul, the freedom we are looking for will come about.

We may think that knowing God is a rather theoretical and mystical goal. God is invisible, and may seem inaccessible - It does seem easier to establish goals in business - or in our marriage -- and family life, doesn't it?

The wonderful promise of the Scripture is that we *can* know God. God said to us through the prophet Jeremiah, "*You will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of you*" (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

Throughout the Bible the desire to know God is compared to a thirst. The Old Testament prophets spoke of the time when the land would be flowing with water, when God Himself would give His people springs in the desert.

Jesus spoke of Himself as the One who could give the living water. "*If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'*" (John 7:37-38).

Are you thirsty for this living, lasting water, this satisfaction in your innermost self? A poem by Nancy Spiegelberg may describe your experience.

**Lord
I crawled
Across the barrenness
to You
With my empty cup
If only
I had known You better
I'd have come
running with a bucket**

(Taken from "Decision" magazine November 1974)

The better we know God, the more often we turn to Him. The more we understand that we are created for fellowship with Him, the more time we will spend fulfilling that purpose, until our life demonstrates the singleness of devotion that Paul expressed – *"This one thing I do..."*

Seeing with God's perspective means that that we will learn to pray optimistically and in faith. God has brought this temptation to us for our good. Then we must thank Him for how He will use it. He wants to build -- and not to destroy. If He wounds us, it is so that He might heal us in the depths of our being.

If you are serious about breaking that sinful habit, why not pray right now, thanking God for what He will do in your life? You might pray something like this:

"Lord, I confess my sin, particularly my rebellion against Your authority. I agree with Your Word that I have sinned, and I also agree that this sin must be forsaken. Thank You for Your forgiveness.

I am grateful for this temptation because it gives me a chance to prove that I love You more than any pleasure in this world. I thank You that the temptation is not greater than I can bear, and I rejoice how You will use it in my life for my good!

I long to know You better, and I am glad that You have allowed this trial as a reminder of how desperately I need You. Help me to remember to give thanks at all times and in all situations."

In Jesus' Name, Amen

Getting Practical

1. Most repeated failures stem from one of three basic causes (a) pride, (b) sensuality, and (c) covetousness. Read Genesis 3:1-8 and find these three elements in Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve.

2. Relate your particular temptation to one or more of the root problems mentioned above, For example: the sin of anger actually reflects pride. We become upset when circumstances do not conform to what we would like. We lose control of ourselves when we cannot control situations according to our own desires.

3. Think of Bible characters who tried to cover or excuse their sin. What was the result for them personally, and for other people?

4. Take Paul's list of the "*works of the flesh*" (Galatians 5:19-21) and describe the way in which each one is suggestive of rebellion against God.

5. In thinking of the particular sin you would like to overcome, ask, "*What would God want to put in the place of this habit?*" Read the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-10) and find the character qualities that seem to be directly opposite to the trait you want God to change in you.

Lesson 5

What Do You Mean "Dead to Sin?"

THE FREEDOM OF LIVING AT THE CROSS

I remember years ago when I attended a Vacation Bible School at a young boy. The teacher was demonstrating a truth and asked for the largest boy present. After some haggling, a very large, muscular type was chosen. The teacher had him stand up front with her and tied a strand of thread around him and asked him if he could break it. He, of course, had to problem breaking it. So she put about three strands around him and again asked if he could break that. He did, with very little effort.

The Bible teacher talked as she began winding the thread around the young boy again and again. She said that this thread was like a habit - after one time of committing a bad habit, perhaps it wouldn't be so difficult to break - but the problem is that you keep committing it again - and again - and again - like these strands of thread. And, as she talked she kept wrapping a whole spool of thread about the muscular boy - until, when she asked him to break loose - he could not do it!

The point the teacher was making, she explained, "*The chains of habit are so light you can hardly feel them, until they become so strong that you cannot break them.*" It certainly left a lasting impression on me. Sin does not appear to be irresistible - until we want to be free from it. The moment we attack it, we are surprised to find that most of its power is hidden. We feel like the muscular boy tied so tight with tread that he could not get loose - or - like the man who tried to drain a swamp, not knowing it was fed by an underground stream.

Let's consider gluttony for example. Remember Mary? [we met her on page 25 and talked of her problem at the bottom of page 26] Mary thought for sure she would be able to control her diet whenever she wanted to. But what really happened? After gaining a

few unnecessary pounds she felt guilty. Her response to this uncomfortable emotion was to promise herself that she would stick to her diet. *Never* would she overeat again -- *never!* But she was disgusted with herself when she did not keep her promise. Guilt drove her to more promises, and her self-condemnation increased. At last, she just gave up!

Isn't the reality of many situations that we promise our self - ("vow" may be a better word) - that we would never say "yes" to some particular temptation, only to find that the next time we face it, we give in once more? What is even more shocking is that we say "yes" to this temptation even when we felt like saying "no!"

What we must do is to give up making promises, realizing that we will never keep them anyway.

Human nature makes promises to reform -- that, invariable, turn out, not only worthless, but even detrimental in bringing about any change in our behavior. One reason is because we are depending on our own strength to change. Even when we ask God to help us keep that promise, we have as yet not grasped the extent of our weakness. Also, such resolutions divert our attention to the wrong focus. We spend time looking within ourselves wondering (usually doubting) whether we really have the inner resources to remain firm. All the while we're looking in the wrong direction.

Let's assume that we've confessed our sin to God; we've repented, admitting that all sin is rebellion against Him. *What should we do then?* We must choose to focus our attention on God's promises. Tell the Lord we are through with our promises, and are now depending on *His promises*. We are tired of the guilt-sin-guilt cycle. We finally admit that God alone "...is able to keep us from stumbling, and to make us stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 1:24). If we make a promise, let it be a promise to meditate on God's Word.

Now our attention will no longer be occupied with the question of whether we have the willpower to say "no" to that particular temptation: our thoughts will be on the Scriptures. This in itself will be a help since we tend to do the activities we think about the most --- *that's why we do so many things we plan to resist!* But when we are free from the pressure of wondering whether we can hold out, our minds are able to soak up the Scriptures and focus on Christ.

Also, we'll discover that the Holy Spirit will give us the ability to say "no" when the temptation comes. In that way we are learning to depend on the Holy Spirit to free us from the compulsion to repeat our sinful behavior.

This action of turning everything over to God is not a "*once-for-all-time*" decision, but rather, a beginning -- a definite initial, starting point! --- It means that we have finally come to the end of our personal *resolutions* and, now, throw ourselves helplessly before a merciful God. This is the beginning --- *not the end!*

The fact that we've come to trust God to keep us from stumbling is not a guarantee that we will never fall. It just means that we are trusting God, we are opening our life to His help. As long as we say, "yes" to God, we are saying "no" to temptations.

Saying "yes" means that we must choose to focus on the Cross. Understanding our identification with Christ, we learn that God is indeed able to keep us from sinning.

**God will not only drain the swamp,
but also stop the underground supply.**

FINDING THE SOURCE

All sinful habits have a common source! There is a tendency to think of some sins as "less sinful" than others. We may say to our self, "I have a bad temper, but at least I don't get drunk" -- or -- "I do struggle with overeating, but I'd never have an affair."

It is true that some sins do have worse *consequences* than others. The *thoughts* of lust and hatred do not lead to the same social consequences as the *acts* of adultery and murder. In this sense all sins are not the same. But from another perspective, all sins are essentially the same because they originate from the same source. We can't rate sins on a scale somewhere between "Serious" and "Minor." Some sins may seem unimportant to us, but they are not to God. The reason is because all sins originate from the corruption of our rebellious sinful nature. The New Testament writers often referred to this as "the flesh," -- which refers to the compulsive inner force inherited from man's fall -- [when Adam sinned] -- that expresses itself in general and specific rebellion against God.

Read carefully Galatians 5:19-21, the passage of Scripture where God lists "the deeds of the flesh" in order to find your particular sinful habit listed:

Defining "Sins of the Flesh"

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these;

1. *Adultery* [immorality, or impure thoughts] –

"Adultery" is translated from the Greek word is, "moicheia," meaning, "unlawful sexual relations between men and women, single or married" (This word is also found in Matthew 15:19; Mark. 7:21; & John. 8:3). The verbs, "moichao" is found in Matthew 5:32, 19:9 & Mark. 10:11-12; and "moicheuo" in Matthew 5:27-28; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 16:18; 18:20; John 8:4; Romans. 2:22; 13:9; James 2:11; & Revelation 2:22).

2. *fornication* [or, impurity] –

Translated from the Greek word, "porneia," and has the same as adultery besides all manner of other unlawful relations. This word means, "adultery of married or single people" according to Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:2; 10:8; 1

Thessalonians 4:3 & Revelation 9:21); *“incest”* in 1 Corinthians 5:1 & 10:8; *“idolatry and adultery in honor of idol gods”* in 2 Chronicles 21:11; Isaiah 23:17; Ezekiel 16:15, 26, 29; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; & Revelation 2:14-21; 14:8; 17:2-4; 18:3-9; 19:2; *“natural harlotry”* in John 8:41 & 1 Corinthians 6:13-18; *“spiritual harlotry”* in Ezekiel 16:15, 26, 29 & Revelation 17:2-4; 18:3-9; 19:2); *“sodomy and male prostitution”* in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Hebrews 12:16; Jude 1:6-7; Romans 1:24-29; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 5:3 & Colossians 3:5.

3. *uncleanness* [or, impurity] –

This word is translated from the Greek word, *“akatharsia,”* meaning *“whatever is opposite of purity; including sodomy, homosexuality, lesbianism, pederasty, bestiality, and all other forms of sexual perversion.”* This Greek word is also found in Matthew 23:27; Romans 1:21-32; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 4:19; 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 4:7; 2 Peter. 2nd chapter and the book of Jude.

4. *lasciviousness* [or, sensuality] –

This word is translated from the Greek word, *“aselgeia,”* meaning, *“lustfulness, unchastity, and lewdness.”* It is translated *“lasciviousness”* in Mark. 7:22; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19; 1 Peter 4:3 & Jude 1:4) -- *“wantonness”* in Romans 13:13 & 2 Peter 2:18 and *“filthy”* in 2 Peter 2:7. This word has the meaning of promoting or partaking of that which tends to produce lewd emotions, anything tending to foster sex sin and lust.

5. *Idolatry* –

Translated from the Greek word, *“eidololatreaia”* meaning, *“image-worship.”* Found also in 1 Corinthians 10:14; Ephesians 5:5; Galatians 5:20; Colossians 3:5 & 1 Peter 4:3. This Greek word includes anything on which affections are passionately set; extravagant admiration of the heart.

6. *witchcraft* – [sorcery, or spiritism, that is, encouraging the activity of demons] –

Translated from the Greek word, *“pharmakeia,”* meaning, *“sorcery, practice of dealing with evil spirits; magical incantations and casting spells and charms upon one by means of drugs and potions of various kinds.”* This word found in Galatians 5:20; Revelation 9:21; 18:23; 21:8; & 22:15.

7. *hatred* [or, quarrels, fighting, enmities] –

Translated from the Greek word, *“echthra,”* rendered *“enmity”* in Luke 23:12; Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:15-16 & James 4:4. It has the meaning of a bitter dislike, abhorrence, malice and ill will against anyone; a tendency to hold grudges against or be angry at someone.

8. *variance* [or, strife, contentious temper] –

Translated from the Greek word, *“eris”* meaning, *“dissensions, discord, quarreling, debating; and disputes.”* Rendered *“debate”* in Romans 1:29; *“strife”* in Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 3:3; Philippians 1:15 & 1 Timothy 6:4; *“contention”* in 1 Corinthians 1:11;

Titus 3:9; “*debate*” in Romans 1:29 & 2 Corinthians 12:20). It means to cause strife and discord. It is not the same as disputing for truth as in Acts 9:29; 15:2, 7; 17:17 & 19:8-9.

9. *emulations* [or, jealousy, envy] –

Translated from the Greek word, “*zeloi*,” meaning, “*envies, jealousies; striving to excel at the expense of another; seeking to surpass and out do others; uncurbed rivalry spirit in religion, business, society, and other fields of endeavor.*” Translated “*zeal*” in John 2:17; Romans 10:2; 2 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Corinthians 9:2; Philippians 3:6; Colossians 4:13; “*feroent mind*” in 2 Corinthians 7:7; “*envy*” in Acts 13:45; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 12:20; James 3:14-15; “*jealousy*” in 2 Corinthians 11:2; “*indignation*” in Acts 5:17 & Hebrews 10:27.

10. *wrath* – [or, fits of rage, passionate anger] –

Translated from the Greek word, “*thumos*,” meaning, “*turbulent passions; domestic and civil turmoils; rage; determined and lasting anger.*” Also found in Luke 4:28; Acts 19:28; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; Hebrews 11:27; Revelation 12:12; 14:8, 10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1 & 18:3. Rendered as, “*indignation*” in Romans 2:8; and “*fierceness*” in Revelation 16:19 & 19:15.

11. *strife* – [or, selfish ambitions, intrigues] –

From the Greek word, “*eritheia*,” meaning, “*disputations; jangling; strife about words; angry contentions; contest for superiority or advantage; strenuous endeavor to equal or pay back in kind the wrongs done to one.*” Also found in 2 Corinthians 12:20; Philippians 2:3; and James 3:14, & 16; rendered, “*contention*” in Philippians 1:16 & Romans 2:8).

12. *seditions* – [or, dissensions, divisions, effort to get the best for yourself] –

From the Greek, “*dichostasia*,” meaning, “*disorder; stirring up strife in religion, parties, & factions*” government, home, or any other place.” Rendered, “*divisions*” in Romans 16:17 & 1 Corinthians 3:3.

13. *heresies* – [or, party intrigues, sectarian parties complaints and criticism, the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group] –

From the Greek, “*hairesis*,” meaning, “*a choosing, hence, a sect,*” as rendered in Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 26:5 & 28:22) and “*heresy*” in Acts 24:14; 1 Corinthians 11:19; Galatians 5:20 & 2 Peter 2:1. The word itself has no evil meaning. The word signifies a sect or party, whether good or bad, distinguished from all other sects and parties. It formerly was applied to different sects of heathen philosophers. The church of Rome uses it only in an evil sense to apply to all who cannot go along with their many dogmas and rituals that have been added for many centuries to the pure teachings of the Christian faith. Christians apply it to all false religions who do not accept the true Christian doctrines. Jews called Christians a sect in Acts 24:5, 14 & 28:22) and Christians called the Pharisees and Sadducees and other groups sects in Acts 5:17; 15:5 & 26:5). All deviation from truth is heresy -- Galatians 5:20; 1 Corinthians 11:19 & 2 Peter 2:1.

14. *envying* – [or, envy]

From the Greek, “*phthonoi*,” meaning, “*ill will, and jealousy at the good fortune or blessings of another; the most base of all degrading and disgraceful passions.*” Found in Galatians 5:21; Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10; Romans 1:29; Philippians 1:15; 1 Timothy 6:4; Titus 3:3; James 4:5 & 1 Peter. 2:1.

15. *murders* –

From the Greek, “*phono*,” meaning, “*to kill; to slaughter; to spoil or mar the happiness of another,*” even, “*hatred*” according to 1 John 3:15. This word also found in Matthew 15:19, 15:18; Mark. 7:21; 15:7; Luke 23:19-25; Romans 1:29; Acts 9:1; Galatians 5:21 & Revelation 9:21.

16. *drunkenness* –

From the Greek word, “*methai*,” meaning, “*intoxicated; slave to drink; drinking bouts.*” The word found in Galatians 5:21; Luke 21:34 & Romans 13:13

17. *reveling* – [or, carousing, or wild parties]

From the Greek word, “*komoi*,” meaning, “*lascivious & boisterous feastings, with obscene music, and other sinful activities.* This word found in Galatians 5:21 and 1 Peter 4:3. Rendered, “*rioting*” in Romans 13:13.

--- *and such like.*”

Note the four divisions of these sins:

1. --- 4 Sins of lust, verse 19 – (Above numbers 1 to 4)
2. --- 2 sins of impiety and superstition, verse 20 – (Above numbers 5 & 6)
3. --- 9 sins of temper, verses 20-21 – (Above numbers 7-15)
4. --- 2 sins of appetite -- eating and drinking, verse 21 – (Above numbers 16-17)

“The Message” reads Galatians 5:19-21 as, “*It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time; repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community.*”

These words describe behavioral patterns that sprout from the same seed – “*the flesh!*” We cannot console ourselves by saying that we have one sin, but not another. The flesh is a tree with different kinds of branches bearing many kinds of sin. In one it may produce outbursts of anger, in another, it might express in lust, or perhaps gluttony. Though “*deeds of the flesh*” may be diverse in our behavior and temperament, the “*flesh*” controls us all if we are not walking in the Spirit. That’s why self-righteousness, that always involves a spirit of comparison, is so abhorrent to God. It thrives on a superficial view of sin – (that is, “*My sins are not as bad as your sins*”), and an equally superficial view of God – (feeling, “*Surely I’m within reach of God’s standards*”).

The Bible puts an end to such vanity. *“All” have sinned; all by nature fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind.* We may think our sin is minor, but it needs the same drastic treatment as that of a criminal whose whole life has been twisted by perversion. Our flesh and his are essentially the same; he may not have had our advantages -- or perhaps God’s grace has restrained us.

If this sounds discouraging to those who think their sinful habit is of little importance, it ought to be encouraging to those who see themselves as beyond hope. Our sinful pattern is no different in principle from that of any other person. Some habits are more ingrained than others, but God’s remedy for each is the same!

The flesh, or the self-life, is so much a part of our thinking that we often do not even recognize its presence. Just in case we get to thinking that we may have escaped the influence of our self-life, let’s ask our self some questions:

Are we ever conscious of . . .

- A spirit of pride, perhaps an exalted feeling in view of success or position -- or training -- maybe appearance --or, our natural gifts and abilities! Do we have an important independent spirit?
- A stirrings of anger or impatience, that some might excuse as, *“nervousness.”* or *“holy indignation* – a touchy, sensitive spirit – a disposition that dislikes being contradicted – a desire to throw sharp, heated words at another?
- Self-willed – a stubborn, unteachable spirit -- an arguing, talkative spirit -- harsh, sarcastic expressions -- an unyielding, headstrong disposition – a driving, commanding spirit -- a disposition to criticize and pick flaws when set aside and unnoticed -- a peevish, fretful spirit – a disposition that loves to be coaxed and humored?
- Carnal fear -- a man-fearing spirit -- a shrinking from reproach and duty -- a reasoning of the cross God calls you to bear -- a shrinking from doing your whole duty -- a fearfulness that someone will offend you -- a compromising spirit?
- A jealous disposition -- a spirit of envy in your heart -- an unpleasant sensation in view of the great prosperity and success of another -- a disposition to speak of the faults and failings rather than the gifts and virtues of those more talented and appreciated than yourself?
- A dishonest, deceitful disposition – the evading and covering of the truth – the covering up of your real faults – the leaving of a better impression of yourself than is strictly true – false humility – exaggeration – straining the truth?
- Unbelief -- a spirit of discouragement in times of pressure -- lack of faith and trust in God -- a disposition to worry and complain in the midst of pain,

poverty, or at the dispensations of Divine Providence -- an over anxious feeling about whether everything will come out all right?

- Formality and deadness -- lack of concern for lost souls -- dryness and indifference -- lack of power with God?

God's Solution

Fortunately, God chose to become involved in our predicament. The death of His Son, Jesus Christ, was a solution designed to free us from the frustration of the dissatisfaction of the deeds of the flesh. We, for the moment, enjoy the works of the flesh, but afterward, hate ourselves for what we yielded to. We resolve to change, however, later find our self-craving the same old sins.

Christ's death accomplished many objectives. The Cross of Christ is the basis for our forgiveness. It is also the basis for our spiritual freedom --- deliverance from our stubborn habits. To appreciate what Christ accomplished, we should become acquainted with two expressions --- "*in Adam*," and, "*in Christ*."

When Adam sinned, the whole human race was plunged into chaos. His descendants have never recovered from that disaster. Our sin nature was inherited from our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents; our ancestry can be traced back to the Garden of Eden. As a result, we are sinners by nature and already under sin's condemnation. Being "*in Adam*" means we are victimized by sin, and quite literally cannot help our self --- we sin as naturally as birds sprout feathers.

But because of Christ's death, believers are transferred from being "*in Adam*," to being, "*in Christ*." God breaks our past ties and Christ becomes our new ancestor - spiritually speaking. That's why Paul refers more than 100 times to believers as being "*in Christ*." It's the basis for a whole new life!

All of this seems rather theoretical. Is there some value to this transfer of relationship? After all, when we were converted, we still looked the same, felt the same, and, unfortunately, often acted the same. On the surface, it sounds like being, "*in Christ*," or, "*in Adam*," is only a matter of words.

Not so! Think of a child who is adopted from one family to another. The fact of adoption doesn't change his appearance or his actions. But if he is taken from a family of slaves and adopted into family of kings, he inherits a new set of relationships. "*Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Here's what happens: God identifies all believers with Christ, not in some mystical or theoretical way, but by changing our legal relationships. Before our conversion, we were *obligated* to obey the sinful impulses of our fallen race. Even when

we became tired of sin and resolved to change, the most we could do was rearrange our lives, but we could not change on the inside.

God has done what we could not do. He has given us a new nature, and the personal presence and power of the Holy Spirit so that we can say “No” to our old self-nature.

To picture what God has done, think of yourself as a tenant in an apartment house. The landlord is making your life miserable and charges exorbitant rent. He mistreats you, barges into your apartment, wrecks the furniture, and then blames *you* for it. One day a new owner buys the apartment complex. You now have a kind landlord who invites you to live in the apartment rent-free. You are relieved, grateful, and looking forward to a peaceful future.

A few hours later there is a knock on your door. To your amazement, here is your old landlord, looking as mean and demanding as ever. He threatens you, reminding you that you have rented from him for many years and are obligated to obey him.

What will you do? To resist him on your own is useless --- he’s more powerful than you are. Your best approach is to remind him you are now under a different management; he’ll have to take up your case with the new landlord.

How much obligation do you have to your old landlord? Precisely as much as does a corpse buried in the cemetery down the street. Your former landlord has no more right to demand a payment from you than he does from those whose names appear in the obituary column. That’s why Paul exhorted us, “*Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11). Our authority to say “No” to temptation is God-given!

Although before our conversion we were duty-bound to serve our inherited sin nature, this does not mean that everything we did was evil. Most people are able to control their desires, and are capable of compassion and decency.

What it does mean is that we are never free from the futility of unsatisfied desires and frustrated passions. Pride, covetousness, and sensuality were our motivational drives. As believers purchased by Christ at high cost, our allegiance is now to Him. By the Holy Spirit, He has given us the power to say “Yes” to a new life!

Dealing With The Real Problem

How do we apply this knowledge when we want to break a specific habit? First, we must clearly see that legally “*in Christ*” we are *already dead* to our sinful passions. This is a point many people resist. They think, “*I’ve got to **become dead**; I’ve got to pray that God will **crucify** me so that I will be alive in Christ.*” But they are wrong. Being dead to

sin is not something that God promises you, it is not an act you beg Him to do. He simply declares it as a *fact* --- already accomplished! Our failures and sins cannot change what God has said. Just because we get talked into obeying our old landlord doesn't change the fact of new management. It does mean that we forgot we could confidently say "No" to his extortion schemes.

Let's say, for example, that we are a believer who lives with fear – perhaps it's a fear of people, of cancer, or, of loneliness. We need to recognize those fears as a bill from our old landlord. Remember that we do not have to listen to him – much less do what he suggests. We must take the matter up with our new Manage. We are no long duty-bound to those former relationships.

Second, we must admit the *need for faith* in our daily life. Our identification with Christ is not something that can be proved empirically, it's not like being able to see with our own eyes that the sun is shining. And even if it could be proven by our experience, many of us would be in trouble. An honest look at our lives hardly supports the idea that we are dead to sin and alive to God. But once we understand, with the Holy Spirit's help, that our ties with sin have *already* been broken, we begin to see that God has not deceived us. When we shift our attention to the completed work of the Cross and insist on our privileges, our old self surrenders to God's authority. Through faith and faith alone we personalize our victory.

Our freedom from sin is never automatic. Every inch is contested. No one ever falls into maturity, even though we are already positionally complete in Christ. There is the danger to tend to look for formulas for a new spiritual technique. But there is no substitute for waiting before God, reading His Word, and then obeying the truth He has revealed.

The Christian life is a growing relationship. Applying the Cross to our life is not something we do once for all. Nor is it sufficient to do it every week or even once a day. It is a moment-by-moment, daily process. As we develop sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's work in our life, we will find that saying "No" to the flesh and "Yes" to Christ will become a way of life. -- Let's turn our attention to "*How to personalize Christ's victory*" in the next lesson.

Getting Practical

1. This would be a good time to take stock of your life again, asked, "*What behavior patterns or thoughts must be changed by God?*"
2. Read Romans, chapters 6 through 8, carefully underling each time Paul uses the expression, "*free from sin,*" or its equivalent. Study what Paul gives as a basis for our freedom.
3. Study the wide-ranging benefits of the Cross. It will help you develop a life of habitual praise to God. Begin the habit of thanking God for the victory Christ accomplished on our behalf as often as you think of it.
4. Begin each day at the Cross. Take time to:

- (a) Give thanks that Christ has *already* conquered the problems you will face that day
- (b) Accept by faith the victory Christ won at the Cross – *before* you are tempted to sin.

Lesson 6

Depending on the Holy Spirit

Slavery was officially abolished years ago on the island of Jamaica, however, many of the slaves, living in remote areas, did not know of their freedom. And, as a result of no knowing their release had been declared, years passed and they continued to serve their masters. They were oblivious to the fact that they were legally free. Their owners kept the news from them as long as they possible could, hoping to extract every ounce of work from their captives. These slaves wouldn't have had to put up with their drudgery --- if they had only known the truth!

Jesus Christ issued a proclamation of liberty for every believer. *Our union with Him qualifies us to share His victory!* The question is, “*Precisely, how is Christ’s victory translated into reality in our life?*” The answer is --- **the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit communicates Christ’s strength to us! He satisfies our spiritual thirst.

What did Christ say about the Holy Spirit's ministry to believers?

In the Gospel of John, chapter 7, Jesus is attending the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem. This took place on the 8th day of the feast. It was a day of great assembly and offering sacrifices for Israel. The first seven days sacrifices were offered for other nation --- God had given instructions for this feast in Leviticus 23:34-36. On the 8th day a priest would go and draw water from the pool of Siloam in a golden vessel and bring it to the Temple. When the morning sacrifice was on the altar he poured this water mingled with wine upon it, while the people were singing with great joy. It was at this precise time that Jesus made His great prophecy of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the life of each believer.

Jesus was deeply moved by the emptiness of the ritual the Jews dutifully performed. On that day -- the 8th day of the feast -- a group of white-robed priests had gone down to the pool of Siloam and filled their jars with water from the pool and walked back to the Temple. They poured out the water in the presence of the people, reminding them of how God supplied Israel with water during their wandering in the wilderness.

This ceremony was a beautiful reminder of what God had done, but the people missed its whole purpose and spiritual meaning -- which was, that God wanted to satisfy their spiritual thirst as well!

This passage says, *“In the last day – [the 8th day] – that great day of the feast – [Feast of Tabernacle] – Jesus stood and cried, saying, `If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly – [inner most being] – shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified”* (John 7:37-39).

Jesus predicts the coming of this Church age when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon all believers.

Notice that the basis of the gift of the Holy Spirit is the *glorification* of Jesus Christ. The Spirit, Jesus said, could not be given to believers until He was *“glorified.”* Believers receive the Holy Spirit because Jesus has been glorified ---that is, He has ascended into Heaven. In the Old Testament era, the Spirit’s work was limited; after Christ’s ascension, the Spirit was given to *every* believer!

Jesus said to His followers, *“I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you”* (John 16:7). Christ could not give the Spirit to the church until He left this earth physically. He had to be *glorified* before the Spirit could descend upon His people.

Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the basis for our forgiveness. Because He took our penalty, we can receive forgiveness for sins without strings attached; the only requirement is trust --- a transfer of our faith from our self to Christ alone. Similarly, the basis on which the Holy Spirit is given is Christ’s ascension and glorification. We don’t have to beg for forgiveness, nor do we need to agonize for the Spirit; the water of life is also free, and is received by faith.

Ever since Christ was glorified, and the Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost, every believer may receive the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9 & 1 Corinthians 6:19). There is no need for striving, anxiety, or a feeling that we are unworthy to receive Him. He is waiting to quench our thirst, but His control in our lives is never automatic.

God gave the Holy Spirit to His Church to be its permanent possession during this present age; and He waits to give each individual member of that Church his or her share of Pentecost --- on the one condition of applying for it by faith. As we take forgiveness from the hand of our dying Lord, we take our share of this Pentecostal gift from the hand of our living Lord, Jesus Christ.

Nowhere in the Acts is prolonged tarrying for the Holy Spirit taught. It is not God’s will for us to think we must tarry for a prolonged period time to receive the Holy Spirit. In the sense that there was one Calvary, so there was one day of Pentecost. At Calvary the provision was made for people of all ages to be saved, so, on the Day of Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the provision was made for people of this entire dispensation to receive the Holy Spirit.

How Do We Receive the Spirit's Power?

When you speak about the fullness of the Spirit, the reaction of many Christians is to say something like, *"That's great for some Christians, but it's not for me -- I'm not good enough! I don't qualify. If I were more dedicated and spent more time in Bible reading and prayer, I might eventually be worthy to walk in the Spirit."*

But they've got it backwards. The Holy Spirit is not given to those who have it all together spiritually -- ***The Holy Spirit is given to enable us to get it together spiritually!*** Paul's words, *"But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh"* (Galatians 5:16).

The order makes an incredible difference! Christians often ignore any thought of walking by the Spirit, because they think they are not good enough. Their life is too filled with fleshly struggles. But that's like refusing to accept medicine until you get well and feel worthy of it!

The whole purpose of medicine is to enable us to get well. It is given to the sick, not the healthy. In the same way, the Spirit is given to enable us to break sin's power; we don't have to do that on our own before we receive the Spirit's power.

Imagine someone say, *"I'm not good enough to be saved; I'm going to wait until I get myself together before I come to Christ."* You would quickly point out that salvation is designed for sinners. None of us is ever good enough to be saved; we are saved because of God's great generosity in Christ. A person who says he isn't good enough to be saved is missing the point of Christ's death.

But the same applies to the Holy Spirit. As Christ's death gives us forgiveness, so Christ's ascension and glorification gives us the Holy Spirit. And the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives is not just for window dressing. *He indwells us so that He might control us!*

Many seem to make the requirements for walking in the Spirit too complicated. They've stressed dedication, surrender, and discipline as prerequisites to the Spirit's power. Can any one of us be sure we have fully carried out all the requirements that many seem to require? Isn't the Spirit's power given to enable us to be yielded and disciplined, rather than expecting all of these characteristics first?

Notice Christ's words, *"If any man is thirsty, let him come unto Me and drink!"* The only requirement is a thirst that will draw us to come to Him. We don't have to be super-saints, just thirsty believers. That's why Christ could offer living water to a woman who had had five husbands and was now living common-law with another man. He promised that from within her would burst forth living water that would quench her emotional and spiritual thirst (John 4:10-14).

Are you thirsty? Do you feel like an apple tree trying to grow in a desert? Then you are a candidate for the Spirit's life and power.

Life in the Spirit

There is a direct connection between walking in the Spirit and breaking a sinful habit. Today there are many people suffer from drug addiction. Perhaps they began getting high just for kicks, but now they are hooked. In New Testament times, drugs as we know them today were not available. But many became addicted to wine. Speaking to that issue, Paul says, "*Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.*" – "*Don't get high on temporary stimulates, but, be filled with the Holy Spirit.*" To those who are struggling with addiction of any kind, the Bible offers a different master; be controlled by the Spirit, rather than drugs or alcohol or any other stubborn habit. The Spirit's control will replace sin's control. His power is greater than the power of all our sin.

Here we stand, weighted down with a sin we can't shrug off. It hangs on like a viper; if it leaves us alone for a day, it is back the next. The question is, "*How do we get the Holy Spirit's help?*"

We begin by clearing the deck, that is, confessing our sin -- and the sin ***must be confessed*** – and then receive God's forgiveness. We need to claim 1 John 1:9, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

Then, we must remember that the Holy Spirit desires to energize us! Don't ever think that He is reluctant, wanting to be coxed into the driver's seat of our life. *He became a resident when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior -- with the express purpose of becoming president.* But He will not exercise His power apart from our faith and the decision of our will. If we ask Him to control us, we must believe that He will.

Perhaps we feel unworthy, or think that there will be a more convenient time, however, just as we took forgiveness from the hand of the *dying* Christ, we take the power of the Holy Spirit from the hand of the *living* Christ.

How were we saved? By depending on the death of Christ. How do we receive the power of the Holy Spirit? By depending on the ascension of Christ. Both come by faith. That's why Paul wrote, "*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him*" (Colossians 2:6).

We receive the Spirit's filling by faith, not by having a particular feeling. I thank God for heart-felt experiences we have with Him, however, it is wrong to trust in feelings, or sensations. There are times when we experience waves of joy, and overwhelming sense of God's presence, but we must walk daily by faith and not by sight – or feelings. We must take God at His Word and by faith receive what He has promised us – even when there is no feeling, or outward evidence. ***God's Word is true!***

God delights when we believe in Him without demanding emotional crutches. Just as a new believer needs to receive God's promises – apart from feelings – so we daily need to receive the power of the Holy Spirit – apart from feelings.

Living by Praise

We can be greatly helped in accepting the Holy Spirit's control if we learn the power of praise! *"He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God"* (Psalm 50:23). Paul put it this way; *"In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

When we read these exhortations to praise God, we may make two very common errors. **(1)** To think we should praise God *only* for the good things He gives us – health, food, clothes, and other blessings; or **(2)** To think that we should praise God *only* when we *feel* like doing so. But Paul wrote, *"In everything give thanks."* That means all circumstances, whether pleasant or painful.

It is extremely difficult to give thanks to God when it seems that things are going wrong. But it's only when we choose to give praise for the rough spots in life that we will begin to see them from God's perspective. Furthermore, if we don't give thanks in all things, we are living in unbelief, for we are assuming that a God who loves us does not control our circumstances. I'm not suggesting that we give thanks for sin, but we can thank God for how He will use that sin to teach, to rebuke, or to challenge us.

Also, we can learn to give thanks even if we don't feel particularly thankful. If God gives a command, He expects obedience, whether we are in the mood or not. Thankfulness, like forgiveness, is not an emotion. Thankfulness is an intelligent response of gratitude to God, based on His Word. It is our determination to be obedient.

Here's what we must do; first, name our sin and give thanks to God that we *already* are victorious over it. When Jesus died on the cross, He provided forgiveness and freedom. Thank Him for both, and pray something like, *"Father, I thank You that I am in Christ. I thank You that my position is secure and immovable. I thank You that in Christ I've already won the victory over the sin that bests me. Thank You that I am free."* Soon our experience will catch up with what God has already given us *"in Christ."*

This is not a once-for-all act of thanksgiving! David wrote, *"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall **continually** be in my mouth"* (Psalm 34:1).

How does praise become a way of life, a daily habit, more important than tying your shoes or combing our hair?

We don't learn to praise in a day, especially since we may have been complaining for years. New habits take time to develop. But we can begin today, and practice tomorrow, and the next day, until it becomes part of us. *"Let the Word of Christ*

richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

Getting Practical

1. Paul lists 9 characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 --- which 2 are the most evident in your life? What 2 are the least evident?

2. Think specifically of ways in which the fruit of the Spirit can be further developed in your life. Ask questions such as:

(a) What obstacles in my life hinder the ministry of the Spirit? Is it unconfessed sin – strained personal relationships – lack of commitment – little time spent in Bible reading or prayer?

(b) Have you ever asked God to control you with His Spirit? James 4:2 says we have not because we ask not. Simply thank God for His control each day, knowing that He will give you strength.

3. The most important ingredient in releasing the Spirit's power in our lives is faith. Our faith is strengthened by, (a) making the Word of God the focus of our attention, and (b) developing the habit of praise. Think of creative ways to make these practices a part of your daily activity.

Lesson 7

Renewing the Mind

The cycle seems to repeat its self --- something is bothering us, knowing what Scripture teaches:

- We attempt to give our anxiety over to God, and feel relieved for the moment, only to find that within a short period of time the weight of it is back on our shoulders.
- We ask God to help us to control our temper, only to discover that something happens and we find our anger out of control once more.
- We pray that we will not harbor lustful thoughts, yet even as we "*reckon our self to be dead*" to all sinful impulses, realize that in an unguarded moment suggestive thoughts refuse to be pushed out of our mind.

We surrender our self to God -- but then soon, so easily, revert to our old habits once more. We mean well, but do so poorly – *Why?*

In Luke, chapter 11, Jesus tells a story that illustrates an important principle in breaking a sinful habit. A man, who had been inhabited by a demon, rejoiced when that sinister spirit was expelled. The wicked spirit then passed through "*waterless places,*" seeking rest. Finding none, it decided to return to its original abode. To its satisfaction, the demon saw that its original house was unoccupied, swept, and put in order. It then found "*seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there, and the last sate of that man becomes worse than the first*" (Luke 11:26).

What does it all means?

Why did this man fail in his quest for freedom? He didn't understand the principle of **REPLACEMENTS**. None of us can overcome evil by simply renouncing it! Rather, we can only do so by substituting the good in its place. Sinful habits cannot be broken without replacing them with righteous ones.

Try a simple experiment. Think of the number eight. Have you visualized it? If so, exercise your willpower and stop thinking of the number eight *right now!*

Are you able to not think of the number eight? Of course, not! The more we determine not to think of something, the more our mind remains on it. The point is that we cannot by sheer willpower stop thinking about the number eight. Trying to push it out of our minds actually causes us to focus our attention on it.

How helpful this concept is when we try to overcome sin. We may get on our knees and ask God to take the desire away; we then determine not to think those lurid, bitter, hateful or greedy thoughts, but there they are again. We resist them once more, trying desperately to push them out of our minds. But we are trapped. Try as we might, we just can't get them to budge.

Can we really be free? --- *Yes!* We *can* control those thoughts, but not by trying to stop thinking about them! To simply resist evil is to make it grow stronger.

Our determination not to think lustful thoughts only reinforces them in our thought patterns!

How, then, can we be free? Let's return to our experiment once more and think of the number eight. Although we cannot stop thinking about it by sheer resistance, we can push that number out of our minds quite easily. Here's how: Think of the number one thousand. Then divide it by five. Concentrate on this new information and you will stop thinking of the number eight. As simple as this illustration may be it supplies a method of crowding suggestive thoughts out of our mind.

We can handle sinful thought patterns in the same way. Fear, lust, covetousness - all of these can be squeezed out of our mind by turning our thoughts to the Scriptures.

Freedom comes by filling our mind with God's thoughts!

A minister tells of a Christian brother whose wife died of cancer. She suffered intensely during the last weeks of her life. Yet she and her husband were able to accept this tragedy without bitterness or the slightest trace of self-pity. The husband was asked, "Why were you and you wife able to accept this so well? Weren't you ever resentful and angry at God though this ordeal?" His reply, "Yes, we had moments like that. But when they came, I read Scriptures to my wife. Then we bought the whole New Testament on records and

*we played it in our house, hour after hour." **That was the secret** --- expelling angry and anxious thoughts by filling the mind with the Word of God.*

What is the best way to take air out of a bottle? Someone might build some kind of elaborate vacuum pump to suck out the air – that might be one way! However, a simpler solution is to fill the bottle with water --- and the air has to leave.

The point is --- to diffuse the power of sin, we need to have our thought patterns replaced by the Word of God. Every temptation, vice, or sinister motive comes to us by our thoughts – and, it is these that must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect”* (Romans 12:2). The difference between worldliness and godliness is a renewed mind. The adage puts it succinctly -- *“You’re not what you think you are; but what you think, you are!”*

Let’s suppose we could flash all the thoughts we had last week on a giant screen for everyone to see. Wouldn’t it reveal how we are doing spiritually? Our thoughts not only shape our life --- they **are** our life!

A man released from prison was having difficulty adjusting to his freedom. He tried this experiment: he took a glass bottle with a distinct shape and crammed it full of wires -- some of the wires were small and some were large. After some time had past he smashed the bottle with a hammer. What was the result? Most of the wires retained the shape of the bottle. In order to get those wires straight again they had to be straightened out, one by one.

The man had established his point: it is possible to be technically free and still retain the traits of bondage. Even though a man is liberated, he must adjust to his freedom and carefully dismantle the habits of the past.

As believers, we were legally free *“in Christ,”* but we can still be enslaved by the fantasies of the flesh and the vices of the world. We can yield, surrender, and *“pray through,”* ***but our mind will revert to familiar territory*** as soon as our experience wears then. To leave this self-defeating cycle, we need to outline a specific strategy for experiencing the freedom we have in Christ, and accept the victory that is legally ours.

Prepare for Battle

How does a believer prepare for battle? It cannot be accomplished without locking horns with wicked spiritual forces.

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the

knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

We have the spiritual artillery needed to destroy the fortresses of the mind. Vain reasonings, powerful imaginations, and perverted attitudes can be routed! We have the spiritual equipment to track down every thought and make it captive to Christ.

Military moves are made according to determined strategy. Weapons need to be understood before they are used. In this battle with Satan and evil, we need to know the strategy, and be well acquainted with our weapons. Specifically, how can we do this?

Three lines of attack

1. IDENTIFY THE ALIEN THOUGHTS THAT WE WANT REPLACED

We must name the fantasies, imaginations, and attitudes that we want to get rid of. To simply say, "*I want to be a better Christian,*" or, "*I want to be more joyful,*" will not do! Generalities are not good. Specifics are needed.

Assuming that we know the sins in our life that won't budge – (if we have not done it before – now is the time to identify them). It might be well to take a sheet of paper and jot down the thought patterns that have to go.

2. BE PREPARED FOR THE DISCIPLINE OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The world, the flesh, and the devil do not surrender without a struggle. The person who is blessed by God is one whose "*delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law he doth meditate day and night*" (Psalm 1:2).

Sometimes we are told, "*We are in a spiritual battle. As soldiers of the cross we must be disciplined; we must put effort and sacrifice into Christian living.*" Then perhaps a week later, another Christian appears to say the opposite, "*I was working too hard at being a Christian; God showed me that I must just hang loose – trust the Lord.*"

Though these viewpoints appear contradictory, they really are one! **Only a Christian who is disciplined in the Word of God can rest in the Lord.** We can cease our striving and learn to relax in the confidence that God is equal to every situation. However, a lazy, undisciplined Christian cannot do this; he will fall apart at the seams when tragedy strikes. The believer who is like a tree planted by the rivers of water is the one who meditates in the Law of God every free moment; his thoughts turn to the Word of God like steel to magnet.

Declaring war on our thought life means that we must set aside time every morning to begin our offensive attack. Meditation in the Scriptures requires effort; nothing worth having can be achieved without exertion.

We have heard the cliché, "*a chapter a day keeps the devil away.*" Don't you believe it! It is possible to read a chapter with our mind on something entirely different than from what we are reading --- tomorrow's business deal – or –

with a heart full of revenge. Real meditation requires quality time. We must assimilate a passage and give it our unhurried attention.

3. BE PREPARED TO MEMORIZE THE WORD OF GOD

“Thy Word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee” (Psalms 119:11). Rather than memorize verses at random, take the list of troublesome thought patterns and find verses of Scripture that speak directly to them. Memorize these verses so that we have them at our fingertips during the day -- we'll need them. The only alternative to memorizing verses is to type them out on small note-cards so that we can have them for immediate reference. These are the passage that God will use to demolish the present strongholds of our mind and construct a new edifice.

Use Our Artillery

So far in our strategy to overcome sin, we have identified the sins we need to triumph over, and have made up our mind to set time aside each morning for God, and we have armed our self with passages of Scripture to work with. *Now what?* What should we do tomorrow morning?

1. Begin the Day Right

First of all, we must realize that our strategy begins the moment we awake in the morning. Those moments between waking up and getting our feet on the floor are crucial. The seeds of discouragement, anger, and lust begin here. While still in bed, thank God for the rest He has given to you. Then give the new day to the Lord. Consciously commit your mind, opportunities, and time to Him. Remind yourself of God's promises. Here are a few: *“For nothing will be impossible with God”* (Luke 1:37). *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13). Reminding ourselves of God's promises gives us the proper perspective on life.

After you are out of bed and reasonably awake --- (some folk need coffee, maybe even breakfast, before they can get their mind in gear) --- read a chapter from the Bible, observing what God is saying to you. Then spend some time to prepare your mind for the particular temptation you will face that day. Let's suppose your boss habitually irritates you. You wish you could tell him what's really going through your mind. If you wait until your boss shouts at you before you decide how you will respond, you will probably react in anger. Use the Word of God in anticipation. During your time with God in the morning, recite the verses you have memorized and claim Christ's victory *before* your boss blows his fuse.

The same principle applies whether your problem is gluttony, lust, addiction, worry, or greed. Claim God's promises for that particular day. Tell Him that with His help you resolve to choose for Him, rather than the world.

Remember, if you wait until temptation comes to decide how you will react, you've waited too long. Choose beforehand to claim God's promises for whatever circumstances you expect to encounter.

2. Obey the Holy Spirit

During the day, learn to obey the first promptings of the Holy Spirit. If you are tempted to enjoy a sensual fantasy, deal with those thoughts *immediately*. [Each of us know when we let our minds skip across that invisible line into forbidden territory]. The moment we do so, we sense we are violating the purity that the Holy Spirit desires for us. That is the moment to say, "*I reject these thoughts in the name of Jesus.*" And then quote the passage of Scripture you have learned for that temptation. With time, your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit will develop.

3. Turn Your Mind To God

Most important, learn to switch topics on the flesh and the devil. Remember the experiment of not thinking of the number eight? We couldn't stop thinking of the number eight, no matter how hard we tried. Only switching to another thought could accomplish this result.

We can do this with any temptation we face. Simply use our temptation as an alarm system --- signal to give praise to God. If, for example, you fear some particular disease, use that fear - or worry - as an opportunity to give glory to God. Quote, for instance, Romans 8:35-39, or read Psalms 103, 144, or 145. Then thank God for all the blessings you have in Christ. Thank Him for forgiveness, for His sovereignty, power, and love. In this way, your stumbling block will be changed into a stepping-stone. You'll be praising rather than pouting.

One way to victory over temptation is to respond by using the desire as a reminder to read a passage of Scripture of praise to God. Rather than your mind concentrating on the desire to sin, you focus on God and His power. Eventually, you will learn that you do not have to yield to this temptation; the very struggle will become God's way of building discipline into your life.

If your problem is gluttony, decide that your hunger pangs will be a reminder to divert your attention to God's Word. Memorize a verse of Scripture; pray for a missionary; sing a song. By outlining and following a specific strategy to resist temptation, you can eventually be free from its grip.

4. Determine Not to Get Discouraged

Finally, do not be discouraged by the frequency of the same temptation. If you have lived a long time with sinful thought patterns, the strongholds of your imagination will not be easily toppled. Furthermore, you must recognize the possibility that you are not merely confronting yourself, but satanic forces as well. Satan's most

used weapon is discouragement! After we have rejected insidious thoughts, he delights in having them pop back into our mind.

Since his activity has become so overt in our society,
we will later deal with specific instruction
on how to confront these forces.

The most important insulation we have against satanic attack is personal righteousness – confessing and forsaking sin. And as we apply the above principles consistently, Satan and his forces will be weakened. Eventually they will flee.

How long does it take for our minds to be renewed? That depends. Some Christians who apply these principles recognize a noticeable difference with a few days – a week, or so! Others who are steeped in decades of sin, may need a much longer time – a month or more before they can say, “*I am free!*” And, of course, no one reaches perfection – that is fully matured, beyond all temptation. The more we meditate on the Word, the more clearly we see new areas of our lives that need to be changed. Subtle motives often surface only after long exposure to the light of God’s Word.

God intends us to be free from mental bondage. His Word is the resource by which our thoughts can become obedient to God.

Even Christ, the eternal Son of God, “*learned obedience from the things which He suffered*” (Hebrews 5:8). “*And if He, the Son, sets you free, you shall be free indeed*” (John 8:36).

Suggested Scriptures for Memorization

<p>Covetousness Psalm 119:36 Luke 12:15 Colossians 3:1-2 & 5-6 Philippians 4:11-12 1 Timothy 6:6; Hebrews 13:5</p>	<p>Lust Romans 12:11 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 Ephesians 4:22-24 Philippians 4:8 1 Peter 2:11</p>	<p>Anger Psalm 37:8 Proverbs 14:29 Proverbs 4:31 Ephesians 4:26 & 31 Colossians 3:8 James 1:19-20</p>
<p>Pride Galatians 6:3 & 14 James 4:6 1 Peter 5:5-6</p>	<p>Lack of Discipline Romans 12:11 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 Philippians 4:12-13 Hebrews 6:12</p>	<p>Worry Matthew 6:25-34 Philippians 4:5 1 Peter 5:7</p>
<p>Bitterness Ephesians 4:31-32 Hebrews 12:15</p>	<p>Gluttony Judges 3:31-32 Proverbs 23:20-21 1 Corinthians 9:27 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 Philippians 4:12</p>	

Protecting My Heart

Jesus, "Then cometh the wicked one [Satan] and catches away that which was sown in his heart [the believer's heart]. Matthew 13:19

2 Corinthians 4:4, "In whom the god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ"

Ephesians 4:17, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity [frivolity] of their mind."

Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

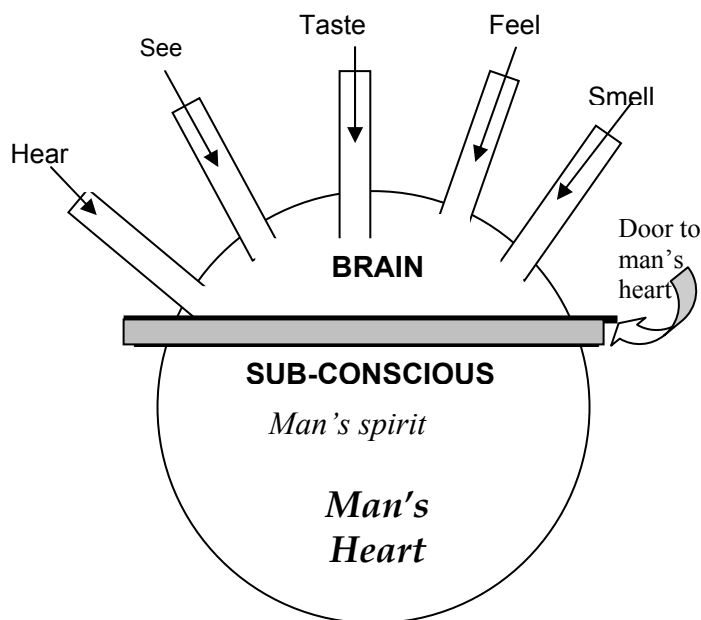
2 Corinthians 10:3-5, " For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of

strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Ephesians 6:10-16, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

UNDERSTANDING THE CONSCIOUS BRAIN AND THE SUB-CONSCIOUS MIND

This is an attempt to picture man's mental and emotional make-up. We all have a brain - [I think you will agree] - Man's brain is, perhaps, the most miraculous thing existing in this natural world, operating on 1/10th of a volt of electricity, is composed of 13 billion cells, with the ability to store 15 trillion facts in a life time. The brain is controlled by 5 senses, which directs all the body's motor functions. However, our *conscious* brain is only about 10% -- or less -- of our personality.



The conscious and the sub-conscious of man's mental and emotional make-up could be compared to a giant iceberg, with about 90 percent of his consciousness below the surface in what is referred to as "*sub-conscious*." We need to understand that man's sub-conscious accepts everything allowed through the door of man's will --- that is, all knowledge, without distinction between good and bad!

God created man with a "*brain*" to serve as - a "*door*" (a gateway) to protect the sub-conscious. The brain serves as a "*bumper*," to man's spirit -- to accept, or reject, any information received through the five senses into man's conscious mind, the brain. The door between the conscious brain and the sub-conscious is where man's *will* resides. Man's soul -- (his real self) -- communicates with the outside world through his conscious brain (mind). God created man unique in that he is different from the animal world. Man was created "*a living soul*."

Throughout Scripture the principle of reaping and sowing is taught, but, nowhere is it put more simpler than in Galatians 6:7, "*Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap*." And, nowhere is this truer than in the fields of man's sub-conscious. God gave man a "*brain*" to protect what enters the sub-conscious - or what Scriptures calls, "*man's heart!*" If a farmer plants corns, he doesn't reap wheat - what he sows is what he will reap! Just so, what we plant in our heart, is the kind of life we will reap! Our thoughts are Satan's prime target. Whatever we exposes our mind too determines what life we will live.

The believer can "*resist the devil*" by a choice of his will -- (with the power of the Holy Spirit) - and Satan "*will flee*" (James 4:7). Jesus said, "*Behold I stand at the door and knock and if any man will open to Me, I will come in and have fellowship with Him*" (Revelation 3:20). It is this "*door*" to man's heart that Jesus refers too.

The Scriptures listed on the previous page teach that we are spiritual to the degree that our mind is involved with spiritual things. (Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 & Philippians 4:8 again.)

What do we expose our mind too?

*"They who live after the flesh, do so because their mind is on the things of the flesh; but they who live after the Spirit do so because their mind is on the things of the Spirit. Because, to be carnally minded is death - [separation from God's purpose] - but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, **if** so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Romans 8:5-9).*

Someone has simplistically stated, "*Sin is our respond to Satanic suggestions; faith is our response to Devine revelation.*"

Satan cannot control our will, he will however influence it as much as we will let him! The "*wiles of the devil,*" mention in Ephesians 6:6 above, refer to Satan's sly tricks, stratagems and devices to trip us up.

LIVING WITH OUR FEELINGS

Watching ads on television, or read the ads in the newspaper or magazines, lets you know the high priority our generation places on "*feeling good*" and how it can be achieved. First you should be surrounded by the right things – the latest styles of clothing, a new car, and, of course, a home in the right neighborhood. Second, you should be free of all physical discomfort. If you have a headache, take a pain killer. If you are depressed, there are stimulants. If you have tension, take some kind of depressant. A bumper sticker captures the mood of our culture – "*If it feels good, do it!*"

It is significant that the first sin ever committed was that of choosing to follow feelings rather than to obey God's commands. The forbidden tree promised to satisfy Eve's hunger; Satan told her she would obtain wisdom. She craved and she ate. But her desire was at odds with God's command. Since that time, people have been living according to the dictates of their *feelings* -- indulging the desires of the flesh and mind.

Feelings in themselves are not evil! God created us with the ability to feel pain and joy; Christ Himself is touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15). To stoically – [without passion] – ignore our feelings or reject them is to invite callousness and indifference Paul condemned the wicked who were no longer capable of compassion, but were "*past feeling*" (Ephesians 4:19). But our feelings are not a fully reliable guide for behavior either. The feeling of hunger is given by God to keep us alive; without it we would starve. But our craving for food must be kept in check, or else we will become gluttonous. Feelings of hunger must be restrained for the total good of the body.

The same can be said for sexual feeling and even feelings of anger and love. Our will – [the door to our sub-conscious] – must provide a check on the stream of emotions that ebb and flow through our being. If we follow our feelings wherever they may lead, we will be fulfilling virtually every meaningless desire.

When I use the word "*feeling*" I am speaking of "*inclinations,*" "*passing likings,*" "*momentary urges.*" I do not mean those deep currents of emotion that are part of the unity of our person. This study is not about an easy cure for deep emotional disturbances!

It is true, however, that by self-understanding, by self-control, and by bringing all our feelings – both the surface and the deepest ones -- into obedience to Christ and to His Word, that many emotional tragedies can be avoided!

No one part of our being is enough to be our guide. We do not live by thought alone – or by will power – spiritual perception – physical activity – or by feelings, *alone!* We are a whole person, made in God's image, and no one of these areas of our total make-up is enough to guide us. No even all of them together are sufficient.

When Jesus spoke of His tempter, He said, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4). He was suggesting the principle of balance, of a life under the authority of the revealed Word of God.

Pitfalls of Living by Feeling

I would like to make some suggestions on how we can cope with our emotions, however, before I do, I would like for us to look at what happens when we live by the dictates of our own hunches and whims.

1. A LIFE BASED ON FEELINGS IS AN INVITATION TO THE SIN OF DISOBEDIENCE

Often our feelings run counter to what God requires. In fact, simply following the path of least resistance, by doing whatever we feel like doing, is what develops most sinful habits. Many of our struggles can be traced to sensuality, or being controlled by our physical senses. Spiritually, this spawns defeat, negativism, and unbelief.

Many people who think they cannot obey God's commandments really don't *feel* like obeying. Occasionally they have days when they wake up wanting to do what God requires – but not often. Our fallen human nature seldom *feels* like obedience; usually it wants to do its own thing. This attitude comes from Satan as he suggests to us – as he did to Eve – that God has asked us to obey commands that we cannot or need not keep. If we think we must *feel* like it, before we obey God's Word, we will never get off the ground in our spiritual lives.

Let's consider an illustration. Let's say that a couple seeks counseling because they feel that they just are not "*in love*" any more. Neither one has committed any serious sin against the marriage. They just feel that the *feeling* of love is gone. They go to the counselor hoping that he will confirm their decision that if there is no feeling left, the only recourse is divorce. However, the couple is shocked to find that the Christian, Bible-believing, counselor says, "*If you don't love each other, there is only one thing to do: you will have to **learn** how to love one another.*" The couple is skeptical, "*How can we **learn** to love someone? You can't produce feelings out of thin air!*"

The counselor explains that in the Bible God commands us to love one another. The husband is to love his wife “*as Christ loved the church*” (Ephesians 5:25). The husband gasps -- he feels that could never do that.

The counselor is persistent. He explains that the husband should consider some other Biblical truths. God’s Word also commands us to love our neighbor – and since his wife is his closest neighbor (Matthew 22:39), he certainly is to love her. But even so, the husband objects that he couldn’t love his wife that way. Then the counselor explains that the man is still not off the hook, for God has commanded us to love “*even our enemies*” (Matthew 5:44).

This couple has made a common error; they are equating love with “*feelings*.” In the Bible, ***love is not a feeling***. We can *learn* to love, even though we begin with little or no emotional impulse, or incentive. In other words, we can *choose* to love. And God gives us the grace to do so.

Love is not an emotion; neither is forgiveness. The Bible commands us to put bitterness away; we are to forgive others whether they ask for our forgiveness or not. Yet many Christians believe that they can’t forgive until they *feel* like it! They think that if they forgive when they don’t *feel* like it --- that would make them hypocritical.

However, if forgiveness were an emotion, God would be commanding us to do the impossible. We know that we cannot switch our emotions on and off at will. We cannot develop the right feelings on our own. God is not mocking us when He tells us to forgive; we can *choose* to do so, whether we *feel* like it or not. We must never attempt to skirt God’s commands under the pretense that we don’t *feel* like obeying Him.

2. A SECOND DANGER OF LIVING BY FEELINGS IS THAT WE MAY TEND TO DERIVE OUR DOCTRINE FROM FEELINGS

If we believe God is with us only when, “*We feel that He is close,*” we will also believe that there are days when He forsakes us, because, “*He feels so far away.*” The assurance of God’s presence does not come by *feelings*, but by faith (Hebrews 13:5). Fortunately, we don’t always have to *feel* God’s presence to be in fellowship with Him and to make spiritual progress.

The Apostle Paul, who by any standard lived a successful, victorious Christian life, had his bad days. He wrote, “*For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life*” (2 Corinthians 1:8).

Even more surprising is the testimony of Christ. As He approached the cross, He was tempted to call a halt to the whole plan of redemption. He was deeply vexed in His spirit and cried out, “*Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, `Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father glorify Thy name’*” (John 12:27-28a).

His agony in Gethsemane is well documented, as His soul was troubled to the point of death (Matthew 26:38). Emotionally, He shrank from the “cup” that He was about to drink – and asked if it were possible that the cup might pass from Him. All these emotional upheavals took place in the God-Man, the One who lived a perfectly sinless life.

Now it is true that most depression is the result of sin. It may be our own sin, or the sin of another person against us, and can be most severe if we have concealed the real cause of it --- even from our self. Depression usually originates in self-pity, bitterness or guilt.

See lesson on, “*Depression, it’s cause and cure*”

There are those who have seen counselor after counselor and still could not seem to cope with intense periods of depression. The problem can often be traced that, despite the counseling – (if they withhold important information that deals with sin) – they can’t seem to get relief, or any help. However, when they admit their sin, confess it, and accept God’s forgiveness – depression leaves. *Self-pity, hostility, and warped values* have the same effect. This is why those who think they have emotional problems often discover that their problems are not really emotional. Indeed, their emotions are working only too well. Their emotional struggles are often symptomatic of unresolved guilt from sin that they have been unwilling to face. Only when the axe is put to the tree does the fruit of sin wither.

However, there are times when we may experience emotional turbulence that may not be related to any particular sin. The cause may be physiological, or perhaps Satan is trying to disrupt our fellowship with God. At any rate, this point needs emphasis: *We do not need to experience a steady stream of peaceful, serene emotional feelings to walk with God!*

Emotions fluctuate. They are perhaps only little more dependable than the weather. Today we feel great, tonight we can’t sleep, and tomorrow life seems demanding. Those moments provide a crucial test of whether we have learned to walk by faith or if we are still dependent on emotional sight. Personally, I’m glad that my acceptance before God is unrelated to the way we feel.

3. A THIRD CONSEQUENCE OF LIVING BY FEELINGS IS THAT WE DEVELOP THE SIN OF PROCRASTINATION

Let’s say that it’s time to visit a friend in the hospital, write a letter, or do some chores around the house. We know what we ought to do, but for some mysterious reason we can’t seem to get started. We will, putter around, watch television; in short we procrastinate. Why?

There may be several reasons for this. We may feel frustrated because the work seems overwhelming; or we may feel inferior, unable to do the job as well as someone else. So we sit around, waiting for the magic moment when we “feel” like doing the job, when suddenly everything will fall into place. But, very often, those magic moments never arrive, and our responsibilities never go

away. The result --- we begin to feel guilty for not doing what we ought. Putting matters off does not relieve tension, but increases it.

Perhaps the most tragic consequence of living according to feelings is that such a life ends up being self-defeating. It seems reasonable to believe that the sure path to happiness is to be able to do whatever we "*feel*" like doing. But, anyone who lives by their feelings does not enjoy their feelings for very long. Shrugging off responsibility only increases guilt. *The more we give in to our feelings, the worse we feel!* Rather than satisfying our feelings, we actually irritate them!

A woman may be depressed because she is unable to finish her housework. She hopes that someday she will feel like cleaning out that guest room, vacuuming and shampooing the carpet, and carrying out the pile of magazines, etc. that has collected. But she doesn't *feel* like it; furthermore, even if she began today, there will be more work tomorrow. She follows her feelings and lies on the sofa, watching television. Since she is doing what she feels like doing, she should be happy and satisfied --- right?

Wrong! Guilt settles upon her like the London fog. Each day she gets more behind! The amount of work piles up. Her children and her husband are beginning to, (maybe not out and out complaining), but dropping hints about the tasks around the house not being done. But, by now, she is so far behind, there is no use trying to catch up. Her frustration will never leave until she chooses to do what she ought to be doing, whether she *feels* like it or not.

The moment we declare war on our besetting sin, we will bump into our feelings, (mostly negative ones). We need to be prepared for a feeling of *helplessness* - an idea that we are the victim of circumstances and desires that we cannot change. This feeling just happens to be the sin of unbelief in a different form. It's one way Satan uses to get us to believe that either God cannot or will not help us.

Very soon, *discouragement* will pry its way into our life. It usually hits a few days after we've decided to make a clean break with sin and develop habits of righteousness. Satan's line goes something like this: "*You've tried to break this habit and failed. There is no reason to try again. You're not good enough to expect God to help you.*"

Another feeling we may have to battle is *laziness* --- the notion that we need not put too much effort into the Christian life. We'll want to procrastinate, to put off any serious attempt at seeking God's will concerning our problem. Satan never fears our good intentions. Only our obedience drives him to distraction.

Let's take a hard look at our feelings and then ask our self, "*How can I cope with them?*"

The Example of Christ in Coping with Our Feelings

Jesus Christ, as fully Man and fully God, experienced all human emotions. He wept at the grave of Lazarus. As He faced the incredible assignment of bearing the sin of the world, He was traumatized by an excruciating emotional burden. Yet Jesus did not spend those last hours on earth in self-pity, bemoaning His fate. He handled the experience constructively, and therefore provides a model for us all. What did He do?

1. Christ admitted His feelings

Jesus said to His disciples, *“My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me”* (Matthew 26:38). He allowed His disciples to have a glimpse at the unutterable passions that come upon Him that dark, oppressive night. To suppress feelings will not cause them to disappear. Feelings must be dealt with honestly. They cannot be ignored. Needless to say, Christ’s emotional upheavals did not lead Him to sinful thoughts or behavior, but even so we must follow Him in honestly acknowledging how we feel.

David, the psalmist, was vulnerably honest. As we read the Psalms, and the wide range of emotions that he felt strikes us. When he was joyful, he shouted praises; when he was depressed, he complained about God’s silence and apparent indifference to his needs. The psalmist reveals his depression, his joy, and even his anger were admitted. We don’t know how often he told others about his woes, but we know he spent much time giving his problems to God. The first step, then, is to **admit the truth about our emotions - and tell God how we feel.**

2. Christ requested the support of friends.

Christ had three groups of disciples: the 70 who went from house to house to proclaim the kingdom, the 12 who were constantly with Him, and then three within that circle were given special opportunities. Peter, James and John who had been invited to the Mount of Transfiguration were now asked to help their Master bear His intense suffering. Christ did not consider it beneath His dignity to ask His friends for prayerful intercession and companionship in the hour of trial.

Corporate intercessory prayer could solve many so-called emotional problems. But, unfortunately the Church today is much like the disciples who found praying more difficult than sleeping. Their spirit was willing, but their flesh was weak.

3. Christ knew that His emotional suffering would not separate Him from the Father’s love and approval

Their relationship was not affected by the weight of His anguish. As believers we need to realize that our acceptance before God is unrelated to our feelings. We do not live the Christian life by moods, but by faith. Freedom

comes to us when we understand that our walk with God is not dependent on how we feel when we get out of bed in the morning.

4. Finally, Christ knew that blessing would follow obedience

Emotional peace and calm would come *after* doing God's will and not before. The assurance of joy in the future enabled Him to endure the tortures of the present. As we pursue victory over the "*sin that so easily entangles,*" we can fix our "*eyes on Jesus who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Hebrews 12:2).

We must remember that *feelings flow from action and not vice versa*. We can prove this tomorrow morning. If we follow our feelings, we probably, will not get out of bed when the alarm clock rings. To wait for the proper feeling will mean that our day will begin behind schedule. But if we choose to get up and take a shower, whether we feel like it or not, we will soon discover that we are feeling pretty good. And by the time we have finished our breakfast, we will be thinking that life isn't so bad after all. Proper feelings come because of actions; they do not precede the action itself.

Whenever we obey God, our feelings begin to fall in line; we have a sense of satisfaction, a sense of self-esteem. To seek the proper feelings first will inevitably lead to despair. Yet, some Christians wait for that magic moment when they will *feel* like obeying, *feel* like committing themselves to God, or *feel* like praying and reading the Bible.

We all have tasks we dislike doing. What makes us think that we should wait until we feel like doing them? Christ did not feel like taking our sin unto Himself and dying on the cross in our place. He suffered more physical pain than most of us can comprehend, along with an excruciating moral anguish, as the sinless One became identified with the sin of the world. Every emotional conflict known to man --- (except personal guilt) --- convulsed within the body of the Holy Son of God. But He went ahead with it because He "*was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Philippians 2:8). Why did He do it? Jesus knew that *after obedience there is joy!* How often we have reversed the order. We think we've got to be in the right mood to obey God. But there is no joy until there is obedience.

One final word: **we must learn to give thanks to God for all things, whether we feel like it or not.** The focus of our attention must be the truth that is settled in heaven.

When we feel anything like depression coming our way, it is good to prepare a list of all the blessings that God has given us in Christ Jesus. Resist all negative emotional impulses. Begin thanking God for each one - even though we may not *feel* thankful! We can be grateful *mentally*, by choosing to be, and tell God so.

Reciting verses of Scripture we have memorized and giving thanks may seem futile, but we must continue --- resisting any thought of quitting. It won't be long before depression will leave us alone! --- [I'm not suggesting that all depression can be handled so simply] --- However, in tackling our emotional moods, praise is the place to begin!

We will discover new liberty in our Christian life if we realize that our faith need not be tied to our feelings. We honor God when we walk by faith without emotional supports. And within time, our feelings begin to catch up with the truth that we accept with our minds. In practical terms, this means that we can begin right *now* to take constructive steps toward positive change. We'll never feel more like doing it than at this very moment. The following suggested application will help us to begin right *now*!

1. Choose, by a determination of our will, to face all stressful situations with a spirit of self-denial instead of letting feelings and pleasure rule us.
2. Knowing that seeking to find victory in feelings is sin – that feelings fluctuate, and spirituality is not equated with “*feeling just right*,” we repent of “*walking in the flesh*,” and of the sin of considering the reality of the Christ-life on the basis of feeling, and decide to trust God and to “*live by faith*.”
3. We will fulfill our responsibilities even when we do not *feel* like doing them!
4. Study carefully and prayerfully Jesus' words in John 12:27-28, realizing that God's will often will counter our own feelings
5. Determine that we will always “*walk by faith*” and not emotional sight!

Getting Practical

1. What evidence is there that our generation stresses physical comfort – (feelings and pleasure) rather than a life of self-denial?
2. Faith often runs counter to feeling. Even the attempt to find victory in feelings is a sin in the life of the believer. In short, living by feeling is simply “*walking in the flesh*.” We must repent of the sin of assessing the reality of the Christ-life on the basis of feeling. Think seriously about these questions: “*Why do our feelings fluctuate? Why do we so often think that spirituality is to be equated with **feeling just right?***” Give examples where faith runs contrary to feelings in your life.
3. What responsibilities do you have that you do not *feel* like doing? Why do you then do them? What would happen if you only did whatever you felt like doing?
4. Read the words of Christ in John 12:27-28. How does the text show that Christ's determination to do the Father's will often went counter to His own feelings?
5. What practical benefits are there in realizing that we “*walk by faith*” and not emotional sight?

Lesson 9

What To Do About Our "Will"

We all have heard someone, possibly on a diet, say, "I just don't have any will power." Isn't it frustrating to know what you ought to do and yet not seem to be able to do it? The gap between knowledge and performance is often embarrassing. We can't seem to get our self moving in the right direction. Yet, unless we can use our "will" effectively, we will be paralyzed in our Christian life.

Can our will be disciplined? The answer is, "Yes!" We do not need to drift aimlessly through life, carried like a cork on a river. We can learn to make responsible decisions, and say, "No" to the path of least resistance!

What Is Our Will?

Our will is our decision-making faculty. Often it is caught between our thoughts and our desires. Our *emotions* express how we feel, our *mind* says what we know, but our *will* tells what we *want*. The weary disciples experienced this tension in Gethsemane. Christ asked them twice to watch and pray with Him, but they fell asleep. Jesus commented, "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

Let's take this problem a little closer to home - to our own bedroom, for instance. The alarm rings at 6:00 A.M. and our mind knows full well what that means: we should carefully move from a horizontal to a vertical position. But our body feels differently about the whole matter. Now our will has to make a decision that cannot satisfy both the body and the mind. And our will has only a few moments to decide or we will drift into unconscious comfort for another hour, or so.

What determines whether our will follows the direction of the mind or the inclinations of our body? It depends on our desires and our determination to fulfill these desires. If our job is important to us, we will be strongly inclined to get out of bed. If our temporary comfort is more attractive than a paycheck, we will tend to ignore the alarm clock.

If we were born into a home with little discipline and weak commitment to dependability, we will have a strong tendency to do whatever comes naturally. However, background cannot be used as an excuse for laziness, because those who were reared in well-disciplined homes fight the same natural desires. Believe it or not, we are all much the same *inside!*

Thank God that our environment need not control us. The power of the Gospel can set us free from the conditioning of our home or society. We can choose, by God's grace, to change, to refuse to be pressed into the mold of our past.

Heredity, or guardian, also influences our will. We've all inherited from the temperaments of our parents. Those who have studied human nature believe they have discovered several distinct behavioral patterns. Every one of us is a combination of these temperaments.

[Tim LaHaye's book on "*Spirit Controlled Temperaments*" is a good study on this subject]

But more important than our heredity or environment is the fact that we were born with a sinful nature --- *a natural tendency to do evil rather than good*. Scripture teaches us that, it is our nature --- our natural instinct --- to indulge the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Our will is paralyzed, unable to choose the righteousness that God requires. Left to our self, we would never choose God - or His ways!

Romans 3:10-11 states, "*There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God.*" Left to "*our self*" we are not even able to seek God, much less live righteous lives.

Those of us who live in America, in this day and age, have a great obsession with freedom. But our freedom, if it exists, is severely limited. At best, within certain limits, we can pursue our desires, fulfill our wishes, and choose our own goals. However, we are not free to seek after God. How, then, can we be saved?

Christ Jesus taught that no man can come to Him unless the Father draws him. He teaches in John 6:44, "*No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day*" and verse 64, "*He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father.*" God does not save us by circumventing our will. He works *through* it, giving us the ability to choose. We have heard the expression, "*Let go and let God,*" implying that God will take over and control us completely if we wish Him to do so. But this is not a Biblical concept! Our will does not become passive when we yield to God. A surrendered "*will*" experiences struggle, as Christ's conflict in Gethsemane demonstrates.

The Holy Spirit does not stop working with man's will at the time of conversion. Paul wrote, "*And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His - [God's] - mightily works within me*" (Colossians 1:29). The Comforter stands ready to come to our aid the moment we face a temptation or have a decision to make.

The Basis of Choice

Before we can bring our will into harmony with God's purposes, we need adequate goals for our life. If we do not believe that life is worth living, it won't make much difference to us if we break sinful habits or reinforce them. A purposeful life, therefore, is the basis for discipline and determination to make right choices.

Day to day activities have short-term meaning. If we choose to begin some chore -- say, for instance, clean the house, mow the lawn, or whatever job we intend to

accomplish -- we have a sense of satisfaction when the task is completed. Specific short-term goals give direction in how we use our time.

However, temporary goals are not adequate for a meaningful and satisfying life. An executive who had achieved all the short-term goals one can imagine --- (he had two beautiful homes, a car, and plenty of vacation time) -- yet, he committed suicide because, he said, "*Life was not worth the trouble of living.*" He had reached all of his materialistic goals and found they were not ultimately satisfying. Though most people would not go so far as to commit suicide -- this true story could be multiplied by thousands and thousands of lives. **Only eternal values can give meaning to temporal ones.** Time must be the servant of eternity. How is this done?

1. THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

Moses could say "No" to the world because he was firmly convinced that time (and eternity) would vindicate his choice. Focusing on the eternal gave him the resources to make wise choices on earth.

Given his values, Moses was willing to forgo immediate pleasures. The Bible does not deny there is pleasure in short-term goals. In Pharaoh's court, Moses could have enjoyed wine, women, and song, and far-flung political power as well. But he knew that such pleasures are short-lived. He was able to postpone his immediate desires because of his faith in future rewards. He could say "No" to the world without thinking he had been shortchanged.

In the record of the faithful ones, (Hebrews 11), we read, "*By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen*" (Hebrews 11:24-27).

Moses endured because he saw the invisible One - Jesus Christ. He saw the difference between time and eternity. Paul's message to Christians is, "*look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal*" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Contrast this with the immaturity of the "*now generation*" wanting all of its kicks, thrills and highs right now --- this every moment! No consideration is given for tomorrow, much less for distant future. The permanent is sacrificed on the altar of the immediate.

Those who trust God can postpone fulfillment of their desires. Sex can wait until marriage; the discipline of hard study can be endured for the sake of an education; and any sinful pleasure can be abandoned in favor of the greater pleasure of fellowship with God.

2. THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

Jesus knew where He had come from, why He was here, and what He was supposed to accomplish. He came down from heaven, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father. That determination controlled every decision He made.

As a result, He was not distracted with trivia. He was never in a hurry, for He knew His Father would not give a task without the time to do it. Christ was not driven by crises, feeling He must heal everyone in the land. He could say, "*It is finished,*" even when many people were still bound by demons and twisted by disease. What mattered ultimately was not the number of people healed or fed, but whether the Father's will was being done. His clearly defined goals simplified His decisions.

We too need such a singleness of purpose. Specific goals will motivate us to do the will of God. Once we know where we are going, it's much easier to get there; indeed, the journey becomes a pleasure. I have noticed that in spite of adversity, those who have been successful in life, have established goals and, (irrespective of obstacles), have sought with all their effort to achieve them. From the moment they have fixed an objective in their minds and decided to concentrate all their energies on a specific goal, they begin to surmount the most difficult odds.

How Do We Set Goals?

According to God's Word, the invisible things in life are more valuable than the visible (2 Corinthians 4:18). The eternal is more enduring than the temporal. But what do these facts have to do with our values - our goals?

Our goals are set on the foundation of our larger belief about life and about our self. Within the framework of our ultimate commitments we formulate our short-range goals.

Let me suggest three levels of commitment that are appropriate for every Christian: **(1)** Commitment to God in Christ Jesus, **(2)** Commitment to the body of Christ, and **(3)** Commitment to the work God has given us to do. These three levels are the outline in which we can specify what we want to accomplish with our life. It is our responsibility to creatively spell out how we plan to fulfill these commitments. For example, our commitment to God might mean that we spend a half an hour each day getting to know the One to whom we have committed our self. (We may want to cut the time we spend watching television.) And, of course, we will want to specify our plans to study God's Word, the Bible.

We will want to set goals in other parts of our life, as well. We may want to lose a few pounds. A body redeemed by God should not be victimized by gluttony. Once we decide how much weight we plan to lose and the diet we will follow --- ***stay with it!*** Choose to forego immediate desires. When we are tempted by foods that are not on our diet, we need to remind our self that this immediate pleasure can be postponed.

Our goal to lose a few pounds must mean more to us than the craving for excess food. We must remember that the benefits of proper body size far outweigh obesity. So we will say “No” to our desires.

The value of discipline reaches into every day activities – such as, getting out of bed in the morning – carrying out the garbage – or washing windows. We can bring our body under control and do what we ought to do --- what is in line with the goals we set. If we value our commitments enough, then saying “No” or “Yes” will be doing what we really want --- long term!

Our momentary feelings are not a good guide toward fulfilling desirable goals. Paul had his body in control. He said, “*But I buffet my body – [keep it under control] -- and make it my slave, lest possible, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified*” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Our Will Is Our “Want to”

The invisible is more valuable than the visible. It is good to set priorities, to have goals. But what about our “want to” --- our will? How are we going to hold to these goals we are setting that fit into our belief about God’s will for our life?

Setting good goals is not easy. And staying with them is even harder yet. As a Christian we need and have available the help of God as we seek to do His will. And yet it is just at this point --- of our will and God’s will --- that there is conflict.

The struggle between our self-will and God’s will is intense. We were born with the desire to control our own destiny, to do “*our own thing.*” Consequently, our fallen will is adept at making choices in harmony with our pride, independence, and self-determination. We resist the idea that God should rule over us, particularly when He begins to meddle in our private affairs.

We don’t want to submit *our* plans to a higher authority for approval. If we “want to” spend time watching television – then, that ought to be *our* decision. Or if we are skimpy in giving *our* money to the Lord’s work, that is *our* business. Entrusting *our* self wholly to God seems rather impractical. If we don’t take care of our self, who will? We have to look out for Number One!

It is just this kind of attitude that needs to learn obedience and humility. Usually we think that the human will must be strengthened, but paradoxically *we become stronger only when we become weaker!* When we surrender our will to God, we finally discover the resources to *do* what God requires. As we give our self to Him, we receive His power.

When we are at the end of our rope, God is there to catch us --- but not before! David knew that the most he could offer God was a yielded will. He wrote, “*The*

sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

Submission to God always involves humility; it is an acknowledgment that we are neither qualified nor able to do what we ought to do.

When we fight against the demands of God, trying to weasel out of whatever doesn't suit us, our will is pitted against God in a desperate struggle for survival.

But when we say, "Yes" to God, we discover the ability to do His will. ***Strength is dependent upon surrender!***

Our "will" will be energized by the Holy Spirit when we stop resisting and chose to say, "No" to our stubborn habit.

We Can Lessen the Conflict

Does temptation ever lose its power? Not completely. Even when we are motivated by a desire to please God, we experience conflict, because God often requires obedience that runs counter to human motivations.

Christ Himself expressed this conflict. Jesus said, "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 voluntarily set aside any personal ambitions and submitted Himself to His Father's will.

The conflict between our immediate interests and God's long-range goals will not just go away. But there is an answer. For when we begin to commit our self to God, the Holy Spirit begins to resolve these conflicts. He pulls the fragments of our life together. He shows us His truth as a standard for making choices. He teaches us a single-mindedness that we never knew before. He shows us the rewards of living in His love and justice. And after a while, we begin to realize that in many instances, what God *requires* of us is really what we *want* to do.

This helps us understand Christ's conflict. True, His human inclinations ran contrary to what the Father's will required. Paul says that Christ did not please Himself (Romans 15:3). But much greater than the natural desire to avoid bearing man's sin and suffering man's punishment -- was His satisfaction in doing God's will. The prophet predicted that Christ would say, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God" (Psalms 40:8).

Visualize a piece of steel suspended between two magnets. It vacillates, unsure of whether it should swing to the right or to the left. For a moment, it wavers. It could go either way, because it is being simultaneously drawn in two directions. Then, as it swings toward the right, it wavers for a second and continues to move in the same direction. Now it moves more rapidly to the right; it cannot swing back any more. It is out of the range of the left magnet's power.

We may be hovering between God and the stubborn habit. Now it is our desires – now it is God’s. We may not, at first know what the outcome, or decision, will be. **But the father we go in God’s direction, the less attraction the world will have!** The day will come when our choices will be easier. Saying, “Yes” to God can be habit-forming.

There is another lesson we can learn from this illustration. *We can’t say “No” to temptation unless we say, “Yes” to God!* Like the magnet, the world will never lose its power to attract. To merely resist its power is pointless; no will is strong enough. But what we do is focus our attention on God as revealed in the Scriptures and then we remove our self from the sphere of the world’s influence.

We can’t resist enticing thoughts simply by saying, “*I resist that thought!*” The thought returns again and again. However, we have the ability to switch our thoughts to the Scriptures --- quote a verse, offer praise, or renew our fellowship with God. Only in the presence of the Almighty does the world lose its lure.

God has given us the resources to say, “No” to sin. Paul urged his readers to obey, but not merely by appealing to their unaided human wills. He reminded them that, “*it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). God works in us by energizing our will. He helps us make the decisions that we ought to make and ultimately really want to make.

God uses our struggles with temptations to teach us how to depend on His power. The final end of the fruit-of-the-Spirit is “*self-control.*” That word, “*self-control,*” means literally, “*to hold oneself in.*” It refers to the mastery of desires --- in the interest of higher ideals.

Don’t feel powerless against a barrage of temptation. Maybe you have an insatiable desire for drugs, alcohol, and excess calories. (Maybe your sins are just restricted to your mind.) Whatever your sins, there is hope. Like Christ, Moses, and an innumerable host of saints before you, you can say “No” to any stubborn habit, by setting the right priorities. And the more you learn to love Christ, the less you will be attracted by the world.

Getting Practical

1. Read Psalm 73 – the story of Asaph who began to wonder whether serving God was worthwhile, or not. Notice particularly how his problem was solved when he began to focus on eternal rather than temporal rewards.

2. Ponder Proverbs 25:28. Describe the characteristics of someone who has no control over his spirit. What are the advantages of being disciplined?

3. Take an inventory of your life by asking, “*In what areas am I resisting God’s complete ownership?*” Suggested areas might be: time, pleasure, recreation, vocation, health, reputation, marital status, friendships, etc. Pray and give these areas fully to God.

4. Think of two responsibilities you have that you most dislike. Why are they so difficult? Depend on God for strength to do one of them right away, or as soon as possible.

5. If you have not already done so, set aside a few minutes each morning to begin the day with God. You'll be tempted not to follow through with your commitment. List what those temptations might be and develop a strategy to combat them.

Lesson 10

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCESSION

We cannot successfully live the Christian life on our own. God never intended that any one of us experience either failure or success *alone* --- independent of the body of Christ. We need God's people for encouragement and intercession, and for the strength that comes from close fellowship.

And more importantly, we need the intercession of Jesus Christ! Our sin is never a private matter. We cannot say, "*It only hurts me.*" God, Jesus Christ, and Satan are involved in our failures, whether public or private. Satan accuses us before the Father; the Son, Jesus Christ, intercedes for us; and the Father gives the verdict. A secret sin on earth is an open scandal in heaven!

The Intercession of Christ

Whenever tragedy strikes any one, the person who can be of most comfort are those who have had a similar experience. For instance, a widow, can best minister to another widow; bereaved parents are helped mostly by the support of others who have lost a child. There are two reasons for this. First, it's encouraging to know that others have survived a similar difficulty. And second all of us what to meet someone who *knows* how we feel.

Jesus Christ qualifies on both counts. Scriptures teaches us that He experienced every form and category of every temptation we've ever encountered. He was assaulted by Satan and bounded by physical distress. He faced hunger, rejection, and death successfully. And today, He is deeply moved by our own feelings and struggles. True, He doesn't have a sin nature as we have, but the excruciating pain of the cross, coupled with the horror of being identified with our sin, was more torment than we could ever imagine. That's why the Scriptures can say, "*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*" (Hebrew 4:15). Today Christ says to us, "*I know how you feel.*" Furthermore, He is moved with compassion (sympathy) for our weaknesses.

Can we confront Satan and win? Can we experience death and arrive safely on the other side? Jesus Christ did and *in Him* we can too! Because He endured His

temptations, He offers all of us hope. Today He is at the right hand of God the Father, making intercession for us. His presence reminds the Father that we have been brought at high cost. When we sin, He takes up our case and assumes all the legal aspects of our relationship with God (1 John 2:1).

An example of His power of intercession is seen in the life of Peter. After the Lord's Supper was instituted, Christ said to him, "*Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*" (Luke 22:31-32).

Peter retorted, "*Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!*" (verse 33). Christ was not impressed; He knew Peter. Moments later, this rugged fisherman would deny Christ – and curse as well. His courage would turn to cowardice in a matter of minutes.

Was Christ's prayer answered? Yes! Peter did deny Christ, but the story doesn't end there. It says, "*He went outside and wept bitterly*" (verse 62). After his repentance, he was able to comfort and strengthen others. His ministry, as recorded in the Book of Acts, and his letters to the young and suffering church (1st and 2nd Peter), are proof that Christ's prayer was answered.

Satan sifted Peter and discovered that he was part chaff and part wheat. But because of the intercession of Christ, the chaff was blown away and the wheat became nourishment for others in need.

Today God gives Satan permission to do the same to us. Temptation, struggles, and failures are all part of the process. Most of us, like Peter, are a mixture of chaff and wheat, as our track record shows. But near to uphold us, keep us, and come to our aid is our Lord Jesus Christ, who is qualified to keep us from stumbling irrevocably. "*For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted*" (Hebrews 2:18).

What an encouragement! As we think about that sin in our life that we can't seem to conquer --- we can't help but be reminded that the outcome of its struggle is intensely important to God. It's a contest between Christ and Satan, and are the trophy!

But Christ is not the only one who intercedes for us. He invites all believers to participate in this rewarding ministry. Remember Christ's intercession in Gethsemane? He was struggling with the prospect of the Cross and asked His disciples to *watch with Him*. Three times He asked them to participate in His agony. They failed because they were too weary, but the invitation was there. Christ gives us the same opportunity. We can intercede with Him on behalf of other believers. We're invited to join Him in a ministry of intercession.

The Intercession of Believers

There are times when some besetting sin will not seem to budge until we enlist the prayer support of others who know how to pray, particularly where there is some kind of powerful addiction. What is needed is the added support of others who will *stand in for us* in the presence of God. There are those who are morally weak --- who may not even know for sure whether they want to change their lifestyle or not. They need persistent prayers and encouragement of God's people to help them come to terms with their problem.

Why is this necessary? Why is it that we need other believers to pray with us? Why doesn't an all-powerful God just give us victory if we individually apply the right principles? On the surface, it seems odd that our failure or success would be determined by other believers' faithfulness or negligence. Why the need for others to become involved?

Primarily, it is because God wants us to give up our independent spirit. By nature, we all are creatures who prefer to live according to our own blueprint. How we live is *our* business --- what right does anyone have to ask or even be interested in how we are progressing spiritually? If we want them to know, we'll tell them!

However, the New Testament teaches otherwise. We are all members of the body of Christ, and each of us affects the function of others. If you have ever had a toothache, you know that the parts of your body are not isolated. When one tooth aches, your whole body hurts.

Have you ever seen a human hand severed from a body? It looks gruesome. Yet, attached to an arm and connected to the nervous system, the hand is not only highly useful, but beautiful too. The difference lies in its relationship to the body. Similarly, in Christ *no individual is anything if cut off from the body!*

That's why God wants us to enlist the resources of other believers. It's humbling to realize that we need their support and help, but we do. Our struggles and temptations remind us that successes or failures are always a team effort. There's no room in the body of Christ for an individual score card.

That's why we must be acquainted with God's people. It is good to form friendships in church, where committed believers gather for fellowship and instruction. Within the larger circle of believers, we find that there are those who become our special friends. As we develop confidence in them we can turn to them in the time of need. At that moment, we are tapping a reservoir of spiritual power. Jesus said, "*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst*" (Matthew 18:20). The first responsibility of God's people is persistent prayer for one another; not merely individual prayer, but corporate prayer. Prayer ***as a group*** is important!

Believers just saying, “*We’re praying,*” is not enough when there’s a persistent problem. For victorious intercession to be accomplished it may be necessary to gather a few believers together to meet regularly for prayer, until the answer comes. There is supportive value in sharing our heartbreaks with a group of God’s people. Christ, you will remember, wanted His disciples to be at His side during His agony in Gethsemane. It wasn’t only their prayers that He wanted. It seems that He wanted someone to be with Him during those agonizing moments, to be an encouragement.

Many have found that another way others can help us is by being those to whom we can be responsible and accountable. We can agree to report to the group, or at least to one individual, on our spiritual progress. If we know someone is going to ask us, “*How’s that problem coming?*” We are going to be more inclined to flee from temptation. One man suggested to his friend, “*Whenever you are tempted to take another drink, call me collect, any time of day, and we’ll pray together over the phone.*”

It’s a great idea to meet together with another, trusted, believer, whom we have confidence in, for sharing and praying is a great idea. To have someone we can be completely honest with --- giving a report on failures and successes – can be an immense help in our spiritual development! Knowing that we have an appointment certainly will be an incentive to overcome temptations. Of course, if we do fail, we need to be honest. Our pride will want us to say that all is well when it may not be. But to develop responsibility toward others – helps us to do what we ought.

God wants to teach us through our difficult situations that we cannot live a successful Christian life independent of other believers. If we are wayward, we can be restored; if we are weak, others can share their strength with us. We should never think that we can live independent lives, apart of other believers, for we will never live fully, successful Christian lives *alone* --- we need other redeemed believers.

Restoring a Believer

What should we do when we see a fellow believer trapped in a sinful habit? Certainly, we do not discuss the matter with others, nor do we just do nothing, hoping that someday they will snap out of it.

The Bible is very explicit about our responsibility. If a believer has erred --- (not merely violated some personal preferences we may have) --- it is our *duty* to restore him, to help him rectify his relationship with God. Jesus taught, “*And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you a Gentile [heathen] and a tax-gatherer [the shunned and hated tax-collector]*” (Matthew 18:15-17).

Our first responsibility is to “*go to him in private.*” Don’t tell friends, relatives, or ever the pastor! At this point, there is no reason to make the sin public. If the brother is

repentant and is given instruction on how to break from that sin, there is no reason for others to become involved.

So many have disobeyed God on this score. Because confronting another believer in love takes courage, many take the cowardly route of gossip and pass the news to others, thinking they will help, or at least “*pray about it.*” Baser motives often lie beneath such excuses. Many seem to delight in other people’s faults because it gives them an exalted feeling of superiority – thinking, “*We’d never do that!*”

Churches have been split and family relationships shattered beyond repair because someone has not had the courage to go to a fellow Christian caught in a sin. Matters that should have been cared for in private have mushroomed into bitter confrontations when people have chosen sides on the issues. Such is the price of cowardice. More accurately, such is the fruit of disobedience.

Paul gave some instructions regarding our attitude in the restoration process. If the person’s sin is generally known, the church should select qualified men to confront the believer in love. “*Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such an one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted*” (Galatians 6:1). We’ve already mentioned that sin in another person’s life may tend to generate self-righteousness in us. It is human nature to feel superior, and to believe that we are immune to certain kinds of temptations. That kind of attitude will stifle any attempt to restore a brother. Paul warns that we dare not come across as some “*super-spiritual*” Christian. We must go in humility, knowing full well that we could slide into the same trespass.

Of course, the initial contact is not the end of it. We must be prepared to befriend, counsel, and pray with those who are hurting. God wants every one of us to have a ministry in the life of another believer. We find that this ministry is not one sided, but soon discover that we cannot help others without being edified in return. It’s not that part of the body of Christ should be dependent on another part, but rather, that we *all* need to be dependent on each other. Anything less than this fosters individualism that prevents spiritual growth and is sin.

Getting Practical

1. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. What responsibility does one member of the body of Christ have to another? Give specific examples. Why do you think that believers do not help each other - as they ought?

2. If possible, join a small group of believers who pray together and support one another spiritually. Learn to share your concerns and struggles with them. It might be well to think of creative ways that the group could better help one another grow in Christ.

3. In what ways have churches often given the impression that they are not interested in helping those with special needs? What can be done to change this impression – or fact?

4. Christ is our Representative in heaven: what specifically would you want Him to request the Father on your behalf? Remember that you have the same access to the Father because of your position in Christ – according to John 16:23-27. Use your opportunity to speak to Him directly through Jesus Christ.

Lesson 11

SATANIC ACTIVITY

Let's say, for example, that we have followed the principles mentioned in this study as closely as possible and have experienced some successes, but still are defeated by failures at times in certain areas of our life. We find that certain desires are so strong; our behavioral ruts are so deep that we just can't seem to find victory in these areas. What's wrong?

Scripture teaches us that not only is our fleshly nature involved in our spiritual struggles, but satanic forces are as well. It isn't only in cases of bizarre behavior – or dabbling in the occult – that we need to confront satanic activity, but God's Word teaches us that we need to confront satanic forces in every day living, if we are ever to live victoriously.

Take, for example, Ananias and Sapphira lying about the amount of money they received from the sale of their land in the 5th chapter of Acts. They declared that they had sold it for a certain amount and was giving all the money to the church, when in actuality they had sold it for a higher price and simply kept part of the money for themselves. God nowhere commanded, or even asked, believers to sell their land and give all the money to the church, therefore, they were not under any obligation to do it. Because of the local need at that time other believers were selling their land and giving the money to the church, so Ananias and Sapphira wanted to appear spiritual and generous, so they told -- what some might call -- "*A white lie.*"

Who would have guessed that Satan was the instigator of this deception? Yet Peter said, "*Ananias, why has **Satan** filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?*" (Acts 5:3). Be assured that the "*father of lies*" is involved when we tell a lie --- even a white one!

The Apostle Paul warns us about Satan's role in the breakup of the marriage, when he wrote, "*lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control*" (1 Corinthians 7:5b). You can be sure that Satan will do whatever he can to ruin a marriage.

Have you ever felt embarrassed to be identified with Jesus Christ – or His church? Is it possible that these thoughts could be instigated by satanic powers? When Peter denied the Lord, Jesus said that Satan was actively involved in his denial and made it clear that Satan was sifting Peter as wheat is sifted (Luke 22:31). Satanic forces also hindered Paul from visiting the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonica 2:18). Satan was also the originator of false doctrine, and the deceived are held captive by him to do his will according to 2 Timothy 2:26. Satan obscures the issues of the Gospel and blinds the minds of the unconverted “*that they might not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan also causes people to forget the Word of the kingdom of God by taking information out of their minds (Luke 8:12).

Don't think that you would never have any contact whatever with demonic forces. No one can escape contact with the prince of the power of the air – the one who has organized his army of wicked spirits to fight God's people. Satan makes meticulous plans for every believer's downfall. Keep it in mind --- a powerful evil spirit has already decided how he plans to ruin your Christian life!

Satan's Target

Philosophers and scientists have for centuries struggled with the problem of the nature of man's mind. They have wondered: “*What are thoughts?*” “*What is the relationship between mind and matter?*” Such questions have been a puzzle to man since the beginning of time. One thing seems clear: **thoughts do not occupy space as we know it, but exist in a separate realm.** For example, it would be absurd to speak of a thought as one inch long, or as occupying a specified area. Thoughts exist in a *spiritual* realm; our mind enters into the spirit world.

We hear a lot about parapsychology and Extra Sensory Perception (ESP). There isn't any question but that the human mind has natural powers that transcend ordinary experience. But herein lies the danger: **because the mind operates in the spiritual realm, dabbling in matters such as ESP -- invites the influence and possible control of alien spirits.** If we have been involved in any form of the occult and find our self struggling with insidious forces, we need to examine God's Word on the matter of deliverance, perhaps study material by established, spiritual, writers whom we have confidence in. [Mark Rubeck's book, “*The Adversary*,” by Moody Press, is one source]

Also see study on “*Dealing With the Devil*”

Satan has access to the human mind; it exists in a realm that is not off-limits to spiritual forces, whether good or evil. Where did Judas get the idea to betray Christ? John tells us that the devil put the suggestion into the heart (mind) of Judas (John 13:2). We read in Scripture that Satan filled the minds of believers with his thoughts (such as, Ananias and Sapphira). Our mind is the target of satanic attack! The adversary's method is to drop ideas and suggestions into our minds so cleverly that we think the ideas are our own. He inflames our passions, arouses greed, inflates our egos, and stirs up hatred and resentment. All of this and more is done by the roaring lion who stalks

the earth, seeking whom he may devour. We can be sure that Satan is involved in the sin that is troubling us.

Does his activity absolve us from any responsibility in committing sin? Not in the least. Peter did not let Ananias and Sapphira off the hook because Satan instigated their lie. Their untimely death stands as a reminder that they were responsible, even though Satan filled their hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit.

Consider Judas --- Satan entered him before the night of betrayal, however he paid dearly for that sin and will do so forever.

If we allow satanic activity in our life, God will hold us responsible, because we have the power to choose whether we will give territory to Satan's kingdom or not. Yes, Satan might suggest that we lie, but the choice whether to act on that suggestion is ours. He may suggest any sin imaginable, but ultimately we make the choice. He cannot work independently of our cooperation.

Dealing with the Devil

Those who say, "*If I leave the Devil alone, he will leave me alone. I don't want to get involved,*" without realizing it, are unwittingly conceding the battle to the enemy. Satan has them exactly where he wants them, safely tucked away on the shelf labeled, "*Too Frightened to Fight.*" Whether they realize it or not, they are already involved --- they have made peace with the enemy by refusing to do battle with him.

Satan's most successful weapon is fear. He'll make us believe that if we take his existence seriously, he will create havoc in our home or ruin our peace of mind. Don't believe him! Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). He will bluff us and push us as far as our ignorance will allow. But we have the authority to renounce Satan's foothold in our life. First, we must take inventory and check our armor. If there is one piece missing, we are vulnerable. One exposed area, and that's where an arrow will be coming through. Satan is an expert marksman. His arrows don't miss their target; we can't depend on a sloppy defensive attack to get us by unscathed. This is one war in which good luck doesn't count.

We can't take the time here to discuss all seven pieces of armor, but they are listed in Ephesians 6:12-17. [See the study on "*The Armor of God*"] I would like to comment on one --- the breastplate of righteousness. Satan always needs some reason to trouble us, some sin that gives him a right to our life. Once that sin is confessed and forsaken, his foothold disintegrates. He still will attack, but we need not fall for his enticements.

When anyone is under satanic attack they are uncomfortable when the blood of Christ is mentioned. This is because they have wandered into Satan's territory by refusing to deal thoroughly with their past. Righteousness shields us from demonic attack. Satanic arrows are deflected when up against a conscience void of offense. If we

are troubled by satanic attack, we should ask, *“Where have I given ground for Satan’s attack? What sin has not been taken care of? Where do I resist God?”* Personal righteousness, then is essential in sealing our self off from Satan’s activity. But so are the other pieces of armor listed in Ephesians. They are enumerated at the end of this chapter.

Second, we need to realize that Satan has no rights, but he’ll never admit it. Christ’s death and ascension effectively cut the ground from under him. Before His death Jesus Christ predicted, *“Now judgment is upon this world – [Satan’s dominion] - now the ruler of this world shall be cast out – [“expelled,” or “thrown out”] (John 12:31).* Christ’s death and ascension to heaven won a legal victory over all satanic forces --- Christ entered Satan’s territory and won a decisive victory on the devil’s home turf. Paul wrote regarding Christ, *“When He – [God] -- had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him – [through Christ Jesus]” (Colossians 2:15).* That’s why James could say, *“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).* Satan is allowed to maneuver through the atmosphere, causing havoc, however, he can be successfully resisted. Paul wrote, *“Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity” (Ephesians 4:26-27).* We can say *“No”* to Satan!

Satan is like a dethroned king who keeps on giving orders to his subjects; he is like a thief who has stolen virtually everything he owns and who tries to persuade us that it was always his. He is like a warrior without authority who keeps recruiting a private army to fight a battle he has already lost!

Finally, remember that *all* believers have legal authority over demonic forces. There is a connection between the 1st chapter of Ephesians and the 2nd chapter that is often overlooked. Near the end of the first chapter, we read of God’s great power that was displayed in Christ – It reads:

“He – [God, the Father] - raised Him – [God, the Son] – from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also I the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who filled all in all” (Ephesians 1:20-23).

As we read these verses carefully we see **(1)** that Christ’s ascension to heaven placed Him above all rule, authority, power, and every name that is named; and **(2)** that all things are under His feet --- no power exists in the universe without Christ’s permission!

Here is the good news that puts it all together: in chapter 2, Paul writes: *“We are seated with Christ in heavenly places.”* This means that Satan, along with all of his wicked spirits, at this very moment is under our feet!

Sometimes Christians pray, “O Lord, we ask you to bind Satan; we pray that you would cause him to depart...” however, resisting and binding Satan is *our* responsibility!

Often we feel weak and helpless, but this does not diminish our position of authority. A policeman may not feel strong at all; indeed, he may be ill or very tired. Physically, he would not be able to stop the smallest compact car. Yet when he raises his hand, all the traffic stops. Why? Because the state has given him authority over traffic.

I’ve heard people say, “I hear voices that tell me to commit suicide. I’m afraid that one of these days I’ll do it.” We don’t have to listen to any voices of demonic forces. Satan cannot program us to obey his commands. The message of the New Testament is clear: **Christ won a complete victory over Satan and we can now participate in that triumph!**

Demonic Activity and Our Sinful Habit

How do we confront wicked powers? We follow the example of Christ, who commanded, “Be gone, Satan, in Jesus name, for it is written . . .” It is good to use this statement --- (out loud, if we are alone) --- commanding Satan to depart in the name of Jesus Christ, based on the promises of Scripture we have claimed. However, simply quoting a verse of Scripture does not make demonic forces cringe, but *the power of the Word of God is unleashed when we bring our self under its authority!* The disciples could not cast out a demon because of unbelief and pride. They were ineffective because their lives were no long under God’s authority (Matthew 17:15-20).

Let’s use a specific illustration. Let’s suppose our habit is simply “overeating.” We have had sufficient to eat – digested all the food our body really needs – however there is more – of something extremely delicious that we just love to feast on -- in the refrigerator. We know that our body belongs to God, but the idea of eating keeps popping into our mind. We’ve memorized verses, given our struggle completely over to God, and determined what diet program is really best for us – simply mapped out what is best for us to eat and what is best not to eat – and what quantities is best for our health. But, let’s say, that we just love to eat whether our body needs it or not. We close the refrigerator door, partially satisfied with our victory. However, shortly we are back again at the refrigerator.

Is it possible that our struggle has anything to do with demonic forces? ***Absolutely!*** Look at it this way --- The first sin occurred simply because Eve ate what she wasn’t supposed to eat. Satan struck at her legitimate desire for food, and made the forbidden fruit enticing. Putting it in today’s language, one might say, “Eve could not close the door of her refrigerator.” The food looked and smelled so good!

Here we are, sitting on the sofa watching television. A commercial comes on that pictures beautifully prepared foods -- and make us think we’re hungry. The idea to eat is powerful. Right now our mind is a battlefield. Satan has built a stronghold (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). We will have to gain control over our thoughts. We must recognize

them for what they are – and say, “*Satan, in the name of Jesus, I command you to leave me, for it is written in 2 Timothy 1:7 that ‘God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.’*” As we hold on, and insist, to that promise – in Jesus’ name – James 4:7 tells us that Satan will have to flee.

I’ve used a simply illustration of just “*overeating*” however, this same strategy must be used in resisting whatever sinful habit we desire to have victory over --- worry --- anger --- gossip --- drugs, of any type --- bitterness --- unforgiveness -- or sexual temptation. Satan wants a foothold on our will. At first he is satisfied with only a tiny bit of control; time is on his side. If we give in a little he’ll eventually get more. Sooner or later, we will be a slave in that area of our life --- *that what he wants!*

When we resist him we will find relief, but probably not for long. Satan and his henchmen do not give up easily. Christ was confronted *three* times in rapid succession. If Satan assaults us 10 times, we need to resist him 10 times, and never give in. We have authority over every suggestion of the evil one.

There may be times when a battle might rage intermittently within our mind for a period of time – maybe even hours – we may be rebuffed again and again – back and forth sinful thoughts keep returning -- but we need to resist this satanic force and refocus our thoughts on God’s promises. If we keep insisting on our authority in Jesus’ name and commanding the evil one to depart, those thoughts eventually will have to leave --- and peace will come to us!

Don’t misunderstand. We will not see the last of insidious thoughts. However, whenever they return, they will do so with less power, and we can know -- on the basis of Christ’s authority -- we can insist on our freedom.

We should never be fooled when satanic forces withdraw – that they are going to leave us alone because they have given up on us. If they withdraw, it is to regroup; it is to re-evaluate their next planned attack. Our responsibility is to be ready, guarding our heart and mind with all diligence, lest we become lax in the middle of a declared war.

We may lose many battles, but eventually we will win the war. Slowly our victories will begin to outnumber our defeats. We will discover that we do have authority, just as the Scriptures teach us. We will wrestle effectively against the kingdom of darkness and prove the Scripture that says, “*Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*” (1 John 4:4).

Getting Practical

1. If Satan wanted to destroy us – and he does – how would he do it? What sin in your life is the most likely place for him to attack?
2. Here are the seven pieces of armor listed in Ephesians 6:12-17. Included is a brief description of what each piece ought to mean to us personally:

- (a) ***The belt of truthfulness***: an attitude of complete honesty
- (b) ***The breastplate of righteousness***: all sin must be confessed and we must constantly look to Christ who is our righteousness.
- (c) ***The feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace***: an eagerness to present the Gospel whenever possible
- (d) ***The shield of faith***: a life lived with implicit trust in God's Word
- (e) ***The helmet of salvation***: confidence in the hope of salvation and the sufficiency of the Cross.
- (f) ***The sword of the Spirit***: knowing the specific statements of God to apply at the point of temptation.
- (g) ***Pray always***: a prayerful attitude of thankfulness and dependence.

3. In addition to using Scripture as suggest in the previous lesson, we must learn to pray against demonic activity in our families, church, and also in specific individuals. We can do this best by putting on the armor of God daily and rebuking satanic activity by the use of Scripture.

A sample prayer might be:

"Father, I think You that Jesus Christ has ascended far above all principalities and powers. I rejoice that because I am joined to Him, I participate in His victory. I thank You that Satan and his armies have been defeated and must be subject to our exalted Savior. Now in Jesus name, I ask that Satan's activity be stopped in the life of so-and-so I bring the might truth of my Lord's victory against all of Satan's working in so-and-so I desire to be in fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout this day. I offer this prayer to God, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!"

Lesson 12

SINNED AGAIN!

Well, let's say that we've made some progress in tackling that sin that won't seem to budge. We've gone a period of time without slipping back into the same habit and feel pretty satisfied that finally we have seen light at the end of the tunnel. We're beginning to feel better about our self and we're optimistic.

Then, all of a sudden, we back to square one. We've fallen into the same trap again and we are right back in the same old habit. Here we thought we had it liked, and then it exploded in our face. We're tempted to conclude that we were deluded – just as we suspected --- victory doesn't seem possible after all!

We all have tasted victory only to later experience defeat. We've stood up --- only to fall back on the same slippery slope. We've all wondered whether we would ever get up again, and stay up.

What Happened?

Jerry G. Dunn, a former alcoholic discovered a cycle among alcoholics. He captured this concept in a book entitled, *“God Is for the Alcoholic.”* It appears that this cycle is the experience, in one form or another, for all of us from time to time.

Dunn did a lot of praying and thinking, wondering why alcoholics would quit drinking, go into a period of abstinence, and then return to drinking again. God gave him insight into this problem, that was when he became aware of the cycle. Dunn says that, in his studies, that it might take a week, a month, or even years to complete the cycle.

THE CYCLE

1. Hatred for the Sin

First, the alcoholic desires never to take another drink. He’s *“had it.”* Never again will he make a fool of himself --- waking up in a strange room, not knowing how he got there. Just remembering the *humiliation* of the past keeps him sober for a while.

Such a feeling is *usually* the first step toward freedom from any sin. We GET tired of gaining weight, blowing our stack, (or *whatever our problem might be*). We become so weary of failure that we begin to seek a way of deliverance. Many Christians haven’t come this far yet! They are not fed up with their sin, yet some of the more obnoxious habits may go, but not the subtle ones! Some sinful habits are still too attractive to discard completely. As we’ve already stressed, God wants us to desire victory for reasons other than personal fulfillment. But usually, our quest for freedom begins with a healthy disgust for our failures.

2. Pride in Accomplishments

Second, Dunn noticed that alcoholics begin to take pride in their sobriety. They say something like, *“You know, I haven’t had a drink in three weeks.”* The alcoholic begins to feel better – he might even get his job back and regain the respect of his children. Soon he begins to have a superior attitude when watching his friends drink. He thinks to himself, *“I’d never act that foolishly again, thank God.”* Yet it is difficult for him to avoid the constant bombardment of alcohol. Social drinking is accepted, and his friends invite him to join. He is still proud of his abstinence and yet fears that he just might slip back into his former habit. Dunn says, *“This is the area we call ‘a dry drunk.’ This man has reached the place where he has to fight against taking another drink. He is disgusted with people who drink. He can’t stand the smell of liquor. He becomes irritable and anyone’s suggestion that he take another drink becomes a personal insult.”*

But after enduring the struggle for some time, the alcoholic begins to think he has solved the problems that have caused his addiction. He feels better physically and mentally. Perhaps he has even begun to attend church, so he thinks his spiritual life is in order. He breathes a sigh of relief. At last, everything will be all right.

3. Overconfident

The next state comes when he feels he has finally mastered the situation. At last, he has his problem under *control*. Opportunities to drink are just as numerous as ever. One of his associates says, *“Aw, you can handle it.”* Until now, he has been refusing such offers. But now, he feels he is the master of a whole new world. Surely he is able to handle a single drink. So he says *“Yes, just this once.”*

At this point, Dunn says, the alcoholic goes in one of two directions. If he is able to stop at one drink, he confirms his conclusion that he can handle drinking. He loses his fear of alcohol. He finds it easy to take another drink when it is offered.

Or that one drink might inflame his passion for alcohol. Dunn writes, *“One drink might be enough to plunge him to the very depths of alcoholism as quickly as one can be pushed over a cliff.”*

Either way, the end result is the same: he will become completely victimized by the bottle again. Dunn mentions a doctor who completed the cycle in 10 years. By drinking a half-glass of beer, he started on another binge that eventually ruined his home and cost him his practice.

Our problem may not be alcoholism but the cycle will follow the same pattern, unless we are careful and rely on the Holy Spirit to give us the resources needed for final and complete victory.

What Does God Want to Teach Us?

What can we learn from our failures? God uses our failures to teach us several lessons. The moment we fail, we receive a crash course in theology. We are vividly reminded that pride comes before a fall. Bunyan was right when he wrote, *“He that is low need fear no fall.”*

Remember the Israelites at Ai? They had just conquered Jericho, a city fortified with huge, strong walls. God had just done a miracle; the walls had collapsed. The next city on their agenda was the smaller town of Ai. Fresh from the victory of Jericho, the men decided that only a small contingent would be needed to conquer the city. *But Israel was defeated!* Israel’s self-confidence was ill-founded. In their enthusiasm for victory, they had overlooked the sin that was in the camp. Their past victory was no guarantee for future conquests.

We need to realize that possibly our most dangerous moment is when we think we have finally mastered our situation. A series of victories sets us up for a fall. Not one of us should ever think, *“This is one sin I have under control. I’ll never commit it again.”*

God hates self-righteousness, a superior, judgmental attitude. How easy it is to think, *"I'd never do what he did!"* Anyone who says that has no idea of what he is capable of doing. There is no sin beyond the capacity of any one of us. If we've not succumbed to the same degree of evil as others, it is because we have not had the same opportunities to do evil, and more importantly, because God's grace has restrained us.

Remember the Pharisee who went into the Temple to pray? He's generally remembered for reciting all of his good works to God. But what we often overlook is that he didn't take the credit for his performance – at least he said, *"God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people..."* (Luke 18:11). But although he *thanked God* he was not like others, he did not receive God's mercy. Why? Because even good works *done in God's name are never the basis for God's acceptance of us*. The publican, the tax-gatherer, was accepted precisely because he understood that *the basis of his acceptance was God's mercy alone*.

Even the oft-repeated assertion, *"There but for the grace of God go I,"* can be said in a self-righteousness attitude. If we think we are different, better than others, because we have attracted God's favor, then we need to examine our own hearts. God condemns self-righteousness. He wants us to see that in essence, all human beings are the same. If we are objects of His special grace, it is nothing righteous on our part, but His grace alone.

Our failures help us learn these lessons. We may not know exactly what Paul's *"thorn in the flesh"* was, but, this we can be sure of, it originated with the devil. Paul writes, *"it was a messenger of Satan to buffet me --- to keep me from exalting myself"* (2 Corinthians 12:7b). Yet that infirmity (whatever it was) was expressly allowed by God to keep Paul from self-righteousness.

God does not cause us to sin, but He uses our sins to remind us of our weakness. We are less tempted to judge others, and, certainly, more understanding of others who do sin, when we become well acquainted with the wickedness of our own heart. We then learn how to view others with humility, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted. When we are caught by sin, God uses the experience to teach us about His righteousness and His hatred for sin.

God also wants us to appreciate the wonder of His grace: *"Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more"* (Romans 5:20). Because of pride, we find it hard to admit that we need God's grace so continually, so desperately. How we would all like to be able to say, *"I've not committed that sin – [whatever we are struggling with] – in such-and-such a period of time."* But our continual problems with sin crowd us to the Cross of Christ. Again and again, we are confronted with Calvary; we are forced to come with nothing in our hands to receive God's provision freely given by His grace.

Peter summarizes it all for us by saying, *"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves,*

therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Peter 5:5b-6).

Signposts to Failure

At Niagara Falls, there is a point of no return; a place where the water rushes so fiercely that it is impossible to make any progress against the stream. Going over the falls is inevitable. There are warning signs that tell the unwary where that point is, but some foolhardy souls either have ignored the signs or have not seen them. (They're not around to tell us which it was.)

We have our warning signs too. Generally, it's a slow leak and not a blowout that stops us. Failure, actually, is quite predictable. We can tell whether we are on our way to the point of not return.

What are those signposts? The first is a feeling of self-satisfaction, a sigh of relief that finally we have everything under control. At that moment, we are vulnerable because our confidence rests with ourselves --- and our past record --- rather than with the Lord. Remember the alcoholic? He thinks he has drinking under control. Even at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, the participants are trained to say, "I am an alcoholic." And they must remember that even after they have been dry for many years.

We must remember that, in spite the new nature we received in Christ Jesus when we were born-again, we still, also, have our old "sinning nature" -- and will have one until the day we die! We need to beware of thinking that we have any sin permanently under control. 1 Corinthians 10:12 says "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Then there is the danger of making hidden provision for defeat! We can't afford to be like the man who desperately to overcome his addiction to pornography, but kept obscene pictures hidden in his room, just in case he became tempted. Or the person who wants to stop smoking but keeps a pack of cigarettes in the drawer, just in case he might need them. Our mind is like a huge house with many rooms. We might be willing to clean up the kitchen, living room, and even some of the bedrooms. But what about that closet crammed with junk? It may seem precious to us, because it represents a small part of our life we are not willing to surrender to the searchlight of the Holy Spirit. But Christ wants to be the Master of our entire life. Everything that is hidden He wants to reveal. There is only one way we can meet Christ's requirement, and that is by refusing to have any room in our life that can be used to retreat to from our spiritual commitment.

God wants us to perform radical surgery on sinful habits. We must burn all bridges behind us. This is what Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Immediately following His remark about the sin of lust, He made a shocking statement --- "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better

for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30).

Once an eye is cut out or a hand cut off, there is no chance of it being put back. The separation is final; there is no hidden agenda for a comeback. Paul wrote, "*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts*" (Romans 13:14).

Also, ***there is the signpost of spiritual coasting!*** That's what happens when we begin to crowd God and His Word to the circumference of our lives. This happens so subtly, unintentionally, as we feel more pressured by the responsibilities of life; job, spouse, children, hobbies, church, friends --- and even television!

Backsliding can take place so slowly that one hardly notices what is happening -- without fanfare --- so quietly that one scarcely notices it. Only tragic failure makes one realize how far he has drifted from the shore. God, in His Word, tells us that He prefers that we are either cold or hot, rather than lukewarm. The reason is simple --- someone who is cold seeks the fire, a person who is lukewarm is generally comfortable and sees no need of change. He is so self-satisfied that he doesn't know how bad off he is! The people at Laodicea were lukewarm, but thought they were hot! They had drifted from their first love and *didn't even know it!* Beware of spiritual coasting!

Finally, ***there is the signpost of compromise.*** That's when we tolerate personal sin for just a little while. Ever watch someone shatter a cement wall with a huge hammer? The first time they hit the wall, it was as solid as ever. Even after 20 blows, or so, it seems immovable. But, as they keep at it, after a while, the wall weakens, but still stands firm and upright. But it weakens. A small piece falls -- then another -- and gradually you see the wall collapse.

That's the way sin is. It is true that you can tolerate sin without having it ruin you --- but you can't do it forever! Compromise is possible for a while without disastrous results, but eventually it weakens our resistance.

How Long Before We Stand Again?

Let's say that we've been caught in the old trap and we're back in the same rut, the question now is, "*How long are we going to stay there?*" Satan would like to say, "*Forever! After all, what's the use --- since you are not really sure you'll be victorious next time, why bother getting back into fellowship with God!*"

We could be tempted to agree. Human nature resents the idea that we must come back to God without an "*award for special merit*" sign pinned on our vest. We are uncomfortable accepting mercy that we don't deserve. We hesitate to come back immediately without a period of probation. We may even want to punish ourselves for

our guilt by maintaining isolation from God and His people. So we postpone our appointment with the Almighty until we have proved we mean business and that we will never fall again. Furthermore, we argue, guilt is good for us; it will teach us *never* to do that again!

God thinks otherwise. For one thing, even if we do reform, that is not His basis for our acceptance anyway. To think we must straighten up before we come back to Him betrays our misunderstanding of the Cross. We are to come solely on the merit of Christ's blood, not on the merit of an acceptable track record.

And is guilt good for us? True, it teaches us how uncomfortable the after effects of sin can be, but it's doubtful whether guilt is an acceptable motivation to change our behavior. Nowhere in the Bible do we read that God uses guilt to discipline His children. Natural consequences of sin, "Yes," because they teach us how reprehensible sin can be. But guilt is not God's means of discipline, because it is contrary to the Cross. God's method of motivating us to live righteously is His love and grace. Hear what Paul says, "*I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*" (Romans 12:1). Grace, freely given, does not provide us license to sin; rather it should motivate us to give ourselves without reservation to the One who loves us so freely -- and so deeply. Whenever we sin, God wants us to come back into fellowship *immediately*. Learn our lessons, but within His forgiveness, not outside of it.

Have you ever heard someone say, "*Keep short accounts with God?*" It's a way of saying, "*Don't let sin pile up in our lives!*" Don't think that we have to wait until the church doors open, or even until the end of the day, before sin is taken care of. Confess it *the moment it is brought to our attention*. We should deal with our sins immediately -- keeping *current* accounts with God. While we are driving our car, working in the office, or doing chores at home, we can be engaging in dialogue with God. As we speak to Him, He replies through His Word.

Listen to the hope of the Scriptures for all who sin:

Jeremiah 8:4, "*Thus says the Lord, 'Do men fall and not get up again? Does one turn away and not repent?'*"

Psalms 145:14, "*The Lord sustains all who fall, and raises up all who are owed down.*"

Micah 7:8, "*Though I fall, I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me.*"

Proverbs 24:16, "*For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again.*"

Psalms 37:23-24, "*The steps of a man are established by the Lord; And He delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong; Because the Lord is the One who holds his hand.*"

We can say “No” to that stubborn habit by saying, “Yes” to God once again!

Getting Practical

1. Thank back to the last time you were trapped by your weakness. Did you have any indication that you were going to give in to the temptation? What can you learn from this experience?

2. In what ways do we sometimes entertain temptation, thinking that we can handle it and know where to stop? What does this type of attitude show about our lives?

3. What do you think might be the best antidote to drifting in our spiritual lives? Or are there several precautions that are needed? Can you think of ways that we can prevent spiritual stumbling?

4. Why do we often delay our confession of sin after we have sinned? What lessons have we not yet learned?

5. Ponder this question: “*Why is sin so subtle?*”

Conclusion

Where Do We Go From Here?

What can we do to follow through on any commitment we have made?

Our study is incomplete unless it is applied! We must not only *know* the truth – but we must *do* it! We, with all probability do not need any more truth on how to obtain victory over our sinful habit than we already have. What we need is to weave what we know into the fabric of our own daily lives. So now is an opportunity to take over where these lessons leave off. You will decide how these lessons will end in the way you deal with temptation.

Get a notebook --- that will belong to you alone --- no editor will read its contents to see if it is marketable. No need to review your grammar or use a dictionary or check the spelling. This notebook will be between you and God.

This notebook will become your *Spiritual Diary*, a chronicle of where you are in your Christian life --- where you want to be --- and the steps you will take to get there. Of course, you will write whatever you wish in your book, however, I would like to include some suggestions that you may want to incorporate into your *Diary*.

(1) Write a letter to God, telling Him:

(a) about your past – the failures and the successes. Be sure to include your weaknesses, or bad habits

(b) Share with God the desires of your heart. Specifically, tell Him what you would like to have Him do in your life during the next few months -- and the year. Concentrate on character qualities,

remembering that His goal is that you be conformed to the image of His Son

- (2) Write out special prayer requests for others --- your partner -- children, relatives, friends --- Be specific
- (3) Ask God to give you wisdom to outline a strategy to become the person you believe He wants you to be. This will include items such as beginning each day with God, memorizing verses of Scripture; learning the ministry of intercession for others.
- (4) Try to anticipate the ways that Satan and the flesh will attempt to prevent you from following through with your commitment, such as sleeping too late, watching television too much, being disorganized, etc. Minimize the possibility that you will fail. How much is a disciplined relation with God worth to you?
- (5) Regularly record in your notebook items such as:
 - (a) specific prayer requests *and* their answers.
 - (b) special observation you make on the Scriptures that are of particular help
 - (c) the lessons that God teaches you

Let your notebook become a monument to God's faithfulness in your life. If you do, the most important lesson in this study will be the one that *you* are writing. The Apostle Paul acknowledged that the best book is a life lived in the power of the Spirit -- --- He said, "*You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read of all men*"

(2 Corinthians 3:2)

*May God help you to begin **TODAY!***