

VICTORY IN CHRIST

by Various

A personal testimony and study of the victorious Christian life, written by someone who grew up in a conservative church learning Bible reading and memorization but later discovered deeper truths about living in the fullness of Christ's victory.

13 Chapters

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Victory in Christ

Do You Believe a Book You've Never Read?

I grew up in a semi-conservative church. We were told to read our Bibles and we were encouraged to memorize Scripture. However, I did not learn the Bible very diligently. I read portions of the Bible almost every day and yet, I didn't hunger or thirst to know God more.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. (1 Peter 2:2)

I certainly did not desire the Word of God as much as a baby desires milk. As I observed others at church, I saw that they were just like me. Perhaps they read their Bibles, even daily, but they seemed to enjoy other things more than God's Word. We may have devoted some of our time to learning more about God but it was quite clear that our affections, our deepest enjoyments, were elsewhere. In the last several years, I have met many people like this. Let me reproduce a conversation for you between what I will call a Christian and a religious person.

Christian: Are you a Christian?

Religious Person: I sure am.

Christian: Would you say that the Bible is the most important book that you own?

Religious Person: It certainly is. No book is more important than the Bible!

Christian: Do you believe the Bible?

Religious Person: Of course I do. As I said, I am a Christian.

Christian: Would you be willing to die for the contents of the Bible?

Religious Person: I sure would. I would lay my life down for God's Word.

Christian: But do you believe every word of the Bible?

Religious Person: (very boldly) Absolutely! Of course I do!

Christian: Have you ever read every word of the Bible?

Religious Person: (nervously) Uh....well....um....no, not yet.

Christian: Oh, you must be a relatively new convert to Christianity then?

Religious Person: Uh...actually, I have been a Christian for several years.

Christian: Why haven't you read the most important book that you own? Why haven't you read every word that you say you believe?

Religious Person: I haven't had time.

Christian: Do you watch more television than you read the Bible?

Religious Person: Yes

Christian: Do you read the newspaper or magazines or novels more than you read the Bible?

Religious Person: Yes

I have had many such conversations with people and I think you can see where I am going with this. Religious people often make very bold claims, but their lives seldom match up to what they claim. Several years ago, when I examined my religious talk with my actual walk, I found that I lived in contradiction.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

I discovered that if I ate food the same way that I read my Bible, I would starve to death. In fact, I was already spiritually dead. I was dead even though I had been going to church for my whole life and I prayed daily and I even read my Bible almost daily. That which thrilled me most was not God.

How was I to answer a holy God? Could I honestly stand before God and explain that I loved Him and that I believed Him when, in fact, I spent more time being entertained than seeking him? I had no answer. I cried out to God and begged his forgiveness and mercy through the blood of Jesus Christ. Miraculously, I became a "newborn baby" and began to crave the Word of God. I couldn't put it down. I realized that my spiritual life depended on seeking God and hearing from him.

They are not just idle words for you--they are your life. (Deuteronomy 32:47)

The Bible became alive to me. It spoke to my heart.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

I found that I could understand it much more than I had ever been able to. It did not require becoming a Bible scholar and years of formal study to be able to understand the Scriptures. No! I found that God gave me understanding when I yielded to him fully. Don't get me wrong. I do not understand everything in the Bible, but the Bible is alive to me as it never has been. I see how what is written applies to my life. Before, it was difficult for me to remember what I read let alone attempt to apply it to my life.

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor 2:14)

Is the Bible a mystery to you? Is it difficult for you to understand? Do you neglect God's Word? Are you truly seeking him with all your heart? Do you indeed know what the Bible says or have you merely been told what the Bible says? I would implore you to repent of your ways if you are not living what you say. Get on your knees before God and begin seeking him. Begin craving his Word.

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. (Hebrews 2:1)

I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. (2 Peter 3:2)

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Cor 10:11-12)

If Any Man Sin...

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John 2:1

As you will probably notice from our website, we teach the truth of the Bible that Jesus came to destroy the devil's working in our lives (1 Jn 3:8). He came so that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4). We teach and believe that God will never allow his children to be tempted beyond what they are able to handle; he himself will make a way for them to stand up under the pressure of every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). We know that a Christian ought to consider himself dead to sin in the same way that Christ was dead to sin (Romans 6:10-14). We believe and teach that God's grace teaches us how to live in obedience to him in this present life (Titus 2:11-14). We trust and rely on God's power to enable us to obey him even to the extent that we can bring every one of our thoughts into the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). The key to living in victory over the devil and the temptations of this world is faith in God's power (1 John 5:3-5). And so we believe that as we abide in Christ we will bear much fruit to the glory of God (John 15:7-8). If we love him, we will obey him (John 14:15). We believe the Scriptures that teach that anyone who abides in Christ can have victory over sin (1 John 3:3-10). Again, the key to this victory is absolute surrender and faith in God through Jesus Christ.

Having said all of this, we do not believe or teach that it is impossible for a Christian to sin. Even as Jesus was tempted by the devil, Christians will continue to be tempted by the devil. Temptation itself, of course, is not sin and as a Christian relies upon God, no temptation will be too difficult (1 Cor. 10:13). If, however, a Christian takes his eyes off of Christ, sin is almost sure to follow. And so we do not want to overlook the fact that it is still possible for a Christian to sin if he or she does not continue to rely every moment upon God.

"If any man sin..." Notice first of all that this verse says "IF". If a Christian sins then he needs to confess the sin and repent of it. Christians who sin must acknowledge their guilt and seek the mercy that comes from God through Jesus Christ. If the Christian refuses to admit the sin and instead chooses to call it a "mistake" and does not seek the forgiveness of God then he or she is in danger of falling under the wrath of God (Heb. 10:26-31). As James 5:19-20 says, if a Christian wanders from the truth and commits sin, he needs to be restored in order to be saved from death.

Those of us who believe that we need to live holy lives (1 Peter 1:15; 2 Peter 3:11) need to be very careful so that if we do commit a sin we do not explain it away or excuse it as something other than sin. Let us not seek to maintain a false righteousness for the sake of the letter of our doctrines. Rather, let us cleave unto Christ, the one who makes us holy (Heb. 2:11), so that we will not sin. But if any man does sin, let him recognize his deplorable and shameful act but do not let him think that he is without hope. For there is an Advocate. Let him forsake his sins and call upon God for mercy and forgiveness.

So, if you sin, TURN from your sin. Don't try to turn God's grace into a license to continue in your sin (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16). And do not try to cover up your sin. For, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). And after you have confessed and repented of your sin, trust God to give you the grace and strength to overcome it in the future. "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). Don't be weakened in your faith. Don't let your trust and reliance in God waiver, for he is able to keep you blameless and present you before his presence faultless and with great joy (Jude 24).

Legalism, Grace and Faith

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. (Romans 3:28)

Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:17)

Sadly, when we speak of obedience to God many people mistakenly think that we are teaching "legalism"--that one can be saved by doing good works. No, we believe and maintain that people are justified by faith apart from good works. There is nothing that we can do to earn salvation. Good works flow out of one's faith. Obedience is a result of a person's love for God; it is not an effort to earn salvation.

There are two beautiful truths balanced so wonderfully in Scripture, as indicated by the above two verses:

No one can be saved by doing good works. Salvation comes through faith in Christ.

Everyone who has been saved by faith will do good works.

Ephesians 2:8-10 describes it this way:

8 For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, so that no one should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

It is clear from verses 8 and 9 that salvation is something that God works in us by his grace; we do not earn it. This fact, however, does not mean that the believer is exempt from doing good works as verse 10 clearly indicates.

Scripture very plainly teaches that salvation is God's work and yet Christians also must "work". For example, Philippians 2:12-13 says:

12 Therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed...work out your own salvation in fear and trembling 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Let us examine just a little about God's grace and faith and how they are at work in a believer. It is by grace through faith that we are able to obey God; clearly, this is not legalism.

True Grace

As we have seen in the preceding Scriptures, grace has an integral part in one's salvation. Grace is not passive in the life of a Christian; it is not merely "unmerited favor", but it is much more than this. Yes, grace is undeserved; you cannot earn it. Grace is favor from God, but what does it do in the life of someone who by faith receives the grace? Titus 2:11-14 tells us that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." God's grace

teaches us to live self-controlled, godly lives "in this present age"--to obey him always, right now in this present age! God's grace does not simply forgive our sins and then cause God to overlook future sins. Rather, by grace God forgives us and then grace teaches us to change our ways and teaches us how to live. Praise God for his grace! Have you received the grace that is spoken of in the Bible or some other "grace" that deceitfully allows you to live for yourself in outright contradiction to the clear teachings of the Word of God?

True Faith

Faith is a full trust, confidence and belief in God and his promises and, more specifically, that through the blood of Christ shed for us we can have our sins forgiven. True faith is a matter of the heart and it will always evidence itself by outward action--otherwise is not real faith and it cannot save you (James 2:14-26). This is very clearly taught in the book of Romans. In the introduction to the book of Romans, Paul writes that the purpose of his apostleship is to "call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5). In the sixth chapter he refers to Christians as being slaves to obedience (Romans 6:16). He concludes the book of Romans similarly, stating that all nations are to "believe and obey [God]" (Romans 16:26). Elsewhere Paul writes that Christians are armed with divine power to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). In addition he states that "keeping God's commands is what counts" (1 Cor. 7:19). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul's letters always included strong and clear exhortations of obedience to God.

The other Biblical authors echoed Paul's writings, since the same Spirit inspired them. Peter wrote that we have been chosen "for obedience to Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2). The Apostle John wrote, "This is love for God: to obey his commands" (1 John 5:3). Truly, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17). The Biblical authors were simply stating the truth as they had been taught by the Son of God himself: "If you love me you will obey what I command" (John 14:15, 21, 23).

Is It Legalism?

Is it legalism to teach that people who have saving faith will obey God? To teach that he will be our top priority, that everything will be counted a loss compared to Christ (Phil. 3:7-9)? Is it legalism to teach that because of God's mercy we choose to willingly offer our lives as living sacrifices for him (Rom. 12:1-2)? To teach that if you choose to be a Christian you will stop living for yourself, live for God, and become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:15, 17)? Is it really legalism to share with people the Biblical requirements of holiness (1 Peter 1:14-17)--that without it we will not see God (Heb. 12:14)? If so then Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, John and others would also need to be accused of legalism. However, so often this is what we hear: "You are being legalistic!"

How does our call to obedience differ from legalism? Simply put, legalism is a lifting up of a set of rules or laws, but obedience exalts God rather than the rules. A Christian doesn't obey God because of a set of rules that exist; rather, he obeys God because he loves God. Notice that all of the Scriptures that I have quoted imply an obedience proceeding from a heart (Matt. 12:33-37) full of love and faith toward God. Do I refrain from murdering and lying because the Bible says not to do such things? No, I refrain from wickedness because I love God and because I have faith in him. Why would I ever want to disobey him?

We often warn people who spend more time on entertainment than they do reading their Bibles. It is not that reading their Bibles will save them, but that those who have true saving faith will not want to be distracted from the Word of God. But oh, how few people take their "Christianity" seriously! Many people think they have experienced the grace of God but they live for themselves. Ask yourself: when you think about "free time" do you honestly use it for God's glory or for your own personal happiness?

Let's look at an example of how a Christian might consider use of his "free time". I do not have any rules that forbid my attendance at a basketball game and I do not believe that such a rule should be formulated or promoted. Rather, let us promote the love of God! If someone says in his heart truthfully before God, "I love God so much, my life is just consumed with him; what can I possibly do for my God tonight?" And if the best thing that that person can think of to glorify God is to attend a basketball game, then he better go and glorify God. If there are many other things that would better glorify God, why would the person want to go if indeed his heart's desire was to love and please God? I am not suggesting that a person should invent a rule against ever going to a basketball game and that such a rule would then save him. Rather, those who love God with all their hearts consider how best to glorify him. Therefore, it is not my practice to attend sporting events because my motive would not be to love, adore and please God. I know in my heart that there are many other things that would better glorify God...many other ways that I could best spend my time to bring God glory. But if he sends me I will go; I have no rule forbidding it. One time God did send me to a basketball game and as a result someone repented.

Conclusion

So it is by grace through faith that we are saved, but we are not exempt from obedience. Following a set of rules cannot save you from hell. Rather, those who try to be justified by observing a law (Gal. 5:4) don't end up obeying the truth (Gal. 5:7)! Christians are free from a "legalistic righteousness" that exalts a group of rules or laws, but we are not free from obedience to God—we are not free to indulge our flesh (Gal. 5:13). Rather, we are free from sin so that we may obey God (Romans 6:17-19). True Christians live by the Spirit and therefore do not fulfill the desires of their flesh (Gal. 5:16) because the flesh and its desires are crucified in those who belong to Christ (Gal. 5:24). And so it remains that only those who receive the grace spoken of in the Bible through faith will be saved. Praise be to God through Jesus Christ--the Savior "for all who obey him" (Heb. 5:9).

Do You Nullify the Good Teaching You Hear?

Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. (Mark 4:18-19)

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. (Luke 8:14)

The above two verses teach us that you can prevent good teaching--even THE Word--from having an effect on your life. If you allow life's worries, riches, pleasures and the desires for other things to enter your life then the word of God will get choked out and you will not bear fruit like a true Christian (click to read about the good fruit in a true Christian's life).

Does your lifestyle cause the good teaching at your church to be wiped out, nullified, thwarted, undone in your life? While teaching you good things, does your church also condone and allow lifestyles that will make all their teaching of no effect? It is a fact that in America many churches teach the basic facts of the Bible while promoting or tolerating lifestyles that contradict the Bible and grieve the very heart of God.

Examine the following to see if you are nullifying good teaching that you receive:

First, ask yourself if you receive good teaching. A few examples are:

Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus died for our sins.

Jesus rose again.

Jesus is coming back.

We should obey all of Jesus' teachings.

Next, ask yourself if you desire other things: Have you allowed other things to become more important to you, especially other things that God does not approve of?

Do you go to movies that promote impurity, filthy language and violence? Do you tell yourself that God doesn't mind?

Do you watch advertisements on TV and listen to them on the radio? Although marketing experts invest billions in their commercials because they know they can greatly affect what you buy, do you just tell yourself that all of the commercials don't affect you? If so you may find yourself going shopping frequently; examine your purchases to see how many things you buy that you really don't need.

Have you allowed professional sports to become exciting to you? You may even stay up late to watch games, read about the latest sports news, and you may even find yourself getting angry or prideful. When you can honestly say that you find sporting events more enjoyable than a good sermon or Bible reading, then you know that you have begun to desire athletics more than God.

Do you like playing video games? Do phrase such as "I died" or "I tried to kill" or "I'm almost dead" creep into your speech while you play? Video games are sometimes so violent that people pretend to kill other people while playing them! Jesus would not do such a thing!

Are you motivated by pleasures?

Although the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles endured great hardships for their faith, do you keep telling yourself that you deserve to live a comfortable life?

Do you take vacations that don't center around God?

Do you listen to sensual music?

Do you go to shopping malls often, especially when you do not need anything?

Do you compare what you have to what others have until you would like a bigger house, newer car, and more fashionable clothes?

Honestly, do you find yourself wanting more money?

Have you convinced yourself that you deserve more money at your job?

Does your life reflect that you believe what Jesus said: "it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim 6:10).

If you can remove all of your personal biases and if you will take a good honest look at yourself you may find that your lifestyle goes against sound Bible teaching. Perhaps you are wondering why so many professing Bible believers around you live the same lifestyle as you. Perhaps you are frustrated that your church never challenged your lifestyle.

If you are asking yourself, "What do I do now?", then you are asking the right question. The Christian life involves God working in us to cause us to want to obey him and to give us the power to obey him (Phil. 2:12-13). Above, we listed just a few outward symptoms that indicate something is wrong in your heart. If you have the symptoms, then your life is preventing God from working in you. He does the work, but you must yield. If you give up all your sin and put your full faith in him, then the blood of Christ will cleanse you and he will empower you to live a life pleasing to Him. God will work powerfully in you. The question is: are you willing to cast off anything that might be "choking" God's Word out of your life? (Heb. 12:1).

Struggling With Sin

"Struggling with sin" is a phrase that is used rather lightly in many religious circles. What does it mean to "struggle" with something? The word "struggle" means to "fight against"; it means to "strive not to give in". It does not mean or imply that the one who is struggling is on the losing side of the struggle. And yet, many "Christians" when they say that they are struggling with sin they mean that they are committing sin(s) even while trying not to. They mean that they have struggled and then they were defeated by sin. And so perhaps the word "defeated" rather than "struggling" more accurately describes such people. Sadly, many people accept such "struggling" (actually defeat) as a way of life. They have not truly struggled so hard that they have suffered any great deal striving with all their might not to give in to temptations (Heb. 12:4).

An example would be appropriate here. I have spoken with many young men who say that they "struggle with" lust. Actually, they mean that they fight against it a little, but end up giving in to their lusts. They claim that they are trying not to sin. (See the article, "I Try".) But in reality they watch commercials that promotes lust; they watch movies and television programs that encourages lust; and they listen to music that contains all sorts of sexual lyrics. Can they actually say that they are trying to overcome lust? Will God believe them when they say that they tried? Make every effort to enter the kingdom of heaven through the narrow door, Jesus says, because many will simply try but not be able to (Luke 13:24).

We are not saying that a Christian will have no struggles with temptation. We are saying that when a Christian is tempted, he must make sure that he is fully submitted to God and resist the temptation; the devil will then flee (James 4:7). For we are promised that not temptation will be too difficult for us because God himself will make a way for us to stand up under every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). We may suffer or struggle and it may be difficult, but we can overcome. Even Jesus suffered when he was tempted (Heb. 2:18). Remember the Garden of Gethsemane! But don't believe the lie that because you struggle you are in sin. It is not true. Struggling against sin does not mean that you are displeasing God. Struggling against sin is one of the main evidences that you hate sin. So, struggle and be victorious through the glorious power of our great and mighty God.

A wholehearted Christian is someone who struggles against sin and then gains the victory through Christ who gives him strength. Christians do struggle with sin...and then get the victory through faith. The "struggle" of the Christian is not a vicious cycle of try-fail, try-fail, try-fail,... No, the struggle of the Christian echoes the sorrowful, yet rejoicing cries of the Apostle Paul, "we faced trials far beyond our ability to endure" (2 Cor. 1:8); "God has delivered us and will continue to deliver us" (2 Cor. 1:10). "Now thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph in Christ" (2 Cor 2:14).

Perhaps you are convicted by God. Perhaps there is sin in your life that you cannot seem to give up. Do not lose hope. (See the article, "If Any Man Sin".) Rather, repent and get rid of everything that hinders you (Heb. 12:1-2). Truly submit to God. Resist the devil and do not give your

temptations a foothold. (Remember the earlier example about lust.)

Overcoming Sin

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

These two verses sum everything up. Our WHOLE duty is to fear God and keep His commandments. Yet, there are so many who claim that this is an impossible duty to fulfill. "Sure," they say, "we can obey God sometimes, but of course we will still sin." They say this despite the fact that they have no Scripture to back up what they claim. So, many professing believers EXPECT to continue to sin and therefore they do because without faith in God to keep them from sin, they will surely fall--guaranteed. "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him" (Titus 1:16). They have a form of godliness going to church every week and being "spiritual" MOST of the time, but when it comes down to it, they have not accepted God's provision to overcome sin and thus they deny the power to be godly. What is this provision that God has made for Christians to overcome sin? It is the grace given us by God sending His Son. Through the blood of Jesus, we can overcome, "for everyone born of God overcomes the world" (I John 5:4). Many professing believers have read passages like Romans 6 and I John 3 that state VERY CLEARLY that we are no longer slaves to sin and that those who are in Christ do NOT continue to sin:

"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" Romans 6:2

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (Rom. 6:18).

"No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him" (I John 3:6).

Despite these and MANY other clear passages throughout the Bible, many do not have the faith to fully believe, so they may turn to a commentary or ask a friend or a "pastor" and it gets explained away for them. Then they FEEL much better thinking that they can continue in sin. So these people are like seed sown along a path: they "hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts" (Luke 8:12). So I ask you, do you have faith to believe the Bible? Have you accepted God's provision to overcome sin in YOUR life? Do you really know what it means to be a SLAVE of righteousness? I pray that you will consider these things. I long to see more people living a victorious life in Christ overcoming sin.

John 8:31-47 contains an excellent lesson on being set free from sin. (What I write from here on will be better understood on your part if you have your Bible with you. If you don't have a Bible, please read this message again when you have one with you.)

Jesus begins by talking to those who had BELIEVED him (v.31). And so I am writing this to those who believe in the Lord and I tell you what Jesus told them: if you hold to his teachings, you are really his disciples and then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free (see v.31-32).

Similar to the Jews (in v.33), you may ask, "we are not slaves of anyone or anything, so what do you mean by telling us that the Truth will set us free? Free from what?"

My reply would be (see v.34-38): "do you sin? Don't you know that, according to Jesus, EVERYONE who sins is a slave to sin? So if Jesus sets you free from sin, you will be ENTIRELY free -- free indeed. I have told you this many times; in fact, you have probably read it in the Bible, but you refuse to believe it. Therefore you continue to sin, showing that your actual 'father' is the devil, not God."

Some may not like my reply and may try to justify themselves like the Jews did in verse 39. Some may say, "Hey, wait a minute! I'm already a Christian."

My reply would be much like Jesus' reply in verses 39-41: "If you are a Christian, then why do you continue to do the things that the devil does (see v.41)? Why do you continue to sin? The whole world is under the control of the evil one and yet you love things that are in the world; therefore, God's love is NOT in you (I John 2:15)." Then I would say, "Turn from your sin and realize that God provides a way for you to stand up under EVERY temptation (I Cor. 10:13). Have faith in God. Rely on Him. Make every effort to be holy (Heb. 12:14; I Peter 1:13-17) and His power will sustain you and keep you from falling (Jude 24; Eph. 3:20). I pray that you will listen and believe the Bible and come to true faith in God."

"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in EVERY way: bearing fruit in EVERY good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience..." Colossians 1:10-11

The Sin of Complaining

And do not complain as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer. (1 Cor. 10:10)

Complain: to utter expressions of grief, resentment, uneasiness, or pain; to lament, murmur, or find fault. (Webster's Dictionary)

Do you complain? Don't be too quick to answer this one. Think about it for a minute. What are your comments about the weather usually like? How do you speak about your spouse? What kinds of things do you say about your job? Do you complain about someone who didn't treat you the way you thought you should be treated? Almost everyday I hear complaining. Religious people are some of the biggest culprits. Examine yourself in this. Are you thankful for cold weather, hot weather, rainy weather, cloudy weather, and sunny weather? Do you complain when it snows a lot or when there is an ice storm? Have you ever complained when the weather "ruined" your plans? "A man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps" (Prov. 16:9). Are you truly content with what the Lord determines for you?

In 1 Corinthians 10 we read about the Israelites after they had been delivered from Egypt. In verse 10 we read that some of the Israelites complained and that God was angry enough to destroy them. Under what circumstances did the Israelites complain? On one occasion they went without water for three days. One time they found water, but it was bitter. They complained when they didn't have food. They complained when they had manna, but no meat. Put yourself in their situations. Do you think that you would have a right to complain about lacking water for three days or eating the same food day after day after day? God sent severe judgments for complaining even in situations that we might think it justified to grumble.

How much more do people deserve the wrath of God who complain about minor complications such as the weather (sent by God) or another person being inconsiderate.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down for warnings for us...Therefore, if you think you stand firm take heed lest you fall (1 Cor. 10:11-12)

Who will be saved?

You may be confident, as many are today, that you are saved. But is your assurance based on the whole of what the Bible says about salvation? Or is your confidence based on what other people have told you? The purpose of this study is to show what the Scriptures themselves teach about salvation. The most urgent and important question you can ask yourself is, "In the end, will I be accepted by God into His kingdom or rejected?" It will be well worth your time to carefully read and study the following verses and references for they answer the question, "Who Will Be Saved?" See, dear reader, if you measure up and meet the test. See if you are one of those who will be saved.

1. Those who do the will of God

Matthew 7:21-23 -- Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven...

1 John 2:17 -- The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

See also: Luke 12:47-48; Hebrews 10:36-37; Revelation 2:26

Question: What is God's will for you? (See 1 Thessalonians 3:3-8)

2. Those who obey Jesus and keep His commandments

1 John 2:3-6 -- We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him...

John 14:15-24 -- ...Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching..."

See also: John 10:2-4, 7-11, 14, 15, 27-28; Hebrews 5:8-9; 1 John 3:23-24; 5:1-3

Question: Does it make any sense to call Jesus "Lord" and then not do what he says (see Luke 6:46)?

3. Those who deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him

Luke 9:23-26 -- then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it..."

See also: Matthew 10:32-39; 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-37; 10:17-27; John 12:24-29

Question: What does it mean to deny yourself and take up your "cross"?

4. Those who forsake all

Luke 14:33 -- In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 13:44-46 -- The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

See also: Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:11

Question: Why would God want us to give up everything? (See Matthew 6:19-21; 1 John 2:17)

5. Those who are holy and overcome sin by the power of Jesus Christ

1 John 3:5-10 -- But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him...No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God...

Hebrews 12:14-17 -- Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord...

See also: Matthew 1:21; 5:21-22, 27-30; Mark 9:42-48; Romans 6:22; 8:12-15; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 10:1-14; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Galatians 5:16-21; Ephesians 5:1-8, 11, 15; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; James 4:4; 1 John 2:29; 5:18; Revelation 3:1-4; 21:7, 8, 27; 22:14, 15

Question: How is it really possible to be holy and stop sinning? (See Titus 2:11-14, 1 Corinthians 10:13, and Philippians 4:13)

6. Those who continue

Romans 11:22 -- Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

1 Corinthians 15:2 -- By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

2 Peter 2:21 -- It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then turn their backs on the sacred commandment that was passed on to them.

See also: Matthew 7:14; 10:22; Mark 4:3-20; 13:13; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Hebrews 3:6, 12-4:2, 9-11; 6:4-11; 10:26-31; James 1:12; 1 John 2:24-25; 2 John 9-11; Revelation 2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 12

Question: Read Ezekiel 18:21-32. Why is it important to continue to be righteous?

7. Those who persist in well-doing

Romans 2:6-16 -- ...To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life...

See also Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37; John 5:28-29; Galatians 6:7-10; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; James 2:14-26; 1 John 3:14-19; 4:7-8, 16, 20, 21; 3 John 11

Question: What does it mean to persist in well-doing? (Look up "persist" or "persistence" in a dictionary.)

8. Those who strive to enter at the narrow gate

Luke 13:23-29 -- Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able..."

Matthew 7:13-14 -- Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

See also: Matthew 11:12; 22:1-14; Luke 16:16; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 1 Peter 4:17-18

Question: What does it mean to strive or "make every effort"?

9. Those who have been born again

John 3:3-6 -- ...unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

See also: Matthew 18:3; Titus 3:5-8

Question: What does it mean to be "born again"? (See 2 Corinthians 5:15, 17)

10. Those who have Christ in them

Romans 8:9-10 -- ...And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ...

See also: 2 Corinthians 13:5; Colossians 1:27; John 15:4-6; 1 John 4:13

Question: What is someone like who has the Spirit of Christ in them?

11. Those who repent (turn away from all their sins)

Acts 3:19 -- Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Luke 13:1-5 -- ...unless you repent, you too will all perish...

See also: Matthew 4:17; 5:3-4; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 5:27-32; 13:1-5; 15:1-32; Acts 2:38; 11:18; 17:30, 31; 20:21; 26:20; Romans 2:3-5; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; 2 Peter 3:9

Question: Why do you think God requires repentance?

12. Those who believe on, call on, and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are baptized

Mark 16:15-16 -- He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Romans 10:9-13 -- That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved...for "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

See also: John 1:11-13; 3:14-18, 36; 5:24; 10:9; 11:25, 26; 20:30, 31; Acts 13:39; 15:5-11; 16:29-34; Romans 3:20-28; 5:1, 9, 10, 17; 6:23; Galatians 2:16-17, 21; 3:11, 24-25; Ephesians 2:4-10; 1 Peter 3:20-21; 1 John 4:15; 5:1, 10-12

Question: If someone really truly believes in Jesus Christ, what type of life will he/she lead?

13. Those who are chosen

2 Thessalonians 2:13 -- But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

See also: Matthew 11:27; 22:14; 24:30-31; Mark 13:27; John 6:37-39, 44; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:29-30; 9:10-24; 11:5-10; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 9:15; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2:6-9; Revelation 17:14

The Many and the Few

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Matthew 7:13-14

If you will examine the teachings of the Bible, you will discover that very few are living according to what is written in it. Very few follow God's ways. People have become corrupt on the earth and they have turned against their Creator. This paper will show three Biblical truths. First of all, according to the Bible relatively few will enter heaven; only a "few" of those who claim to be God's people will actually enter his kingdom. Secondly, sin in your life is what will keep you from heaven whether you profess to believe the gospel or not. Finally, many people tolerate sin in their lives because of their ignorance of God's Word and because they have been deceived by a great number of false teachers.

Jesus didn't hesitate to proclaim to people that the path leading to hell is traveled by many more people than the path to heaven (Matt. 7:13-14). He said that only a few find the gate that leads to eternal life. As an illustration of this, consider what happened in Noah's time. God put an end to the wickedness on the earth by causing a great flood. How many were saved from destruction? In the ark "only a few people, eight in all, were saved" (1 Peter 3:20). How many people will be saved when Jesus comes back and the ungodly are destroyed? Jesus gave us a clue: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:37) -- there will be few. Indicating how rare true faith is Jesus said, "when the Son of Man (Jesus) comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Indeed, only a few are chosen (Matt. 22:14).

From the beginning, God predicted that only a few would survive his judgments because of the disobedience and rebellion of the people. He said, "You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the Lord your God" (Deut. 28:62). Quoting the prophet Isaiah, the Apostle Paul declared, "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved" (Romans 9:27).

Some of you may be thinking that because you have given an intellectual ascent to certain facts of the Gospel you will be saved from God's wrath--you think that you will be numbered among the "few". However, the corruption in the world is not isolated among those who are "unchurched". Many of the very people who claim to know and love God draw near to him merely with their lips, but deny him by their actions (Titus 1:16). As the number of church buildings in America increases, the country continues to get more and more wicked. Why is it that, despite churches scattered throughout every town in America, wickedness still abounds? Many people who claim to be Christians do not live the type of lives required by God. They live in outright contradiction to God's Word and yet they expect to enter heaven when their lives on Earth are finished. While claiming to be "saints" the many continue to live as "sinners" and admit freely that they are still sinners despite

the very stern warning that "all sinners will be destroyed" (Psalm 37:38).

So then both those who do not know God and those who claim to know him will be kept from entering his kingdom because of sin. Everyone has sinned in the past (Rom. 3:23) and for his sin, each person earns death as his reward (Rom. 6:23). (This "death" includes not only physical death of the body, but the "second death" spoken of in Rev. 21:8). Now God commands all people everywhere to turn from their sins in repentance (Acts 17:30) and to prove their repentance by their deeds (Acts 26:20). Those who come to their senses and accept the knowledge of God will stop sinning (1 Cor. 15:34) because Jesus bore their sins on the cross so that they would "die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24). Many people refuse to believe that through Christ they can die to sins and live for righteousness. And so while claiming to be "saved" it is unclear what the many are "saved" from. Jesus came to "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21) and to "destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8) and yet many professing Christians claim that they can't help but sin. Thus while claiming to love God, they actually become servants of the devil because "he who does what is sinful is of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Refusing to believe that "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14), many will even admit to telling an occasional lie or occasionally doing something that is impure in God's sight. They think that God will wink at their sin. They don't think that sin is an incredibly serious matter that will keep them from the kingdom of God if they continue in it. But concerning those who will enter heaven God says, "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). Since the Apostle Paul knew this, he wrote that among God's people there should not even be a hint of impurity (Eph. 5:3).

The idea of being completely saved from sins--for God's people to stop sinning--is rarely believed today. Very few people accept the truth that can set them free from sin (John 8: 31-36) and so many find themselves still in slavery to sin, still serving the devil (1 John 3:8). Because many people continue to be evildoers, Jesus will forbid them to enter the kingdom of heaven even though they call him "Lord" (Matt. 7:21-23). So why are so many people who claim to know God so ignorant regarding what God actually says about who will enter his kingdom? It is because they do not want to know. They are willfully ignorant. Think about it. Nearly everyone in America has a Bible or has access to a Bible. How many people read it? How many professing Christians read it as much as they should? If you surveyed professing believers, many of them would admit that they do not read their Bibles as much as they know that they should. They know the good that they ought to do but they do not do it and thus they sin (James 4:17). These people claim to live by every word of God (Matt. 4:4), but throughout the supposed many years of being "Christians" many of these people have never even read every word of God. And so they show that they are not seeking to please God because they do not make every effort to find out what is written for them in his Word. God says, "my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

While the "few" diligently read, study and obey their Bibles, the "many" rely almost solely on their churches to make up for their lack of knowledge of God's Word. They look to their pastors, priests, and other ministers to teach them what God's Word says, but few are teaching the truth of the Gospel. As we shall see, the Bible actually predicts that only a few will be teaching the truth of God's Word, while there will be many deceivers in the world (1 John 4:1). Over and over the Bible warns of the danger of trusting what any person says without comparing it to God's Word. It says that we need to "test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21). It is necessary to examine everything we hear or

read and compare it to the Bible to see if it is true because Jesus said to "watch out for false prophets" (Matt. 7:15) and that many will come to deceive you (Matt. 24:4-5, 24). The Bereans were commended for receiving the Apostle Paul's message with great eagerness and for examining the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11). After he said farewell to the elders of the church in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul knew that false teachers would arise (even from among the church) and distort the truth of God's Word (Acts 20:29-30). For three years and with many tears Paul warned them night and day to be on their guard (Acts 20:31)! Paul also writes warnings of a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but will gather to themselves a great number of false teachers who will tell them what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:3). Infiltrating modern Christianity, many false teachers have come and have deceived many people just as the Bible predicted (2 Peter 1-2). If they would have taken heed to the Bible's multiple warnings of false doctrines and diligently studied and obeyed the Bible they would not have been deceived.

Concerning the many hypocrites that claim to know God and yet deny him by their actions God says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29: 13). They claim to do "all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31) and yet do most things for the purpose of bringing themselves entertainment or pleasure with no thought for the many other things that God may have them do. The prevalent false "gospel" that many false teachers are preaching deceives people into thinking they can live for themselves. This is an outright contradiction to the true Gospel of the Bible which declares that Jesus died for us so that we would stop living for ourselves and start living for him (2 Cor. 5:15). False teachers teach that you can keep sinning and have heaven too, but the Bible says "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2 Tim. 2:19). The false gospel appeals to the masses by allowing them to do what they want to do--and so they embrace it.

This false gospel is no gospel at all. It is a death sentence that deceives many people into thinking that their souls are secure and in right standing with God. The poor deceived people who cling to unbiblical teachings and refuse the truth are among the "many" who Jesus said would try to enter through the "narrow door" and not be able to (Luke 13:14). They try, but only half-heartedly. They seek, but only when convenient. They follow God, but only when they are not following their own appetites. They claim to know God, but in actions they deny him (Titus 1:16). They seem eager to know God's ways, but they end up doing as they please (Is. 58:1-4). And since their mind is on earthly things, "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame" (Phil. 3:19).

Which group are you in--the many or the few? Are you in the remnant that is serving God or the multitude who is not? "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths" (Zeph. 3:13)

Too Difficult?

I hope all of you who read this are seeking the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Before you read this message, I would encourage you to have a Bible with you so you can look up the verses I refer to. Also, please read the surrounding passages and study them. May the Lord help us to serve him.

Within the pages of the Bible are the guidelines and requirements for one who chooses to follow God. These include denying one's self (Matt. 16:24, Luke 14:27), loving God above anything else (Luke 14:26, 33; Matthew 22:37), and loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). If we have true faith in God, our faith causes changes in our lives. These changes are evidenced by what we do (James 2:14-16; Eph. 2:8-10), what we think (Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1-3; Eph. 5:23), what we say (Eph. 5:25, 29), and what we delight in or take pleasure in (Psalm 1:1-2; I Pet. 2:2, Matthew 5:6). Through Christ we are dead to sin (Romans chapter 6) and our former way of life. By His grace, we are made free from sin (Rom. 6:18). Jesus is our example and we need to follow in his steps (I Pet. 2:21) and live like he lived (I John 2:6). Those who are in Christ are a new creation (II Cor 5:17) and we need to "...put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). In Christ Jesus, we are created by grace to be righteous and holy through faith in him. We are told to forsake our life of sin.

Is Jesus's call too difficult? Is it too hard? For just any human being, it is too difficult, but a Christian has the Spirit of God. God's power is at work in us (Eph. 3:20). Through Christ, we ARE dead to sin (Rom. 6) and we ARE crucified with Christ; He lives in us (Gal. 2:20). So, I ask you this: is obeying God and overcoming sin in our lives too hard for us IF we have faith in him and trust in him (not ourselves)? Let's see what the Bible says:

Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your soul. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29-30). Would you agree that Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden light? From a human standpoint it may not seem like his yoke is easy. But what is a yoke anyway? A yoke is a device that holds two oxen together to plow a field; it has two large holes--one for each ox. If we take the spiritual yoke upon us that has one hole for Jesus' head and one for ours, we must let him lead and give up our will. If we rebel, the yoke will pull at our neck and then it will hurt; but if we let him lead, He will guide us through the paths of righteousness (Psalm 23). Don't get the wrong idea: just because Jesus said his yoke was easy doesn't mean we won't suffer persecution. In fact, Jesus said that WE WILL go through trials but we can have peace in Him (John 16:33). He even gives us joy that enables us to rejoice at being counted worthy to suffer for him (Acts 5:41). Also, trials serve to perfect us (James 1:2-4). If we rebel against God, we will find that Prov. 13:15 is true: "Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard." So, the way of a transgressor is hard, not the way of the righteous. Saul (later named Paul) found the way of a transgressor to be hard when Jesus appeared to him and said that it was hard for Saul to kick against the goads (Acts 26:14). (An ox kicking against the goads was a Greek proverb symbolizing useless resistance; eg- the ox

was only hurting itself.) It is hard to rebel, but IF we surrender our will and die DAILY to ourselves, it is easy to let him lead. We must continue to serve him and deny ourselves (Matt. 16:24) or else we will find ourselves fighting God. We WILL fall if we rely on ourselves. "Where fore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

God's commands are not a burden to us, but rather a joy. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3). And it is possible to keep his commands because as the very next verse in I John 5 states: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (v.4). Have the faith to believe that his power works in us (Eph. 3:20) and you can and will overcome. "Take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish ALL the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16). "Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:23). "I can do all things THROUGH CHRIST which STRENGTHENETH me" (Philippians 4:13). "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (I Cor. 10:13).

Rely on God to help you take the way out of EVERY temptation. He is a faithful God. "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and HE WILL DO IT." I Thess. 5:23-24

What is a Christian?

There are many thousands of religious people and church members who are not real Christians. The Bible describes them as "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (II Tim.3:5). They regard themselves as Christians, and have the outward form of Christianity, but it is only an empty shell, with no power to keep them from sin, no power to cancel their guilt, no power to give them peace of mind or joy of heart, and no power to give them eternal life. "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him" (Titus 1:16). They have just enough of the form of Christianity to deceive them, just enough to make them think that all is well between their souls and God, when in fact nothing is well.

What then is a real Christian? The Bible says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ" (II Cor.5:17-18).

First, he is "in Christ." Christ is not merely a historical figure to him, but the very sphere of his life and existence, and the center of his plans and thoughts and activities. "For to me to live is Christ", said the Apostle Paul (Phil.1:21). And by Jesus Christ he is "reconciled" to God. He does not live at a distance from God, like the prodigal son in the far country. He has come home to the Father, and gladly serves Him, and lives in fellowship with Him.

Next, "he is a new creature." He has not merely joined a church, or gotten religious, or been baptized, or gone forward in a revival meeting, or prayed for salvation. All this may be only an empty shell, a form without power. He has something deeper than this. "He is a new creature"--a new creation, "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph.2:10). He has not merely changed a few outward things. His nature is changed, from the inside out. He is converted, from an enemy of God to a child of God, and the Bible says, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). He is born again with a new life from God, and the Bible says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). His whole being is renewed, made over, created anew, so that he is no longer the same man he was before. He is a new creature.

Further, "old things are passed away." He has not merely put away a few of the grosser forms of sin, but has renounced all of his old life of sin and self. His old ambitions and plans, his old activities and pastimes, are all passed away. The sins and follies which he once loved and pursued, he now renounces and forsakes. His old pleasures now appear empty and vain. His old views and philosophies of life, his old haunts, his old companions in sin, have all passed away from his life.

Further, "all things are become new." All things. He has new associations, new friends, new thoughts and goals, new habits and activities--in short, a new life. He has been born again. He has not merely made a few outward changes, but all things have changed--the places he goes, the way he spends his time and money, the thoughts he thinks, the songs he sings, the people he

associates with, the things he reads, the things he loves or hates--all that he is and does is become new. He is a new creature.

Finally, "all things are of God." God is the source of this new life, and everything in it. He no longer gets his thoughts and ideas and aspirations from the world. He no longer follows the world's pleasures and pastimes and habits and ways. "All things" in his life "are of God."

Now consider whether you are a real Christian. Are all things in your life of God? Are the places you go, the songs you enjoy, the things you watch or read, the language you use, the thoughts you think, the friends you choose, are all these "of God"--or do they proceed from the world or self? Is the way you spend your time and money, the way you dress, the way you live in general, determined by the ways of the world, or the Word of God? Do you live to do God's will, or your own?

Are you a "new creature"? Can you look back to the time when you were converted, reconciled to God, born again? Can you point to a time before which the world was your sphere, and self your end, but after which the old life of sin and self passed away, and you were a new creature? Can you look back to a point at which you forsook the ways of the world and sin, and embraced the will of God as the rule of your life? Can you point to a time when self was dethroned, and Christ became your life?

If you can, you have been converted, and your sins are blotted out. If not, you have never been born again, and you cannot see the kingdom of God. And unless you repent and forsake your present life of self and sin, you will never be a Christian, and you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Do You Tolerate Evil?

Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:32)

A shocking thing is happening in American religion. Many religious people who claim to love God also approve of or tolerate things that God hates. The Bible says, "Hate that which is evil; cling to that which is good" (Romans 12:9) and "Let those who love the LORD hate evil" (Psalms 97:10), but many people who claim to follow the Bible do not hate evil. Rather, even though they themselves may not commit evil deeds, they tolerate evil and those who practice it.

As Romans 1:32 says, there are two things you can do to anger God--commit sin or tolerate and approve of sin.

Do you tolerate evil? Something is tolerable if it can be endured or "received without disgust, resentment, or opposition" (Webster's Dictionary). Do you ever see wickedness without a feeling of disgust and opposition rising up in your heart? Do you tolerate wickedness? Do you find it easy to put up with wickedness? Or do you abhor wickedness? Does wickedness arouse in you an intense hatred and disgust, making you sick when you observe it? I would challenge you to examine yourself honestly before God.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12).

There will come a day when we all will be judged according to what we have done. For sake of illustration, picture someone in a courtroom being charged with tolerating evil.

Prosecutor: You stand accused of tolerating what is evil.

Defendant: These charges are completely false. I love the Lord and hate what is evil. I am a Christian.

Prosecutor: Do you find evil entertaining?

Defendant: Absolutely not!

Prosecutor: I have evidence that leads me to believe otherwise: Do you ever laugh at wickedness?

Defendant: Uh...well...um...I guess I have found a few dirty jokes to be funny...

Prosecutor: What about on television or in movies? There are numerous comedies and sit-coms that exalt foolishness, making fun of and insulting others.

Defendant: Well, yes, I have laughed at many such things, but...

Prosecutor: The Bible says, that among God's people there should never be "obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving...Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is" (Ephesians 5:4, 17).

Defendant: I guess I haven't taken such verses seriously.

Prosecutor: You also stand accused of tolerating filthy language.

Defendant: Wait a minute! I don't curse or swear.

Prosecutor: True, but you regularly watch movies that contain profanity and most movies even take the Lord's name in vain.

Defendant: But actually, I notice these things and I wish that movies didn't contain bad language.

Prosecutor: While you watch the movies, the vulgar language does not create in you enough disgust to leave the movie theater or turn off your TV. If every "Christian" who says he hates filthy language would boycott the movies perhaps Hollywood would change. Instead, people compromise their standards to watch what they call a "good" movie, but what God calls a "ruined" movie.

Prosecutor: Now, let us talk about violence. Do you tolerate and approve of violence?

Defendant: Now this time I can say with confidence that I hate violence. There is so much violent crime in the world and it makes me sick even to think about it!

Prosecutor: Again, the evidence points to the conclusion that you tolerate violence and even that you are entertained by violence. Do you watch violence in movies?

Defendant: Yes, but certainly that is not wrong.

Prosecutor: God told Noah that he would destroy the world because of violence (Gen. 6:11-13). "The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates" (Psalm 11:5). You should be deeply distressed and saddened by the violent acts that you see portrayed on the movie screen. But God, who knows your heart, knows that the violence in movies has not served to give you a righteous hatred for evil; instead it has caused you to be desensitized toward it.

Defendant: I guess I have never considered any of these things. Everyone else is watching these same television programs and movies.

Prosecutor: We are told to be innocent concerning evil (Rom. 16:19). Should you, a professing Christian, indulge in the same entertainment as the people around you who don't even claim to know God? Indeed, as Jesus warned, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Defendant: OK...But I am a Christian! I believe in Jesus so none of these things matter!

Prosecutor: Would you be embarrassed to have Jesus sitting with you while you watch your movies? Can you honestly say that you react the same way he would to the movies?

Defendant: I see your point. I would be embarrassed to have Jesus watching movies with me.

Prosecutor: Be warned, there are many who "claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good" (Titus 1:16). Again, Jesus warned you about this: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Does the defendant in this dialogue at all resemble you? Do you tolerate and even approve of the things God hates? Are you able to receive the entertainment that is full of foolishness, coarse joking, filthy language, and violence without disgust, opposition or resentment? If so, you tolerate evil. This is no small matter! I urge you to take these things seriously. For there will come a day when the books are open and your deeds will be laid out plainly before the Judge. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

You have the opportunity now to renounce all wickedness and ask God to create in you a clean heart through the blood of Christ. You have the opportunity to ask God to fill you with the same hatred that he has toward wickedness. I plead with you to seize this opportunity.

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