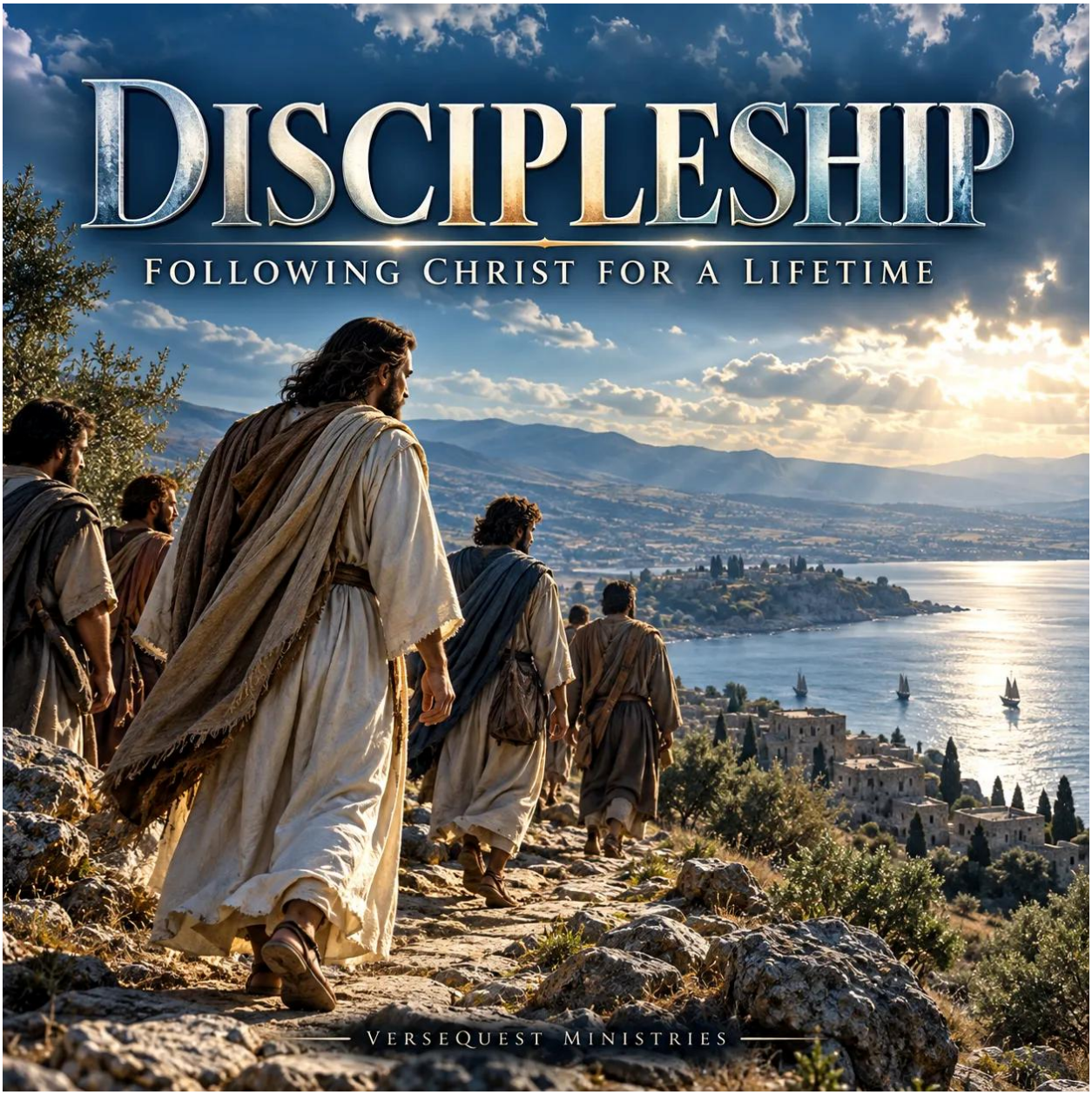
Discipleship

Following Christ After Salvation

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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Copyright Page

Discipleship

Following Christ After Salvation

A Ten-Part Bible Study Series on Salvation, Spiritual Growth, Christian Service, and Finishing Faithfully

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Discipleship — Following Christ After Salvation is an original ten-part Bible study series prepared to encourage believers to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This publication presents biblical teaching from a King James Bible-believing, dispensational perspective, maintaining the distinction between Israel and the Church, salvation and discipleship, justification and sanctification, and the free gift of eternal life and the believer's subsequent responsibilities.

Its central doctrinal foundation is that **salvation is received by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, entirely apart from human works.** Christian discipleship follows salvation and must never be imposed as an additional requirement for obtaining or maintaining eternal life.

Readers are encouraged to examine every teaching in light of the Scriptures, rightly dividing the word of truth according to 2 Timothy 2:15.

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VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES

Studying the Scriptures. Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth.

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

— 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

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Discipleship

Following Christ After Salvation

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Discipleship — Following Christ After Salvation

Introduction: Saved by Grace, Called to Follow, and Expected to Grow

There is something seriously wrong with modern Christianity when a man can claim to have been saved for thirty years, possess six Bibles, attend hundreds of church services, listen to thousands of sermons, and still require somebody to explain why he ought to read the Scriptures, pray, resist sin, and tell another sinner about Jesus Christ. Somewhere along the way, the Christian life has been reduced to a religious waiting room where people receive salvation, find a comfortable chair, and occupy themselves until the Lord calls them home. They have been taught enough about grace to know they cannot earn eternal life, but apparently nobody has explained that the God who saved them expects them to do something with the life they have received. They can tell you the date they were saved, the preacher who delivered the message, and how wonderful they felt afterward. Ask them what they have learned about the Bible since then, how they have grown in doctrine, or what responsibilities they have undertaken for Christ, and suddenly the conversation becomes quieter than a church building on Monday morning. **Salvation was never intended to become the beginning and end of a Christian's spiritual education. It is the beginning of a life that ought to be spent learning to follow the Saviour.**

Before anybody reaches for Luke 14, starts shouting about taking up crosses, counting costs, and forsaking everything, we had better establish the gospel correctly. There is no faster way to corrupt discipleship than to turn it into another condition for receiving eternal life. The Apostle Paul declares in Ephesians 2:8–9, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Romans 4:5 states that God justifies the ungodly man who believes rather than works. First Corinthians 15:1–4 identifies the gospel through which sinners are saved: Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. There is no installment plan attached to Calvary. There is no probationary period during which a sinner must demonstrate sufficient obedience before the Lord agrees to honor His promise. Salvation is not a partnership in which Christ contributes ninety-nine percent and the sinner supplies the remaining portion through religious dedication. **Jesus Christ purchased redemption with His blood. The sinner receives eternal life through faith. Anybody attempting to charge an additional admission fee is selling something other than the gospel of the grace of God.**

But now read the next verse. Ephesians 2:10 declares, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” There is the distinction that religious confusion continually attempts to erase. Good works do not produce salvation, but salvation establishes the believer in a

position where good works ought to follow. The Christian is not commanded to obey in order to become God's child. He is commanded to obey because he already belongs to God. Romans 12:1 appeals to the brethren by the mercies of God to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto Him. Notice that mercy comes before sacrifice. Grace comes before service. Redemption comes before discipleship. Yet none of those truths gives the believer permission to make himself spiritually useless. A man who has been delivered from condemnation but deliberately refuses every responsibility of Christian living has not discovered some extraordinary depth of grace. He has discovered a convenient religious excuse for remaining exactly where he started. **Grace removes the sinner from the courtroom of condemnation. It does not appoint his old nature chairman of the Christian life.**

That is why this series is necessary. Christianity is drowning beneath two competing counterfeits, and both are doing a remarkable job of keeping people confused. On one side stands the Lordship Salvation preacher who takes the demands of discipleship, mixes them into the free gift of justification, and leaves sinners wondering whether they have surrendered enough, obeyed enough, repented of enough individual sins, or persevered long enough to qualify for eternal life. On the other side stands the religious libertine who treats eternal security like a lifetime membership in a club where the rules no longer matter. The first fellow turns salvation into works. The second turns grace into an excuse for carnality. One burdens the conscience with requirements Christ never attached to justification; the other encourages the flesh to live as though the Lord who purchased the believer has no further authority over his conduct. The King James Bible condemns both errors. Romans 6:15 asks whether believers should sin because they are under grace rather than law, and Paul answers, “God forbid.” The same apostle who proclaimed justification apart from works instructed believers to walk worthy of their calling. **The Bible does not offer salvation by works, and it does not offer discipleship without obedience.**

Discipleship begins with the recognition that the Christian has been brought into a living relationship with Jesus Christ and must learn to walk according to the Scriptures. Colossians 2:6 commands, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” The believer has received Christ; now he must learn how to walk. That requires something considerably more substantial than collecting religious opinions from popular personalities and borrowing convictions that collapse the moment somebody opens a Bible. Second Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to study, show himself approved unto God, and rightly divide the word of truth. The Christian must learn what God has actually written, to whom He was speaking, under what covenant or dispensation a passage belongs, and how its truth applies to the present Church Age. Israel is not the Church. Law is not grace. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not the Great White Throne. The catching away

of the Church is not the same prophetic event as the Second Advent. And the gospel committed to Paul must not be rewritten by dragging requirements from another biblical setting into justification under grace. **A believer who cannot rightly divide the Scriptures will eventually confuse what God has distinguished, and then spend years defending the confusion as though it were a sacred family inheritance.**

The Christian must also learn that prayer is not a religious emergency button mounted behind glass for use only when everything catches fire. Philippians 4:6 commands believers to bring their requests before God with prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. First Thessalonians 5:17 declares, “Pray without ceasing.” Prayer belongs to the ordinary responsibilities of discipleship because the redeemed sinner remains dependent upon his heavenly Father. Yet prayer must never become an attempt to manipulate God through theatrical expressions, repeated demands, or supposed formulas guaranteeing earthly prosperity. The believer approaches the throne of grace through Jesus Christ, not through his own importance. He prays according to God's will, trusts the intercessory ministry of the Holy Spirit, and recognizes that the Lord's wisdom exceeds his limited understanding. Sometimes God removes the burden. Sometimes He supplies the grace necessary to endure it. A Christian who neglects prayer while boasting about his spiritual understanding resembles a soldier who has studied every detail of military strategy but refuses communication with his commander. **Knowledge without dependence can produce an impressive religious vocabulary while leaving the believer practically governed by self-confidence.**

Neither was the Christian saved to become a permanent spectator in the household of faith. Acts 2 describes believers continuing in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. First Corinthians 12 explains that the body possesses many members with different functions. Ephesians 4 describes spiritual leadership and instruction intended for the perfecting of the saints and the work of the ministry. The local church was never meant to become a weekly theatrical production where a professional entertainer occupies the platform, the congregation evaluates the performance, and everybody returns home to await the next episode. Biblical fellowship involves sound doctrine, mutual care, responsible leadership, prayer, service, and accountability. Not every congregation bearing a religious name deserves unquestioning loyalty, and no Christian should surrender biblical truth to protect a corrupt organization. But rejecting false doctrine is not permission to reject every form of meaningful fellowship. The believer should seek sound Christian association and contribute faithfully according to his abilities. **The Church is not a stadium where thousands gather to watch a handful of professionals perform Christian duties. God's people have responsibilities that cannot be discharged merely by applauding somebody else's obedience.**

And those responsibilities extend beyond the church meeting into the believer's personal conduct. Romans 12:2 commands, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Second Corinthians 6:17 calls for separation from spiritual uncleanness, while Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 instruct believers concerning putting away the practices of the old man and walking according to the new life in Christ. The Christian cannot spend six days deliberately cultivating worldly appetites, reserve an hour for religious appearances, and reasonably expect holiness to materialize through some unexplained spiritual miracle. His speech matters. His honesty matters. His relationships, entertainment, personal purity, stewardship, and treatment of other people matter. Yet biblical separation must never become another system of self-righteousness in which outward regulations are mistaken for the righteousness of Christ. The Pharisee can follow an impressive list of rules while remaining full of pride, bitterness, and hypocrisy. The worldly Christian can condemn that Pharisee while excusing his own flesh. Neither arrangement constitutes biblical discipleship. **The objective is not to make the old man look respectable in church clothes. It is to walk in the Spirit rather than allowing the flesh to govern the life Christ redeemed.**

Service and generosity are equally important. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” God has entrusted believers with differing abilities, opportunities, resources, and responsibilities. Some teach the Scriptures. Some witness personally. Some support missionary labor. Others help families, encourage discouraged believers, provide practical assistance, or perform necessary work that receives almost no public recognition. Christian service is not measured exclusively by the size of the audience or the prominence of the position. Nor is generous giving a method of purchasing divine favor. Second Corinthians 9:7 teaches willing and cheerful giving, not financial coercion conducted under the threat of losing God's blessing. The Old Testament tithing requirements imposed upon Israel must not be confused with New Testament giving under grace. And the offering plate was never intended to become a cash register through which prosperity preachers finance personal luxury while promising that everybody else's contribution will unlock a heavenly fortune. **The Lord does not need a Christian's money to complete redemption, but He has given redeemed people opportunities to support His work. Faithfulness is the issue, not religious showmanship.**

Then there is the gospel itself. A Christian who has received everlasting life through faith in Jesus Christ should understand the importance of telling another sinner how to be saved. Romans 1:16 declares that the gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” Second Corinthians 5 identifies the ministry of reconciliation, while Romans 10 emphasizes the necessity of hearing the word of God. Personal witnessing does not require every believer to become a professional evangelist or possess the

speaking ability of an accomplished preacher. It does require an understanding of the gospel and a willingness to communicate it faithfully when opportunities arise. The Church must never replace salvation through Christ with political activism, social improvement programs, entertainment, or religious motivational speeches. Helping the needy is commendable, but charitable activity does not automatically explain Christ's substitutionary death and bodily resurrection. A man can receive food, clothing, shelter, and encouragement while remaining completely ignorant of the gospel. **The Christian should care about earthly suffering, but he must never become so occupied with temporary needs that he forgets the eternal condition of the soul.**

Furthermore, discipleship does not guarantee a comfortable earthly existence. The prosperity preacher who claims that sufficient faith eliminates poverty, sickness, persecution, and hardship has apparently misplaced the chapters describing the Apostle Paul's ministry. Second Corinthians 11 records imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, hunger, danger, exhaustion, and persecution. Second Corinthians 12 records Paul's earnest request concerning his thorn in the flesh and the Lord's answer: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Second Timothy 3:12 warns that those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. None of these passages teaches that suffering automatically produces spiritual maturity or that every difficulty is evidence of righteousness. A Christian can suffer because of foolishness just as readily as because of faithfulness. But genuine obedience may bring hardship, and the Lord has never promised to remove every earthly obstacle. **Sometimes faithfulness leads through an open door. Sometimes it leads through a prison door. The Saviour remains faithful on both sides, and the Christian must learn to distinguish divine faithfulness from personal comfort.**

Spiritual warfare is another reality the believer cannot afford to ignore. Ephesians 6 commands Christians to put on the whole armour of God and stand against the wiles of the devil. The world promotes values contrary to Scripture, the flesh continues to oppose the Spirit, and Satan operates through deception, temptation, accusation, and opposition to biblical truth. But spiritual warfare must never become a religious circus in which theatrical performances replace sound doctrine. The believer does not need imaginary classifications of demons, secret spiritual formulas, or supposed revelations unsupported by Scripture. He needs truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and prayer. False doctrine may arrive through a respectable teacher with impressive credentials and a Bible beneath his arm. Carnality may operate through ordinary habits without requiring an elaborate supernatural explanation. The Christian must therefore remain watchful, established in Scripture, and obedient to Christ. **The devil does not retire when a sinner gets saved, but neither does he become the owner of the believer's eternal**

destiny. Jesus Christ has already purchased that redemption, and the Christian's responsibility is to stand faithfully in the Lord's strength.

Finally, discipleship must be understood as a lifelong course rather than a temporary season of religious excitement. Acts 20:24 records Paul's determination to finish his course and the ministry received from the Lord Jesus. First Corinthians 9 compares faithful service to disciplined athletic competition, while Philippians 3 describes pressing toward the mark rather than remaining occupied with what lies behind. The Christian may encounter changing responsibilities as the years pass. Youthful strength gives way to maturity, family obligations increase, ministries develop, circumstances change, and physical limitations eventually remind every man that his earthly body was never designed to remain young indefinitely. Yet faithfulness remains possible within changing circumstances. A believer who can no longer accomplish what he once did may still pray, encourage, teach, support, and serve according to the opportunities remaining. Yesterday's obedience does not automatically fulfill today's responsibilities, and yesterday's failures do not give the Christian permission to abandon tomorrow. **A runner who spends the last mile staring at the starting line should not be surprised when he stumbles over the obstacles directly in front of him.**

And there is an appointed evaluation awaiting the redeemed. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. First Corinthians 3:11–15 explains that Jesus Christ is the foundation and that the believer's work will be examined by fire. Some work will abide and receive reward; other work will be consumed, resulting in loss. Yet verse 15 explicitly states that the man whose work burns “shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” This is not the Great White Throne judgment, and eternal life is not being auctioned according to human performance. It is the judgment of Christian service. God knows what was accomplished, what opportunities were neglected, and what motives governed the work. The Lord is not impressed by the religious advertising that impresses men. He sees what remains when public applause, impressive statistics, institutional reputation, and personal ambition have been stripped away. **A Christian can arrive in heaven with eternal salvation completely secure and discover that much of what occupied his earthly life was suitable for little more than the fire. The wise believer takes that possibility seriously before the examination begins.**

This ten-part study, *Discipleship — Following Christ After Salvation*, is therefore not another attempt to place saved people under the Mosaic law, manufacture religious bondage, or suggest that eternal life can be lost through imperfect performance. It is an examination of what the King James Bible actually teaches concerning the life that follows salvation. We will begin by establishing the distinction between the free gift of eternal life

and the cost of faithful discipleship. From there, we will examine the Scriptures, prayer, Christian fellowship, separation, service, generosity, personal witnessing, suffering, spiritual warfare, and the responsibility to finish faithfully. Each subject belongs within the larger framework of salvation by grace, sound doctrine, right division, and the believer's security in Jesus Christ. The purpose is not to produce religious performers who become skilled at impressing one another. It is to confront biblical responsibilities that have been neglected, correct doctrinal confusion that has been tolerated, and encourage saved people to take seriously the privilege of following their Saviour.

There is no need to invent another gospel to preach stronger discipleship, and there is no need to weaken biblical commands in order to defend eternal security. The Lord has already settled the matter. Salvation is free because Jesus Christ paid the price. Discipleship involves learning to obey the One who paid it. A Christian may be secure in Christ and still require correction. He may possess eternal life and still waste opportunities. He may be assured of heaven and still need to grow in doctrine, holiness, service, and spiritual discernment. These truths do not contradict one another. They describe the difference between what Christ accomplished for the sinner and what the saved believer ought to do in response. **The man who confuses salvation with discipleship will eventually corrupt the gospel. The man who separates salvation from every responsibility of discipleship will eventually excuse carnality. The Bible believer must refuse both errors and stand where the Scriptures stand.**

So open the King James Bible and prepare to examine the Christian life beyond the moment of conversion. Leave the religious excuses at the door. Leave the self-righteous measuring stick beside them. We are not interested in purchasing a salvation Christ has already provided, nor are we interested in spending the remainder of our lives pretending that grace makes obedience unnecessary. There is doctrine to learn, Scripture to study, prayer to offer, sin to resist, fellowship to maintain, gospel work to accomplish, opposition to endure, and a course to finish. The Saviour deserves more than an annual recollection of the day we were saved and an occasional hour of religious attention when circumstances become convenient. The Apostle Paul did not finish his course boasting about the comfort of the journey. He declared in 2 Timothy 4:7, **“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”** That is the kind of testimony every Christian should desire. **Salvation is not the finish line of discipleship. It is the starting point. Jesus Christ has already done what no sinner could ever do for himself. Now the redeemed must learn to follow Him—not to obtain eternal life, but because they already possess it. The cross purchased the salvation. The Christian life is the walk that follows. And if the Lord has given us another day upon this earth, then there is still a course before us and work worth doing for His glory.**

1 of 10: Discipleship — Salvation Is Free, but Following Christ Will Cost You Something

Key Passage: Ephesians 2:8–10 (KJV)

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Introduction

There is something terribly wrong with modern Christianity when a preacher cannot tell a sinner how to be saved without handing him a list of conditions that would make a Philadelphia lawyer reach for his reading glasses. One fellow says believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Another says believe, surrender everything, abandon every sin, promise lifelong obedience, and prove the sincerity of your decision by the quality of your subsequent performance. Then another fellow comes along, turns salvation into a religious handshake, and assures everybody that since eternal life is free, it makes absolutely no difference how they live afterward. Both extremes have managed to miss what God plainly wrote. Ephesians 2:8–10 settles the matter without a committee meeting, theological convention, or denominational permission slip. Salvation is by grace through faith, completely apart from human works. Good works follow salvation because God has created the believer in Christ Jesus unto them. The sinner is not commanded to construct his own righteousness before approaching Calvary. He comes empty-handed to the Saviour who has already finished the work. But once that sinner is saved, God has something considerably better planned than leaving him spiritually parked beside the road with the engine running and the transmission in neutral.

Before examining discipleship, we must establish precisely what salvation is, because everything that follows depends upon getting that foundation right. The gospel for the present Church Age is declared in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4: Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the scriptures. The sinner receives salvation by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work, not by adding a record of religious accomplishments to the transaction. Romans 4:5 says, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Notice who receives justification. Not the fellow who finally makes himself respectable enough to impress heaven, but the ungodly man who believes. God does not justify him because he has successfully reformed his life. He justifies him through faith. The righteousness that saves is not produced by the sinner's character, maintained by his determination, or purchased through his sacrifices. It comes from Jesus Christ. **The**

moment human performance becomes the foundation of justification, grace has been escorted out the back door while religion takes its seat at the table.

But the same Bible that declares salvation to be free also commands saved people to walk worthy of their calling, mortify the deeds of the body, present themselves unto God, resist the devil, serve one another, and endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. These commands are not contradictions of grace. They are instructions addressed to people who have already received it. There is a tremendous difference between the price of redemption and the cost of faithful discipleship, and confusing those two things has produced generations of unnecessary bondage on one side and careless Christianity on the other. Some believers spend their lives trying to earn an eternal life Christ already purchased. Others act as though receiving that eternal life relieved them of every responsibility to the One who purchased it. Neither position is supported by Scripture. The blood of Christ settles the believer's standing before God; the word of God governs his daily walk. Salvation establishes the relationship. Discipleship concerns the fellowship, obedience, growth, service, and sacrifices that ought to characterize that relationship. **You do not follow Christ to persuade Him to save you. You follow Christ because He already has.**

1. The Gift of Salvation Cannot Be Purchased with the Currency of Works

The first doctrinal distinction appears in the actual language of Ephesians 2:8–9. Paul writes, “For by grace are ye saved through faith,” and immediately adds, “and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Grace means that salvation proceeds from God's unmerited favor rather than man's deserving. Faith receives what God has provided. The words “not of yourselves” exclude human merit, and “Not of works” remove every religious accomplishment from the foundation of justification. Finally, Paul explains why: “lest any man should boast.” There will be no redeemed sinner standing in glory congratulating himself because his dedication supplied the missing percentage of Christ's unfinished work. Romans 11:6 establishes that grace and works cannot be mixed as competing grounds of acceptance. If salvation is of grace, it is no more of works. Some religious systems attempt to combine the two like a mechanic mixing oil and water and then complain when the engine will not run. God never authorized that arrangement. Grace is not divine assistance for human self-redemption. It is God's provision for sinners who cannot redeem themselves.

Romans 4:4–5 makes the distinction so sharp that even religious tradition ought to have difficulty dulling it. “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.” If salvation could be earned, God would owe eternal life to the successful worker. But the next verse says that the man who “worketh not” and believes receives righteousness counted to him. Paul reinforces the same truth in Titus 3:5: “Not by works of

righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us." Baptism cannot purchase justification. Church attendance cannot purchase it. Charitable giving cannot purchase it. Promises to become a better person cannot purchase it. Neither can a dramatic testimony, a tearful altar experience, or the ability to impress the congregation with a sufficiently emotional account of one's conversion. These things may have their proper places or consequences, but none constitutes the payment for sin. The payment was made at Calvary. The resurrection demonstrated the victory of the crucified Saviour. A sinner who attempts to contribute his own righteousness to that finished work is effectively offering God a handful of counterfeit coins after Christ has paid the entire debt.

Now observe that Ephesians 2:10 begins with the word "For." The argument has not changed subjects. Paul moves directly from salvation without works to God's purpose for saved people: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Notice that he does not say we are created in Christ Jesus *by* good works. He says *unto* good works. The difference is not a minor grammatical decoration for theologians to argue about over coffee. It determines whether good works are the root of salvation or its proper fruit. A tree must be alive before it can bear fruit. Nailing apples to a dead stump does not make the stump an apple tree, regardless of how convincing the arrangement looks from the highway. Likewise, dressing an unregenerate sinner in religious behavior cannot produce the new birth. God saves the sinner first and then instructs him to walk in the good works He has ordained. The order is established by inspiration, and no preacher possesses the authority to reverse it.

2. Eternal Security Rests upon Christ, Not the Believer's Daily Performance

Jesus Christ declared in John 5:24, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Pay particular attention to the verbs. The believer *hath* everlasting life. He *shall not* come into condemnation. He *is passed* from death unto life. These are not promises that a Christian might eventually qualify for eternal life after enough years of obedient service. They describe the settled position of the person who believes. First John 5:13 likewise tells believers that they may "know that ye have eternal life." Assurance is not built upon a Christian's ability to predict his own future faithfulness. It rests upon the reliability of the One who made the promise. A saved man can know where he stands because God has declared it in writing. If eternal life disappears every time a believer stumbles, somebody ought to remove the word *eternal* from the description. But God has not made that alteration, and neither should the preacher.

Consider the security of the believer from another angle. Ephesians 1:13–14 teaches that those who believed the gospel were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the

earnest of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. The sealing belongs to those who have believed, not merely to Christians who have achieved an exceptional level of devotion. Romans 8:1 declares, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” The believer's security is established by his union with Christ, not by the fluctuating quality of his emotional life or obedience. Some days a Christian may be encouraged; other days he may be weary, chastened, distracted, or ashamed of his conduct. None of those conditions makes the finished work of Christ unfinished. The Saviour does not require a new crucifixion whenever one of His children fails. Christians who measure eternal security with the thermometer of personal performance will experience a doctrinal fever every time their spiritual temperature changes.

Nevertheless, eternal security does not mean the believer's conduct is beyond correction. Hebrews 12:5–11 addresses divine chastening, and 1 Corinthians 11:30–32 demonstrates that believers may face serious temporal consequences because of sin. The distinction is between condemnation and chastisement. Condemnation concerns the judicial penalty from which Christ has delivered the justified sinner. Chastisement concerns a Father's dealings with His children. A disobedient son may experience discipline without ceasing to be a son. In fact, the existence of fatherly correction establishes that the relationship carries responsibilities. Some confuse the Father's rod with the Judge's sentence, while others mistake the absence of eternal condemnation for the absence of accountability. Scripture teaches neither confusion. The Christian can lose fellowship, usefulness, testimony, joy, opportunities, and future rewards. He cannot undo the finished work of Jesus Christ. **A believer's security rests upon the Saviour's faithfulness; his spiritual growth requires taking the Saviour's commandments seriously.** Both truths belong in the same Bible and ought to remain together.

3. The Christian Must Learn to Walk in the Life He Has Received

Colossians 2:6 provides the natural progression from salvation to discipleship: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” Paul begins with something already accomplished. These people had received Christ. They were not being instructed to walk in order to become recipients of salvation. They were told to walk because they had received Him. The next verse describes believers as “Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” There is a progression here that deserves attention. A plant must possess roots before it grows upward. A building requires a foundation before the walls rise. A Christian must possess spiritual life before he can grow spiritually. Yet a plant that never develops beyond its first appearance is not demonstrating healthy growth. God did not save His people merely to

leave them perpetually ignorant of the Scriptures, unstable in doctrine, and useless in service. Eternal life is received in a moment. Christian maturity ordinarily develops through years of learning, correction, obedience, and dependence upon God.

Romans 6 confronts the relationship between salvation and righteous living with extraordinary precision. Having established justification by faith, Paul asks, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” His answer in Romans 6:2 is unmistakable: “God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” Paul does not answer by threatening to revoke the believer's justification. He appeals to the believer's identification with Christ and the spiritual reality of his new position. Romans 6:11 commands Christians to reckon themselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Verse 13 directs them to yield themselves unto God as those alive from the dead. Notice the order once again. They are instructed to yield themselves *as those that are alive from the dead*. The life comes first; the yielding follows. Grace does not provide permission to make peace with sin. It supplies the foundation upon which the believer is commanded to resist sin and walk in newness of life.

The practical difference between possessing salvation and practicing discipleship becomes obvious when a new Christian begins confronting ordinary decisions. He must learn to study Scripture rather than relying upon whatever religious personality happens to occupy the loudest microphone. He must learn to pray, resist temptation, forgive, speak truthfully, control his tongue, serve other believers, and make choices governed by God's word rather than his former habits. He must recognize that the flesh has not been converted merely because the soul has been saved. Galatians 5:17 describes the continuing conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, and Galatians 5:16 commands, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” No serious Bible student should confuse this conflict with the loss of salvation. Neither should he regard the conflict as an excuse for surrender. A soldier who discovers that an enemy remains nearby does not conclude that the war has become imaginary. He learns to stand, recognizes the danger, and obeys his orders. The Christian life demands the same seriousness.

4. Counting the Cost Is Not the Same as Paying for Salvation

Luke 14:25–33 is frequently dragged into discussions of salvation without sufficient attention to its historical setting or actual wording. The Lord Jesus Christ is speaking to great multitudes during His earthly ministry, before His crucifixion and resurrection, in a setting connected with Israel and the approaching rejection of her Messiah. In verse 26, He declares that a man who does not hate father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, and his own life cannot be His disciple. Verse 27 speaks of bearing one's cross, and verse 33 declares that whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be His disciple. The repeated

expression is “cannot be my disciple.” It does not read, “cannot receive the free gift of eternal life under the gospel subsequently committed to Paul.” Those statements must be taken seriously, but they must also be handled honestly. The Lord is announcing the severe demands associated with following Him, particularly when loyalty to Him places the disciple in opposition to the strongest earthly attachments. He is not presenting a financial schedule for purchasing forgiveness.

The comparisons in Luke 14 are deliberately severe because discipleship was never advertised as a leisurely religious hobby. Christ describes a man intending to build a tower who first sits down and counts the cost. He then speaks of a king considering whether ten thousand men can meet an opposing force of twenty thousand. The point is that following Him must not be approached with empty boasting and foolish presumption. A man should not announce his willingness to follow Christ into suffering while imagining that discipleship guarantees uninterrupted popularity, comfortable circumstances, and universal applause. Likewise, the reference to hating one's family must be understood in light of the supreme loyalty demanded by the Lord, not twisted into a command to violate God's other instructions concerning family responsibilities. The issue is priority when earthly relationships conflict with obedience to Christ. The Lord was not gathering a fan club. He was exposing the difference between admiring His works and accepting the hardship associated with following Him.

Now here is where theological confusion enters wearing its Sunday shoes. Some teachers take every costly statement about discipleship, attach it to the entrance of salvation, and insist that a sinner must first demonstrate a complete willingness to surrender everything before God will justify him. But Romans 4:5 still says God justifies the ungodly man who believes. Ephesians 2:8–9 still excludes works. The gospel of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection remains the saving message for the present dispensation. Luke 14 must not be used to overthrow those declarations. At the same time, the truths expressed in Luke 14 have serious application to Christians who profess to follow the Lord. Discipleship may involve persecution, broken associations, material sacrifice, surrendered ambitions, and obedience when obedience becomes costly. The Christian who wants a crown without a conflict, spiritual usefulness without discipline, and fellowship with Christ without inconvenience has misunderstood the assignment. **Calvary is where Christ paid for our salvation. Discipleship is where the saved believer learns that following the Saviour is not a sightseeing excursion.**

5. Eternal Security Is Not a License to Live Like the Devil

One of the most tiresome objections raised against eternal security is that it supposedly encourages Christians to sin without restraint. The reasoning goes something like this: If

the believer cannot lose salvation, why not live as wickedly as possible? Paul anticipated that objection nearly two thousand years before modern religious critics discovered it. Romans 6:15 asks, “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?” The answer is, “God forbid.” Notice that Paul does not surrender the doctrine of grace to defeat the accusation. He condemns the abuse of grace while preserving its truth. The possibility that someone might misuse a doctrine does not make the doctrine false. A man may use his freedom irresponsibly, but the remedy is not to pretend he was never free. The Christian's liberty is not permission to serve the flesh. Galatians 5:13 instructs believers, “only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” The proper response to grace is grateful obedience, not calculating how much wickedness a person can enjoy without losing heaven.

First Corinthians provides a particularly uncomfortable problem for those who imagine that every genuine Christian must display uninterrupted spiritual maturity. Paul addresses the Corinthians as brethren and yet identifies them as carnal in 1 Corinthians 3:1–3. They displayed envying, strife, and divisions. They behaved in ways that contradicted their calling. Their carnality did not become acceptable because they were brethren; it became more reprehensible because they were brethren. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul confronts gross immorality within the assembly and commands decisive action. He does not congratulate the church on its tolerance or advise that doctrinal soundness should be sacrificed to protect everybody's feelings. Sin among believers requires biblical correction. But correction must be distinguished from inventing an additional requirement for justification. A Christian who lives carnally does not demonstrate that carnality is harmless. He demonstrates that a saved man can act shamefully, damage others, dishonor his testimony, invite divine chastening, and waste opportunities that will never return. Grace removes the eternal condemnation of sin; it does not remove the earthly consequences of rebellion.

There is also something absurd about measuring the value of salvation by asking how little obedience a person can get away with afterward. Imagine someone being rescued from a burning building and immediately demanding permission to move back inside because the rescue was free. That would not disprove the reality of the rescue. It would demonstrate remarkably poor judgment concerning fire. Yet much religious argument follows precisely that pattern. The Bible does not teach that saved people are incapable of serious sin. David's life provides a sobering Old Testament example of the destructive consequences of sin, though his covenant setting must not be confused with the Church Age. Paul's warnings to believers establish the same practical seriousness under grace. The Christian is commanded to put away lying, bitterness, wrath, uncleanness, and other works of the flesh because they contradict his new life in Christ. There is no contradiction between

eternal security and holy living. **The fact that salvation cannot be purchased by obedience does not mean obedience has suddenly become worthless.**

6. The Judgment Seat of Christ Will Reveal What the Saved Man Did with His Life

First Corinthians 3:11 establishes a foundation that no man can replace: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Paul then describes the materials that may be built upon that foundation: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and stubble. Every man's work will be made manifest, and the fire will try what sort it is. This passage must be read carefully because religious confusion thrives wherever the words *saved*, *works*, and *fire* appear in the same chapter. The issue is not whether the foundation survives. The foundation is Christ. The issue is the quality of what has been built upon Him. Verse 14 promises a reward when a man's work abides. Verse 15 declares, “If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” That single verse demolishes the claim that the believer's works determine whether he ultimately possesses salvation. The works may burn. The reward may be lost. The man himself is still saved.

Second Corinthians 5:10 explains that believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where the things done in the body will be evaluated. This is not the Great White Throne judgment described in Revelation 20:11–15. Confusing the two judgments is like confusing a military inspection with a criminal sentencing and then wondering why nobody can understand the proceedings. The Great White Throne concerns final judgment and the lake of fire. The judgment seat of Christ concerns the accountability of those belonging to Christ. Salvation is not being auctioned to the highest spiritual bidder. The believer's service, stewardship, faithfulness, and conduct are being evaluated by the Lord who redeemed him. First Corinthians 4:5 also reminds us that the Lord will bring hidden things to light and make manifest the counsels of the hearts. God sees more than impressive religious results. He sees motives. A ministry may attract admiration while producing little of eternal value. An obscure act of faithful service may receive recognition that the world never considered worth noticing.

Paul understood that salvation and reward were distinct matters. In 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, he compares Christian service to an athletic contest in which participants exercise discipline while seeking a prize. His concern about becoming a castaway belongs to that context of disciplined service and the prize; it must not be ripped away from the surrounding passage and transformed into proof that Christ's gift of eternal life can be forfeited. In 2 Timothy 4:7–8, Paul looks toward the completion of his course and the crown of righteousness. He is not announcing that he has finally accumulated enough personal merit to purchase heaven. He is describing the faithful completion of a ministry entrusted

to him. The same principle should sober every Christian. Years can be spent accumulating money, arguments, possessions, recognition, and personal comforts while opportunities for eternal usefulness disappear unnoticed. A believer may arrive in heaven securely saved and yet discover that much of what occupied his earthly life was combustible material. **Grace secures the believer's destination; faithfulness matters when his life's work is examined.**

7. Following Christ Must Become a Daily Walk, Not an Occasional Religious Performance

If discipleship is to mean anything, it must extend beyond the vocabulary of a sermon and enter the daily conduct of the believer. Second Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to study and rightly divide the word of truth. Second Timothy 3:16–17 declares the Scriptures profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. A Christian cannot become established in sound doctrine while keeping his Bible permanently closed. Nor can he expect spiritual discernment to develop through a steady diet of religious entertainment, isolated verses, and emotional excitement. Prayer must become a real part of his dependence upon God, not merely an emergency response when circumstances become unbearable. Fellowship with sound believers matters, and Hebrews 10:24–25 addresses the responsibility of assembling together and provoking one another unto love and good works. These are not religious payments toward eternal life. They are ordinary responsibilities involved in Christian growth. A soldier does not become trained merely by admiring his uniform. He must learn his instructions, maintain his equipment, and perform his duties.

Discipleship also reaches into the uncomfortable territory of personal conduct. Romans 12:1–2 urges believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices and not be conformed to this world. Ephesians 4 instructs Christians concerning honesty, speech, anger, labor, forgiveness, and the putting away of corrupt behavior. Colossians 3 directs their attention toward things above while commanding them to mortify earthly practices contrary to their position in Christ. These passages do not describe an optional advanced course reserved for preachers and missionaries. They concern Christian living. The believer must learn to distinguish biblical separation from self-righteous religious traditions, Christian liberty from fleshly indulgence, and faithful obedience from attempts to impress men. Sometimes the cost of following Christ involves surrendering a profitable but dishonest opportunity. Sometimes it means refusing companionship that continually draws the believer into sin. Sometimes it requires admitting wrongdoing, repairing damage, or telling the truth when a lie would be considerably more convenient. The Christian who insists that Scripture should

govern his theology but never interfere with his choices has invented a strange arrangement in which God may speak from the pulpit but must remain silent at the kitchen table.

And then there is service. The Lord did not save His people so they could spend the remainder of their earthly existence inspecting everybody else's imperfections from a comfortable distance. Ephesians 2:10 says believers are created unto good works. Romans 12 describes service among the members of the body. Second Corinthians 5:18–20 presents the ministry of reconciliation, while 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 establishes the gospel that must be proclaimed. Some Christians will labor publicly; others will serve quietly. Some will teach, some will support, some will encourage, some will witness, and others will perform responsibilities that receive little earthly recognition. Giving, patience under suffering, resistance to false doctrine, and spiritual vigilance also belong to the believer's walk. Ephesians 6:10–18 reminds Christians that spiritual warfare requires the whole armour of God, not a collection of motivational slogans. Discipleship involves real battles, real sacrifices, and real opportunities to glorify Christ. The Christian need not accomplish everything another believer accomplishes. He is responsible to be faithful with what God has entrusted to him. **The Christian life is not measured by how loudly a man announces his dedication, but by whether he obeys the Lord when obedience costs him something.**

Conclusion

The distinction between salvation and discipleship is not a theological technicality to be filed away for future argument. It is foundational to understanding the Christian life. If the cost of discipleship is inserted into the gospel as a prerequisite for justification, the sinner's attention is diverted from Christ's finished work to his own capacity for sacrifice. Assurance becomes impossible to establish objectively because nobody can measure precisely how much surrender, obedience, or perseverance is sufficient. The sinner is left examining his performance when Scripture commands him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But if the responsibilities of discipleship are dismissed because salvation is free, then grace becomes an excuse for laziness, worldliness, and indifference. Both errors rob the Scriptures of their proper force. The Bible teaches a free and complete salvation through faith in Christ, followed by a life in which the believer is commanded to grow, obey, serve, endure, and glorify God. There is no need to weaken either truth in order to defend the other. God has already placed them together in Ephesians 2:8–10. The religious world may enjoy manufacturing contradictions, but the Scriptures do not require its assistance.

Every Christian should therefore ask some serious questions without confusing those questions with the basis of his salvation. Am I feeding upon the word of God or living on spiritual scraps? Am I praying or merely talking about prayer? Am I growing in doctrinal

understanding or borrowing convictions from whoever speaks with the greatest confidence? Am I serving Christ, witnessing faithfully, supporting sound ministry, resisting sin, and seeking to walk in the Spirit? Have worldly interests become more important than the responsibilities entrusted to me? Am I willing to suffer inconvenience, misunderstanding, or material loss rather than compromise biblical truth? These questions are not designed to make believers doubt the promises of eternal life. They are designed to make believers confront the responsibilities attached to the life they already possess. Philippians 3:13–14 records Paul's determination to press toward the mark, even after years of remarkable service. He did not regard previous faithfulness as permission for present complacency. Neither should we. Yesterday's obedience does not perform today's responsibilities, and tomorrow's intentions cannot recover every opportunity wasted today.

So let the matter stand where the King James Bible places it. The sinner comes to Jesus Christ for salvation, trusting His death, burial, and resurrection. He contributes no righteousness of his own, purchases no portion of the gift, and receives no probationary version of eternal life. Having believed, he belongs to the Lord and is called to walk worthy of that calling. There will be lessons to learn, sins to resist, Scriptures to study, prayers to offer, burdens to carry, sacrifices to make, and battles to fight. There may be seasons of suffering when obedience brings little earthly encouragement. There will also be opportunities to serve the Saviour who loved us and gave Himself for us. And beyond this earthly course stands the judgment seat of Christ, where the value of our work will be revealed. The Christian who understands these truths will neither attempt to purchase salvation through discipleship nor use salvation as an excuse to neglect discipleship. **Christ did not charge the sinner a price for eternal life. He paid that price Himself. But the believer who intends to follow Him should understand that the road of faithful obedience was never advertised as a road without sacrifice. Salvation is the gift that brings us into the family of God. Discipleship is the walk that ought to follow. The gift is free because Christ paid for it. The walk is costly because following Christ means that self no longer has the right to rule.**

2 of 10: Discipleship — A Bible on the Shelf Will Not Put Scripture in Your Heart

Key Passage: 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Introduction

There is something almost comical about a Christian who claims to love the Lord Jesus Christ, insists that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and then proceeds to live as though opening that Bible might cause him a permanent injury. He will spend hours watching television, scrolling through foolishness, arguing with strangers, following the latest controversy, and absorbing the opinions of people who could not locate the book of Habakkuk with a flashlight and a table of contents. But ask him to spend thirty minutes studying Scripture, and suddenly his schedule becomes more crowded than Jerusalem during the Passover. The King James Bible sits on the shelf, its pages untouched, while its owner wonders why he cannot recognize false doctrine, overcome familiar temptations, or explain what he supposedly believes. A Bible in the house is a blessing, but possession is not the same as preparation. A soldier does not become proficient with a sword by hanging it above the fireplace. A starving man does not receive nourishment by admiring the menu. And a Christian will not grow spiritually by treating the written word of God as an ornament.

The Apostle Paul did not tell Timothy to admire the Scriptures, occasionally consult them, or substitute the opinions of impressive religious personalities for personal examination. He commanded, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God.” Notice the object of the approval. Timothy was not studying to impress a congregation, accumulate religious credentials, or win an argument with somebody who had memorized fewer verses. He was studying to stand approved before God, as a workman who would not need to be ashamed. That language ought to settle the casual attitude with which so many professing believers approach the Bible. Study involves labor. Workmen are expected to work. And the command does not end with learning religious information; it specifies “rightly dividing the word of truth.” A man can memorize Scripture and still mishandle it. He can quote a verse accurately while assigning it to the wrong people, the wrong covenant, the wrong dispensation, or the wrong future event. **The Bible is not merely to be read. It must be believed, understood in its proper setting, and handled faithfully.**

Discipleship cannot advance very far without the Scriptures because Christian growth is not produced by religious enthusiasm alone. Salvation is received freely through faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work, but the saved man must learn how to walk in the life he has received. God has not left the believer to invent his own doctrine, imitate the surrounding culture, or depend upon whichever preacher delivers the most entertaining performance. He has provided His written word for doctrine, correction, instruction, and spiritual maturity. The same Book that establishes salvation by grace through faith also teaches the believer how to resist sin, identify deception, serve faithfully, endure suffering, and rightly divide the truth. Yet an astonishing number of Christians want the benefits of spiritual maturity without submitting to the discipline through which maturity develops. They want discernment without study, strength without nourishment, and biblical

convictions without examining the Bible. That arrangement has about as much chance of succeeding as planting a garden on concrete and blaming the weather when nothing grows. **You cannot live upon Scripture you refuse to receive, and you cannot faithfully defend truth you have never bothered to learn.**

1. Study to Shew Thyself Approved — The Command Is Not a Suggestion

Second Timothy 2:15 was written by Paul to Timothy, a trusted fellow labourer responsible for teaching and defending sound doctrine. The immediate context concerns disputes over words, profane and vain babblings, and false teachers whose errors threatened the faith of others. In verses 17–18, Paul identifies Hymenaeus and Philetus, who claimed that the resurrection was already past and thereby overthrew the faith of some. This was not an innocent disagreement over the color of the church carpet. It was doctrinal corruption involving the timing and nature of a fundamental biblical truth. Paul's remedy was not to encourage Timothy to become more entertaining, discover a clever communication technique, or develop a sufficiently agreeable personality. He commanded him to study and rightly divide the word of truth. Scripture was to govern the teacher's doctrine, expose the error, and establish the proper understanding. Although Timothy had particular ministerial responsibilities, every Christian can recognize the necessity of knowing the Scriptures rather than swallowing whatever happens to be served from a pulpit.

The expression “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed” deserves serious consideration. A workman is not someone who merely owns the equipment, admires another man's craftsmanship, or talks endlessly about the importance of completing the job. He applies himself to the labor before him. Biblical study requires reading passages carefully, comparing Scripture with Scripture, examining context, tracing subjects, recognizing repeated expressions, and submitting conclusions to what God has written. Proverbs 2:4–5 describes seeking wisdom as silver and searching for it as hidden treasures. Valuable things ordinarily require effort, and the word of God is worth considerably more than anything buried beneath a mountain. Yet some Christians investigate the features of a new automobile more carefully than the doctrines they profess to believe. They can explain the operating system of their telephone but cannot explain the difference between justification and sanctification. The embarrassment is not that they have failed to master everything. Nobody has. The embarrassment is that many have stopped trying.

Approval before God must also be distinguished from applause before men. A preacher may fill a building, attract thousands of admirers, publish impressive credentials, and still mishandle the Scriptures so badly that his teaching would require a warning label. Conversely, a quiet believer who faithfully studies and obeys the word of God may possess greater spiritual discernment than a celebrated religious personality. First Corinthians 4:2

declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” Faithfulness is not measured by the size of an audience or the number of compliments received after a sermon. It concerns whether the truth has been handled honestly and whether the servant has discharged his responsibility. A man should never become more concerned about appearing intelligent than about being scripturally correct. The Bible does not exist to decorate our opinions with impressive quotations. Our opinions must be judged by the Bible. **The workman approved of God is not necessarily the man with the loudest voice, but the man who has faithfully handled the word entrusted to him.**

2. All Scripture Is Inspired — God's Word Is Not a Religious Suggestion Box

Paul's declaration in 2 Timothy 3:16 is among the clearest statements concerning the authority of Scripture: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Every expression carries weight. Paul says *all scripture*, not merely those passages that agree with modern religious tastes. He says *given by inspiration of God*, not produced by human imagination and later decorated with religious approval. He says Scripture is *profitable*, identifying the specific ways it benefits the believer. Doctrine tells us what is true. Reproof exposes what is wrong. Correction restores what has departed from the proper course. Instruction in righteousness teaches how the believer ought to live. Remove any of these functions, and you begin dismantling the very purpose for which God provided His word. The modern appetite for preaching that never reproves or corrects is therefore an appetite for something less than the complete ministry of Scripture. A preacher who never confronts error may be popular, but popularity is not listed among the four purposes in this verse.

The surrounding passage strengthens the argument. In 2 Timothy 3:14–15, Paul reminds Timothy of the things he had learned and of the holy scriptures he had known from childhood, which were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Timothy possessed familiarity with the sacred writings long before receiving Paul's final instructions. Those Scriptures prepared him to recognize God's revealed truth concerning the promised Messiah. Yet Paul continues by establishing that all Scripture is profitable for the believer's complete instruction. Verse 17 gives the purpose: “That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” The word *perfect* concerns completeness and maturity, while *throughly furnished* describes the equipment necessary for faithful service. God has not provided an incomplete manual that requires the latest religious trends to supply its missing chapters. The Scriptures furnish the believer for the work God has appointed. The problem is not that God's equipment is defective. The problem is that too many workmen leave it locked in the shed.

The preservation and authority of God's words also matter because the believer must possess a definite written standard rather than a collection of competing religious impressions. Psalm 12:6 declares, “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” Our confidence rests in the Scriptures God has given and preserved, and the King James Bible provides the written authority upon which our teaching and examination are established. We are not approaching Scripture as though every clear statement must first obtain permission from a committee of scholars before ordinary believers may trust it. Neither are we authorized to correct God's words whenever they contradict our preferred doctrines. The Bible judges the teacher; the teacher does not sit in judgment over the Bible. That does not eliminate the responsibility to study carefully, recognize context, or admit when we have misunderstood a passage. It makes those responsibilities more important. **A man who claims that Scripture is his final authority but continually allows tradition, popularity, and personal preference to overrule it has established a final authority that never actually gets the final word.**

3. From Milk to Strong Meat — Spiritual Growth Requires Spiritual Nourishment

First Peter 2:2 commands, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” Peter is writing to believers identified as strangers scattered throughout several regions, and his instruction follows the declaration in 1 Peter 1:23 concerning being born again by the word of God. The picture is direct and unmistakable. Newborn children require nourishment because life must be sustained and developed. A baby who refuses nourishment cannot be expected to become strong simply because the parents have purchased an impressive collection of feeding equipment. In the same manner, spiritual growth requires the regular reception of God's word. The context also includes commands to lay aside malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies, and evil speakings. Nourishment and conduct belong together. The word is not given merely to fill the mind with facts; it is intended to affect the believer's manner of life. A Christian who consumes endless religious information while deliberately preserving sinful habits has misunderstood the purpose of his spiritual diet.

Hebrews 5:12–14 presents an even sharper rebuke. The writer addresses people who, because of the time that had passed, ought to have become teachers but still needed someone to instruct them in the first principles of God's oracles. They required milk rather than strong meat. The epistle addresses Hebrew believers within a setting where the relationship between the Old Testament system and the superior priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ is of special importance. We must not erase that historical and doctrinal setting while making application. Nevertheless, the rebuke concerning immaturity carries a legitimate warning for Christians today. Hebrews 5:14 explains that strong meat belongs to

those “who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” The significant expression is *by reason of use*. Discernment develops through applying the truth already received. A man does not become skilled at handling Scripture merely by owning six study Bibles, twelve notebooks, and a collection of colored pencils large enough to open a stationery store.

There is nothing disgraceful about a newly saved believer needing elementary instruction. Every Christian begins somewhere, and the Lord does not expect a newborn child to possess the understanding of a mature servant. The disgrace appears when years pass without corresponding growth because the believer refuses to study, learn, and obey. First Corinthians 3:1–3 demonstrates that the Corinthians remained carnal and were unable to receive instruction as spiritual maturity required. Their divisions and envying revealed serious problems despite their position in Christ. The answer was not to abandon doctrine or substitute entertainment for instruction. They needed spiritual correction and growth. Milk is essential for the newborn, but it is not intended to become the permanent limit of every Christian's understanding. The believer should progress from foundational gospel truths toward a fuller grasp of the Scriptures, learning to recognize doctrine, dispensational distinctions, prophetic subjects, and practical responsibilities. **A Christian who has been saved for thirty years but refuses to advance beyond his first lessons should not blame the Bible for his spiritual infancy. The pantry is full; the problem is that he will not eat.**

4. Rightly Dividing the Word — Not Everything Written to Someone Else Is Written About You

The command to rightly divide the word of truth is indispensable because the Bible contains different covenants, audiences, promises, dispensations, and prophetic events. All Scripture is inspired and profitable, but not every command was issued to the same people under the same circumstances. God dealt with Israel under the law of Moses in ways that must not be confused with His present dealings with the Church, the body of Christ. The law was given to Israel as part of a national covenant. Exodus 19 and 20 establish that setting. The Church, composed of saved Jews and Gentiles united in Christ, possesses a different position under grace. Romans 6:14 declares, “For ye are not under the law, but under grace.” This does not mean that the Old Testament is useless or that God's moral truth has become obsolete. It means that a student must recognize God's distinctions rather than forcing every instruction into one undifferentiated religious arrangement. **When God makes a distinction, the Bible student has no authority to erase it with a sermon illustration.**

The Apostle Paul explains the revelation of the mystery concerning the present dispensation in Ephesians 3:1–9. He identifies himself as the apostle of the Gentiles and

describes the revelation committed to him concerning their place in the same body through the gospel. Ephesians 2:14–16 establishes the breaking down of the middle wall of partition and the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in one body through the cross. The gospel Paul preached is declared in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. Romans 4:5 establishes justification through faith apart from works, while Ephesians 2:8–9 confirms salvation by grace through faith. These passages must govern our presentation of salvation in the present Church Age. We must not drag Israel's national covenant requirements into the gospel and begin commanding sinners to observe the Mosaic law in order to be justified. Neither may we seize a passage concerning Israel's future tribulation and carelessly turn it into a threat that a saved member of Christ's body will lose eternal life.

Consider how much confusion disappears when passages are read according to their intended audiences. James 1:1 addresses “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” Matthew 24 concerns prophetic events associated with Israel, the tribulation, and the Lord's coming. Romans 11 explains that Israel has not been permanently discarded from God's purposes, and the promises concerning her future cannot simply be transferred to the Church because a preacher prefers a more convenient prophetic system. First Thessalonians 4:13–18 concerns the catching up of believers to meet the Lord in the air, while Revelation 19 describes His return in judgment and triumph. These events must be examined carefully rather than carelessly blended. Right division does not authorize removing inconvenient verses or manufacturing contradictions where none exist. It demands that every passage be understood in context and then properly applied. We can learn from Israel's wilderness failures without pretending to be the nation Israel. We can receive spiritual instruction from the Psalms without claiming every national promise as our personal property. **A Bible that has been rightly divided becomes clearer. A Bible that has been carelessly mixed becomes a religious stew in which nobody can identify the ingredients.**

5. The Bereans Searched the Scriptures — A Preacher's Reputation Is Not Proof of His Doctrine

Acts 17:10–12 provides a remarkable example of biblical examination. Paul and Silas entered the synagogue at Berea after encountering opposition in Thessalonica. The Bereans received the word with readiness of mind, but they also searched the Scriptures daily to determine whether the things preached were so. Verse 11 identifies them as more noble than those in Thessalonica because of this conduct. Notice that they were examining the teaching of the Apostle Paul himself. Paul was not a counterfeit apostle, a religious entertainer, or an ambitious self-promoter. He had been called by the Lord Jesus Christ and

entrusted with the revelation of the gospel he preached. Yet the Bereans were commended for testing his message against the written word available to them. Their readiness to listen did not eliminate their responsibility to examine. Their willingness to examine did not require them to approach the truth with hostile unbelief. They received the preaching and searched the Scriptures. Both actions were necessary.

This establishes a principle that ought to make every Bible-believing congregation considerably less vulnerable to deception. No pastor, evangelist, teacher, denominational leader, seminary professor, or celebrated religious personality stands above the authority of Scripture. A man may possess years of experience, advanced education, impressive credentials, and thousands of admirers while still being wrong about a passage. Credentials may demonstrate that someone completed a particular course of study. They do not establish that every conclusion he teaches is biblical. A preacher's reputation is not a replacement for chapter and verse. First Thessalonians 5:21 commands, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” That does not mean cultivating a rebellious spirit that rejects correction or searches endlessly for opportunities to ridicule faithful teachers. It means examining doctrine with an open Bible and a mind governed by truth. A preacher who teaches accurately should welcome serious examination. If the congregation's questions threaten his entire ministry, perhaps the problem is not that the sheep have started reading.

The warning becomes more urgent when we consider the abundance of religious material circulating through modern communication. A Christian can encounter hundreds of sermons, short videos, quotations, supposed prophetic revelations, and doctrinal claims without opening a Bible. Popularity has become a counterfeit certificate of spiritual authority. A teaching is reposted thousands of times, and people begin treating repetition as proof. Yet a lie does not become true because it has acquired a large audience. Second Timothy 4:3–4 warns of a time when people will not endure sound doctrine but will gather teachers according to their own lusts, having itching ears. That warning is not an endorsement of every preacher who claims to be unpopular. A man can be unpopular because he is foolish as easily as because he is faithful. The test remains Scripture. Galatians 1:8 demonstrates how seriously Paul regarded corruption of the gospel. Even a supposedly heavenly messenger was not permitted to preach another gospel. **The Bible believer must never surrender his judgment to a personality. The man behind the pulpit is accountable to the Book upon the pulpit.**

6. Hiding the Word in the Heart — Knowledge Must Become Obedience

Psalm 119:9 asks, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” Verse 11 continues, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might

not sin against thee." These statements arise from the Old Testament setting of Israel's relationship with the LORD and His revealed commandments. We should preserve that setting rather than pretending the psalmist was secretly writing a Pauline epistle. Nevertheless, the spiritual principle is unmistakable. God's word must be received inwardly and applied to conduct. The psalmist did not merely store religious information for future conversations. He treasured the word because he desired to walk according to it and resist sin. Scripture hidden in the heart provides truth to recall when circumstances make immediate consultation difficult. Memorized passages expose temptation, correct false reasoning, strengthen convictions, and direct the conscience. The word becomes especially precious when obedience is inconvenient. A believer who has filled his thoughts with Scripture possesses something far more valuable than an impressive ability to repeat religious slogans.

Colossians 3:16 brings this principle directly into the instruction of the Church: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Notice that Paul does not say the word should occasionally visit, occupy a spare bedroom, or make an appearance when the family Bible is brought out for company. It is to *dwell* within the believer, and to dwell *richly*. The immediate passage connects this indwelling word with teaching, admonishing, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and singing with grace in the heart to the Lord. The word of Christ should influence worship, fellowship, conduct, and understanding. Verse 17 extends the matter further: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." A Christian cannot honestly claim that Scripture occupies a rich place in his life while deliberately excluding it from his speech, work, relationships, and moral choices. The word is not supposed to become a decorative religious accent. It is meant to govern the household.

James 1:22 warns, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." The epistle addresses the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and its original audience must be recognized. Yet the warning against hearing without doing has a clear and legitimate application to every believer who possesses God's word. There is a difference between correctly explaining forgiveness and actually forgiving someone who has wronged you. There is a difference between identifying biblical commands concerning honesty and refusing to lie when deception would be profitable. There is a difference between giving a detailed exposition of Christian charity and treating the brethren with contempt. First Corinthians 8:1 reminds us that knowledge can puff up, but charity edifieth. Knowledge without obedience may produce a man who can win a doctrinal argument while behaving like an uncorrected child. Scripture was never intended to inflate religious pride. **The object of Bible study is not to make the head so large that the Christian can no longer**

walk through the church door. It is to furnish the whole man for faithful service before God.

7. A Lifetime in the Scriptures — Nobody Graduates from the Word of God

A faithful relationship with Scripture requires deliberate attention rather than waiting for an irresistible feeling of spiritual enthusiasm. Paul instructed Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Reading and doctrinal instruction were responsibilities associated with Timothy's ministry, not optional decorations. Christians likewise benefit from establishing regular habits of Scripture reading, focused study, prayerful consideration, memorization, and practical obedience. Reading continuously through the Bible helps the believer recognize its larger structure, historical progression, recurring subjects, and connections between books. Focused study allows him to examine particular doctrines and passages more closely. Memorization preserves important truth for ready use. Comparing Scripture with Scripture helps expose mistaken interpretations. None of these practices should become a system of religious merit by which a believer attempts to earn salvation or establish superiority over others. A reading schedule is a servant, not a saviour. Nevertheless, good intentions that never produce actual study are about as useful as a calendar filled with appointments nobody intends to keep.

The household also provides opportunities for biblical instruction. Deuteronomy 6:6–9 originally addressed Israel under the Mosaic covenant, commanding the people to teach God's words diligently to their children. We must not transfer Israel's covenant obligations wholesale to the Church, but the passage certainly demonstrates the importance God placed upon the transmission of His revealed truth within the family. Ephesians 6:4 instructs fathers to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Christian parents should therefore take seriously the responsibility of teaching Scripture rather than surrendering the entire task to occasional church programs or assuming that children will somehow develop biblical convictions by breathing the air inside a religious building. Reading Scripture together, explaining the gospel clearly, answering honest questions, and demonstrating obedience in ordinary family life are meaningful responsibilities. A child who hears endless religious instructions but watches adults disregard them receives a powerful lesson in hypocrisy. The home should never become a place where the Bible is praised publicly and contradicted privately.

Finally, no amount of prior study entitles a Christian to retire from learning. Paul had received extraordinary revelation, endured extensive missionary labors, and taught profound doctrine, yet his last recorded instructions to Timothy included a request for the books and especially the parchments in 2 Timothy 4:13. The man who had written inspired

Scripture still valued written material during the closing period of his earthly service. That ought to humble the fellow who has read three commentaries, attended a few Bible conferences, and now considers himself sufficiently educated to correct everybody in Christendom. The Bible contains more than any one believer will exhaust in a lifetime. New passages become clearer as other Scriptures are understood; familiar verses yield further applications as circumstances change; and previously overlooked connections emerge through careful examination. Even extensive familiarity must remain subject to correction by the written word. A long record of Bible reading is valuable, but yesterday's study does not eliminate today's responsibility. **The Christian who believes he has finished learning from God's word has not reached the summit of spiritual maturity. He has merely decided to stop climbing.**

Conclusion

The Scriptures are not an accessory to Christian discipleship. They are indispensable to it. Second Timothy 2:15 requires the workman to study and rightly divide the word of truth. Second Timothy 3:16–17 declares that all Scripture is inspired of God and profitable for furnishing the man of God unto good works. First Peter 2:2 presents the word as spiritual nourishment, while Hebrews 5:14 demonstrates that mature discernment develops through exercised use. Psalm 119 emphasizes the importance of hiding God's word in the heart, Acts 17 commends the examination of preaching by Scripture, and Colossians 3:16 commands the word of Christ to dwell richly within believers. These passages address different audiences and settings, but together they establish an unmistakable truth: God's written revelation must be received, understood, and obeyed. The Christian who neglects Scripture voluntarily deprives himself of the very instruction God has provided for spiritual growth. No amount of religious enthusiasm can replace that instruction, and no human authority possesses the right to contradict it.

There is no shortage of information available to the modern believer. Sermons, conferences, books, religious broadcasts, recorded lectures, and countless other materials can provide useful instruction when they are faithful to Scripture. But these resources must remain subordinate to the Bible itself. A Christian may benefit greatly from a sound teacher without surrendering his obligation to search the Scriptures. He may appreciate careful exposition without accepting every conclusion unquestioningly. He may gain knowledge through study aids without treating those aids as inspired authorities. The danger comes when secondary instruction replaces the actual reading and examination of God's word. The believer becomes dependent upon another person's interpretation and gradually loses the ability to distinguish what Scripture says from what somebody claims it says. That is how false teaching acquires an audience among people who possess Bibles

they seldom open. God has not commanded us to become suspicious of every faithful teacher, but He has commanded us to study. **A borrowed conviction may survive an agreeable conversation. A conviction established from Scripture is prepared to withstand serious examination.**

So open the Bible. Read it with attention. Study it with diligence. Believe what God has written, compare passage with passage, preserve the distinctions He has established, and refuse to make any religious personality your final authority. Learn the gospel clearly enough to explain how a sinner is saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Learn the doctrines committed to the Church through the Apostle Paul. Understand the place of Israel in God's revealed purposes, the difference between law and grace, the promises concerning Christ's return, and the responsibilities of the believer's daily walk. Memorize passages that establish fundamental truth. Teach the Scriptures to your family. Examine preaching rather than merely applauding it. And when the word of God exposes something wrong in your own conduct, do not congratulate yourself for identifying the verse while refusing to obey it. Receive the correction. The Christian life is not a competition to see who can collect the greatest quantity of religious information. It is a life of faithfulness to the Lord who has spoken. **A Bible on the shelf may testify that you own a copy of God's word. A Bible studied, believed, and obeyed demonstrates that God's word has been given its rightful place in your life. The leather cover will not strengthen your faith, the gold-edged pages will not produce spiritual discernment, and the dust upon the binding will not impress the Lord. Open the Book. The Author has already spoken. The question is whether His people intend to listen.**

3 of 10: Discipleship — Prayer Is Not a Religious Emergency Button

Key Passage: Philippians 4:6–7 (KJV)

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Introduction

There is something rather peculiar about a Christian who claims to know the Almighty God, believes that Jesus Christ died for his sins, rejoices that he possesses eternal life, and then proceeds through an ordinary week as though heaven has disconnected the telephone. He can discuss prophecy for three hours, argue about doctrinal matters until midnight, identify

every false teacher within fifty miles, and explain precisely why the religious world has gone completely off the rails. But ask him about his prayer life, and suddenly the conversation becomes quieter than a church offering plate during a financial crisis. Prayer has become an emergency button behind a glass cabinet. Break the glass when the doctor delivers bad news, when the mortgage payment comes due, when the children are in trouble, or when the automobile begins making noises that sound financially devastating. Otherwise, leave the equipment untouched. That may describe how people operate a fire extinguisher, but it bears remarkably little resemblance to the Christian life presented in the King James Bible. The believer was never instructed to treat communion with God as a last resort after exhausting every earthly possibility.

The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Notice the contrast between *nothing* and *every thing*. Paul does not reserve prayer for national emergencies, terminal illnesses, missionary conferences, or the occasional crisis that exceeds human understanding. He includes everything within the believer's proper dependence upon God. The command was written to saved people in the present dispensation of grace, not to Israel negotiating a national covenant under Moses. Paul was writing as a prisoner who understood hardship, uncertainty, opposition, and material limitation. He was not describing Christianity from a comfortable chair while somebody else paid the bills. The very man who instructed believers to pray had learned contentment through suffering and dependence upon Christ. Philippians 4:7 then promises the peace of God, which passes all understanding, to keep believers' hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Notice what the passage actually promises. It promises God's peace, not an immediate rearrangement of every difficult circumstance according to the Christian's personal specifications.

Prayer is neither a religious performance designed to impress spectators nor a heavenly vending machine that distributes blessings whenever somebody inserts the correct combination of religious expressions. The born-again believer has access to God through Jesus Christ, depends upon the Holy Spirit, and is instructed to approach the Father with thanksgiving, requests, worship, intercession, and continuing faithfulness. This privilege was purchased at a price no human being could afford, yet Christians frequently neglect it as though they were doing God a favor whenever they decided to speak to Him. Some have replaced prayer with positive thinking. Others have buried it beneath lifeless repetition. Still others have developed the remarkable doctrine that enough faith will obligate God to finance their ambitions, eliminate every illness, and make their earthly circumstances permanently comfortable. Scripture teaches none of that foolishness. **Prayer does not place God under man's authority. It brings the believer before the throne of the God**

whose authority never changes. Discipleship requires learning that distinction before religious presumption begins masquerading as faith.

1. The Throne of Grace Is Open Because Jesus Christ Opened the Way

Hebrews 4:14–16 establishes the foundation upon which believers approach God. The passage declares that we have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, who has passed into the heavens. He is not a distant religious figure who merely understands the theory of human suffering. Hebrews 4:15 states that He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." The following verse commands, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The epistle's original Hebrew setting and its extensive treatment of priesthood must be respected. Christ's superiority to the Levitical priesthood is fundamental to the argument. Yet the access believers possess through their risen Saviour is unmistakable. The throne is called a throne of grace, not a counter where spiritual merchandise is purchased with sufficient religious effort. Our confidence rests upon the high priesthood and finished work of Jesus Christ, not our personal worthiness.

Ephesians 2:18 declares, "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The immediate passage concerns the reconciliation of believing Jews and Gentiles through Christ, establishing their access to the Father by the same Spirit. That statement destroys the notion that an additional human religious official must control the believer's approach to God. First Timothy 2:5 confirms, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." A saved person does not need to purchase access through ceremonies, obtain an appointment through a religious hierarchy, or persuade another sinner to act as an indispensable middleman. Jesus Christ is the mediator. His blood accomplished the reconciliation. His resurrection and continuing intercession establish the believer's confidence. Romans 8:34 declares that Christ is at the right hand of God and makes intercession for us. **The Christian who approaches the Father through Jesus Christ is not sneaking through heaven's back entrance. He is coming by the way God Himself provided.**

Now consider the absurdity of neglecting such access. Men will arrange appointments months in advance to meet political officials, wealthy businessmen, or some celebrity whose greatest accomplishment may be possessing an unusually impressive collection of admirers. They will boast afterward that they received fifteen minutes with somebody important. Meanwhile, the saved believer possesses the privilege of approaching the throne of grace through Jesus Christ and sometimes cannot be bothered to spend five minutes in prayer. This is not because God is inaccessible. It is because the Christian has allowed earthly concerns to become more important than spiritual fellowship. Hebrews

10:19–22 further establishes boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus. The believer's confidence is not arrogance, and boldness must never be mistaken for irreverence. We approach a holy God through the Saviour who purchased our access. A Christian who understands that privilege should neither approach casually nor remain unnecessarily silent. Grace has opened the door. Faith should take advantage of the invitation.

2. Pray Without Ceasing — A Continuing Walk, Not an Occasional Ceremony

First Thessalonians 5:17 contains one of the shortest commands in the New Testament: “Pray without ceasing.” The verse is brief enough for a child to memorize, yet substantial enough to expose the neglected prayer life of a mature Christian. Paul is addressing believers who had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, as described in 1 Thessalonians 1:9. His closing instructions include rejoicing, praying, giving thanks, proving all things, and abstaining from evil. Prayer belongs within the continuing responsibilities of the Christian life. The expression does not require a believer to remain physically kneeling twenty-four hours a day, refusing to eat, sleep, work, or fulfill family responsibilities. Scripture itself commands those other duties. Rather, the believer should maintain a continuing disposition of dependence upon God, returning regularly to prayer throughout ordinary life. Prayer is not a ceremonial event that requires stained-glass windows, special clothing, or a particular geographical location. A Christian can pray at home, while traveling, before beginning work, or when facing an unexpected decision.

The next verse states, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” Thanksgiving is not a decorative introduction attached to prayer so the request will sound more respectable. It is a biblical responsibility. The believer ought to remember the mercies already received rather than approaching God as though heaven has failed to provide anything useful until today's particular demand is satisfied. Salvation alone gives the Christian reason for thanksgiving that no earthly difficulty can erase. Ephesians 5:20 likewise commands believers to give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This does not require pretending that evil is righteous or suffering is pleasant. It requires recognizing God's character, grace, and faithfulness even when circumstances are difficult. The complaining Christian can sometimes produce a catalogue of grievances long enough to qualify as a multivolume publication while struggling to identify three blessings for which he ought to thank God.

A continuing life of prayer also demands sincerity rather than theatrical presentation. Matthew 6:5–8 records the Lord Jesus Christ warning against hypocritical public praying and vain repetitions during His earthly ministry. The setting belongs to His instruction concerning kingdom righteousness, and it must not be confused with Paul's later revelation

concerning the Church. Nevertheless, the condemnation of religious hypocrisy has a clear application. Prayer is not improved by multiplying impressive expressions while the heart remains indifferent. Nor does a man become spiritual merely because he can produce a lengthy prayer filled with elaborate vocabulary and carefully arranged religious phrases. Public prayer has a legitimate place, but it must not become a performance designed to earn admiration. God is not impressed by verbal gymnastics. **A short, sincere prayer from a dependent believer is worth more than twenty minutes of religious decoration offered principally for the benefit of the audience.** The Christian should cultivate regular prayer because he needs fellowship with God, not because he wishes to establish a reputation for extraordinary spirituality.

3. Supplication and Intercession — Bringing Real Needs Before a Real God

Philippians 4:6 distinguishes prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving while instructing believers to make their requests known unto God. Supplication involves presenting particular needs and petitions rather than speaking only in vague religious generalities. There is nothing unspiritual about asking God for help with genuine earthly necessities. Paul understood hunger, financial difficulty, physical weakness, imprisonment, and the demands of ministry. Scripture does not require believers to pretend they have no practical needs. The Christian may pray for wisdom, provision, protection, opportunities to serve, strength under temptation, and grace during suffering. The command to make requests known does not imply that God lacks information. Matthew 6:8 states that the Father knows what is needed before the request is made. Prayer is not a system for supplying heaven with missing intelligence. It is the appointed means by which the believer expresses dependence and brings his concerns before God. **God does not need the Christian's report to discover the situation. The Christian needs prayer because he is not sufficient to govern his own life independently of God.**

Intercession extends that concern beyond personal circumstances. First Timothy 2:1 commands that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men. Paul specifically mentions kings and those in authority, connecting such prayer with the desire that believers may lead quiet and peaceable lives in godliness and honesty. The instruction is not to worship political leaders, excuse their wickedness, or pretend their decisions are beyond biblical criticism. It is to pray concerning those whose authority affects the conditions under which people live and the gospel is proclaimed. Believers should likewise pray for missionaries, pastors, teachers, struggling Christians, families, persecuted brethren, and unbelievers who need salvation. Romans 10:1 records Paul's heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel, that they might be saved. Prayer for the lost should never be replaced by the assumption that merely disapproving of their conduct

fulfills our Christian duty. A man can denounce wickedness loudly while neglecting to pray that sinners might receive the gospel and be saved.

Colossians 4:2–4 provides a particularly revealing example of Paul's priorities. He commands believers to continue in prayer and watch with thanksgiving, then asks them to pray that God would open a door of utterance so that he might speak the mystery of Christ. Notice what the imprisoned apostle requests. He does not begin with a demand for a luxurious residence, a larger salary, or an easier assignment. He asks for an opportunity to proclaim the truth faithfully. His desire was that the gospel would advance despite the difficulties surrounding his ministry. This does not make requests for ordinary necessities illegitimate, but it exposes the shallow priorities often found in modern religious petitions. Some prayers sound suspiciously like shopping lists prepared by people who have confused Christianity with a private purchasing department. Paul was concerned about opportunities to preach Christ. The believer ought to examine whether his own requests reflect any comparable concern for the souls of men and the advancement of sound doctrine.

4. Praying According to God's Will — Faith Is Not a Device for Controlling Heaven

First John 5:14–15 establishes a necessary safeguard against religious presumption: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.” The words *according to his will* are not an insignificant qualification that may be erased whenever a preacher needs another impressive testimony for the offering appeal. They establish the proper relationship between the believer's requests and God's authority. Verse 15 continues by connecting confidence in God's hearing with the petitions desired of Him. Biblical confidence is not confidence that our wishes are inherently perfect. It is confidence in the God whose will is perfect. Prayer does not transform human desire into divine obligation. The Christian may ask boldly, but he must never confuse boldness with the authority to command God. The Lord remains sovereign whether the answer comes in the form anticipated by the believer or whether His purposes require something different.

Second Corinthians 12:7–10 provides one of the most decisive corrections to the claim that sufficient faith guarantees deliverance from every physical affliction. Paul describes a thorn in the flesh and states that he besought the Lord three times for its removal. The answer was, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul did not conclude that God had failed, that prayer was worthless, or that his faith had become defective because the thorn remained. He learned to glory in his infirmities so that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Here was an apostle who had experienced extraordinary divine revelation, performed signs associated with his apostleship, and

faithfully preached the gospel. Yet God did not grant the precise deliverance Paul requested. That ought to settle the claim that every unanswered request for healing proves unbelief. The Lord answered Paul's prayer by providing sufficient grace rather than removing the condition. **Sometimes the answer to prayer is not the removal of the burden, but the grace necessary to carry it faithfully.**

We must also rightly divide passages concerning prayer rather than collecting impressive promises and applying them indiscriminately. Matthew 21:22 and John 14:13–14 contain statements made by the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples within particular settings connected with His earthly ministry and the revelation of His authority. These passages deserve careful examination alongside the broader testimony of Scripture, not careless extraction for commercial religion. The apostolic signs recorded in Acts and the particular promises associated with Israel's prophetic program must not be converted into guarantees that every Christian will enjoy supernatural wealth, perfect health, or unrestricted control over circumstances. Romans 8:28 promises that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose; it does not promise that every event will feel pleasant or correspond to personal expectations. God is not obligated to rewrite His purposes because someone has discovered a verse and attached an ambitious interpretation to it. **Faith believes what God has actually promised. Presumption demands what God has never promised and then accuses Him of failure when He refuses to cooperate.**

5. The Holy Spirit Helps Our Infirmities — Prayer Is Not Dependent upon Perfect Words

Romans 8:26 declares, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” That statement should produce humility in every Christian who imagines he has acquired such extraordinary spiritual understanding that his requests are always perfectly aligned with God's purposes. Paul includes himself in the expression *we know not*. The passage concerns believers who possess the Spirit and await the redemption of their bodies amid the sufferings of this present time. Romans 8:23–25 speaks of groaning and waiting in hope, while verse 26 introduces the Spirit's assistance in our weakness. There are occasions when the believer understands that he needs God's help but does not possess complete knowledge concerning what ought to happen. The Christian sees a small portion of the circumstances. God knows the entire matter. Prayer therefore requires dependence rather than the arrogant assumption that our proposed solution is necessarily the best possible outcome.

The verse continues by saying that the Spirit makes intercession for us “with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Verse 27 explains that He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. This is not a command for Christians to manufacture

unintelligible sounds or a guarantee that emotional excitement constitutes superior prayer. The passage describes the Holy Spirit's intercessory work on behalf of believers who struggle with human weakness and incomplete understanding. Some religious performances have turned prayer into a contest to determine who can produce the most unusual noises while everybody else pretends the spectacle demonstrates spiritual maturity. Romans 8 is discussing something considerably more substantial. The Spirit helps the believer's infirmities and intercedes according to God's will. The Christian's inability to articulate every concern perfectly does not eliminate divine assistance. Our confidence rests in the Spirit's ministry, not the elegance of our vocabulary. **Heaven is not waiting for the believer to discover a secret phrase before the Holy Spirit can perform His work.**

This truth provides substantial encouragement during suffering without becoming sentimental religious nonsense. There are circumstances involving illness, bereavement, persecution, family difficulties, and overwhelming responsibilities when a believer may not know precisely what to request. One possible outcome appears desirable, yet the consequences remain beyond human knowledge. Romans 8 does not command the Christian to pretend that he possesses omniscience. It teaches that the Spirit helps our infirmities while God's purposes remain secure. The chapter also declares that nothing can separate the believer from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Prayer must be practiced within that assurance. A Christian does not lose his standing in Christ because he cannot explain every difficulty or formulate an impressive petition. Nor should he confuse emotional intensity with divine approval. The believer can approach God sincerely, acknowledging his limitations and trusting the intercession described in Scripture. This is not weakness disguised as spirituality. It is recognition that God's wisdom extends considerably beyond the narrow window through which human beings observe their circumstances.

6. Prayer Belongs in Spiritual Warfare — The Armour Is Not Complete Without It

Ephesians 6:10–18 describes the Christian's spiritual warfare and the necessity of putting on the whole armour of God. Paul identifies the conflict as something greater than ordinary human opposition, involving principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. He then describes the armour: truth, righteousness, the preparation of the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. But the passage does not conclude by telling the believer to admire his spiritual equipment. Verse 18 continues, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Prayer belongs alongside the armour because the Christian cannot wage

spiritual warfare in the strength of his own flesh. The word of God is indispensable, but knowledge of Scripture is not a substitute for dependence upon the God who gave it.

This exposes another peculiar feature of modern religious behavior. A man may spend countless hours investigating every supposed demonic conspiracy, discussing the devil's activities, and explaining extraordinary theories about spiritual darkness, yet devote almost no attention to ordinary biblical prayer. He possesses enough information about Satan to publish a geographical encyclopedia of hell but appears unfamiliar with the command to pray for all saints. Paul did not instruct the Ephesians to become fascinated with the enemy. He instructed them to stand in the Lord's strength, use the armour God provided, and persevere in prayer. Second Corinthians 10:3–5 likewise explains that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God. The Christian must resist deception, bring thoughts into obedience to Christ, and maintain spiritual vigilance. Yet spiritual warfare should never become an excuse for theatrical rituals, invented demon classifications, or claims of special authority unsupported by Scripture. **The devil does not need a Christian to worship him if he can keep that Christian sufficiently distracted from the word of God and prayer.**

Paul's instruction also emphasizes praying for other believers. The warfare is not confined to one individual's private difficulties. Missionaries encounter opposition. Pastors face pressure to compromise doctrine. Families confront temptation and discouragement. Young believers require strengthening in the faith. Christians experiencing persecution need courage, wisdom, and perseverance. Ephesians 6:19–20 records Paul's request that utterance might be given him to make known the mystery of the gospel boldly. Again, his concern centers upon faithful proclamation rather than personal comfort. Prayer should accompany Christian service, not merely appear after human plans have collapsed. The teacher who prepares a Bible lesson ought to pray. The believer who witnesses to an unbeliever ought to pray. The church supporting missionary labor ought to pray. The Christian confronting temptation ought to pray before surrendering rather than afterward merely regretting the damage. A soldier who refuses to maintain communication while operating in hostile territory has created an unnecessary danger. The Christian who neglects prayer while claiming to engage in spiritual warfare has done something remarkably similar.

7. Sin, Confession, and Fellowship — God Is Not Obligated to Bless Rebellion

Prayer cannot be separated from the believer's conduct. Psalm 66:18 declares, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” The psalm belongs to Israel's worship and testimony concerning God's dealings, but its warning against cherishing sin has an unmistakable moral application. First John 1:9 instructs believers concerning confession:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The Christian must distinguish the judicial forgiveness associated with justification from the restoration of practical fellowship when sin is confessed. Confession does not purchase salvation a second time. The believer does not become unborn and then regenerated repeatedly whenever he fails. Nevertheless, sin must not be excused merely because salvation is secure. A Christian cannot deliberately nourish bitterness, dishonesty, uncleanness, or rebellion while treating prayer as a device to protect his private interests from the consequences of disobedience.

James 5:16 commands, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James addresses the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and the surrounding passage includes particular instructions concerning sickness, elders, anointing with oil, and prayer. These matters must be examined in their proper historical and doctrinal context. We should not seize the healing language as an unconditional guarantee that every sickness in the present Church Age must disappear whenever a sufficiently determined believer prays. Neither should confession be twisted into a demand that Christians publicly broadcast every private failure before an audience. The passage establishes the seriousness of righteousness, prayer, and responsibility toward one another. There are faults requiring confession, injuries requiring reconciliation, and sins that ought to be abandoned rather than defended. The Christian who has wronged another person should not imagine that a few impressive prayers erase his responsibility to deal honestly with the wrong.

We must also avoid the opposite error of assuming that every unanswered prayer proves hidden sin. Job's suffering exposes the danger of making accusations based upon incomplete knowledge. Paul's thorn in the flesh demonstrates that serious affliction can remain despite earnest prayer. Timothy's frequent infirmities in 1 Timothy 5:23 further prevent simplistic claims that faithful believers are always physically healthy. There may be occasions when disobedience hinders prayer, but no Christian possesses authority to declare that every illness, financial loss, or delayed answer is evidence of secret wickedness. The proper response is to examine oneself honestly before Scripture, confess known sin, and continue trusting the Lord. God is not manipulated by religious performance, and the believer is not qualified to interpret every difficult circumstance as a direct verdict upon somebody else's spiritual condition. **Prayer is not a license to ignore righteousness, but neither is suffering a certificate proving that a Christian has failed. The word of God must judge both conclusions.**

Conclusion

The biblical life of prayer is far removed from the shallow religious arrangements that have become popular in modern Christianity. Philippians 4 commands believers to bring their requests before God with thanksgiving and promises the peace of God through Jesus Christ. First Thessalonians 5 directs them to pray without ceasing. Hebrews 4 establishes their access to the throne of grace through their great high priest. Romans 8 reveals the intercessory ministry of the Holy Spirit amid human weakness. Ephesians 6 places persevering prayer alongside the whole armour of God, while Colossians 4 connects prayer with opportunities to proclaim the gospel. First John 5 establishes the importance of praying according to God's will. These passages do not describe a religious system designed to make the believer wealthy, remove every inconvenience, or guarantee that earthly circumstances will always correspond to personal desires. They reveal a continuing responsibility and privilege grounded in the believer's relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Prayer belongs to discipleship because the Christian was never intended to walk independently of the Lord who saved him.

The practical application reaches into ordinary life. A Christian should pray with thanksgiving when circumstances are favorable and continue praying when difficulties appear. He should bring genuine needs before the Father without pretending that God is ignorant of them. He should pray for the salvation of sinners, the strengthening of believers, the faithfulness of missionaries, the soundness of churches, and the advancement of the gospel. He should confess sin rather than defend it, seek wisdom rather than rely entirely upon personal judgment, and remember that divine answers must be understood according to God's will rather than human demands. He should resist the religious superstition that measures prayer by vocabulary, volume, emotional excitement, or the length of the performance. There is a place for extended prayer, and there is a place for brief petitions offered throughout the day. Neither form possesses automatic spiritual superiority. The central issue is whether the believer is genuinely depending upon God in accordance with His word. **A prayer life is not established by occasionally mentioning heaven when earth becomes uncomfortable. It is established through continuing fellowship with the Father who has granted us access through His Son.**

So the next time a burden appears, do not wait until every earthly resource has failed before approaching the throne of grace. And when that burden passes, do not place prayer back inside the cabinet until another emergency arrives. The God who receives the believer's requests during suffering is the same God who deserves thanksgiving during prosperity. The Saviour who purchased access to the Father has not limited that privilege to hospital rooms, funeral services, financial disasters, and desperate midnight conversations. The Christian has been instructed to pray always, continue in prayer, watch with thanksgiving, and make his requests known unto God. There will be matters he cannot

understand, circumstances he cannot control, and answers that do not arrive in the form he anticipated. Nevertheless, the Scriptures have given him sufficient reason to remain faithful in prayer. **The believer who neglects prayer may still possess eternal life, but he is attempting to live the Christian life while disregarding one of the greatest privileges purchased by his Saviour. Prayer is not an emergency button mounted on the wall of the Christian life. It is part of the daily walk itself. God has opened the throne of grace through Jesus Christ. The question is not whether heaven is accessible. The question is why so many of God's children behave as though they have nothing to say to their Father until everything catches fire.**

4 of 10: Discipleship — The Local Church Is Not a Spectator Sport

Key Passage: Acts 2:41–42 (KJV)

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Introduction

There is something fundamentally wrong with modern Christianity when the local church begins resembling a theatrical production more than an assembly of blood-bought believers gathered around the word of God. The lights are adjusted, the music is rehearsed, the advertising department has selected its slogans, and the man behind the pulpit has been instructed to keep everything sufficiently entertaining that nobody becomes uncomfortable. The congregation arrives, watches the performance, contributes financially, and leaves with the satisfaction of having attended another religious event. Somewhere along the way, the Bible has been reduced to a convenient source of inspirational quotations, the pulpit has become a stage, and the saints have become customers. If the Apostle Paul walked into some modern religious establishments, he might have difficulty determining whether he had entered a church or purchased admission to an unusually expensive variety show. The New Testament never presented the local assembly as a spiritual entertainment company. It presented believers gathered for doctrine, fellowship, prayer, worship, mutual edification, and the work of Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:41–42 provides an unmistakable starting point. Following Peter's preaching at Pentecost, those who gladly received his word were baptized, and approximately three thousand souls were added. The passage then identifies four continuing activities: the

apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. Notice what appears first. Doctrine. Not entertainment, impressive architecture, fundraising schemes, or motivational speeches intended to make everybody feel successful. These early believers continued steadfastly in the teaching delivered through the apostles. Their fellowship was built upon revealed truth, and their common life included spiritual instruction, practical concern, and prayer. Acts 2 occupies a significant historical position in the transition from Israel's prophetic setting into the development of the New Testament Church. Peter was addressing Jews in Jerusalem, and the unfolding revelation of the Church Age must be recognized when applying the passage. Nevertheless, the account establishes principles that remain essential. A biblical assembly is not measured by the sophistication of its facilities but by its faithfulness to the truth and the spiritual responsibilities entrusted to its members.

Discipleship requires the saved man to understand that he was not redeemed merely to become an independent religious consumer who collects sermons, criticizes everybody else's shortcomings, and refuses responsibility for anyone beyond himself. Salvation places the believer into Christ's spiritual body, and the New Testament repeatedly demonstrates that believers gathered in identifiable local assemblies where they received instruction, exercised their gifts, supported ministry, observed ordinances, and cared for one another. Some Christians have been badly injured by corrupt religious organizations, and Scripture never commands submission to false doctrine or abusive leadership. Others face illness, distance, persecution, or circumstances that make ordinary gatherings difficult. Those realities deserve understanding. But there remains a vast difference between genuine limitations and a deliberate refusal to have anything to do with God's people. **The Christian who wants the blessings of the body while rejecting every responsibility to the body has confused membership with spectatorship. Christ did not save His people to turn them into an audience. He saved them to become faithful servants.**

1. The First Assemblies Continued in Doctrine, Not Entertainment

Acts 2:42 states that the believers “continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The word *stedfastly* deserves attention because it describes continuing commitment rather than temporary excitement. These believers did not merely respond emotionally to Peter's preaching and disappear once the remarkable events surrounding Pentecost had concluded. They remained connected to the teaching and fellowship of the growing assembly. Acts 2:46 describes their continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house. The historical setting must be remembered: these were Jewish believers in Jerusalem during a period of

transition, before the full revelation concerning the mystery of the Church had been committed to Paul. Their continued connection with the temple must not be transformed into a requirement that Christians return to the Mosaic religious system. Nevertheless, their dedication to fellowship and instruction establishes a powerful contrast with the casual, consumer-driven religion that frequently passes for church participation today.

Acts 2:44–45 also describes believers having things common and distributing possessions according to individual needs. This was a remarkable expression of generosity within the circumstances of the Jerusalem assembly. It does not establish compulsory economic collectivism as a universal requirement for every Christian congregation. Acts 5:4 shows that Peter recognized the owner's authority over his property before it was sold. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira concerned their deception, not a failure to surrender private ownership under some permanent church-operated economic arrangement. Rightly dividing the passage preserves the historical account without inventing commandments God never issued. The legitimate application is that Christians should care about the material needs of their brethren rather than merely offering impressive religious speeches while ignoring actual suffering. Fellowship involves more than shaking hands before the opening hymn. It includes practical concern, generosity, encouragement, and responsibility. A congregation that can afford elaborate decorations but cannot find compassion for a struggling family might profit from another reading of Acts.

The progression throughout Acts demonstrates that local assemblies became centers of preaching, teaching, missionary labor, and organized fellowship. Acts 11 describes the development of the congregation at Antioch, where Barnabas and Saul assembled with the church and taught many people. Acts 13 records the Holy Ghost separating Barnabas and Saul for missionary work in connection with that assembly. Acts 14:23 refers to elders ordained in churches, while Acts 20 records Paul's instructions to the elders of Ephesus. These congregations were not identical in size, resources, location, or circumstances, but their existence was recognizable. They had believers, teaching, responsibilities, and leadership. The New Testament church was never defined by the possession of a particular style of building. Early Christians could assemble in homes, and Romans 16:5 mentions a church meeting in a house. **The church does not become biblical because the building has stained-glass windows, and it does not become unbiblical because the congregation meets around a kitchen table. The question is whether God's word governs what takes place when His people assemble.**

2. The Body of Christ and the Local Assembly Must Not Be Confused

First Corinthians 12:12–13 establishes an essential doctrinal distinction. Paul compares the body of Christ to a physical body possessing many members, then declares, “For by

one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." This spiritual baptism identifies the believer with the body of Christ. It is not the same thing as water baptism, nor does it depend upon joining a particular religious organization. The Church, which is Christ's body, includes saved believers united to Him by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:22–23 identifies the Church as His body, while Ephesians 2:16 describes the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in one body by the cross. This is the mystery revealed in connection with the present dispensation, and it must not be confused with Israel's national covenant identity. The saved Jew and saved Gentile possess a spiritual unity in Jesus Christ that neither the Mosaic law nor religious membership records could manufacture.

Yet the spiritual body of Christ must also be distinguished from individual local congregations. Philippians 1:1 addresses "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." These were identifiable believers gathered within a particular geographical setting, possessing recognized responsibilities and officers. First Corinthians was written to the church of God at Corinth, where Paul addressed actual disputes, immoral conduct, doctrinal confusion, disorderly gatherings, and misuse of spiritual gifts. Galatians 1:2 refers to the churches of Galatia, while Romans 16 identifies believers and assemblies connected with Paul's ministry. A person enters the spiritual body of Christ through salvation, not by signing a membership card. Participation in a local assembly, however, involves recognizable fellowship and practical responsibility among believers. Those two realities should never be collapsed into one another. A religious organization cannot save a sinner by enrolling him, and a saved man does not need a denominational certificate to establish his position in Christ.

This distinction exposes two serious errors. The first belongs to religious institutions that claim to possess exclusive authority over entrance into the family of God. Such systems attempt to place organizational membership, prescribed ceremonies, or submission to a hierarchy where Scripture places faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8–9 leaves no room for that arrangement. The second error belongs to the believer who argues that because he belongs to the universal spiritual body, local fellowship is unnecessary. That is rather like a man announcing that because he belongs to the human race, he has no responsibility toward his own household. The argument sounds impressive until ordinary life requires somebody to cook supper, repair the roof, and care for the children. The spiritual body of Christ is a glorious reality, but New Testament believers carried out many of their practical responsibilities through actual assemblies. **Being spiritually joined to Christ does not make Christian fellowship unnecessary. It establishes a relationship that ought to produce genuine concern for Christ's people.**

3. Pastors, Teachers, and Deacons Are Servants of Scripture, Not Religious Celebrities

Ephesians 4:11–12 explains that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The purpose is spiritual maturity and effective service, not the manufacture of religious celebrities. Apostles and prophets occupy a foundational place in the establishment and revelation of the New Testament Church, as Ephesians 2:20 explains. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers serve through the proclamation and instruction of God's word. Their responsibilities cannot be reduced to managing events, supervising financial campaigns, or creating an attractive public image. The pastor who neglects Scripture while specializing in religious entertainment has misunderstood the central responsibility of his office. Second Timothy 4:2 commands, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Notice that Paul includes reproof and rebuke. Evidently the Holy Ghost never received the modern memorandum explaining that preaching must avoid anything capable of offending human pride.

First Timothy 3:1–13 establishes qualifications for bishops and deacons, and Titus 1:5–9 provides further instruction concerning elders. These qualifications address character, conduct, family responsibilities, doctrinal faithfulness, and the ability to exercise spiritual oversight properly. A bishop must be apt to teach, while Titus 1:9 requires holding fast the faithful word so that he may exhort by sound doctrine and convince gainsayers. Deacons likewise must demonstrate seriousness, honesty, and faithfulness. These offices were not created as honorary titles to reward wealthy donors, influential families, or men who have mastered the art of religious politics. Nor does possessing an official title automatically make someone spiritually qualified. The pastoral office is not an opportunity to construct a personal kingdom financed by the congregation. First Peter 5:2–3 warns elders against serving for filthy lucre and becoming lords over God's heritage. Biblical leadership operates under Christ's authority and remains accountable to His word.

The opposite error is equally dangerous: treating the pastor as either an untouchable ruler or an employee whose responsibility is to satisfy every personal preference within the congregation. Hebrews 13:17 speaks of spiritual oversight and accountability, while 1 Timothy 5:19–20 addresses accusations and the rebuke of sinning elders. These instructions require careful application rather than serving as weapons for abusive leaders or rebellious members. Faithful leaders deserve respect, prayer, cooperation, and appropriate material support, as 1 Timothy 5:17–18 indicates. But respect does not require surrendering biblical discernment. Acts 17:11 commends those who searched the Scriptures to examine what was preached. If the Apostle Paul's teaching could be

examined against Scripture, a modern pastor should survive the experience without requiring emergency assistance. **The pastor is not the head of the Church. Jesus Christ is. The pastor is a servant entrusted with responsibilities under the authority of God's word, and the congregation must never confuse the servant with the Master.**

4. Forsaking the Assembly Is Not the Same as Rejecting a Religious Corporation

Hebrews 10:24–25 commands, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." The epistle addresses Hebrews within a context containing important warnings, covenant distinctions, and prophetic expectations that must not be carelessly transferred into unrelated Church Age doctrines. Nevertheless, the instruction concerning mutual encouragement and assembling provides a legitimate and substantial application to Christian fellowship. Notice the purpose of gathering. Believers are to consider one another, encourage love and good works, and exhort one another. The passage does not present attendance as a method of purchasing eternal life, nor does it establish that sitting inside a building automatically produces maturity. Assembly is connected with mutual spiritual responsibility. Christians need instruction, encouragement, correction, and opportunities to serve. A believer cannot perform every responsibility described in the New Testament while deliberately refusing meaningful contact with other believers.

At the same time, there is nothing biblical about using church attendance as a religious club with which to beat people into organizational submission. A person caring for a sick family member, enduring physical limitations, living under persecution, or struggling to locate a sound assembly is not necessarily rebelling against God. Nor should anyone remain beneath destructive false doctrine merely to maintain an impressive attendance record. Galatians 1:8–9 makes the seriousness of another gospel unmistakable, and Romans 16:17 instructs believers to mark and avoid those causing divisions and offences contrary to learned doctrine. Sound teaching matters more than institutional loyalty. The local church is not granted permission to corrupt the gospel because the congregation meets three times a week. A building full of people singing enthusiastically while receiving another gospel has not become spiritually healthy through the size of the crowd. **Attendance at a corrupt assembly does not become obedience merely because someone has hung a religious sign above the entrance.**

But legitimate concerns about false doctrine must not become a convenient excuse for permanent isolation. Some Christians have developed the remarkable ability to identify imperfections in every congregation while remaining blind to their own unwillingness to serve. They demand flawless leadership, flawless teaching, flawless organization, and

flawless fellowship, apparently forgetting that the New Testament churches themselves contained sinners who required correction. Corinth had divisions and serious misconduct. Galatia faced doctrinal corruption. Philippi required instruction concerning unity. The existence of problems does not automatically justify abandoning every relationship with believers. The biblical response includes discerning truth, correcting error where appropriate, and seeking sound fellowship. This may take place within a traditional assembly, a smaller congregation, or a faithful gathering in a home. Online instruction may provide valuable assistance, especially where physical gathering is difficult, but merely consuming religious material is not identical to shared responsibility. **The Christian who cannot find a perfect church has made an accurate observation about human imperfection. The Christian who therefore refuses all fellowship has reached a conclusion Scripture never authorized.**

5. Every Member Has a Function — The Pew Was Never Intended to Become a Permanent Parking Space

First Corinthians 12:14 declares, "For the body is not one member, but many." Paul develops the illustration by comparing the functions of the foot, hand, ear, eye, and other members of the physical body. Each contributes something necessary, and none possesses authority to declare another member worthless merely because its function differs. Verse 18 states, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." The immediate context concerns spiritual gifts and the unity of the body of Christ, including particular manifestations associated with the apostolic period. We must understand that setting without assuming every historical manifestation must operate identically in every present-day congregation. The fundamental principle remains powerful: God did not establish His people as a collection of isolated personalities competing for recognition. Different members possess different abilities and responsibilities, and their service should contribute to the edification of the whole.

Ephesians 4:15–16 describes believers growing up into Christ, the head, with the body joined and compacted together as every part makes its contribution. The passage identifies a coordinated work producing increase and edification in love. That does not mean every Christian must preach publicly, lead music, teach a classroom, or serve in an official position. The New Testament recognizes a variety of legitimate forms of service. Some believers teach Scripture. Others assist families, support missionaries, encourage struggling saints, prepare materials, perform necessary practical work, or witness faithfully within their circumstances. Romans 12:4–8 emphasizes different functions and the importance of exercising responsibilities diligently and sincerely. Service should correspond to what God has entrusted to the believer, not to his appetite for public

recognition. A congregation cannot function properly if everybody demands the microphone while nobody is willing to carry the chairs. **The hand does not become useless because it cannot see, and the eye does not become superior because it happens to occupy a more noticeable position.**

First Corinthians 12:25–26 further declares that members should have the same care one for another, suffering together when one suffers and rejoicing together when one is honored. That is rather different from religious spectatorship, where members appear only when the scheduled performance promises something personally enjoyable. Christian fellowship includes inconvenient responsibilities. Sometimes a family needs practical assistance. Sometimes an elderly believer needs encouragement. Sometimes a missionary requires financial support. Sometimes a younger Christian needs patient instruction rather than another lecture about everything he has failed to understand. Galatians 6:2 commands believers to bear one another's burdens, while verse 5 reminds each person of his own responsibility. These statements complement rather than contradict each other. We have individual duties, and we also have opportunities to assist others. The Christian should not become a perpetual consumer who expects the congregation to meet every personal need while offering nothing in return. **The local assembly is not a restaurant where the saints inspect the menu, complain about the service, and leave someone else to wash the dishes. It is a fellowship of servants under one Lord.**

6. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Church Discipline Require Biblical Order

The New Testament identifies ordinances and responsibilities that belong within the life of the local assembly. Water baptism follows personal faith and serves as a public testimony identifying the believer with the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 8:36–38 records the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism, while Acts 18:8 describes Corinthians who heard, believed, and were baptized. The order is important. Baptism is not the finished work of Christ, and water cannot accomplish the spiritual regeneration that comes through faith in Him. Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 1:17, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” That distinction would be impossible if water baptism constituted the essential saving ingredient of the gospel. The local church must therefore preserve baptism as an act of obedience rather than converting it into a religious payment for eternal life. A sinner is not made righteous before God by entering a pool, and a saved believer does not become unsaved because a particular religious institution has not placed his name upon its baptismal records.

The Lord's Supper likewise requires careful biblical instruction. First Corinthians 11:23–26 records Paul's teaching concerning the bread and cup in remembrance of the Lord's death.

The passage declares that believers show the Lord's death till He comes. The supper directs attention to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, not to a renewed offering of His body or a ceremony that repeatedly accomplishes redemption. Hebrews 10:10–14 establishes the sufficiency and finality of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. The Corinthians had introduced serious disorder into their gatherings, and Paul rebuked their selfishness, irreverence, and failure to discern the solemn nature of the observance. The Lord's Supper was not designed as a fashionable religious ceremony to decorate the church calendar. It calls believers to remember the crucified Saviour and examine themselves honestly. First Corinthians 11:28 instructs, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” Biblical remembrance should produce reverence rather than superstition.

Church discipline is another responsibility frequently neglected because modern religious institutions are terrified of losing customers. First Corinthians 5 addresses open immorality within the Corinthian assembly and commands decisive action. Paul's concern was not organizational embarrassment but the seriousness of tolerated sin among those professing Christ. Second Corinthians 2:6–8 also demonstrates the importance of forgiveness and restoration when appropriate correction has produced repentance. Discipline is not permission for church leaders to humiliate people, exercise private revenge, or invent offenses beyond Scripture. Neither does it allow congregations to tolerate destructive conduct indefinitely because confronting sin might affect attendance. Matthew 18:15–17 provides instructions concerning offenses within its own historical setting, and its principles require honest, careful application rather than institutional abuse. A biblical assembly must combine doctrinal fidelity, holiness, justice, patience, and mercy. **A church that refuses all correction eventually becomes a refuge for disorder, while a church that refuses all restoration turns discipline into punishment without a biblical purpose. Truth must govern both.**

7. A Bible-Believing Assembly Must Be Measured by Truth, Not Religious Advertising

Second Timothy 4:3–4 warns that a time will come when people “will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” That warning ought to be posted above the entrance of every religious organization that has exchanged biblical preaching for uninterrupted entertainment. The appetite for agreeable messages creates demand for teachers willing to satisfy it. If people prefer flattering speeches to correction, they will eventually find someone capable of supplying them. A congregation may possess expensive equipment, impressive facilities, polished musicians, and carefully developed publicity while remaining doctrinally impoverished. None of those resources is inherently sinful, but none establishes biblical faithfulness. The

test is whether the Scriptures are preached accurately, the gospel is preserved, Christ is exalted, and believers are taught to obey sound doctrine. A church can have a professional sound system and still be spiritually tone-deaf. The amplification may be excellent while the message is entirely wrong.

A sound assembly must also distinguish genuine pastoral authority from manipulation and religious commerce. Second Corinthians 2:17 warns against those who corrupt the word of God, while 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 exposes false apostles and deceitful workers. These warnings demonstrate that religious appearance alone cannot establish spiritual legitimacy. Financial exploitation, manufactured spiritual experiences, false promises of guaranteed prosperity, and authoritarian leadership have no rightful place in biblical ministry. Giving should be taught according to the instructions addressed to believers under grace, including the willing and cheerful generosity of 2 Corinthians 9:6–7. The offering plate is not an instrument through which a preacher sells divine favor. Nor does a pastor become the owner of the congregation because he occupies the pulpit. Financial transparency, honest stewardship, responsible leadership, and doctrinal accountability are appropriate concerns. **When a preacher treats God's people as customers and the Scriptures as merchandise, he has left the pattern of biblical ministry and entered a business arrangement wearing religious clothing.**

Finally, the responsibility to identify sound fellowship belongs to the believer himself. Acts 17:11 commends those who examined teaching against Scripture, and 1 Thessalonians 5:21 commands, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” These instructions do not require Christians to develop a rebellious spirit that rejects every form of leadership. They require spiritual discernment. Examine the gospel being preached. Examine the treatment of Scripture. Examine the leadership's conduct and qualifications. Determine whether the congregation encourages genuine Christian growth or merely protects its institutional reputation. Consider whether believers are being equipped to serve or trained to become permanently dependent upon a personality. Where sound fellowship exists, contribute faithfully rather than remaining a professional critic. Where serious false doctrine dominates, refuse to sacrifice biblical conviction for organizational convenience. And where ordinary circumstances prevent involvement in a larger congregation, remember that the New Testament does not require impressive architecture before believers can gather around the word of God. **The strength of a church is not determined by the size of its building, the wealth of its treasury, or the celebrity of its pastor. It is measured by faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His written word.**

Conclusion

The local church is not an optional entertainment department attached to Christianity. The New Testament presents identifiable assemblies in which believers received doctrinal instruction, prayed, worshipped, exercised their abilities, supported missionary labor, cared for one another, and maintained accountability under the authority of Jesus Christ. Acts 2 establishes the early pattern of continuing in apostolic doctrine and fellowship. First Corinthians 12 reveals the necessity of different members functioning together within Christ's body. Ephesians 4 explains that spiritual leadership and instruction are intended to equip believers for ministry and maturity. Hebrews 10 emphasizes assembling and encouraging one another, while the pastoral epistles establish qualifications and responsibilities for recognized leaders. These passages must be examined in their proper settings, preserving the distinction between the universal spiritual body of Christ and local assemblies of believers. Yet their combined instruction leaves no room for the claim that Christian fellowship is merely a religious hobby for people with sufficiently convenient schedules. Discipleship involves learning to live faithfully among God's people.

At the same time, the local church must never be elevated into a substitute saviour. Salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not by church membership, baptism, financial contributions, attendance records, or submission to a religious hierarchy. A Christian's eternal security rests upon Christ's finished work, not the institutional stability of a congregation. Religious organizations can become corrupt, leaders can depart from sound doctrine, and assemblies can deteriorate into arrangements that bear little resemblance to biblical fellowship. The believer must retain his responsibility to examine everything according to Scripture. But rejecting corruption is not the same thing as rejecting the biblical responsibilities of Christian community. There are faithful congregations serving in humble circumstances, small assemblies meeting in homes, and believers laboring without recognition or elaborate facilities. Their work may never receive public applause, but heaven does not calculate faithfulness according to the standards of religious advertising. The question is whether the truth is being taught and whether the people are genuinely seeking to walk according to it.

So the Christian should approach fellowship with a different question than the one commonly asked in the religious marketplace. Instead of demanding to know what a congregation can provide in exchange for attendance, ask how the word of God is being handled and where faithful service is needed. Instead of measuring the success of a gathering by the excitement of the performance, examine whether biblical understanding, obedience, prayer, mutual concern, and gospel witness are being strengthened. Respect faithful leadership without worshipping personalities. Recognize spiritual responsibilities without surrendering the authority of Scripture. Support sound ministry, care for the brethren, encourage the weak, correct error where Scripture requires it, and refuse the

temptation to become a permanent religious spectator. The Lord did not appoint every believer to occupy the same position or perform the same work, but He has called His people to serve faithfully. **A church is not a theater, the pastor is not the star of the production, and the congregation is not a paying audience. Jesus Christ is the Head, the Scriptures are the authority, and the saved are called to function as members of His body. A pew may provide a place to sit, but it was never intended to become the final destination of Christian discipleship. The believer who has received eternal life should not spend the remainder of his earthly journey merely watching somebody else serve the Lord.**

5 of 10: Discipleship — Come Out from Among Them: Separation Without Self-Righteousness

Key Passage: 2 Corinthians 6:17 (KJV)

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,”

Introduction

There is something fundamentally dishonest about a Christian who claims to have been delivered from this present evil world while spending the greater portion of his waking hours attempting to resemble it. He wants the world's entertainment, the world's approval, the world's appetites, the world's ambitions, and the world's standards of acceptable conduct, but he also wants everybody to recognize him as a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. He has apparently concluded that the Christian life consists of dragging the world into the church, sprinkling a few religious expressions over it, and declaring the entire arrangement sanctified. The Bible has a considerably different message. In 2 Corinthians 6:17, the Apostle Paul writes, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.” That is not a suggestion from an unusually strict preacher who dislikes modern conveniences. It is an apostolic command grounded in the holiness of God. The believer has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and his conduct ought to reflect the One who redeemed him. **Salvation removes the sinner from condemnation; discipleship teaches the saved man to stop making himself comfortable with the very corruption from which he was delivered.**

But before somebody begins measuring everybody's spirituality by clothing styles, personal preferences, and the length of his private list of forbidden activities, we had better establish

another equally important truth. Biblical separation is not salvation by works wearing a respectable suit. A sinner is justified by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, not by successfully separating himself from every questionable association, abandoning every worldly habit, or demonstrating sufficient personal holiness to satisfy the local religious inspection committee. Ephesians 2:8–9 remains true regardless of how uncomfortable it makes the legalist: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Separation does not purchase redemption. Holiness does not complete Calvary. Good works do not contribute the missing portion of an unfinished sacrifice. Yet verse 10 declares that believers are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The saved man has responsibilities precisely because he already belongs to Christ. **Good works are not the admission price for eternal life; they are part of the conduct appropriate to those who possess it.**

We must therefore confront two opposing errors that have produced enormous confusion throughout Christianity. On one side stands the worldly believer who labels every biblical warning *legalism*, as though the Holy Ghost committed an offense by instructing Christians to live soberly, righteously, and godly. On the other side stands the self-righteous religionist who has confused personal separation with personal superiority and apparently believes that God keeps an additional book in heaven recording everybody's compliance with his favorite household regulations. Neither man has properly understood the Scriptures. The first wants grace without godliness. The second wants godliness without grace. One excuses the flesh; the other decorates it with religious achievements. Biblical discipleship rejects both counterfeits. Romans 12, 2 Corinthians 6–7, Ephesians 4–5, Colossians 3, Titus 2, and 1 John 2 present a life of separation grounded in God's mercy, governed by His word, and directed toward holiness. The objective is not to manufacture a religious appearance while remaining inwardly corrupt. It is to walk consistently with the Saviour who purchased us.

1. Present Your Bodies a Living Sacrifice — Holiness Begins with the Mercies of God

Romans 12:1 begins with a word that ought to prevent the entire doctrine of separation from becoming another system of religious bondage: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God.” Paul addresses brethren, not lost sinners attempting to earn justification. The preceding eleven chapters have established the guilt of mankind, the righteousness of God, justification by faith, the believer's position in Christ, the conflict with sin, the security of salvation, and God's continuing purposes concerning Israel. Having established those doctrinal foundations, Paul appeals to believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God. Notice the order. Mercy precedes sacrifice. Salvation precedes service. The believer does not present his body to persuade

God to justify him. He presents it because God has already shown him mercy. Romans 12:1 calls this “your reasonable service.” There is nothing unreasonable about a redeemed sinner acknowledging that his life belongs to the One who redeemed him. What is unreasonable is demanding the benefits of Calvary while insisting that Christ must never interfere with personal conduct.

The expression “a living sacrifice” also exposes the difference between genuine dedication and occasional religious excitement. Under the Mosaic economy, sacrifices were brought to the altar according to the requirements given to Israel. Paul is not reinstituting those offerings for the Church. He is using sacrificial language to describe the believer's present responsibility to God. The Christian remains physically alive while presenting himself for the Lord's service. That includes his speech, conduct, relationships, employment, decisions, habits, and use of time. A man cannot honestly present his body to God on Sunday morning and reclaim exclusive ownership of it on Monday afternoon because temptation has offered him something attractive. First Corinthians 6:19–20 reminds believers that they are bought with a price and must therefore glorify God in their body and spirit. The purchase has already occurred. The responsibility follows. **The body purchased by Christ was not redeemed so the old nature could continue operating it as private property.**

Romans 12:2 continues, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The command concerns a continuing contrast between worldly conformity and spiritual transformation. The world possesses its own judgments concerning success, pleasure, morality, reputation, ambition, and acceptable conduct. A Christian who permits those judgments to govern his thinking will eventually begin resembling the very system Scripture warns him against. Renewing the mind requires sustained attention to God's word, sound doctrine, and obedience to revealed truth. It is not accomplished by attending one emotional meeting, making an impressive declaration of dedication, and returning immediately to the same habits. Paul connects transformation with proving the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. That requires discernment developed through Scripture. The believer must learn to distinguish what God approves from what society celebrates. A Christian who allows the world to write his convictions should not be astonished when his convictions begin looking suspiciously like the world's advertising.

2. Come Out from Among Them — Separation from Idolatry and Spiritual Compromise

Second Corinthians 6:14 declares, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” Paul then develops a series of deliberate contrasts: righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, belief and unbelief, and the temple of God and idols.

These contrasts establish the subject of the passage. The issue is not that Christians must refuse every ordinary interaction with an unbeliever. It concerns incompatible spiritual partnerships that require the believer to compromise his allegiance to Christ. Corinth was a city immersed in idolatry and moral corruption, and the congregation had already demonstrated serious difficulty distinguishing Christian liberty from participation in sinful practices. Paul reminds these believers that they are the temple of the living God. Their identity requires separation from arrangements that unite the worship of God with the worship of idols. The command is serious because spiritual fellowship cannot be manufactured between fundamentally contradictory allegiances. **You cannot yoke righteousness and unrighteousness together and expect the arrangement to plow a straight furrow.**

The passage continues with the command to come out, be separate, and touch not the unclean thing. Paul draws upon Old Testament language concerning God's people and His presence among them, applying the principles of holiness to believers in Christ. The historical promises originally addressed to Israel must be understood in their own covenant settings, but Paul himself employs their language to establish the seriousness of separation within the Corinthian assembly. Second Corinthians 7:1 completes the instruction: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Notice that holiness extends beyond visible behavior. The flesh and spirit are both mentioned. A man may avoid certain outward practices while cherishing bitterness, pride, covetousness, or unbelief within. God has not commanded merely that the Christian appear respectable before other church members. Separation includes rejecting inward corruption that may never become visible to the congregation.

Yet separation must not become an excuse for abandoning the very people Christians are supposed to reach with the gospel. First Corinthians 5:9–13 carefully distinguishes avoiding certain professing brethren engaged in open wickedness from attempting to withdraw completely from unbelievers in the world. Paul explains that avoiding all such people outside the church would require believers to go out of the world. That is hardly the Great Commission. Likewise, 1 Corinthians 7:12–16 addresses believers married to unbelieving spouses and does not command the Christian to abandon a willing spouse simply because conversion has produced a difference in faith. These passages protect us from turning separation into religious isolation. The believer can work beside unbelievers, treat them honestly, show compassion, and proclaim the gospel without participating in their sins. **Biblical separation is not permission to build a monastery, lock the doors, and congratulate yourself for having avoided the sinners Christ commanded His people to reach.**

3. Be Not Conformed — The World Wants Your Mind Before It Claims Your Conduct

First John 2:15 commands, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” The passage continues by declaring that if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. John then identifies the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life as belonging to the world rather than the Father. The word *world* in this warning concerns the corrupt order of desires and values opposed to God, not a command to despise creation or hate the human beings for whom Christ died. The distinction is essential. A Christian may appreciate honest labor, family relationships, natural beauty, and legitimate earthly responsibilities without embracing the world's rebellion. But when pleasure becomes sovereign, possessions become idols, and personal recognition becomes life's chief ambition, worldly affection has displaced proper spiritual priorities. John concludes that the world passes away, along with its lust, while the one who does God's will abides forever. **The world offers temporary merchandise at eternal prices, and its advertising department never mentions the expiration date.**

Ephesians 4:17–24 describes the contrast between the former Gentile walk and the life appropriate to those who have learned Christ. Paul warns against walking in the vanity of the mind, having the understanding darkened and being alienated from the life of God through ignorance and hardness of heart. He then instructs believers concerning putting off the old man, being renewed in the spirit of the mind, and putting on the new man, created after God in righteousness and true holiness. This is not merely an instruction to exchange one collection of outward habits for another. The mind must be governed by truth. The believer who constantly feeds upon corrupt entertainment, worldly philosophy, sensual advertisements, and ungodly companionship is providing the flesh with a remarkably generous supply of ammunition. He then wonders why resisting temptation has become difficult. There is no mystery here. **A man cannot continually pour filth into his thinking and reasonably expect holiness to emerge from his conduct.**

That principle reaches directly into entertainment and personal appetites. Philippians 4:8 directs believers toward things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. Ephesians 5:11 commands, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” These passages do not provide an inspired catalogue naming every modern film, song, program, website, or recreational activity. They provide biblical standards by which such things must be examined. Does the entertainment celebrate adultery, mock righteousness, glorify wickedness, or cultivate appetites Scripture condemns? Does it train the mind toward purity or make sin attractive? These questions should matter more than whether an activity has become popular among professing Christians. The fact that something is widely accepted does not make it spiritually

profitable. The devil has never experienced difficulty attracting an audience. Sometimes the most dangerous entertainment is not what openly declares itself wicked, but what gradually makes wickedness seem ordinary.

4. Put Off the Old Man — Holiness Must Reach the Tongue, the Body, and the Wallet

Ephesians 4:25–32 demonstrates that separation cannot remain a vague religious slogan. Paul commands believers to put away lying and speak truth with their neighbors. He warns against allowing anger to become sin, forbids stealing, and instructs the former thief to labor honestly so that he may have something to give to those in need. The passage also addresses corrupt communication, bitterness, wrath, clamour, evil speaking, malice, kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. These are ordinary matters that frequently expose the real condition of a Christian's walk. It is possible to possess correct convictions about prophecy while being dishonest in business. A man may loudly condemn worldly entertainment while destroying his household through uncontrolled anger. Another may defend the authority of Scripture while using his tongue like a sharpened instrument intended to injure everyone nearby. **Separation that never reaches the mouth has stopped considerably short of the heart.** Biblical holiness must govern how the believer speaks when no congregation is present to admire his performance.

Ephesians 5:3–7 continues with warnings concerning fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting that is not convenient. The chapter does not treat sexual immorality as an unfortunate misunderstanding requiring a more fashionable explanation. It identifies conduct that is contrary to the Christian's calling. Colossians 3:5 likewise commands believers to mortify fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, “which is idolatry.” The connection between covetousness and idolatry deserves attention. A man can worship possessions without bowing before a carved statue. He can organize his entire existence around acquiring money, property, influence, and pleasure while occasionally mentioning God as though heaven were another investment account. Sexual sin and material greed are not harmless personal preferences. They represent appetites that must be brought under the authority of Scripture. The believer's body belongs to Christ, and Christian liberty does not authorize its use for uncleanness.

Drunkenness receives equally direct treatment. Ephesians 5:18 declares, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” Paul places the influence of intoxicating excess in direct contrast with the believer's responsibility to be filled with the Spirit. Galatians 5:19–21 includes drunkenness among the works of the flesh, alongside other practices that contradict godly living. The Christian should not require an elaborate theological investigation to recognize that deliberately surrendering self-control to

intoxication is incompatible with biblical sobriety. First Thessalonians 5:6 commands believers to watch and be sober. These instructions concern more than avoiding public embarrassment. They involve guarding judgment, maintaining spiritual vigilance, and refusing habits that encourage fleshly indulgence. The same biblical seriousness applies to dishonest financial dealings, gambling with responsibilities, corrupt speech, and other practices through which selfish appetite becomes master. **A Christian who claims that his flesh is free to do whatever it pleases has misunderstood liberty. He has merely changed the name on the door of his bondage.**

5. Christian Associations — Influence the World Without Becoming Its Property

First Corinthians 15:33 warns, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” In its immediate context, Paul is confronting false teaching concerning the resurrection, including the destructive moral consequences of denying that fundamental truth. The warning therefore reaches beyond ordinary companionship into the influence of corrupt doctrine. People are affected by what they continually hear, approve, and practice. A believer who constantly surrounds himself with those who mock biblical truth should not imagine that their influence is spiritually neutral. Second Timothy 2:22 commands Timothy to flee youthful lusts and follow righteousness, faith, charity, and peace “with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Scripture recognizes the importance of godly associations. This does not require a Christian to reject every unbelieving relative, coworker, or acquaintance. It does require wisdom concerning close partnerships and influences that repeatedly demand compromise. **Companionship is never spiritually insignificant when companions are continually training one another in what to admire, excuse, and pursue.**

The believer must also distinguish evangelistic contact from sinful participation. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 that he adapted his approach to different people for the sake of winning some, while remaining subject to Christ. He did not declare that reaching idolaters required him to practice idolatry or that witnessing to immoral people required participation in their immorality. Christian witness involves entering ordinary society without surrendering biblical conviction. Jesus Christ received sinners and spoke to people whom religious leaders despised, yet He never became a participant in their wickedness. The distinction between compassion and compromise is fundamental. A Christian may assist someone struggling with addiction without joining the addiction. He may maintain professional relationships with unbelievers without adopting their dishonesty. He may show kindness to a lost neighbor without pretending that the neighbor's unbelief is spiritually harmless. The objective is to bring the gospel to sinners, not to become a convincing imitation of the sinners being reached.

Personal relationships also require biblical discernment without developing needless cruelty or spiritual arrogance. A believer considering marriage should take seriously the warning against unequal spiritual partnerships in 2 Corinthians 6:14, while recognizing the specific marriage instructions already given in 1 Corinthians 7. A Christian should not knowingly build his future upon an agreement that requires abandoning devotion to Christ. Yet existing obligations cannot simply be discarded because obedience has become inconvenient. Children must honor appropriate family responsibilities, workers must conduct themselves honestly, and Christians must demonstrate charity toward people who do not share their beliefs. Separation does not cancel ordinary righteousness. Romans 12:18 instructs, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” That command does not require surrendering truth, but it certainly forbids manufacturing unnecessary hostility. **A separated Christian should be recognizable by his faithfulness to Christ, not merely by how thoroughly he has learned to insult everyone who disagrees with him.**

6. Liberty Is Not Carnality, and Separation Is Not Phariseeism

Galatians 5:1 declares, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Paul is addressing the danger of returning to a system in which observance of the law becomes necessary for justification. The Galatians were being troubled by teachers who attempted to place believers under requirements incompatible with salvation by grace through faith. Galatians 2:16 plainly establishes that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ. Biblical separation must never be converted into a substitute system of justification. A believer does not become more securely saved by adopting additional clothing regulations, dietary restrictions, religious calendars, or personal traditions. His righteousness before God rests upon Christ. The man who attempts to improve that standing through self-imposed rules has not discovered deeper Christianity. He has returned to the very confusion Paul's epistle was written to confront.

But Paul immediately guards against abusing that liberty. Galatians 5:13 states, “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” Freedom from the law as a system of justification does not mean freedom to commit fornication, lie, steal, become drunk, or indulge every corrupt appetite. Romans 6:15 asks whether believers should sin because they are not under the law but under grace. Paul's answer is “God forbid.” The Christian is free from condemnation through Christ, yet he remains responsible to walk in the Spirit. Some people have turned the accusation of legalism into an all-purpose escape hatch. Confront dishonesty, and they cry legalism. Condemn sexual immorality, and they cry legalism. Mention separation from

idolatry, and they cry legalism. Apparently, in their revised theology, the only sin remaining is telling a Christian that sin still exists. **Grace did not abolish righteousness. It established the believer's obligation to walk according to the life he has received.**

On the other side stands the religious legalist who manufactures commandments where Scripture has not spoken. Colossians 2:20–23 warns against man-made ordinances and displays of voluntary humility that possess an appearance of wisdom but do not accomplish genuine victory over the flesh. Romans 14 addresses matters in which believers must recognize distinctions between clear biblical commands and disputable personal convictions. The chapter must not be used to excuse practices Scripture plainly condemns, but neither should Christians elevate every private preference into universal divine law. A believer may voluntarily abstain from something he considers spiritually unprofitable without claiming that every Christian who makes a different lawful decision is rebellious. The danger begins when human regulations replace scriptural authority. Religious pride can flourish behind modest clothing, strict routines, and impressive declarations of separation. The Pharisees demonstrated that outward religious precision can coexist with profound inward corruption. **Holiness is not established by counting how many rules you have written beyond the Bible. When man-made standards become the measure of righteousness, self-righteousness has simply learned to wear church clothes.**

7. Walk in the Spirit — Separation Is the Fruit of Grace, Not the Price of It

Titus 2:11–12 provides one of the clearest explanations of the relationship between grace and godliness: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” Notice the teacher. Grace itself teaches believers to deny ungodliness. This destroys the argument that preaching holy living necessarily contradicts salvation by grace. Paul does not say grace eliminates moral responsibility. He says grace instructs us concerning it. Titus 2:13 directs attention toward the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, while verse 14 declares that Christ gave Himself to redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Salvation and godliness are connected without becoming identical. Christ's redemption provides the foundation. Zealous service and separation are appropriate results. **The grace that saves the sinner does not become an enemy of holiness after the sinner is saved.**

Galatians 5:16 supplies the practical command: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Paul then explains the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, identifying the works of the flesh before describing the fruit of the Spirit. The believer still

possesses a fleshly nature capable of sin. Salvation does not render temptation imaginary or eliminate the necessity of vigilance. Nevertheless, the Christian is not commanded to surrender helplessly to that nature. He is instructed to walk in the Spirit and cultivate conduct consistent with the new life in Christ. Colossians 3:1–4 directs believers to seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. The command rests upon their position in Him. They are to set their affection on things above because their life is hid with Christ in God. Then come instructions concerning mortifying sinful practices and putting on mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness, and charity. The inward position produces corresponding outward responsibilities.

Ephesians 5:8 expresses the same relationship with remarkable precision: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” Notice the sequence again. They are light in the Lord; therefore, they are commanded to walk accordingly. The identity precedes the responsibility. This protects both eternal security and personal holiness. A Christian's failures do not undo the finished work of Christ, but neither does his secure position excuse disobedience. The believer must continually examine his conduct against Scripture, confess sin, resist temptation, and submit his choices to the Lord. He should welcome faithful correction without mistaking human traditions for divine commandments. He should pursue fellowship with sound believers without cultivating contempt for the lost. He should separate from sinful practices without imagining that separation makes him inherently superior to other sinners. **The Christian life is not the old man wearing a religious uniform. It is the redeemed believer learning to walk in the Spirit while refusing to let the flesh resume command.**

Conclusion

Biblical separation is neither an optional decoration added to Christianity nor a religious payment required to obtain salvation. The Apostle Paul commands believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, refuse conformity to the world, separate from idolatrous compromise, put away corrupt conduct, and walk according to the new life they possess in Jesus Christ. John warns against loving the world and its passing lusts. Titus explains that the grace which brings salvation also teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly desires. These instructions were not written to establish a second gospel based upon personal performance. They were given because the saved man belongs to Christ and is responsible to live accordingly. Separation must therefore begin with biblical identity rather than outward religious exhibition. The Christian who has been justified by faith possesses an entirely different standing before God from the unregenerate sinner. His daily conduct ought to reflect that standing. **The purpose of separation is not to convince heaven that**

we deserve redemption. It is to demonstrate proper allegiance to the Saviour who has already redeemed us.

This truth must be applied without favoritism or hypocrisy. The worldly Christian cannot excuse drunkenness, sexual immorality, dishonesty, covetousness, filthy communication, or idolatrous associations by announcing that he is under grace. Scripture has already answered that argument. Equally, the self-righteous Christian cannot condemn everybody who fails to adopt his private regulations while overlooking the pride, bitterness, malice, or lovelessness within his own heart. Scripture has answered that argument as well. The standard is God's word, not human appetite and not human tradition. Some associations must be refused because they require spiritual compromise. Some entertainments should be rejected because they cultivate the very lusts Scripture commands us to deny. Some habits must be abandoned because they contradict holiness. Other decisions require wisdom, conscience, charity, and careful distinction between what God commands and what individuals prefer. Christians should neither become comfortable with sin nor intoxicated with their own appearance of righteousness. The Lord did not redeem His people to become worldly entertainers or religious Pharisees.

So come out from among the corruption that contradicts the word of God. Refuse the unequal yoke that requires disobedience. Guard the mind against worldly conformity. Put away lying, wrath, bitterness, uncleanness, and covetousness. Pursue honesty, sobriety, purity, kindness, charity, sound doctrine, and faithful service. Let the Scriptures determine your convictions rather than popular opinion or religious traditions. Do not despise unbelievers; bring them the gospel. Do not excuse sin among professing believers; confront it according to Scripture. Do not measure holiness by your ability to impress other Christians; measure your conduct against the word of the Lord who redeemed you. And never forget that the righteousness which justifies a sinner belongs to Jesus Christ, not to the sinner's successful performance. **Separation without grace becomes Phariseeism. Grace without separation becomes an excuse for carnality. Biblical discipleship rejects both counterfeits. The Christian was saved by grace, established in Christ, and commanded to walk in the Spirit. The world may continue offering its pleasures, its applause, and its passing treasures, but the believer has something infinitely better than the world's approval: he belongs to Jesus Christ. A saved man still carries his old nature, but he has absolutely no biblical reason to appoint that old nature chairman of his daily affairs. Come out from among them, not because separation can purchase eternal life, but because the Lord who purchased your eternal life deserves your faithful obedience.**

6 of 10: Discipleship — Saved to Serve, Not to Occupy a Pew and Collect Blessings

Key Passage: Ephesians 2:10 (KJV)

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Introduction

There is something almost entertaining about a Christian who can identify every mistake the pastor makes, explain how the missionaries ought to conduct their ministries, criticize the financial decisions of the church, and provide an exhaustive account of what everybody else should be doing, yet somehow becomes extraordinarily difficult to locate whenever actual work needs to be accomplished. He can supervise a church project from his recliner with the confidence of a five-star general, but ask him to participate and suddenly his calendar looks like it belongs to the President of the United States. He knows precisely how much everybody else should give, how often everybody else should witness, and why the congregation would function better if people would simply follow his advice. Meanwhile, his own contribution amounts to warming a pew, collecting religious benefits, and occasionally offering unsolicited criticism. The Apostle Paul had a different understanding of Christian service. Ephesians 2:10 declares that believers are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. God did not save sinners merely to produce an audience. He saved them to become His workmanship, with responsibilities that extend considerably beyond occupying a comfortable seat.

Before discussing service, however, we must establish the foundation that religious legalists have been trying to overturn for centuries. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” The very next verse introduces good works, not as the cause of salvation, but as the purpose for which the saved believer has been created in Christ Jesus. The order is inspired, deliberate, and nonnegotiable. A sinner does not earn eternal life by volunteering for church activities, supporting missionaries, feeding the hungry, preaching sermons, distributing literature, or surrendering his savings to a religious organization. He receives salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work. Romans 4:5 establishes justification for the one who believes rather than works. But the same believer who has been justified freely is instructed to serve the Lord faithfully. **Good works cannot purchase salvation, but salvation certainly provides a reason for good works. The cross settles the believer's standing; discipleship concerns what he does with the life Christ has given him.**

The Christian life therefore involves something more substantial than collecting sermons, accumulating Bible knowledge, and congratulating oneself for possessing correct doctrine. Sound doctrine is indispensable, but truth received should produce responsibilities fulfilled. The believer must learn to serve with the abilities, opportunities, possessions, and time entrusted to him. Romans 12 describes believers presenting their bodies to God and exercising different responsibilities. First Corinthians 12 explains the variety of operations within Christ's body. Second Corinthians 8–9 establishes principles of generous giving. Colossians 3:23 commands Christians to work heartily as unto the Lord. And First Corinthians 3 reveals a coming examination of the believer's work at the judgment seat of Christ. These passages do not establish a competition for public recognition. They establish accountability before the Saviour. Some service will be visible, much will remain unnoticed, and none should be performed merely to purchase applause. **The question is not whether a Christian can describe what other believers ought to accomplish. The question is whether he is faithfully performing the responsibilities God has placed before him.**

1. Created Unto Good Works — Salvation Is the Beginning of Service, Not Its Reward

Ephesians 2:10 begins with a statement that destroys human boasting: “For we are his workmanship.” The saved believer is God's workmanship, not a self-manufactured monument to personal righteousness. The verse continues, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Notice the direction of the statement. The believer is not created *by* good works, nor is he instructed to accumulate enough of them to complete his justification. He is created *unto* good works. God has already performed the saving work, and the Christian is now responsible to walk according to that new position. The distinction is as obvious as the difference between planting a tree and expecting it to bear fruit. Nobody with ordinary sense imagines that attaching a basket of apples to a dead stump will transform it into a living tree. Yet religion repeatedly attempts the spiritual equivalent by requiring unregenerate sinners to produce Christian behavior as the condition for receiving life. **God does not command a dead sinner to manufacture eternal life through activity. He gives life through Christ and then instructs the living believer to serve.**

Romans 12:1 establishes the proper motivation for Christian service: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Paul is addressing brethren who have already received the mercies explained throughout the preceding chapters. He is not conducting an evangelistic auction in which the highest bidder receives justification. The sacrifice described is living, and the believer is urged to present himself because of God's mercy. The word *reasonable* should embarrass the Christian who imagines that

faithful service constitutes some extraordinary favor bestowed upon heaven. Christ purchased our redemption through His own blood. We received eternal life without contributing a single righteous work toward its purchase. In light of that mercy, presenting ourselves for His service is hardly an outrageous demand. It is the appropriate response of a redeemed sinner. The man who considers every Christian responsibility an unbearable imposition has evidently forgotten the magnitude of what Christ accomplished for him.

Service must also be distinguished from religious activity performed for appearance. Matthew 6:1 warns against doing alms before men to be seen of them, and although the passage occurs within the Lord's earthly ministry to Israel, its exposure of religious hypocrisy remains instructive. First Corinthians 13:3 demonstrates that even extraordinary sacrificial giving profits nothing when charity is absent. A man may perform visible acts of service while secretly worshipping his own reputation. Another may labor quietly with genuine concern for others and receive little earthly recognition. God judges more than outward activity. He knows whether service proceeds from gratitude, obedience, charity, competition, pride, or the desire to control other people. The Christian ought to serve because he belongs to Christ, not because his name might appear on a plaque. **The Lord does not need a publicity department to discover who has been faithful. He sees the work, and He knows the heart behind it.**

2. Different Members, Different Gifts — Not Everybody Was Called to Hold the Microphone

First Corinthians 12:4–6 declares, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” Paul is addressing the Corinthian congregation concerning spiritual gifts, unity, and the proper functioning of Christ's body. His argument is not that every believer should perform precisely the same work. It is that different members possess different functions under one Lord. Verse 7 explains that the manifestation of the Spirit is given “to profit withal.” The gifts were not provided for personal exhibition or spiritual competition. They served the edification and proper functioning of the body. The immediate chapter also contains manifestations associated with the apostolic period, and those historical circumstances must be understood rather than casually assuming that every sign and operation described at Corinth is an unrestricted promise to every subsequent congregation. Nevertheless, the principle of differing responsibilities within the body remains unmistakable.

Paul develops the illustration by comparing the Church to a physical body composed of many members. First Corinthians 12:14 says, “For the body is not one member, but many.” The foot cannot declare itself unnecessary because it is not a hand, and the ear cannot

abandon its function because it is not an eye. Verse 18 declares that God has set the members in the body as it pleased Him. That ought to settle the childish competition over who deserves the most recognition. The believer who teaches publicly is not automatically more faithful than the one who performs necessary work without an audience. The person who supports a missionary may accomplish something valuable without ever preaching behind a pulpit. The Christian who assists a struggling family, encourages a discouraged believer, or quietly provides practical help may be performing a service that receives little attention but carries genuine spiritual significance. **A body composed entirely of mouths would make an impressive amount of noise, but it would have considerable difficulty accomplishing anything else.**

Romans 12:6–8 likewise identifies differing gifts and responsibilities, including ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. The instructions emphasize diligence, simplicity, and cheerfulness rather than competition. First Peter 4:10 adds, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Peter's epistle addresses scattered believers within its own historical setting, but the principle of stewardship is plain. Whatever ability or opportunity God has entrusted to the Christian should be used responsibly rather than buried beneath insecurity, laziness, or ambition. No believer possesses every ability, and no one should pretend otherwise. The Christian should learn what Scripture permits and requires, recognize his actual opportunities, and serve faithfully. It is better to perform a modest responsibility well than to spend twenty years coveting a prominent position while neglecting the work already available. **God has not commanded every Christian to become famous. He has commanded His servants to be faithful.**

3. Faithful in Little Things — God Does Not Measure Service by Public Applause

First Corinthians 4:1–2 establishes the proper understanding of Christian stewardship: “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” Paul is addressing the Corinthians concerning himself and other ministers who had been entrusted with divine revelation and responsibility. The steward does not own what has been placed under his care. He manages something belonging to another. That distinction should govern every Christian's understanding of time, resources, opportunities, and service. The believer's life belongs to the Lord who redeemed him. His abilities are not instruments for personal glorification. His possessions are not ultimate treasures that justify neglecting every spiritual responsibility. His opportunities are not guaranteed to remain available indefinitely. A steward is evaluated according to faithfulness to the owner's instructions, not according to how successfully he promotes himself. **The servant who spends his time**

advertising his importance while neglecting his master's business has misunderstood the employment arrangement.

Colossians 3:23–24 commands, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.” The immediate setting concerns responsibilities within households, including servants under earthly masters. That context must be preserved, but the instruction plainly demonstrates that ordinary labor can be performed with conscious responsibility toward Christ. Faithfulness is not confined to church buildings or public ministry. A Christian employer should be honest. A Christian employee should work diligently. Parents should fulfill their responsibilities rather than neglect their households while pursuing religious recognition. A believer who promises assistance should make every reasonable effort to keep his word. Small responsibilities reveal character because they remove the artificial excitement that accompanies public recognition. Anybody can appear enthusiastic while the audience is applauding. The real test frequently arrives when nobody is watching and the assignment has become inconvenient.

Luke 16:10 declares, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.” The immediate context concerns stewardship and the use of unrighteous mammon, but the principle deserves careful application. Many Christians want substantial responsibilities while disregarding ordinary ones. They imagine themselves directing great ministries, preaching to thousands, or accomplishing remarkable works for God, but cannot be depended upon to complete a simple commitment. Such ambition resembles a man demanding command of an ocean liner because he has successfully operated a bathtub. There is nothing wrong with desiring greater usefulness, provided that desire remains subject to God's will and is accompanied by faithfulness in present duties. Service begins where responsibility exists. A believer can pray, study, encourage, witness, assist, give, and labor according to his actual circumstances. He need not wait for extraordinary opportunities before obeying ordinary instructions. **The Christian who refuses to be faithful with what is already in his hands has little reason to complain that God has not entrusted him with something larger.**

4. Cheerful Giving — The Offering Plate Is Not a Cash Register Connected to Heaven

Second Corinthians 8:1–5 introduces the remarkable generosity of the Macedonian churches. Paul describes their severe trial of affliction, abundant joy, and deep poverty, yet explains that they gave willingly and even beyond what might ordinarily have been expected. Their generosity was not presented as the product of extraordinary wealth. It arose from devotion to the Lord and concern for the needs of other believers. Verse 5 provides the central explanation: “but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by

the will of God." That sequence is important. Genuine generosity begins with proper spiritual allegiance, not religious manipulation. A person who gives because a preacher has frightened him, publicly embarrassed him, or promised guaranteed financial multiplication is operating under an entirely different arrangement. Paul commended willing participation in a genuine collection for needy saints. He did not invent a spiritual investment program promising that contributions would automatically produce luxury automobiles and larger houses.

Second Corinthians 9:6–7 continues the instruction concerning giving: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." Notice what Paul does not say. He does not command every Christian to surrender a fixed percentage under threat of losing salvation. He does not establish an auction in which divine favor is awarded according to the size of the contribution. He emphasizes purpose, willingness, and cheerfulness. Verse 8 declares that God is able to make grace abound so believers may have sufficiency and abound to every good work. That provision must be understood within the passage's concern for generosity and ministry, not converted into an unconditional promise of personal riches. The Christian should give responsibly, recognizing both genuine needs and existing obligations. **The offering plate was never designed to become a slot machine where believers insert money and expect heaven to distribute financial jackpots.**

The distinction between Old Testament tithing and New Testament giving must also be maintained. Under the Mosaic law, Israel's tithes were connected with the Levitical system, agricultural increase, national worship, and covenant obligations. Numbers 18:21 assigns tithes to the Levites, while Malachi 3:8–10 addresses Israel concerning robbing God and bringing tithes into the storehouse. Those instructions cannot simply be lifted from their national covenant setting and imposed upon saved members of Christ's body as though nothing changed at Calvary. The Church is not the nation Israel, and salvation under grace is not maintained through compliance with the Mosaic tithe. This does not make generosity unnecessary. Second Corinthians 8–9 provides direct instructions concerning giving under grace. Believers should support legitimate ministry and meet genuine needs according to their means. But threatening Christians with Malachi's covenant curses while promising financial riches for contributions is doctrinal confusion dressed as fundraising. **God loves a cheerful giver. He did not instruct the Church to finance religious extortionists who preach prosperity while their congregations struggle to pay the electric bill.**

5. Supporting the Work of the Gospel — Generosity Must Reach Beyond Personal Comfort

Philippians 4:14–18 provides an excellent example of practical missionary support. Paul commends the Philippian believers for communicating with him concerning giving and receiving, explaining that they had assisted him when other churches had not. He describes their contribution as “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” The context is not a general promise that every financial contribution guarantees earthly prosperity. It concerns believers who willingly supported a gospel minister in his labor. Paul had experienced both abundance and need, as Philippians 4:11–13 explains. He did not regard missionary service as a guarantee of comfortable circumstances. Nevertheless, he recognized the spiritual significance of those who supported the work. The person who provides legitimate assistance to gospel ministry is participating in something greater than an ordinary financial transaction. **A missionary may carry the gospel into another region, but those who faithfully support the labor are not necessarily absent from the work simply because their feet never leave home.**

Third John 5–8 likewise commends faithful assistance to brethren who had gone forth for the Lord's name. Verse 8 declares, “We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.” That expression deserves attention. A Christian may become a fellowhelper to the truth by providing practical support to those engaged in faithful service. This can include missionary assistance, distributing Scripture, providing necessary materials, helping with transportation, offering hospitality, or supporting sound biblical instruction. Yet discernment remains necessary. Second John 9–11 warns against assisting those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. Generosity is not an obligation to finance every person who attaches religious vocabulary to a financial request. Believers should examine the doctrine, character, purpose, and accountability of those receiving support. A cheerful giver is not commanded to become a gullible giver. Money entrusted to ministry should be handled honestly, and Second Corinthians 8:20–21 demonstrates Paul's concern to avoid blame in administering financial gifts.

Practical concern must also reach believers facing genuine hardship. Galatians 6:10 instructs Christians to do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith. First Timothy 5 contains careful instructions concerning widows, family responsibilities, and the appropriate use of church assistance. Those distinctions protect both compassion and accountability. The Bible does not command believers to ignore needy brethren, but neither does it encourage irresponsibility by removing every distinction between legitimate need and deliberate unwillingness to work. Second Thessalonians 3:10 addresses those who refuse labor despite having the ability and opportunity. Christian charity should therefore operate with wisdom, honesty, and concern for real circumstances. A struggling family may need assistance. An elderly believer may need practical help. A missionary may need financial provision. A discouraged servant may need encouragement more than

money. **Service is not always measured by how much a Christian gives away. Sometimes it is measured by whether he notices a genuine need and does something useful instead of delivering another speech about generosity.**

6. The Judgment Seat of Christ — Saved by Grace, Evaluated for Service

First Corinthians 3:5–15 establishes one of the most serious reasons for faithful Christian service. Paul begins by addressing divisions among the Corinthians, who had elevated human ministers into competing religious factions. He asks, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. The laborers were servants, and their work depended upon God. Verse 8 states that every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. Paul then establishes the foundation: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” The believer's service must be built upon Christ, not personal ambition, religious competition, or the worship of human personalities. An impressive religious structure built upon a false foundation is not made acceptable because the construction attracts admiration. **God is not inspecting how successfully Christians have built personal kingdoms. He is examining what has been accomplished upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.**

Paul describes materials of differing quality: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and stubble. The day will declare every man's work because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test its quality. First Corinthians 3:14 promises a reward when the work remains, while verse 15 declares, “If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” That statement must never be confused with the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11–15. The believer's eternal salvation rests upon Jesus Christ and His finished work, while his service is subject to examination at the judgment seat of Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10 confirms that believers must appear before that judgment seat to receive according to what was done in the body. This is not salvation by works sneaking through the back door. It is accountability for those already saved. The distinction protects eternal security while establishing the seriousness of Christian responsibility.

The fire will also expose the difference between outward appearance and enduring value. First Corinthians 4:5 declares that the Lord will bring hidden things to light and make manifest the counsels of the hearts. A ministry may attract enormous attention while accomplishing comparatively little of eternal worth. Another believer may serve faithfully in obscurity without receiving substantial earthly recognition. Numbers, applause, financial success, and public admiration do not automatically establish spiritual quality. Nor does obscurity automatically establish faithfulness. The Lord will judge according to perfect

knowledge, including motives concealed from human observers. Some work will abide; some will be consumed. Some rewards will be received; some will be lost. The saved person remains secure in Christ, but the opportunities of earthly service are not meaningless. **A Christian may spend his entire life constructing an impressive pile of religious accomplishments and discover at the judgment seat that he selected building materials better suited for a bonfire than an eternal reward.**

7. Finish the Work Entrusted to You — Faithfulness Matters More Than Recognition

The Christian must learn to measure his service by biblical faithfulness rather than public attention. First Corinthians 15:58 commands, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” That instruction concludes Paul's extended treatment of the resurrection, including the promised victory over death through Jesus Christ. The certainty of resurrection provides a foundation for continuing service. The believer's labor is not meaningless because his future is secured in Christ. Yet the command is to remain steadfast, not merely enthusiastic during convenient seasons. Anyone can appear dedicated when the work is exciting, the congregation is appreciative, and difficulties remain small. Faithfulness becomes more revealing when the work is repetitive, criticism appears, physical strength decreases, or recognition disappears. A servant who works only when somebody is applauding has confused Christian ministry with a stage performance.

Galatians 6:9 instructs, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” The context concerns sowing, reaping, and doing good, especially to those of the household of faith. Paul does not promise that every act of service will produce immediate visible success. A Christian may witness faithfully while seeing little response. A teacher may spend years instructing believers who grow slowly. A missionary may labor under severe limitations. A parent may continually teach the Scriptures while facing discouragement. None of these circumstances automatically proves that the labor is worthless. First Corinthians 3:6 reminds us that God gives the increase. The servant is responsible for obedience and faithfulness, not for exercising divine control over results. There is a considerable difference between planting faithfully and imagining that one can command the harvest. **The Lord did not appoint every Christian to manufacture spectacular results. He called His servants to be faithful with the work entrusted to them.**

Paul's final testimony in 2 Timothy 4:7 provides the proper perspective: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” Notice that Paul speaks of *my course*. He did not spend his final days complaining that another apostle had received a

different assignment. He looked back upon the responsibilities given to him and testified concerning their completion. Every Christian should consider that example without imagining that all believers must perform Paul's particular apostolic ministry. The Lord has entrusted different opportunities to different people. Some will serve for decades; others may possess fewer years or experience serious physical limitations. Some will teach publicly; others will labor privately. The question is whether each believer remains faithful within his actual circumstances. There is no biblical profit in comparing assignments until envy replaces service. **God did not save you to spend your entire Christian life examining another man's field while weeds grow waist-high in the one He entrusted to you. Finish your course. Do the work before you. Serve the Lord while the opportunity remains.**

Conclusion

Christian discipleship requires more than the ability to recite correct doctrines and identify the failures of other believers. Salvation is entirely the gift of God, received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human works. Yet the saved man has been created in Christ Jesus unto good works, and Scripture repeatedly commands him to serve faithfully. Romans 12 calls believers to present themselves unto God and exercise their responsibilities diligently. First Corinthians 12 establishes the diversity of functions within Christ's body. First Corinthians 4 identifies faithfulness as the essential requirement of stewardship. Second Corinthians 8–9 teaches willing generosity, while Philippians 4 demonstrates the importance of supporting gospel ministry. Colossians 3 reminds believers that ordinary labor can be performed unto the Lord. None of these passages gives religious organizations permission to purchase salvation through human activity or manipulate believers through financial threats. They establish the proper responsibilities of people who already belong to Jesus Christ. **The Christian was not redeemed to become an expert spectator. He was redeemed to walk in the good works God has appointed.**

That responsibility should produce humility rather than religious superiority. A believer who teaches publicly should not despise the one who serves quietly. A Christian who possesses substantial financial resources should not imagine that his contributions make him more valuable before God than a poor believer who gives sacrificially according to his ability. A person who performs practical labor should not condemn others merely because their responsibilities differ. The body has many members, and faithful service takes many legitimate forms. At the same time, the existence of different gifts cannot excuse deliberate idleness. The Christian who continually criticizes ministry while refusing to assist it ought to examine his conduct. The one who claims to support missions but never prays, gives, encourages, or participates should consider whether his profession has become an empty

slogan. The man who demands faithfulness from everybody else must remember that he also stands accountable to the Lord. Christian service is not a competition to determine who can appear most impressive. It is stewardship before the Saviour who sees both the labor and the motive.

So serve the Lord with what He has entrusted to you. Study His word so that your service rests upon sound doctrine. Give willingly and responsibly, without attempting to purchase divine favor. Support faithful missionaries and genuine gospel ministry. Assist those facing legitimate needs. Encourage discouraged believers, teach where qualified, witness when opportunities appear, and perform ordinary responsibilities with honesty and diligence. Do not wait until every circumstance becomes convenient, every critic becomes agreeable, and every assignment promises recognition. The Christian life is not a spectator sport, and the judgment seat of Christ will not be conducted according to applause, attendance statistics, or the size of a ministry's advertising budget. The Lord will examine the work and its quality. **One day the tools will be laid down, the opportunities will end, and the earthly course will be finished. The believer will stand before Jesus Christ, not to negotiate the price of eternal life, but to give account of the life he lived after receiving it. Some work will endure, and some will disappear in the fire. The wise Christian will not wait until that day to discover that service mattered. Salvation is free because Christ paid for it. Faithful service is our reasonable response because we belong to Him. Stop occupying the pew as though somebody purchased you a permanent ticket to watch. There is work to be done, and the Master is worthy of the labor.**

7 of 10: Discipleship — You Were Not Saved to Keep the Gospel a Secret

Key Passage: Romans 1:16 (KJV)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

Introduction

There is something terribly inconsistent about a Christian who claims that Jesus Christ rescued him from everlasting condemnation, gave him eternal life, sealed him with the Holy Spirit, and secured his future in heaven, yet somehow cannot find the courage, compassion, or interest to tell another sinner how to receive that same salvation. He can discuss the weather with a stranger, argue about politics with a neighbor, recommend a restaurant to a coworker, and explain the advantages of his favorite automobile with the

enthusiasm of a commissioned salesman. But mention the gospel of Jesus Christ, and suddenly he develops a remarkable case of religious lockjaw. The man who can spend forty-five minutes explaining why his preferred football team should have won last Sunday cannot manage five minutes explaining why a lost sinner needs to be saved. Something is wrong with that arrangement. The gospel was not entrusted to the Church so believers could bury it beneath their private interests, occasionally mention it during a church service, and leave the actual business of evangelism to somebody drawing a salary from a religious organization. **If the message is important enough to determine where a sinner spends eternity, it ought to be important enough for a saved man to open his mouth.**

The Apostle Paul declared in Romans 1:14, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.” He continued in verse 15 by expressing his readiness to preach the gospel to those at Rome, and then delivered that thunderous declaration in verse 16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” Notice that Paul did not claim the gospel would always make him popular, wealthy, respected, or welcome in fashionable society. He had already encountered sufficient opposition to know better. His message had brought persecution, imprisonment, beatings, rejection, and serious personal hardship. Yet he was not ashamed because the gospel was “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” There is the issue. Not human eloquence, religious entertainment, clever advertising, or emotional manipulation. The power belongs to God, and the message concerns salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul's willingness to preach arose from his understanding of what God had accomplished and what sinners desperately needed to hear. **A man who understands the value of the gospel will not measure its importance by the approval of the crowd.**

Discipleship involves learning to carry that gospel faithfully into ordinary life without confusing witnessing with religious showmanship. Not every believer has been called to occupy a pulpit, conduct public meetings, travel as an evangelist, or address large audiences. The New Testament recognizes different responsibilities within Christ's body. Nevertheless, every saved person can appreciate the importance of the message by which he was saved and seek appropriate opportunities to make it known. That responsibility requires understanding the gospel clearly, recognizing man's sinful condition, explaining the finished work of Christ, and distinguishing salvation by grace through faith from the countless religious counterfeits that have accumulated around it. It also requires wisdom, patience, courage, and the humility to recognize that the believer cannot manufacture another person's conversion. We proclaim the truth. God gives the increase. The objective is not to collect impressive statistics, win theological arguments, or force religious decisions through emotional pressure. It is to present Jesus Christ faithfully so sinners may

hear, understand, and believe the gospel. **You were not saved to become a professional spectator while lost people remain ignorant of the only Saviour who can deliver them.**

1. The Gospel Is a Specific Message — Not Whatever a Religious Organization Happens to Be Selling

First Corinthians 15:1–4 establishes the gospel that Paul preached and by which the Corinthians were saved. He begins, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand.” He then identifies its essential contents: “how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” There is the gospel in its doctrinal substance. Jesus Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He rose again the third day. Paul does not present salvation as a campaign for social improvement, a program of religious self-development, or an invitation to join an organization offering spiritual benefits. The message concerns an accomplished historical work with eternal consequences. Christ died for sinners, and His resurrection declares the victory of the Saviour who bore their sins. A witnessing Christian must know this message thoroughly enough to explain it without burying its meaning beneath a mountain of religious vocabulary. **The gospel is not good advice about improving your life. It is good news about what Jesus Christ accomplished to save your soul.**

The identity of the One who died is equally important. John 1:1 declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Verse 14 identifies the Word made flesh. First Timothy 3:16 declares that “God was manifest in the flesh,” while Colossians 2:9 states that in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. The Saviour is not merely an unusually admirable teacher, a religious reformer, or a man who achieved exceptional moral development. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh. His sinlessness distinguishes Him from every descendant of Adam who requires redemption. Second Corinthians 5:21 explains that God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Remove Christ's deity, His sinlessness, or His substitutionary sacrifice, and the saving message has been fundamentally corrupted. A gospel presenting another Jesus cannot save merely because someone has preserved a few familiar religious expressions.

Paul's insistence that Christ died and rose again “according to the scriptures” also establishes the authority behind the message. The gospel was not invented by an enthusiastic religious committee searching for a more marketable approach to spirituality. The death and resurrection of Christ fulfilled God's revealed purposes. Isaiah 53 describes the suffering Servant bearing iniquity, while Psalm 16:10 speaks prophetically of God's Holy One not seeing corruption. Paul declares in Romans 4:25 that Christ “was delivered for our

offences, and was raised again for our justification." The believer therefore proclaims an accomplished redemption grounded in God's word. The gospel does not require supplementary ceremonies, emotional performances, or philosophical improvements to make it effective. First Corinthians 1:18 acknowledges that the preaching of the cross appears foolish to those who perish, but to the saved it is the power of God. **The preacher's responsibility is not to redesign the gospel until unbelievers find it fashionable. His responsibility is to proclaim faithfully what God has already revealed.**

2. Before a Sinner Can Appreciate Salvation, He Must Understand What He Needs Saving From

Romans 3:10 declares, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." Verse 23 continues, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Those statements do not leave room for the flattering assumption that mankind consists principally of respectable individuals requiring occasional religious encouragement. The Bible identifies a universal problem called sin. Romans 5:12 explains that sin entered the world by one man, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men because all have sinned. The sinner's difficulty is not merely that his circumstances could be improved or that he has failed to discover his personal potential. He stands guilty before a holy God. His good intentions cannot remove that guilt, and his occasional acts of kindness cannot erase the record of unrighteousness. **The gospel will never be understood correctly by a man who has been persuaded that he merely needs a spiritual tune-up when Scripture declares that he needs redemption.**

Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Notice the contrast between wages and gift. Wages are earned. A gift is received. Sin earns death, while eternal life comes through Jesus Christ. Hebrews 9:27 declares that men are appointed once to die, and after this the judgment. Revelation 20:11–15 describes the Great White Throne judgment and the lake of fire, identifying the final destiny of those not found written in the book of life. That judgment belongs within its proper prophetic setting and must not be confused with the judgment seat of Christ where believers' works are examined. Nevertheless, the warning is unmistakable. Sin carries consequences that extend beyond temporary earthly discomfort. The Christian who witnesses faithfully must not remove judgment from the message simply because modern audiences prefer a gospel without unpleasant subjects. There is no compassion in concealing the danger from someone who needs deliverance.

At the same time, explaining sin does not require treating the lost person with contempt. Romans 3:23 includes the person delivering the message. The witnessing Christian was not born into a superior category of humanity. He too was a sinner requiring God's mercy.

Ephesians 2:1–5 describes the former condition of believers and the grace by which God made them alive with Christ. That truth should produce seriousness without arrogance. Some religious people have developed a talent for announcing the wickedness of the world as though their own salvation occurred because heaven recognized their exceptional personal qualities. Such boasting contradicts the very gospel they profess to defend. The object of explaining sin is not to win a contest determining which sinner deserves the greatest condemnation. It is to establish why Christ's sacrifice was necessary. **A physician who refuses to explain a deadly diagnosis is not compassionate, but a physician who enjoys humiliating the patient has also misunderstood his responsibility. Tell the truth about sin, then point the sinner to the Saviour.**

3. Salvation Is by Grace Through Faith — Do Not Add Religious Obstacles to Calvary

Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Romans 4:5 establishes the same truth with extraordinary precision: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” These passages settle the question of how a sinner receives salvation in the present Church Age. He believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting the finished work accomplished through His death, burial, and resurrection. He does not purchase justification through baptism, religious membership, personal reform, generous giving, ceremonial observance, or promises of future obedience. Acts 16:30–31 records the Philippian jailer's question, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” The apostolic response was not an application for admission into a religious probationary program. It directed the sinner to Christ.

This is where religious confusion has made an impressive career out of complicating what Scripture plainly declares. One organization adds baptism. Another requires church membership. Another demands a sufficiently emotional experience. Still another insists that a sinner must first promise to abandon every individual sin, surrender every ambition, and demonstrate complete lifelong obedience before God will justify him. But justification cannot be founded upon an uncertain record of future performance while remaining salvation by grace apart from works. Biblical repentance must also be understood properly. Acts 20:21 describes Paul's testimony of “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Repentance is not permission to remain in unbelief, nor is it a separate program of achieving sinless living before receiving salvation. The sinner must turn from his false confidence and unbelief toward God through faith in Jesus Christ. Genuine faith receives the truth concerning Christ. It does not establish a contractual promise that every future failure will cancel eternal life.

Romans 10:9–13 emphasizes faith in the risen Lord and the confession associated with that faith, while verse 17 declares that faith comes by hearing the word of God. These instructions must be explained without turning a prescribed verbal performance into an additional work that supposedly purchases regeneration. The sinner's confidence must rest upon Jesus Christ, not upon how skillfully he repeats a prayer. A person may pray sincerely while expressing saving faith, but the prayer does not possess independent saving power. Neither do tears, raised hands, walking down an aisle, or signing a religious card. First Corinthians 1:17 distinguishes Paul's commission to preach the gospel from water baptism, making clear that baptism cannot simply be identified as the saving message itself. **The cross does not need a human contribution to complete its payment. If salvation requires Christ plus your religious performance, somebody has stopped preaching the gospel of grace and started selling another arrangement.**

4. Ambassadors for Christ — The Message Has Been Entrusted to Redeemed Sinners

Second Corinthians 5:18 declares that God "hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." Verse 19 explains that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and that He committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Paul then states in verse 20, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." The language is remarkable. An ambassador represents another authority and communicates a message entrusted to him. He does not invent the policy, rewrite the terms, or negotiate a different arrangement whenever the audience becomes difficult. Paul's apostolic ministry possessed a particular authority, but the gospel entrusted to the Church remains the message believers are responsible to proclaim. We are not authorized to replace reconciliation through Christ with whatever religious proposal happens to attract the largest crowd.

An ambassador also understands that the message is more important than his personal reputation. Paul declares in Romans 1:14 that he was a debtor to Greeks and Barbarians, wise and unwise. That debt did not mean those people had purchased his services. It expressed his obligation to preach the gospel entrusted to him. First Corinthians 9:16 likewise records his declaration, "for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Paul's particular apostolic commission was extraordinary, and not every Christian has been appointed to the same office. Yet believers can recognize the seriousness with which he regarded the message. He did not wait until society became favorable, until every objection disappeared, or until witnessing became comfortable. He understood that souls needed the gospel. **An ambassador who refuses to deliver his**

sovereign's message because the audience might dislike it has misunderstood his assignment before he ever begins speaking.

This responsibility does not authorize arrogance, theatrical confrontation, or the assumption that every conversation must become an argument. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 that he adapted his approach to different people in order to gain opportunities for the gospel. His flexibility concerned his manner of dealing with individuals, not permission to compromise the message. He could reason with Jews from the Scriptures, address Gentiles concerning the true God, and respond appropriately to differing circumstances without inventing separate plans of salvation. The witnessing Christian should likewise recognize the person before him. A confused teenager, an elderly neighbor, a religious person trusting his own goodness, and a determined unbeliever may require different explanations and approaches. Scripture supplies the truth, but wisdom governs how that truth is presented. **Faithfulness does not require becoming unnecessarily offensive. The gospel already confronts human pride without the Christian adding his own bad manners to the presentation.**

5. Speak with Boldness and Grace — Witnessing Requires More Than Winning Arguments

Colossians 4:5–6 commands, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Paul is addressing the believer's conduct toward those outside the fellowship of the saved. The instruction joins wisdom, opportunity, gracious speech, and an appropriate answer. That combination is important. A Christian can possess the correct gospel and still behave so foolishly that his unnecessary arrogance becomes the principal obstacle in the conversation. Conversely, he can become so concerned about appearing pleasant that he never communicates anything substantial enough to offend unbelief. Scripture authorizes neither extreme. Gracious speech is not spineless speech. Seasoned speech is not corrupt speech. The Christian must learn to answer honestly, clearly, and appropriately while preserving the saving message. **The objective is to remove unnecessary obstacles from the presentation, not to remove every biblical truth that might disturb the listener.**

First Peter 3:15 instructs believers to sanctify the Lord God in their hearts and be ready to give an answer concerning the hope within them, with meekness and fear. Peter writes to scattered believers facing trials and opposition, and the passage concerns maintaining a faithful testimony amid suffering. Its practical instruction is valuable for Christian witness. Readiness requires preparation. A believer should be capable of explaining why mankind is sinful, who Jesus Christ is, what He accomplished at Calvary, why His resurrection

matters, and how salvation is received. He need not possess an answer to every historical, philosophical, scientific, or theological question ever invented. Nobody has been commissioned to carry an entire theological library inside his skull. When an unfamiliar objection appears, there is no disgrace in acknowledging the need for further study. The disgrace comes when a Christian knows nothing about the gospel but can recite endless information about subjects having almost nothing to do with salvation.

Acts 8:26–35 provides a memorable example in Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch. The man was reading Isaiah 53 but required understanding. Philip began at the Scripture and preached unto him Jesus. Notice the simplicity of that procedure. He did not begin by promoting his personal achievements, denouncing every political controversy of the surrounding world, or delivering an elaborate advertisement for his religious organization. He began with the passage before the man and directed him to Christ. The historical setting belongs to the transitional period recorded in Acts and must be understood accordingly, but the example illustrates the value of Scripture-centered explanation. The woman at the well in John 4 likewise demonstrates how the Lord dealt directly with an individual's circumstances while bringing the conversation toward spiritual truth. **An effective witness does not need to manufacture a theatrical encounter. Sometimes the greatest opportunity begins with an honest question, an open Bible, and a willingness to explain what God has said.**

6. Religious Activity Is Not Evangelism — Do Not Substitute Everything Else for the Gospel

First Corinthians 1:17–23 exposes the difference between preaching Christ and relying upon human wisdom. Paul declares that Christ sent him to preach the gospel, “not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” He continues by explaining that the preaching of the cross appears foolish to those who perish, while those who are saved recognize God's power. Paul was not condemning clear language, careful explanation, or thoughtful reasoning. He was establishing that salvation does not depend upon philosophical brilliance or persuasive entertainment. The message of Christ crucified must remain central. The religious world continually attempts to improve this arrangement by substituting something more marketable. Replace the cross with self-improvement, replace sin with unfortunate circumstances, replace judgment with vague unhappiness, and replace saving faith with positive thinking. The result may attract an audience, but it is no longer the gospel Paul preached. **A message that never tells sinners why Christ died cannot claim to be complete merely because everybody leaves feeling encouraged.**

Charitable activities and practical assistance have legitimate places in Christian service. Galatians 6:10 instructs believers to do good unto all men, especially those of the

household of faith. James 2:15–16 exposes the emptiness of professed concern that ignores genuine physical need. Feeding hungry people, assisting struggling families, visiting the sick, and helping neighbors are commendable acts when performed honestly and compassionately. But none of them automatically communicates the saving message. A man can receive a warm meal without understanding the gospel. He can obtain clothing, shelter, medical assistance, and practical encouragement while remaining completely ignorant of Jesus Christ's finished work. Compassion should not be used to manipulate vulnerable people, nor should material assistance be made conditional upon a forced religious profession. Nevertheless, charity must not become a permanent substitute for evangelism. **A full stomach is a genuine earthly blessing, but it cannot justify an ungodly sinner before a holy God. The Christian should recognize both the bodily need and the eternal one.**

Political activism, religious entertainment, and endless controversy can likewise consume the energy that ought to be devoted to gospel proclamation. A believer may possess legitimate convictions about public affairs and address moral questions according to Scripture, but political allegiance is not the new birth. Winning an election does not regenerate a sinner. Changing legislation does not automatically reconcile anyone to God. The same is true of religious concerts, dramatic performances, motivational gatherings, and elaborate church promotions. Activities may attract attention, but attraction is not conversion. Galatians 1:8–9 demonstrates the seriousness of corrupting the gospel, while 2 Corinthians 4:3–5 identifies the spiritual blindness surrounding unbelief and declares, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.” The Church must remember what has actually been entrusted to it. **If a ministry can remove the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ from its central message without changing much of what it does, the problem is considerably larger than its advertising budget.**

7. Plant the Seed, Water Faithfully, and Leave the Increase to God

First Corinthians 3:5–7 establishes the proper relationship between human responsibility and divine results. Paul asks, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” He then explains, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” Verse 7 concludes that neither the planter nor the one who waters deserves ultimate credit, because God gives the increase. This statement demolishes the religious obsession with personal statistics and public recognition. Christians should rejoice when sinners believe the gospel, but they must not imagine that salvation is manufactured by the witness's personality, pressure, or professional techniques. One believer may introduce a person to Scripture. Another may answer questions months later. Another may explain the gospel at an important moment.

The work of God is not restricted to the individual who happens to be present when faith is expressed. **The farmer who plants the seed has a responsibility to plant faithfully, but he has no authority to command the harvest to appear on his preferred schedule.**

This distinction also protects the integrity of an evangelistic invitation. It is entirely appropriate to urge a sinner to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, explain that salvation is available now, and make the gospel personally clear. Second Corinthians 6:2 declares, “behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” But urgency must never become manipulation. A preacher cannot save someone by applying enough emotional pressure, repeating a question until the person gives the desired response, or convincing an audience that a momentary decision satisfies the biblical requirements of faith. Nor should a Christian announce conversions merely because individuals repeated words they did not understand. The sinner must hear and believe the gospel. Romans 10:17 declares, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Our responsibility is to communicate the message clearly and invite genuine faith in Christ. We cannot perform that faith on somebody else's behalf.

Paul's testimony in Philippians 1:12–18 further demonstrates that gospel proclamation must remain central even when circumstances become difficult. His bonds had contributed to the furtherance of the gospel, and others had become bold to speak the word without fear. Paul acknowledged that some preached Christ from questionable motives, yet he rejoiced that Christ was being preached. This does not authorize another gospel or make corrupt doctrine acceptable. It demonstrates that the message of Christ was more important than Paul's personal reputation. Faithful witnessing may occur during illness, imprisonment, financial hardship, ordinary employment, family responsibilities, or unexpected conversations. Not every Christian will see large numbers of people respond. Some may labor for years with little visible fruit. The believer must therefore resist discouragement and remember that his responsibility is faithfulness. **Heaven did not appoint us to become spiritual salesmen who falsify the numbers when business is slow. We are witnesses of Jesus Christ, entrusted with a message that remains true whether the audience is one person or ten thousand.**

Conclusion

The gospel of Jesus Christ is too important to be buried beneath the ordinary distractions of Christian life. Romans 1 declares that it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. First Corinthians 15 establishes its essential contents: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Romans 3 exposes the sinner's guilt, while Romans 4 and Ephesians 2 establish justification by grace through faith apart from works. Second Corinthians 5 identifies the ministry of reconciliation, and

Colossians 4 commands wise, gracious speech toward unbelievers. These passages do not leave the Church free to replace the gospel with religious entertainment, political programs, social improvement, or emotional manipulation. Nor do they require every believer to possess the same abilities or occupy the same ministry. They establish something more fundamental: sinners need to hear the truth concerning Jesus Christ, and saved people ought to care enough about that truth to proclaim it faithfully. **The gospel is not the private property of preachers, denominations, evangelistic organizations, or professional ministers. It is the saving message entrusted to the Church concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.**

That responsibility should produce conviction without manufacturing guilt beyond Scripture. A Christian may struggle with speaking publicly, lack experience in answering objections, or face circumstances that limit opportunities. Those limitations do not mean every believer must suddenly become an accomplished evangelist. Growth requires learning. Begin by knowing the gospel. Study the passages that explain sin, judgment, Christ's identity, His substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, and salvation through faith. Learn to distinguish the free gift of eternal life from the responsibilities that follow salvation. Pray for genuine opportunities. Speak honestly with family members, neighbors, coworkers, acquaintances, and others when appropriate circumstances arise. Answer questions with patience and refuse unnecessary quarrels. Support faithful missionary labor, encourage those proclaiming the truth, and remain conscious that ordinary conduct can either strengthen or damage the credibility of your witness. The Christian who lies, cheats, mistreats others, and then attempts to proclaim righteousness has created an avoidable contradiction. **A faithful testimony does not replace the gospel, but a corrupt testimony can make people considerably less willing to hear it.**

So do not spend the remainder of your earthly life merely discussing how desperately the world needs Jesus Christ while refusing opportunities to tell the world about Him. Lost sinners do not need another religious marketing campaign, another entertaining performance, or another argument designed to demonstrate how intelligent the Christian thinks he is. They need the truth about their sin, the righteousness of God, the finished sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the eternal life offered through faith in Him. There will be people who refuse the message, people who misunderstand it, people who mock it, and people who respond with sincere faith. The Christian is not responsible for controlling their decisions. He is responsible for handling the truth faithfully. Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase. That arrangement has not become obsolete because modern religion prefers impressive statistics and carefully managed public relations. **You were saved by a gospel that somebody proclaimed, somebody preserved in writing, and somebody faithfully explained. The Lord Jesus Christ supplied the redemption, and**

the word of God revealed the way of salvation. Now that you know the truth, do not bury it beneath your comfort, your entertainment, your fear of rejection, or your collection of excuses. The gospel was not given to make Christians famous, comfortable, or socially acceptable. It was given because sinners need a Saviour. Tell them who He is. Tell them what He did. Tell them how they can be saved. Then leave the increase where it has always belonged—in the hands of Almighty God.

8 of 10: Discipleship — The Christian Life Comes with Scars, Not a Guarantee of Comfort

Key Passage: 2 Timothy 3:12 (KJV)

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Introduction

The moment somebody steps behind a pulpit and announces that salvation guarantees uninterrupted prosperity, perfect health, financial abundance, and a life conveniently insulated from suffering, you can be reasonably certain he has spent considerably more time studying advertising techniques than reading the Apostle Paul's biography. Evidently somebody forgot to inform Paul that he was supposed to be wealthy, comfortable, universally admired, and permanently healthy. The poor fellow was beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked, persecuted, betrayed, hungry, exhausted, and repeatedly placed in situations where death appeared to be standing just outside the door. Apparently, according to the modern prosperity crowd, the greatest missionary in the New Testament simply failed to discover the secret formula for successful Christian living. Paul could write inspired Scripture, establish churches, endure persecution, and preach the gospel throughout the Roman world, but somehow he never mastered the preacher's favorite financial confession. That kind of theology does not merely misunderstand suffering. It insults the testimony of faithful believers whose lives demonstrate that obedience to Jesus Christ sometimes leads directly into hardship. **The Christian life was never advertised in Scripture as an all-expenses-paid vacation through enemy territory.**

The Apostle Paul makes the matter unmistakably clear in 2 Timothy 3:12: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Notice the certainty of the statement. Paul does not say that exceptionally careless Christians might occasionally experience inconvenience. He identifies persecution as something that belongs to the experience of those who will live godly in Christ Jesus. The immediate context concerns

Paul's doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, and afflictions. Timothy knew what Paul had endured at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. These were not imaginary difficulties invented to provide illustrations for a comfortable sermon. Paul had been driven from cities, opposed by unbelievers, and subjected to actual violence. Nevertheless, he testified that the Lord delivered him out of those persecutions. Deliverance did not mean the suffering never occurred. It meant the Lord remained faithful through the circumstances. **God's faithfulness is not measured by whether the Christian avoids the battlefield. Sometimes His faithfulness is demonstrated by sustaining the soldier while the battle continues.**

Discipleship requires understanding that salvation delivers the believer from eternal condemnation without granting immunity from the consequences of living in a fallen world. The Christian possesses everlasting life through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. His position in Christ is secure, his sins have been dealt with at Calvary, and his eternal destination rests upon the Saviour rather than personal performance. Yet none of those blessings means his body cannot become ill, his circumstances cannot deteriorate, his friends cannot betray him, or his obedience cannot provoke opposition. Scripture distinguishes suffering for righteousness from suffering because of foolish decisions, personal sin, or ordinary human limitations. It also distinguishes the believer's present tribulations from the future prophetic Tribulation associated with Israel and the Day of the Lord. Those distinctions matter. We must neither promise Christians an earthly comfort God never guaranteed nor encourage them to manufacture persecution through arrogance. The purpose of this study is to understand suffering according to the Scriptures, recognize the sufficiency of God's grace, and learn why the presence of scars does not mean the absence of the Saviour.

1. Justified by Faith — Peace with God Does Not Mean Peace with Every Circumstance

Romans 5:1 establishes the believer's position with extraordinary clarity: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” That peace is the consequence of justification, not a guarantee that every earthly circumstance will become pleasant. Before salvation, the sinner stands guilty before God. Through faith in Jesus Christ, he receives justification and possesses peace with God. Romans 5:2 then explains that believers have access by faith into the grace wherein they stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. These are settled spiritual blessings grounded in Christ's finished work. The believer does not have to negotiate them every morning according to his emotional condition. Yet Paul immediately introduces a truth that demolishes the prosperity preacher's carefully polished presentation. Verse 3 declares, “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also.” Apparently, peace with God and earthly tribulation can exist

simultaneously. The man who insists otherwise has found a contradiction that exists in his theology, not in the Bible.

Paul continues in Romans 5:3–5 by explaining that tribulation works patience, patience experience, and experience hope. This is not a promise that every painful event automatically transforms a Christian into a spiritual giant. The passage describes the proper operation of tribulation within the believer's relationship to God's grace, love, and revealed promises. Patience involves endurance under pressure. Experience concerns tested character developed through that endurance. Hope rests upon God's faithfulness rather than upon the immediate appearance of favorable circumstances. The Holy Ghost sheds abroad the love of God in the believer's heart, providing a foundation that suffering cannot destroy. A Christian who encounters difficulty must therefore resist the assumption that hardship proves his salvation has become defective. The same apostle who preached justification by faith also taught that believers would experience tribulation. **Grace is not a promise that the road will remain smooth. It is the provision by which the redeemed traveler continues when the road becomes difficult.**

We must also distinguish the peace *with* God described in Romans 5:1 from the peace *of* God promised in Philippians 4:6–7. The first concerns the believer's justified standing through Jesus Christ. The second concerns God's peace guarding the hearts and minds of believers who bring their requests before Him with thanksgiving. Both are valuable, but they are not identical. A saved man may experience fear, sorrow, discouragement, or physical pain without losing his justified standing. His assurance must rest upon Christ's promise, not upon an uninterrupted emotional experience of comfort. Some religious teachers have confused spiritual peace with the absence of human difficulty, leaving suffering Christians to wonder whether God has abandoned them. Paul knew better. He possessed peace with God while experiencing circumstances that would make a modern luxury-minded preacher cancel the entire missionary itinerary. **The Christian who measures God's love by the softness of his pillow will have serious difficulty understanding the apostle who wrote inspired Scripture from prison.**

2. Paul's Scars Were Real — The Apostle Who Refused to Preach a Comfortable Gospel

Second Corinthians 11:23–28 contains one of the most astonishing records of suffering found anywhere in the New Testament. Paul describes abundant labors, stripes beyond measure, frequent imprisonments, and repeated encounters with death. Five times he received forty stripes save one from the Jews. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. Three times he suffered shipwreck, and he spent a night and a day in the deep. He endured dangerous journeys, threatening waters, robbers, opposition from his own countrymen, hostility from heathen, perils in cities and wilderness regions, and

dangers among false brethren. He also experienced weariness, painfulness, watchings, hunger, thirst, fasting, cold, and nakedness. Then he mentions the daily care of all the churches. This was not the testimony of a man who had discovered how to avoid difficulties by exercising insufficient faith. It was the record of a servant who continued obeying Jesus Christ while difficulties arrived from practically every direction.

Consider the implications for modern preaching. If financial prosperity and physical comfort are reliable measurements of spiritual faithfulness, Paul would have qualified as one of Christianity's greatest failures. He spent considerable time without ordinary conveniences, experienced opposition from religious and civil authorities, and endured circumstances that no sensible person would deliberately seek. Yet the Lord had called him to proclaim the gospel and reveal the mystery concerning the Church. Acts 9:15–16 records the Lord's declaration concerning Paul's appointed ministry and the great things he would suffer for His name's sake. His hardships were not evidence that God's calling had failed. They were part of the circumstances accompanying that calling. The prosperity preacher who condemns suffering believers for inadequate faith ought to explain why the Apostle Paul never obtained the guaranteed comfort supposedly promised to everybody who believes. **When a doctrine requires condemning the apostle who wrote much of the New Testament, the doctrine needs correction, not the apostle.**

Paul's suffering also demonstrates that ministry faithfulness must never be confused with visible success or public admiration. In Acts 14:19–22, he was stoned at Lystra and left for dead. After continuing his missionary work, he returned to strengthen the disciples and exhorted them to continue in the faith, declaring that through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God. That historical setting involved the establishment of early congregations and the particular circumstances of apostolic missionary labor. It does not authorize Christians to seek persecution deliberately. Nevertheless, Paul's example reveals the seriousness of gospel ministry in a hostile world. The man who had experienced violent opposition returned to encourage others rather than surrendering his commission. He was not interested in manufacturing a comfortable religious career. He wanted the gospel preached and believers established. **Sometimes faithfulness opens the door to another city. Sometimes it opens the door to another prison. The servant's responsibility remains obedience on both sides of the hinges.**

3. Treasure in Earthen Vessels — God's Power Is Not Dependent upon Human Strength

Second Corinthians 4:7 declares, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” Paul is describing the ministry of the gospel entrusted to weak human servants. The treasure is glorious; the vessel is frail. That distinction should prevent a great deal of religious boasting. God did not choose to reveal

His power through human beings who were incapable of fatigue, suffering, discouragement, or physical deterioration. The apostles carried a divine message while remaining vulnerable to ordinary human limitations and extraordinary persecution. Paul continues in verses 8–9: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” The contrasts are deliberate. Trouble existed, but it did not accomplish final defeat. Persecution occurred, but it did not establish divine abandonment. **The earthen vessel may be cracked, bruised, and battered, but the treasure does not become worthless because the container has suffered damage.**

Second Corinthians 4:16 advances the argument: “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” Paul recognizes the deterioration of the physical body rather than pretending that faith eliminates aging and weakness. The outward man perishes. The inward man receives renewal. Scripture does not encourage a Christian to deny physical reality in order to demonstrate spiritual confidence. Bodies grow tired. Strength diminishes. Injuries leave consequences. Illnesses may persist. The believer can seek appropriate care and relief without imagining that doing so constitutes unbelief. Yet physical deterioration does not mean the inward life in Christ must deteriorate with it. The Christian may grow in understanding, patience, gratitude, and faithfulness even while the body becomes less capable of performing earlier responsibilities. That is a tremendous encouragement to believers who cannot accomplish everything they once did. Their value before God has not disappeared because their physical abilities have changed.

Verses 17–18 then introduce the eternal perspective: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Paul contrasts temporary affliction with eternal glory and visible things with things that are not seen. When he calls affliction light, remember the catalogue of suffering he has already described. This is not a comfortable spectator dismissing somebody else's pain. It is a battered apostle measuring his suffering against eternity. He does not deny the severity of earthly hardship; he places it beside the immeasurable glory awaiting the redeemed. The comparison changes the scale without pretending the wounds are imaginary. A lifetime may seem long while we are living it, but it remains brief when set beside everlasting life. **The Christian who measures eternity with an earthly ruler will never understand why Paul could call his afflictions light. He was not looking at the size of the wound alone. He was looking at the glory beyond it.**

4. My Grace Is Sufficient — Sometimes God Answers Prayer Without Removing the Thorn

Second Corinthians 12:7–10 provides a decisive answer to the claim that every physical affliction must disappear when a Christian exercises sufficient faith. Paul describes a thorn in the flesh, identified as a messenger of Satan to buffet him, connected with the danger of becoming exalted above measure through extraordinary revelations. The precise physical nature of the thorn is not identified in the passage, and there is no biblical necessity to invent a medical diagnosis in order to understand the lesson. Paul states that he besought the Lord three times for its removal. This was not a careless unbeliever offering a halfhearted request. It was the Apostle Paul, a servant entrusted with remarkable revelation and genuine apostolic authority. Yet the Lord did not grant the requested removal. Instead, He answered, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” That statement should end the foolishness of declaring that every remaining affliction proves defective faith.

Notice that Paul did not treat the Lord's answer as evidence of failure. He responded by declaring that he would rather glory in his infirmities so the power of Christ might rest upon him. He learned to recognize that divine strength could be manifested through human weakness rather than merely through the elimination of weakness. This does not mean suffering is enjoyable or that Christians should refuse legitimate opportunities for relief. Paul had asked for deliverance. The request itself was not condemned. But when the Lord answered differently, Paul accepted the sufficiency of divine grace. There is a considerable difference between praying earnestly for healing and demanding that God obey a schedule constructed by a religious teacher. **Prayer is not a lever by which man forces heaven to move. Sometimes God answers by removing the obstacle, and sometimes He provides the strength necessary to continue while the obstacle remains.**

First Timothy 5:23 further demonstrates that faithful believers could experience continuing physical difficulties. Paul advised Timothy concerning his stomach and frequent infirmities rather than declaring that the young minister had failed to exercise proper spiritual authority. Epaphroditus became sick near unto death according to Philippians 2:25–30, and Paul acknowledged God's mercy in his recovery. Second Timothy 4:20 records that Trophimus had been left at Miletum sick. These examples do not deny God's ability to heal. They establish that physical sickness was not automatically removed from every faithful servant during the apostolic period. The believer may pray for healing, seek appropriate treatment, and trust God without pretending to possess a guarantee Scripture has not given. It is particularly cruel to accuse suffering Christians of hidden unbelief when the Bible itself records devoted servants enduring physical weakness. **The preacher who promises perfect health as the universal reward of sufficient faith has a serious problem: the New Testament refuses to cooperate with his advertising.**

5. Suffering for Christ Is Not the Same as Suffering for Your Own Foolishness

First Peter 4:12–16 warns believers not to consider fiery trials strange, but it also distinguishes suffering for Christ from suffering caused by wrongdoing. Verse 15 declares, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters." The next verse contrasts that conduct with suffering as a Christian. The distinction is unmistakable. Not every hardship constitutes persecution for righteousness. A person who steals and is arrested has not become a martyr because he happens to attend church. A believer who lies to his employer and loses his position is experiencing the consequences of dishonesty, not necessarily opposition to Jesus Christ. A man who behaves arrogantly, insults his neighbors, and deliberately manufactures quarrels cannot automatically classify the resulting hostility as persecution. **Being disliked does not make a Christian righteous. Sometimes people dislike him because he is behaving like a fool, and the Bible has quite a bit to say about foolishness.**

Second Timothy 3:12 specifically identifies those who will live godly in Christ Jesus as suffering persecution. The emphasis belongs upon godliness, not upon obtaining the maximum possible amount of opposition. Philippians 1:27–30 likewise instructs believers to conduct themselves as becomes the gospel and acknowledges that suffering for Christ may accompany their faith. The Philippians were facing adversaries, and Paul encouraged them to stand fast in one spirit while striving together for the faith of the gospel. That is different from seeking controversy merely for the satisfaction of claiming persecution afterward. A faithful Christian may lose opportunities because he refuses dishonesty, suffer rejection because he proclaims Christ, or endure genuine opposition because he will not compromise sound doctrine. Such suffering is not evidence that he should abandon obedience. But there is no biblical reward for turning every personal disagreement into a supposed spiritual battle.

The Christian must also distinguish persecution from ordinary suffering shared by humanity. Ecclesiastes 9:11 observes that time and chance happen to all, while Romans 8 describes a creation groaning under corruption. Illness, natural disasters, financial difficulties, accidents, and bereavement affect believers and unbelievers alike. A Christian does not become spiritually superior merely because he experiences an injury, nor should he assume every misfortune is a special attack from the devil. Sometimes a difficult circumstance results from personal carelessness. Sometimes another person's wrongdoing causes harm. Sometimes the limitations of life in a fallen creation are painfully evident. Biblical discernment requires understanding the difference without denying that God can sustain His people through every category of hardship. **The Christian should not manufacture a persecution certificate for every inconvenience, and he should not turn**

ordinary consequences into heroic testimony merely because admitting a mistake would be embarrassing.

6. The Trial of Faith — Patience Is Developed Through Endurance, Not Purchased Through Suffering

James 1:2–4 states, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” James addresses the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and that original setting must be recognized before making application. The epistle's references to trials, works, and justification must not be carelessly substituted for Paul's doctrinal instructions concerning salvation by grace through faith in the present Church Age. Nevertheless, the principle concerning tested faith and patience is valuable. Trials expose whether convictions possess substance beyond comfortable circumstances. The believer may know the right doctrine when life is pleasant, but hardship creates occasions to exercise that knowledge. Patience develops through endurance rather than through merely discussing endurance. A man cannot learn to carry a burden by spending his entire life inspecting diagrams of weightlifting equipment. At some point, his convictions must be exercised under actual pressure.

James does not command believers to rejoice because wickedness is righteous or suffering is inherently pleasant. He identifies a reason for recognizing spiritual profit amid trials. Verse 4 declares, “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” The emphasis concerns maturity and completeness developed through the proper exercise of faith. This does not mean every suffering person automatically becomes mature. Hardship can expose bitterness, pride, unbelief, and rebellion as readily as it can provide occasions for patience. The response matters. A Christian may allow disappointment to become an excuse for abandoning prayer, neglecting Scripture, mistreating others, or rejecting faithful fellowship. Another may respond to the same difficulty by seeking the Lord's help, examining his conduct, and continuing in obedience. The suffering itself does not manufacture holiness. **A furnace can reveal what is present in the metal, but merely standing near the fire does not turn every piece of scrap iron into gold.**

Romans 8:28 must also be handled honestly: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Paul is not promising that every individual event is pleasant, righteous, or immediately understandable. The surrounding passage concerns suffering, hope, the intercession of the Spirit, and God's purpose in conforming believers to the image of His Son. Verse 29 identifies that purpose. God works according to an eternal objective much greater than maintaining uninterrupted earthly comfort. The Christian may not understand how

particular hardships fit within that purpose, and Scripture does not authorize inventing explanations for every tragedy. It provides assurance concerning God's faithfulness and final purposes. This truth should produce confidence without presumption. **Romans 8:28 is not a promise that every road will be paved with convenience. It is assurance that God's purpose does not collapse because the road passes through suffering.**

7. Present Suffering and Future Glory — Keep Your Eyes on the Right Destination

Romans 8:18 declares, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” This statement comes from a man whose personal experience gives extraordinary weight to the comparison. Paul understood persecution, exhaustion, danger, and physical weakness. Yet he measured present affliction against the coming glory associated with the believer's redemption. Romans 8:22 explains that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. Verse 23 adds that believers themselves groan while waiting for the adoption, specifically identified as “the redemption of our body.” Salvation has already established the believer's justified standing in Christ, but the present physical body remains subject to suffering, weakness, and death. The future redemption of the body is therefore an essential part of Christian hope. **The Lord did not promise to make the present mortal body permanently comfortable. He promised a redemption that will ultimately leave mortality behind.**

This expectation belongs within the proper distinction between the Church's hope and Israel's prophetic program. First Thessalonians 4:13–18 describes the dead in Christ rising and living believers being caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. First Corinthians 15:51–53 reveals the mystery of believers being changed, with mortality putting on immortality. These passages concern the blessed expectation of those belonging to Christ during the present dispensation. They should not be confused with the Second Advent in judgment or Israel's promised national restoration. The Church does not need to appropriate Israel's earthly covenant blessings in order to possess a glorious future. Our hope rests in Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and the promised transformation of our bodies. The believer's present scars are not the final chapter. He awaits a body no longer subject to the corruption that presently afflicts him. That expectation does not eliminate today's pain, but it establishes a future that pain cannot overturn.

Philippians 3:10 records Paul's desire to know Christ, “and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” Paul was not suggesting that his personal suffering could contribute to the atoning work of Calvary. Christ's sacrifice was complete, sufficient, and incapable of improvement through human affliction. Rather, Paul understood that faithfulness to the risen Saviour could involve

sharing in the rejection and opposition associated with serving Him. Philippians 3:20–21 then directs attention toward heaven, from which believers look for the Saviour, who will change their vile body and fashion it like unto His glorious body. There is the ultimate answer to the Christian's present physical limitations. The Lord has not promised an earthly existence without wounds. He has promised a future transformation beyond their reach. **The world measures success by how comfortably a man lives before he dies. Scripture directs the believer toward what Jesus Christ has promised beyond death and corruption.**

Conclusion

The biblical testimony concerning suffering is too clear to be dismissed by religious advertising. Romans 5 connects justification with peace toward God while acknowledging tribulation. Second Corinthians 4 describes divine treasure carried in weak human vessels. Second Corinthians 11 records the extraordinary hardships endured by the Apostle Paul, while chapter 12 establishes the sufficiency of God's grace when an affliction remains. Philippians acknowledges suffering for Christ, and 2 Timothy 3:12 plainly warns that godly living will encounter persecution. Romans 8 places present suffering beside future glory and the promised redemption of the believer's body. None of these passages teaches that salvation can be purchased through suffering, that illness proves spiritual failure, or that every Christian must experience precisely the same afflictions. They establish a truth modern prosperity religion desperately wishes were absent from the Bible: **faithful Christians can suffer severely without being abandoned by God. The presence of hardship does not cancel the promises purchased by Jesus Christ.**

The believer must therefore reject both the prosperity preacher's comfortable fantasy and the opposite error of treating suffering itself as a mark of spiritual superiority. A man is not righteous because he is poor, sick, mistreated, or unpopular. Neither is another man ungodly because he possesses material resources, enjoys physical health, or experiences favorable circumstances. The standard remains Scripture. Christians should seek to live honestly, wisely, soberly, and faithfully while trusting the Lord through whatever circumstances arise. They may seek medical treatment, work to improve difficult situations, accept legitimate assistance, and pray earnestly for relief without demonstrating unbelief. They must also recognize that obedience sometimes brings opposition that cannot be avoided without compromise. When such opposition comes, they should refuse unnecessary retaliation, maintain sound doctrine, and continue serving Christ. There is no prize for manufacturing a crisis through stupidity, but there is eternal significance in remaining faithful when righteousness becomes costly. **The Christian does**

not earn spiritual medals by collecting unnecessary wounds. He honors Christ by obeying Him whether the road is comfortable or covered with thorns.

So do not allow a preacher with a polished smile and an expensive wardrobe to convince you that God's love can be measured by the contents of your bank account, the condition of your body, or the absence of difficulty in your household. Open the King James Bible and look at the Apostle Paul. Examine the persecutions, the imprisonments, the shipwrecks, the weariness, the thorn in the flesh, and the unwavering testimony concerning the sufficiency of Christ. Remember that the Saviour Himself suffered rejection and crucifixion before rising triumphantly from the dead. The Christian's salvation rests upon that finished work, and his future is secured by the risen Lord. Meanwhile, discipleship requires faithfulness through the circumstances of this present life. **Sometimes God opens the prison door. Sometimes He gives grace to remain faithful inside the prison. Sometimes He removes the thorn. Sometimes He declares that His grace is sufficient while the thorn remains. Sometimes the Christian walks beneath clear skies, and sometimes he continues through a storm he cannot understand. But the storm has no authority to cancel the covenant of grace established through Jesus Christ. The scars may remain for the present, the burdens may continue, and the world may offer little encouragement. Nevertheless, the believer has not been forsaken. The Christian life comes with scars, not a guarantee of comfort. And when the Lord finally changes this mortal body into the likeness of His glorious body, the temporary wounds of earthly service will have given way to a glory that no suffering in this present world was ever capable of defeating.**

9 of 10: Discipleship — The Devil Does Not Retire When a Sinner Gets Saved

Key Passage: Ephesians 6:11–12 (KJV)

“Put on the whole armour 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.”

Introduction

There is something almost comical about modern Christianity's treatment of the devil. Half the religious world behaves as though Satan retired somewhere around the completion of the book of Acts, purchased a comfortable retirement home, and decided to leave

everybody alone. The other half talks about him so constantly that you would think the devil wrote the Bible, established the Church, and personally supervises every inconvenience between breakfast and bedtime. One crowd denies the enemy's activity, while the other gives him enough publicity to qualify as his international advertising department. Neither crowd has paid sufficient attention to Ephesians 6:11, where the Apostle Paul commands believers to “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” That command was not addressed to lost sinners attempting to earn salvation. It was written to people already saved by grace through faith, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and seated spiritually in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. **Salvation does not retire the devil. It places the believer in a spiritual conflict that requires biblical understanding, vigilance, and the armour God has provided.**

The Apostle Paul continues in Ephesians 6:12 by declaring that our warfare is not against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. Notice that Paul identifies a genuine spiritual conflict without commanding Christians to become fascinated with every imagined detail of the unseen world. He does not provide a catalogue of regional demons, secret spiritual passwords, elaborate deliverance ceremonies, or a classification system for assigning an evil spirit to every human weakness. Instead, he directs believers toward the strength of the Lord, the whole armour of God, the word of God, faith, righteousness, salvation, and persevering prayer. The Christian's protection rests upon what God has revealed, not upon the inventions of religious entertainers. Some preachers have managed to turn spiritual warfare into a theatrical production featuring more shouting, stomping, dramatic gestures, and imaginary conversations with devils than actual Bible exposition. If the Apostle Paul walked into some of those performances, he might reasonably inquire whether anyone had remembered to bring the Scriptures.

The Christian must recognize three persistent enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world presents a system of values and desires opposed to God. The flesh remains capable of sin even after the believer has been born again. The devil operates through deception, temptation, opposition, and the corruption of truth. These enemies must be distinguished without pretending they operate in complete isolation. A believer can yield to his flesh without requiring a demon to personally supervise every foolish decision. He can adopt worldly thinking without hearing an audible satanic instruction. He can also encounter false doctrine that ultimately serves the devil's purposes while being delivered by a respectable religious teacher carrying a Bible. Discipleship therefore requires more than enthusiasm and suspicion. It requires sound doctrine, spiritual discernment, obedience, and faithful dependence upon Jesus Christ. **A saved man cannot afford to**

sleep through spiritual warfare, but neither should he spend his Christian life inspecting every shadow while neglecting the light of God's written word.

1. Saved and Sealed — The Devil Cannot Undo What Christ Has Finished

Before discussing spiritual warfare, we must establish the believer's position in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, completely apart from human works. Ephesians 1:13–14 teaches that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel of salvation. That sealing continues until the redemption of the purchased possession. The Christian's eternal security does not depend upon his ability to overpower Satan through personal strength, maintain an uninterrupted record of obedience, or perform a series of spiritual rituals whenever he becomes afraid. Salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Colossians 2:13–15 describes the forgiveness of trespasses, the removal of the handwriting of ordinances against us, and Christ's triumph over principalities and powers. The Saviour accomplished the victory through His cross. **The devil may oppose the believer's walk, but he cannot present an unpaid invoice for a redemption that Jesus Christ has already purchased in full.**

Romans 8:33–39 reinforces that security by declaring that God justifies, Christ died and rose again, and nothing can separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul specifically includes principalities and powers among the things unable to accomplish that separation. The Christian is not hanging over eternal damnation by a thread while Satan waits for an opportunity to cut it. The believer belongs to Christ, and his standing rests upon the Saviour's righteousness rather than his spiritual performance. This does not mean Satan is incapable of deceiving, troubling, or tempting Christians. It means his activity cannot overturn the promises of eternal life. There is a tremendous difference between a secure relationship with God and a careless daily walk. The saved man may suffer damaged fellowship, chastening, lost usefulness, and forfeited rewards through disobedience. None of those consequences turns Christ's completed redemption into a temporary arrangement.

This distinction exposes a serious error in religious teaching that portrays every Christian as perpetually vulnerable to losing salvation through satanic interference. John 10:28 records the Lord's promise of eternal life and security to His sheep. Ephesians 4:30 identifies the believer as sealed unto the day of redemption while simultaneously warning against grieving the Holy Spirit. Those truths belong together. Spiritual warfare concerns the believer's conduct, testimony, faithfulness, discernment, and resistance to evil; it does not require Christians to repeatedly purchase what Christ has already secured. The devil's accusations cannot improve upon the authority of God's written word. A Christian who continually measures his security by his latest spiritual victory has abandoned the

foundation of assurance. **The armour of God is given to a soldier who already belongs to the Lord. He does not put on the armour to persuade the Commander to enlist him.**

2. The World, the Flesh, and the Devil — Know Which Enemy You Are Fighting

Ephesians 2:1–3 describes the former condition of believers who were dead in trespasses and sins. Paul identifies the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air, and the lusts of the flesh. These expressions reveal a combination of corrupt worldly influence, satanic activity, and human sinful desires. The world system continually promotes values contrary to Scripture, offering pleasure without righteousness, ambition without humility, and liberty without accountability. First John 2:15–17 warns against loving the world and identifies the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The Christian must not confuse the created world or ordinary human relationships with the corrupt spiritual system opposed to God. He is commanded to witness to sinners, not despise them. Nevertheless, he must refuse the world's standards whenever they contradict Scripture. **A Christian who allows the world to write his convictions should not be surprised when his spiritual testimony begins resembling the world's advertisements.**

The flesh represents another enemy, and this one does not require crossing the street to find him. Galatians 5:16 commands, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Verse 17 describes the opposition between the flesh and the Spirit, while verses 19–21 identify works including adultery, fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, hatred, wrath, strife, envyings, and drunkenness. The passage does not describe a collection of demons requiring individual names and ceremonial eviction notices. It identifies sinful conduct arising from the flesh. Romans 7 likewise demonstrates the seriousness of the conflict with sin, while Romans 6 commands believers to reckon themselves dead to sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ. The answer is not to blame Satan for every voluntary act of disobedience. **Some Christians would rather accuse the devil of stealing the cookies than admit they personally walked into the kitchen, opened the jar, and ate the entire supply.**

The devil is a genuine personal adversary, but acknowledging his existence does not excuse human responsibility. Second Corinthians 2:11 warns, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” The immediate context concerns forgiveness and the danger of allowing a disciplinary matter to become destructive through excessive sorrow or unforgiveness. That is revealing. Satanic advantage may arise through circumstances that appear ordinary: bitterness, division, resentment, pride, and the refusal to obey biblical instruction. The believer must therefore resist the temptation to make spiritual warfare an exotic subject disconnected from daily conduct. An unforgiving Christian, a dishonest businessman, an immoral church member, or a doctrinally careless

teacher may provide opportunities for destruction without witnessing supernatural spectacles. The devil does not require fireworks when ordinary disobedience accomplishes his purposes. **A believer can spend an entire evening investigating imaginary demonic activity while handing the enemy an actual advantage through bitterness he refuses to surrender.**

3. Satan's Greatest Weapons Include Deception, Counterfeit Doctrine, and Religious Appearance

Second Corinthians 11:13–15 describes false apostles and deceitful workers transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. Paul then explains, “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” Verse 15 adds that Satan's ministers can appear as ministers of righteousness. This should permanently correct the childish assumption that satanic deception must always arrive accompanied by frightening symbols, obvious wickedness, or theatrical displays of darkness. False doctrine may arrive wearing a respectable suit, carrying an impressive collection of credentials, and quoting Scripture with considerable confidence. The Corinthians faced teachers who threatened to corrupt their understanding of Christ and the gospel. Paul warned in verse 4 about another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel. The danger was doctrinal, not merely emotional or spectacular. **The devil does not need to convince everybody that evil is attractive when he can persuade religious people that a counterfeit gospel is actually the truth.**

First Timothy 4:1–2 reinforces this warning by declaring that some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy. The passage identifies false religious teaching as a serious danger associated with spiritual deception. It proceeds to mention forbidding marriage and commanding abstinence from meats as particular examples of corrupt doctrine. Notice how ordinary the mechanism can appear. Instead of some bizarre supernatural performance, the deception arrives through religious rules falsely imposed as divine requirements. Galatians 1:8–9 likewise warns against preaching another gospel, even if the supposed messenger comes from heaven. The Christian therefore requires biblical discernment more than fascination with appearances. A preacher's sincerity, popularity, eloquence, or supernatural claims cannot establish truth. God has provided the Scriptures as the standard. **A lie does not become sound doctrine because the speaker raises his voice, opens a Bible, or announces that he received special information directly from heaven.**

Second Timothy 2:24–26 establishes how the servant of the Lord should respond to those opposing the truth. Paul commands gentleness, patience, aptitude to teach, and meek instruction, with the hope that God will grant repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. Verse 26 refers to recovery from the snare of the devil. Notice that deliverance from

deception is associated with truth, repentance, and proper instruction rather than theatrical combat. The Christian is not instructed to abandon reasoned biblical teaching and begin shouting at invisible enemies whenever someone embraces false doctrine. He is instructed to handle Scripture faithfully and correct error appropriately. This does not eliminate the necessity of strong rebuke where Scripture requires it, but it places spiritual warfare within the discipline of biblical truth. The teacher must distinguish between a deceiver knowingly corrupting doctrine and a confused person who has been misled. **The answer to a counterfeit Bible doctrine is not a louder counterfeit spiritual performance. It is the genuine word of God rightly divided and faithfully proclaimed.**

4. The Whole Armour of God — Truth, Righteousness, the Gospel, and Faith

Ephesians 6:13 commands believers to take unto themselves the whole armour of God so they may withstand in the evil day and, having done all, stand. The repeated emphasis upon standing is significant. Paul does not instruct Christians to become reckless spiritual adventurers seeking confrontation with unseen powers. He commands steadfastness under divine protection. Verse 14 begins, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.” Truth must govern the believer's understanding and conduct. A soldier whose equipment is secured with falsehood has prepared himself for disaster before the fighting begins. The Christian must know sound doctrine, reject deliberate dishonesty, and submit his judgments to Scripture. The breastplate of righteousness directs attention toward the righteousness associated with the believer's life and position in Christ. Justification rests upon the righteousness of Christ, while practical righteousness should characterize the Christian's walk. Neither can be replaced by outward religious appearance.

Verse 15 continues, “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” The gospel is not an optional attachment carried only by professional evangelists. The believer must be established in the saving message of Jesus Christ and prepared to stand and serve according to that truth. Romans 1:16 identifies the gospel as God's power unto salvation, while 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 establishes Christ's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection. A Christian who understands spiritual warfare but cannot explain the gospel has become fascinated with the battlefield while forgetting the central message entrusted to the Church. The shoes signify readiness and firm footing rather than restless fascination with demons. **A soldier who spends his time studying the enemy's uniform while forgetting his own orders is not demonstrating military excellence. He is advertising an urgent need for training.** The believer must be grounded in the gospel before attempting to instruct others concerning spiritual conflict.

Ephesians 6:16 adds, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” Biblical faith rests upon God's revealed word rather than human imagination. Romans 10:17 declares that faith comes by hearing the word of God. The shield therefore does not consist of positive thinking, emotional excitement, or the repeated assertion that unpleasant circumstances cannot occur. The believer may face accusations, doubts, temptations, persecution, and discouragement, but he must answer these assaults with confidence in God's actual promises. A Christian cannot successfully defend himself with religious slogans that contradict Scripture. If he has been taught that salvation guarantees prosperity, the first serious hardship may leave him bewildered. If he understands Romans 8 and 2 Corinthians 12, he possesses better preparation. **The shield of faith is not built from whatever promises man wishes God had made. It rests upon what God has actually said.**

5. The Helmet, the Sword, and Prayer — God's Equipment Is Better Than Man's Inventions

Ephesians 6:17 continues, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The helmet directs attention toward salvation, the central blessing secured through Jesus Christ. First Thessalonians 5:8 likewise speaks of the hope of salvation as a helmet. The Christian must understand his standing and expectation in Christ rather than allowing accusations to overturn biblical assurance. Salvation is received by grace through faith, and eternal security rests upon the Saviour's finished work. A confused believer who imagines that Satan can cancel his redemption every afternoon will spend his spiritual life terrified rather than established. The sword of the Spirit is explicitly identified as the word of God. Scripture is the weapon Paul names, not religious imagination or supposed secret authority. **God has placed a sword in the Christian's hand, and some believers have responded by dropping it in order to wave a collection of homemade spiritual slogans at the enemy.**

Second Corinthians 10:3–5 further explains the nature of Christian warfare: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.” Paul states that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God, capable of pulling down strong holds and casting down imaginations and every high thing exalting itself against the knowledge of God. The immediate context concerns Paul's apostolic ministry and his defense against opposition, but its emphasis upon truth and obedience is clear. Strongholds are not presented as an invitation to invent elaborate maps of unseen spiritual kingdoms. Paul identifies thoughts, imaginations, opposition to divine knowledge, and obedience to Christ. The Christian confronts false arguments through biblical truth, not through physical violence or psychological theatrics. The weapons are spiritual because the conflict involves truth,

deception, allegiance, and obedience. **You cannot defeat a lie by beating the person who believes it, and you cannot establish sound doctrine by shouting louder than the man who is wrong.**

Ephesians 6:18 completes the description with “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Prayer is inseparable from spiritual vigilance. The believer is not self-sufficient simply because he possesses biblical knowledge. He must depend upon the Lord, intercede for other Christians, and remain watchful. Paul's following request concerns boldness to make known the mystery of the gospel, demonstrating that spiritual warfare and gospel proclamation belong together. There is something remarkably inconsistent about a Christian who can discuss Satan's strategy for hours but cannot spend fifteen minutes praying for missionaries, pastors, struggling believers, or lost sinners. Prayer is not an emergency button for occasional disasters. It belongs to continuing Christian service. **The armour of God does not include a theatrical costume, a secret password, or a certificate identifying the Christian as a professional demon hunter. It includes the provisions God has actually revealed.**

6. Be Sober and Vigilant — Spiritual Watchfulness Is Not Religious Paranoia

First Thessalonians 5:6 commands, “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” The immediate context concerns the Day of the Lord, believers' identity as children of light, and their proper conduct in view of God's prophetic purposes. Paul then mentions the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation. Spiritual watchfulness involves alertness, sobriety, and readiness rather than careless conformity to surrounding darkness. The Christian should recognize false doctrine, temptation, and opportunities for compromise. But biblical vigilance must not become obsessive suspicion in which every disappointment, mechanical failure, illness, or disagreement is assigned a demonic explanation. Some religious people have developed such elaborate theories about satanic activity that they can identify fifteen imaginary spiritual causes for a flat tire while overlooking the nail plainly sticking out of the rubber. **Discernment begins with what Scripture actually reveals, not with the ability to invent supernatural explanations for ordinary events.**

First Peter 5:8–9 states, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith.” Peter addresses believers facing suffering and opposition, and his warning must be read alongside his instructions concerning humility, steadfastness, and faithful endurance. The devil is described as an adversary, not a harmless religious symbol. His activity is genuine, and Christians must not become careless. Yet Peter's command is to resist

steadfastly in the faith. He does not instruct believers to seek personal meetings with Satan, investigate the private names of demons, or build entire ministries around dramatic confrontations with the unseen world. Resistance rests upon faithfulness to God. The lion illustration emphasizes danger, but the biblical response is neither panic nor fascination. A soldier who spends every waking moment staring at enemy territory while refusing his assigned duties has allowed vigilance to become paralysis.

James 4:7–8 likewise declares, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” James originally addresses the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and his epistle must be understood within that setting. Nevertheless, the principle of submission to God and resistance to the devil provides legitimate instruction. Notice the order. Submission comes before resistance. A person cannot deliberately cultivate sin while expecting an impressive declaration of authority to replace obedience. Ephesians 4:26–27 warns believers against allowing anger to become sin and commands them not to give place to the devil. That is a practical warning connected with ordinary conduct. The Christian who refuses forgiveness, embraces bitterness, and cultivates dishonesty may be providing opportunities for spiritual damage while claiming extraordinary authority over Satan. **A man who refuses to submit to God's word has no business pretending that spiritual victory can be manufactured by the volume of his voice.**

7. Spiritual Warfare Is Not a Circus — Reject the Counterfeit Deliverance Industry

Acts 19:13–16 records the remarkable incident involving certain Jewish exorcists who attempted to invoke the name of Jesus over a man possessed by an evil spirit. The sons of Sceva employed the expression, “We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” The evil spirit answered, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” The resulting humiliation demonstrated the danger of treating the name of Jesus Christ as a magical formula. This event occurred during the extraordinary apostolic ministry recorded in Acts, when genuine signs accompanied God's work through His appointed servants. It must not be converted into an instruction for every Christian to reproduce the incident or develop a professional deliverance business. The passage actually exposes the presumption of men who attempted to appropriate spiritual authority they did not possess. **The name of Jesus Christ is not a religious incantation, and spiritual authority cannot be manufactured by repeating somebody else's words with sufficient theatrical enthusiasm.**

The modern deliverance industry frequently thrives upon claims that go far beyond the written Scriptures. Some insist that particular demons govern individual cities, family occupations, ordinary emotions, financial difficulties, or inherited habits. Others claim special knowledge of invisible ranks, territorial assignments, generational contracts, and

spiritual ceremonies supposedly necessary for freedom. Still others turn public religious gatherings into performances involving shouting, dramatic gestures, staged confrontations, and supposed revelations that cannot be tested against Scripture. The Bible certainly records actual demonic activity, particularly during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and the apostolic period. Those accounts must be believed in their proper setting. But a recorded event is not automatically a universal command, and extraordinary apostolic signs cannot simply be claimed by anyone who desires an audience. Luke 10:17–20 records the seventy rejoicing over the submission of devils, yet the Lord redirected their attention toward a greater reason for rejoicing. The Christian should learn from that correction rather than build his entire religious identity around fascination with evil spirits.

Spiritual warfare also requires recognizing the difference between genuine spiritual opposition and ordinary human difficulties. Scripture does not authorize diagnosing every illness, sorrow, habit, disagreement, or personal struggle as demonic possession. Nor should Christians neglect necessary practical responsibilities while seeking supernatural explanations unsupported by God's word. The believer must confront sin through repentance and obedience, false doctrine through Scripture, temptation through spiritual vigilance, and suffering through faithfulness to Christ. He should maintain fellowship with sound believers, receive biblical correction, and resist the influence of those who corrupt the gospel. Second Corinthians 11 warns that Satan's ministers may appear righteous, making doctrinal discernment indispensable. A sensational performance can be thoroughly unbiblical even when the audience responds enthusiastically. **The devil is not defeated by turning the church into a circus. The Christian is commanded to stand in the Lord's strength, remain established in truth, and resist the enemy through faith and obedience.**

Conclusion

The biblical doctrine of spiritual warfare is serious precisely because the enemy is real, the deception is dangerous, and the believer's responsibilities are substantial. Ephesians 6 commands Christians to put on the whole armour of God and stand against the devil's wiles. Second Corinthians warns against satanic advantage and counterfeit religious ministers. Galatians identifies the continuing conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, while First Thessalonians commands sobriety and vigilance. First Peter warns that the devil seeks to devour, and James teaches submission to God and resistance to the adversary. These passages do not authorize Christians to become obsessed with darkness or to invent spiritual practices beyond Scripture. They direct believers toward the truth, righteousness, gospel readiness, faith, salvation, God's word, and prayer. The same Bible that reveals the enemy also identifies the provisions God has supplied. **The Christian does not need a**

better imagination concerning Satan. He needs a stronger commitment to what God has already written.

The believer must therefore maintain a proper balance between confidence in Christ and seriousness about spiritual opposition. Eternal salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, not upon the believer's ability to recognize every satanic device. Nevertheless, security in Christ does not remove the responsibility to resist temptation, reject false doctrine, forgive offenses, control the flesh, and remain faithful in service. The devil cannot overturn Christ's promises, but he can exploit carelessness, pride, bitterness, doctrinal ignorance, and disobedience. That is why the Christian must refuse both extremes: treating Satan as an imaginary character and treating him as though he possesses unrestricted authority over the redeemed. The Lord Jesus Christ remains sovereign, and the word of God remains the believer's standard. Some battles involve direct opposition to gospel preaching. Others appear through attractive false teaching, destructive relationships, or ordinary temptations that gradually weaken spiritual judgment. **The enemy does not need to destroy a Christian's salvation to damage his testimony, waste his opportunities, and render his earthly service ineffective.**

So put on the whole armour of God. Stand in truth when deception becomes fashionable. Practice righteousness when sin promises temporary pleasure. Remain established in the gospel when religion attempts to add works to salvation. Hold the shield of faith when accusations and discouragement arrive. Remember the security purchased by Jesus Christ, take up the sword of the Spirit, and continue in prayer for all saints. Do not surrender the mind to worldly thinking, the body to fleshly appetites, or the conscience to false doctrine. Refuse the counterfeit teachers who replace Scripture with religious spectacle, and reject the arrogance that imagines spiritual victory can be achieved through human strength. The Christian does not need to chase the devil through every dark corner of the world. He needs to obey the Lord who has already defeated him. **Satan did not retire when you were saved, and the Christian life is not a peaceful vacation through territory uncontested by evil. But neither has the devil become the ruler of your eternal destiny. Jesus Christ purchased your redemption, the Holy Spirit sealed you unto the day of redemption, and the word of God has supplied the instructions for the battle. The devil may roar, deceive, accuse, and oppose, but the Christian is not commanded to worship his power or tremble before his reputation. He is commanded to stand. Keep your Bible open, your doctrine sound, your conduct clean, your faith established, and your attention fixed upon Jesus Christ. The enemy is real, but the Saviour is greater. The battle demands vigilance, but the victory belongs to the Lord.**

10 of 10: Discipleship — Finish the Course: Do Not Spend Your Last Mile Looking Back

Key Passage: 2 Timothy 4:7–8 (KJV)

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Introduction

There is something almost tragic about a Christian who begins his journey with enough enthusiasm to shake the windows out of the church building, purchases three study Bibles, announces his determination to serve Jesus Christ until his dying breath, and then spends the next thirty years explaining why he no longer has time to do anything. He can remember the date of his salvation, the preacher who gave the invitation, the first Bible conference he attended, and every stirring promise he made when the excitement was fresh. Ask him what he is doing for the Lord today, however, and the conversation becomes considerably less impressive. Somewhere between the starting line and the finish line, he traded faithfulness for familiarity, conviction for convenience, and spiritual responsibility for a comfortable collection of excuses. He has enough stories about yesterday's victories to fill a library, but precious little evidence of today's obedience. The Apostle Paul did not approach the Christian life that way. When death stood near enough to hear him breathing, Paul did not spend his final testimony advertising how spectacularly he had begun. He declared, **“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”** There is a world of difference between starting with excitement and finishing with faithfulness.

Second Timothy 4:6–8 places that declaration within one of the most solemn settings in the New Testament. Paul writes, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.” This is not a young preacher delivering an enthusiastic sermon about everything he hopes to accomplish during the next forty years. This is an aged apostle nearing the conclusion of his earthly ministry, writing to Timothy while imprisonment and impending death frame his circumstances. Paul had endured beatings, shipwrecks, persecution, imprisonment, betrayal, exhaustion, and the continual burden of caring for the churches. He had preached the gospel entrusted to him, defended sound doctrine, established assemblies, corrected error, and suffered because he refused to compromise the truth. Now, approaching the end, he could testify that he had completed his assigned course. Notice the possessive expression: *my course*. Paul was not required to finish Peter's course, Barnabas's course, or somebody else's assignment. He was responsible for

the ministry entrusted to him. And having reached the closing stretch, he looked beyond the executioner's sword toward the righteous Judge who would reward faithful service.

Every saved person needs to understand the distinction between receiving eternal life and faithfully completing the Christian course. Salvation is the free gift of God, received by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. It is not earned through endurance, purchased through good works, or maintained by accumulating enough years of obedient service to satisfy heaven. But salvation does not make the believer's earthly conduct meaningless. Scripture teaches responsibility, perseverance, spiritual discipline, stewardship, and future accountability at the judgment seat of Christ. A Christian may waste opportunities, compromise doctrine, damage his testimony, abandon useful service, and suffer loss of reward without undoing the redemption Christ accomplished at Calvary. Those are serious matters precisely because the believer belongs to the Lord. The Christian life has a beginning, a course to be run, and an appointed conclusion. Along the way there will be battles, disappointments, changing responsibilities, physical limitations, and temptations to quit. **The question is not whether you began the race with enough enthusiasm to impress the spectators. The question is whether you intend to remain faithful when the spectators disappear and the finish line comes into view.**

1. The Foundation Is Secure — Eternal Life Is Not a Trophy for Finishing First

Before examining the Christian race, we must establish what the race cannot accomplish. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Romans 4:5 likewise states that God justifies the ungodly man who believes rather than works. Salvation is not an athletic championship in which the strongest, fastest, most disciplined, or most successful contestant earns eternal life. The sinner receives everlasting life by trusting Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, as declared in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4. The believer's standing rests upon Christ's finished work, not upon his ability to complete an impressive spiritual résumé. **If eternal life were awarded only to Christians who performed flawlessly until death, heaven would be empty of redeemed sinners and full of abandoned applications.** But the Lord did not offer an application. He provided a Saviour.

John 5:24 establishes the certainty of that salvation: “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” First John 5:13 explains that believers may know they possess eternal life. Ephesians 1:13–14 identifies the sealing of the Holy Spirit and the earnest of the believer's inheritance. These passages must govern our understanding of Christian perseverance. A saved person does not run the race hoping that sufficient

endurance will eventually persuade God to honor a temporary promise. He runs because he already belongs to Christ. His failures may bring chastening, damaged fellowship, lost opportunities, and forfeited rewards, but they do not transform eternal life into temporary life. Hebrews 12:5–11 describes the Father's chastening of His children, demonstrating that discipline concerns an existing relationship. A disobedient son needs correction, not another birth certificate. The believer's security remains grounded in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:10 immediately follows the declaration of salvation by grace: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” There is the proper order once again. The believer is created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works, not saved *by* good works. Nevertheless, the works matter. The Christian should study Scripture, pray, serve, witness, resist temptation, remain doctrinally faithful, and persevere because he has been redeemed. Some religious teachers confuse discipleship with justification and turn every command to endure into another condition for maintaining salvation. Others use eternal security as an excuse to become spiritually useless. Both errors disregard the distinction God has established. **Grace does not turn salvation into a reward for running. Grace places the redeemed believer upon the course and gives him every reason to run faithfully. The finish line concerns the completion of service, not the purchase of redemption.**

2. Run to Obtain the Prize — Discipline Is Not Legalism When Scripture Commands It

First Corinthians 9:24–27 presents the Christian course through the illustration of athletic competition. Paul writes, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.” The Corinthians understood athletic contests, and Paul used that familiar picture to teach spiritual responsibility. Verse 25 explains that competitors exercise temperance in all things while seeking a corruptible crown, whereas the believer labors with an incorruptible reward in view. Notice the distinction between salvation and the prize. Paul is not teaching that Christians compete against one another for a single available position in heaven. He is using the discipline of an athlete to illustrate the seriousness of faithful service. The runner must train, exercise restraint, and maintain his direction. An athlete who spends six months discussing the importance of conditioning while refusing to leave his recliner should not expect a championship medal merely because his intentions were impressive.

Paul continues in verse 26, “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.” He possessed a definite purpose. His service was not aimless religious activity performed whenever circumstances happened to be favorable. Verse 27 adds, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” The immediate context concerns

disciplined ministry, faithful preaching, and the prize associated with service. It must not be twisted into a denial of justification by faith or eternal security. Paul recognized that a preacher could proclaim truth to others while failing to maintain the personal discipline appropriate to his own calling. The possibility of becoming disapproved for service and reward was serious. His body was not permitted to govern his spiritual responsibilities simply because the flesh preferred an easier arrangement. **A man who preaches self-control while being mastered by his own appetites has become an illustrated sermon on hypocrisy.**

Spiritual discipline involves practical decisions that rarely attract applause. A Christian must make time for Scripture when entertainment would be more convenient. He must pray when circumstances encourage self-reliance. He must resist sinful appetites when the flesh offers immediate pleasure and promises to send the consequences later. He must honor commitments, maintain honesty, cultivate sound doctrine, and serve without requiring constant encouragement. First Timothy 4:7–8 connects godliness with exercise, while acknowledging that bodily exercise profits for a limited time and godliness carries broader value. Discipline does not mean constructing man-made religious regulations or attempting to earn divine acceptance through personal severity. It means taking God's commands seriously. A runner who refuses training cannot reasonably complain that the race demands endurance. Likewise, a Christian who continually feeds the flesh while neglecting Scripture should not be surprised when spiritual weakness becomes evident. **The flesh will volunteer to lead the Christian life, provided the destination is whatever feels pleasant and the schedule contains no actual obedience.**

3. Forgetting What Is Behind — Yesterday's Victories and Failures Must Not Govern Tomorrow

Philippians 3:12–14 reveals that Paul did not regard himself as having completed spiritual growth while he remained in earthly service. He writes, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after.” He continues by declaring, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.” Then comes the familiar declaration: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” These words were written by a man whose ministry had already accomplished more than most Christians could imagine. Yet Paul refused to treat previous achievements as proof that present faithfulness was unnecessary. His emphasis was upon pressing forward. The apostle was not sitting beside the track polishing yesterday's trophies while other servants continued running.

The expression “forgetting those things which are behind” does not mean Paul literally erased his past from memory. His own epistles repeatedly recount his former persecution of the Church, his conversion, his sufferings, and God's mercy toward him. The expression concerns refusing to allow previous circumstances to govern his present pursuit. Yesterday's successes can become dangerous when they produce complacency. A Christian may have taught Scripture faithfully for decades, supported missionaries, led people to Christ, and served through difficult seasons. Those accomplishments should produce thanksgiving, not a declaration that obedience has become unnecessary. The believer who spends every conversation explaining what he accomplished thirty years ago ought occasionally to consider what remains before him today. **A man cannot run tomorrow's mile on yesterday's footsteps, and a Christian cannot fulfill today's responsibilities by continually rehearsing yesterday's testimony.** The Lord has not commanded believers to live without gratitude for the past, but neither has He authorized permanent retirement from obedience while opportunities remain.

Past failures can become equally destructive when they produce paralysis. A believer may remember wasted years, sinful decisions, compromised convictions, neglected opportunities, or relationships damaged through foolish conduct. Scripture requires honest confession and appropriate correction, not pretending that wrongdoing never occurred. First John 1:9 addresses confession, while Galatians 6:7 reminds believers that sowing has consequences. Yet the Christian who has confessed sin must not allow yesterday's failure to become an excuse for refusing today's responsibilities. Paul had once persecuted the Church, as he acknowledged in 1 Timothy 1:12–16, but God's mercy did not leave him forever standing beside the ruins of his former life. He became a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. The believer cannot reverse every consequence or recover every wasted opportunity. He can obey the Lord with what remains. **The devil would gladly have one Christian worship his past achievements and another worship his past failures. Either way, both men stop looking toward the course still before them.**

4. Finish the Ministry You Received — Faithfulness May Lead Through Opposition

Acts 20:24 records Paul's declaration to the elders associated with the Ephesian church: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” The surrounding passage reveals that Paul understood bonds and afflictions awaited him. He was not speaking from ignorance of danger. He had received warnings concerning suffering, yet his primary concern was completing the ministry entrusted to him. Notice that he did not claim every Christian must duplicate his specific apostolic commission. His course involved proclaiming the gospel of

the grace of God and carrying out the responsibilities committed to him by the risen Saviour. The principle of faithfulness remains applicable to believers with different responsibilities. **Paul did not measure success by how effectively he avoided trouble. He measured his service by whether he remained faithful to the One who had called him.**

The Christian must therefore distinguish perseverance from foolish stubbornness. Paul was willing to suffer for the gospel, but he also exercised wisdom in responding to danger. Acts records occasions when he departed from hostile circumstances, accepted assistance, and used lawful means available to him. Faithfulness does not require standing in the path of every unnecessary injury merely to produce an impressive testimony. Neither does it permit abandoning biblical responsibilities whenever opposition appears. Second Timothy 3:12 warns that those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. The believer must expect that sound doctrine, honest conduct, and faithful witness may bring rejection. Some will misunderstand him. Some will oppose his convictions. Some may betray his trust or criticize his ministry. Yet the existence of opposition does not automatically prove wrongdoing. Nor does opposition automatically establish righteousness. The test remains Scripture. **A Christian is not faithful merely because people dislike him, but he is not necessarily unfaithful because obedience has made him unpopular.**

Paul's testimony also confronts the temptation to surrender ministry because people disappoint us. In 2 Timothy 4:10, he records that Demas had forsaken him, having loved this present world. Verse 16 describes his first answer, when no man stood with him, but all forsook him. Yet verse 17 declares, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.” Consider the force of that statement. Human companions failed, but the Lord remained faithful. Paul did not conclude that the gospel had become unworthy of proclamation because some former associates had abandoned their responsibilities. Christians must learn this lesson before bitterness destroys their service. Pastors may disappoint. Fellow workers may prove unreliable. Friends may become indifferent. None of those failures changes the truth of the gospel or cancels Christ's authority. **The Christian who serves only while people remain agreeable is not primarily serving the Lord. He has made human approval the fuel upon which his faithfulness depends.**

5. Be Not Weary in Well Doing — The Course Changes as Life Changes

Galatians 6:7–9 contains a warning and an encouragement that belong together. Paul declares, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” He then contrasts sowing to the flesh with sowing to the Spirit before commanding, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we

faint not." The passage addresses believers and concerns the practical consequences of their conduct. It is not a formula for purchasing eternal life through continued performance. Nor is it a guarantee that every faithful action will produce an immediate earthly reward. The agricultural illustration makes the point unmistakable. Sowing ordinarily precedes reaping, and the farmer cannot demand a harvest five minutes after putting seed into the ground. The Christian must continue faithfully even when visible results develop slowly. **Some believers want a harvest before they have finished planting, and others abandon the field because the first handful of seed did not produce a forest by Wednesday.**

First Corinthians 15:58 supplies additional encouragement: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." The command follows Paul's extended exposition of the resurrection, including the future transformation of the believer's body and victory over death through Jesus Christ. Because that resurrection hope is certain, faithful labor possesses lasting significance. The Christian should not evaluate service exclusively by immediate numerical results, financial success, public recognition, or emotional satisfaction. A parent may teach Scripture faithfully while children require years to understand its significance. A teacher may repeat foundational truths until the congregation finally grasps them. A missionary may endure discouragement while the gospel advances slowly. A believer may assist others without receiving thanks. These things do not automatically make the labor vain. **God's accounting department does not operate exclusively upon the statistics that impress religious advertisers. Faithfulness matters even when the results are not suitable for a promotional brochure.**

The course also changes as life progresses. A young believer may possess physical strength but require greater doctrinal understanding. Parents raising children face responsibilities that differ from those of an unmarried Christian or an elderly servant. A person working long hours must fulfill legitimate obligations while seeking appropriate opportunities to serve. Another may experience illness, disability, bereavement, or diminishing strength that prevents earlier forms of labor. God has not commanded believers to pretend their circumstances are identical. Colossians 3:23 directs Christians to work heartily as unto the Lord, and 1 Corinthians 4:2 identifies faithfulness as the requirement of stewards. A Christian who can no longer travel may still pray, encourage, teach, write, support, or bear witness according to his abilities. Reduced physical capacity does not necessarily mean reduced spiritual usefulness. **The Lord does not require an eighty-year-old believer to pretend he still possesses the body of a twenty-year-old.**

He requires faithfulness with the responsibilities and opportunities that remain. The assignment may change, but the Master has not.

6. Lay Aside Every Weight — Bitterness, Compromise, and Worldliness Can Ruin the Run

Hebrews 12:1–2 introduces another powerful picture of endurance: "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." The epistle addresses Hebrews within a setting containing important covenant and prophetic distinctions, and its warnings must not be carelessly converted into denials of eternal security for the body of Christ. Nevertheless, the exhortation concerning endurance and laying aside hindrances provides a serious practical lesson. Notice that the writer distinguishes *every weight* from *the sin*. Not every hindrance must be an inherently sinful activity. Something lawful may become spiritually unprofitable when it consumes excessive attention, interferes with obligations, or repeatedly displaces Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and service. A runner does not enter a race carrying furniture simply because no rule explicitly forbids owning a chair. **A Christian may possess the liberty to engage in an activity and still lack the wisdom to recognize when that activity has become a weight around his ankles.**

Bitterness is another dangerous burden. Hebrews 12:15 warns against a root of bitterness springing up and troubling many. Ephesians 4:31–32 commands believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, while practicing kindness and forgiveness. A Christian may experience genuine mistreatment without possessing biblical permission to cultivate hatred indefinitely. There are wrongs that require correction, accountability, or appropriate separation, but bitterness is not the same as justice. It can gradually occupy the mind until every conversation returns to an old injury and every opportunity for service becomes secondary to rehearsing the offense. Some believers have allowed one disappointment to dominate twenty subsequent years. They can remember every insult, every betrayal, and every unpleasant church disagreement with astonishing accuracy, yet struggle to remember the responsibilities God placed before them. **Bitterness is a heavy piece of luggage, and the Christian who insists upon carrying it should not be surprised when his spiritual pace begins to resemble a funeral procession.**

Doctrinal compromise and worldly entanglement can be equally destructive. Second Timothy 4:3–4 warns that people will turn from sound doctrine toward teachers who satisfy their itching ears. Second Timothy 2:4 declares that a man engaged in warfare does not entangle himself with the affairs of this life, so that he may please the one who chose him

to be a soldier. Paul is using military service as an illustration of undivided responsibility, not commanding Christians to abandon legitimate employment, family duties, or ordinary earthly obligations. The issue is entanglement that prevents faithful service. Some believers gradually surrender convictions to obtain acceptance, money, comfort, or religious influence. Others become so absorbed in controversy, entertainment, possessions, and personal ambitions that Christ's work receives whatever time remains after everything else has been satisfied. **The devil does not always need to knock a Christian off the road. Sometimes he only needs to persuade him to park beside it, admire the scenery, and call permanent inactivity a well-deserved rest.**

7. The Judgment Seat of Christ — One Day the Lord Will Examine the Course

Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." This judgment concerns believers and must be distinguished from the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11–15. The Great White Throne concerns final judgment and the lake of fire. The judgment seat of Christ concerns accountability for those who belong to Him. First Corinthians 3:11 establishes Jesus Christ as the only foundation, while verses 12–15 describe the believer's work being tested by fire. Gold, silver, and precious stones represent work that withstands examination, while wood, hay, and stubble illustrate what will not endure. Verse 15 states that a man whose work burns shall suffer loss, "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." That verse protects the distinction between eternal salvation and future reward. **The fire examines the building materials, not the sufficiency of the foundation. Jesus Christ remains the foundation when the worthless work has disappeared.**

Colossians 3:23–25 connects ordinary service with the Lord's future evaluation. Believers are instructed to work heartily as unto the Lord, knowing they shall receive the reward of the inheritance because they serve the Lord Christ. The passage also warns that wrongdoing will receive its proper recompense and that there is no respect of persons. God does not judge according to celebrity, denominational prominence, wealth, or the size of an audience. First Corinthians 4:5 reminds believers that the Lord will bring hidden things to light and make manifest the counsels of the hearts. That should encourage quiet servants while sobering public ministers. An obscure believer may have served faithfully for decades without recognition. A famous preacher may have built an impressive reputation upon motives that will not survive divine examination. The Lord knows the difference. **Earthly applause can be purchased, manufactured, or manipulated. The righteous Judge will not require a publicity department to determine what deserves reward.**

Second Timothy 4:8 identifies the crown of righteousness awaiting Paul and “all them also that love his appearing.” This expectation belongs naturally with the Church's blessed hope and the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. First Thessalonians 4:13–18 and Titus 2:13 establish the believer's expectation of Christ's coming, distinct from Israel's future national restoration and the Lord's subsequent return in judgment. Revelation 2:10 also contains the promise of a crown of life to those faithful unto death, addressed specifically to the suffering church at Smyrna within the prophetic book's setting. Its original audience must be respected rather than turning every expression into an unrestricted personal guarantee. Nevertheless, the Scriptures consistently establish that faithfulness matters to the Lord. The Christian should serve in view of His appearing, not merely in pursuit of earthly recognition. **The believer who understands the judgment seat of Christ will not spend his entire life competing for temporary crowns while neglecting the Lord who holds the eternal ones.**

Conclusion

The Christian course begins with salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, but it continues through a life of responsibility, discipline, obedience, service, and perseverance. Paul understood that distinction. He did not labor to purchase justification, and he did not imagine that his sufferings added anything to the sacrifice accomplished at Calvary. He served because he belonged to the Saviour who had redeemed and commissioned him. His ministry was not easy, his circumstances were not always favorable, and his companions did not always remain faithful. Yet when he approached the conclusion of his earthly life, he could testify that he had fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith. That is the testimony worth considering. The Christian should not measure his life merely by how impressively he began, how many people recognized his service, or how many religious accomplishments he can display before others. **The issue is whether he remained faithful with what the Lord entrusted to him. A spectacular beginning cannot replace a faithful finish, and yesterday's obedience cannot perform today's responsibilities.**

Every believer should therefore examine the course still before him. The young Christian should establish sound doctrine, cultivate spiritual discipline, and refuse to waste his strength upon the world's passing attractions. The parent should faithfully fulfill family responsibilities while teaching the Scriptures and maintaining a consistent testimony. The minister should preach the word rather than surrendering doctrine for applause. The older believer should continue serving according to his present abilities without assuming that diminished physical strength has made him useless. The discouraged Christian should remember that earthly opposition does not cancel divine promises. The one who has failed

should confess sin, accept appropriate correction, and return to faithful obedience rather than remaining indefinitely imprisoned by regret. And the believer who has enjoyed years of fruitful service should resist the temptation to treat previous faithfulness as permission for present complacency. There is no biblical advantage in continually staring backward while the remaining course disappears beneath our feet. **You cannot change the miles already traveled, but you remain responsible for how you travel the miles that are left.**

So finish the course. Keep your Bible open, your doctrine sound, your conscience clear, your responsibilities before you, and your eyes upon Jesus Christ. Do not allow bitterness to rob the remaining years, worldly pleasures to consume your opportunities, false doctrine to corrupt your convictions, or human disappointment to persuade you that faithful service no longer matters. Do not confuse the security of eternal salvation with an exemption from accountability. The Lord who saved you by grace has appointed a day when your work will be examined. The apostle who wrote of that judgment also declared that his departure was at hand, and he faced it with the testimony of completed service. One day every Christian will reach the end of his earthly course. The pulpit will become silent, the books will close, the opportunities to witness will end, and the work assigned for this present life will be finished. **When that day arrives, the question will not be whether you once possessed tremendous enthusiasm, enjoyed public recognition, or impressed other Christians with stories of former accomplishments. The question will concern faithfulness to the Lord who purchased you. Salvation was never the prize for running well; it was the free gift that made the Christian course possible. But the race matters, the labor matters, the doctrine matters, and the finish matters. Do not spend your last mile looking backward at what you accomplished, regretting what you wasted, or complaining about who disappointed you. There is a finish line ahead, a righteous Judge beyond it, and a Saviour worthy of your obedience until the final step. Fight the good fight. Keep the faith. Finish the course.**

Discipleship — Following Christ After Salvation

Conclusion: Salvation Was the Beginning, Not the End of the Journey

There comes a point in every serious examination of Christian discipleship when the excuses must stop, the religious decorations must be pushed aside, and the saved man must face a question that cannot be answered by displaying a baptismal certificate, naming his favorite preacher, or describing what happened at an altar thirty years ago. **What have you done with the life Jesus Christ gave you after He saved your soul?** That

question does not challenge the sufficiency of Calvary, threaten eternal security, or suggest that salvation must be maintained through human performance. It challenges the comfortable religious arrangement in which a person receives the greatest gift ever offered to mankind and then proceeds to live as though the Giver has no further claim upon his attention, conduct, or service. Modern Christianity has produced an astonishing number of people who can explain why salvation is free but become remarkably uncomfortable when somebody mentions the responsibilities that follow it. They want eternal life without spiritual growth, assurance without obedience, sound doctrine without study, blessings without service, and a heavenly inheritance without allowing the word of God to interfere with their earthly arrangements. That may satisfy a religious consumer, but it does not resemble the Christian life presented by the Apostle Paul.

Let us establish the foundation one final time, because there is no excuse for confusing the matter after everything the Scriptures have declared. Ephesians 2:8–9 states, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Romans 4:5 declares that God justifies the ungodly man who believes rather than works. First Corinthians 15:1–4 establishes the gospel of Jesus Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is not a contract under which God agrees to provide temporary life while the sinner attempts to earn the permanent version through obedience. Jesus Christ did not suffer upon the cross, shed His blood, die, and rise again merely to leave redemption hanging upon the unstable thread of human achievement. The sinner receives everlasting life through faith in the finished work of the Saviour. **The blood purchased it. Grace provides it. Faith receives it. Human works contribute absolutely nothing toward its purchase.** The Lordship Salvation preacher who attempts to insert lifelong discipleship into the conditions of justification has confused the fruit with the root and the responsibility of the saved with the salvation of the lost. No amount of religious sophistication can make that confusion biblical.

But the same God who inspired Ephesians 2:8–9 also inspired Ephesians 2:10, and apparently some Christians have developed the remarkable habit of stopping their reading precisely one verse before the responsibilities begin. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” There is no contradiction between those statements. Salvation is not of works, but the saved believer is created unto good works. The Christian does not serve to purchase eternal life; he serves because eternal life has already been given to him. He does not study Scripture to persuade God to adopt him; he studies because he already belongs to the family. He does not separate from wickedness to complete an unfinished redemption; he separates because the Lord who redeemed him has commanded holiness. And he does

not witness to sinners in order to earn heaven; he witnesses because he knows the gospel through which sinners may be saved. **Grace is not an excuse for spiritual laziness. Grace establishes the relationship that makes faithful discipleship possible.** The believer who uses eternal security as permission to live carelessly has not discovered some superior understanding of the gospel. He has taken a glorious doctrine and attempted to turn it into a comfortable shelter for the flesh.

Throughout this series, we have examined the essential responsibilities that ought to characterize a Christian after salvation, beginning with the written word of God. Second Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to study and rightly divide the word of truth. Second Timothy 3:16–17 declares that all Scripture is inspired of God and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Yet there remain Christians who have possessed a Bible for decades and still depend almost entirely upon somebody else to explain what they believe. They can identify their denomination, quote their favorite preacher, and repeat a collection of familiar religious expressions, but ask them to distinguish Israel from the Church, law from grace, justification from sanctification, or the Judgment Seat of Christ from the Great White Throne, and suddenly their doctrinal confidence begins leaking like a bucket with the bottom knocked out. The Bible was not given merely to furnish sermons for professional ministers. It was given to be read, believed, studied, obeyed, and rightly divided. **The Christian who refuses to study God's word should not complain about his inability to recognize false doctrine. A soldier who leaves his sword hanging on the wall has voluntarily surrendered the very weapon God placed in his hand.**

We also examined prayer, that extraordinary privilege made possible through Jesus Christ, yet so frequently neglected by those who profess to belong to Him. Philippians 4:6 instructs believers to bring their requests before God through prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. First Thessalonians 5:17 commands, “Pray without ceasing.” Hebrews 4:16 directs believers to approach the throne of grace for mercy and help in time of need. Nevertheless, some Christians conduct their entire lives through personal determination, worldly calculation, and human advice, only remembering prayer when circumstances become too difficult to manage. They treat heaven like an emergency repair service available whenever earthly arrangements stop functioning. Others have turned prayer into a religious ordering system where God is supposedly obligated to deliver prosperity, perfect health, and uninterrupted comfort whenever the customer supplies sufficient faith. Neither arrangement reflects biblical dependence. God remains sovereign, and His will does not become subordinate to human demands. **Prayer is not a mechanism for placing Almighty God under man's authority. It is the privilege of approaching the Father through the Son while depending upon the Holy Spirit.** The Christian who neglects that

privilege is not demonstrating independence. He is demonstrating how easily the flesh can become satisfied with living without conscious dependence upon God.

Then there is the matter of Christian fellowship, where modern religion has accomplished the remarkable feat of transforming congregations into audiences and pastors into performers. Acts 2 describes believers continuing in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. First Corinthians 12 explains that the body possesses many members with different responsibilities. Ephesians 4 establishes that spiritual leadership and instruction are intended to equip believers for ministry and maturity. Yet many congregations have become religious entertainment centers where the principal objective is keeping the customers satisfied, the offering plates supplied, and the attendance figures moving in the proper direction. Others have experienced genuine corruption and concluded that every form of Christian fellowship should be abandoned. Scripture authorizes neither religious commercialism nor deliberate isolation from all believers. A sound assembly should be governed by God's word, faithful leadership, biblical accountability, and genuine concern among its members. Not every church building contains a faithful congregation, and no believer must sacrifice sound doctrine to preserve institutional loyalty. But rejecting religious corruption does not eliminate the responsibilities of Christian fellowship. **The local church was never meant to become a theater where the saints purchase admission to watch somebody else practice Christianity. There is work to be done, and the body requires its members to function.**

Personal holiness and biblical separation provided another necessary examination. Romans 12:2 commands believers not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Second Corinthians 6:17 calls for separation from spiritual uncleanness, while Ephesians 4–5 and Colossians 3 instruct Christians to reject the corrupt practices of the old man and walk according to their new position in Christ. Yet two competing errors remain popular. The worldly Christian regards every biblical warning as legalism because he has apparently concluded that grace exists to protect his favorite sins from criticism. The religious Pharisee, meanwhile, has constructed an impressive collection of personal regulations and mistakes outward conformity for spiritual superiority. The first man excuses carnality. The second decorates pride with religious obedience. Biblical discipleship rejects both. The Christian should resist dishonesty, sexual immorality, drunkenness, idolatry, bitterness, covetousness, corrupt communication, and worldly conformity because Scripture commands godly conduct. But he must never imagine that successful separation supplies the righteousness required for justification. **Holiness is not a payment toward salvation, and Christian liberty is not permission to live like the devil. The believer has been redeemed from condemnation, but he has not been appointed to become the flesh's permanent secretary.**

Service and stewardship likewise belong to the life that follows salvation. Romans 12 describes different gifts and responsibilities. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” First Peter 4:10 instructs believers to minister according to what they have received, recognizing their responsibilities as stewards of God's grace. Yet some Christians have made a lifelong occupation of criticizing everybody else's ministry while contributing practically nothing themselves. They know how the pastor should preach, where the missionary should travel, which programs should be discontinued, and how somebody else's money ought to be distributed. Ask them to assume a responsibility, however, and they disappear faster than a thief when the sheriff turns the corner. Biblical service is not restricted to standing behind a pulpit. Teaching, encouraging, helping families, supporting missionaries, distributing Scripture, witnessing, and countless other responsibilities provide opportunities for faithfulness. Christian giving should be willing, cheerful, and responsible according to 2 Corinthians 8–9, not extracted through manipulation or promises of guaranteed riches. **The offering plate is not a heavenly cash register, and the judgment seat of Christ will not award crowns according to which religious organization operated the most profitable fundraising campaign.** The Lord examines faithfulness, not financial theatrics.

Nor can the Christian neglect the gospel entrusted to the Church. Romans 1:16 declares that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. Second Corinthians 5:18–20 establishes the ministry of reconciliation and the responsibility associated with representing Christ. Yet it is possible for believers to become so occupied with politics, entertainment, controversy, religious activities, and personal interests that the saving message becomes little more than an occasional reference during a church service. They can argue for hours concerning the problems of society while never explaining to another sinner how to receive eternal life. Personal witnessing does not require every Christian to become a professional evangelist, but it does require understanding and valuing the message of salvation. The sinner must hear about his guilt before God, the identity of Jesus Christ, His substitutionary death, His bodily resurrection, and justification by grace through faith. Social improvement may accomplish legitimate earthly good, but it cannot regenerate a sinner. Charitable assistance may relieve temporary suffering, but it does not replace the gospel. **A man may leave a religious gathering entertained, encouraged, financially assisted, and socially accepted while remaining completely ignorant of how to be saved. If Christ's finished work has not been proclaimed, the most important message has been left outside the building.**

We also confronted the popular fiction that faithful Christianity guarantees a comfortable earthly existence. The Apostle Paul suffered beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, hunger, persecution, exhaustion, betrayal, and physical affliction. Second Corinthians 12 records

the Lord's declaration, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Second Timothy 3:12 warns that those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Those passages do not describe a Christian life insulated from every difficulty through sufficiently enthusiastic declarations of faith. They describe believers who may experience genuine hardship while remaining secure in Christ. The prosperity gospel has turned spiritual instruction into a financial advertisement, as though the Lord were obligated to provide luxury, health, and success in exchange for human confidence and generous donations. Scripture provides no such arrangement. Neither does suffering automatically make somebody righteous. A person can suffer because of foolishness, sin, or circumstances common to life in a fallen world. But faithful obedience may also bring real opposition. **The Christian is not promised an earthly road without thorns. He is promised a Saviour whose grace remains sufficient when the thorns cannot be removed.** The scars of faithful service do not establish divine abandonment.

Then we examined spiritual warfare, a subject frequently distorted by those who either deny the devil's activity or become so fascinated with it that Satan receives more attention than the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 6:10–18 commands believers to put on the whole armour of God. Truth, righteousness, gospel readiness, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer are the provisions identified in Scripture. The believer must recognize the world, the flesh, and the devil without confusing their operations or inventing doctrines that God has not revealed. False teachers may corrupt the gospel while presenting themselves as ministers of righteousness. The flesh may tempt the Christian toward ordinary sinful conduct without requiring an elaborate supernatural explanation. And the devil can exploit bitterness, doctrinal ignorance, pride, and disobedience to damage Christian testimony. But the answer is not a collection of theatrical deliverance ceremonies, imaginary territorial authorities, or supposed revelations that cannot survive examination against the Bible. **The Christian does not need to become an expert in the devil's imaginary organizational chart. He needs to know the Scriptures, stand in the Lord's strength, and obey the commands God has actually given.** Spiritual warfare is serious because spiritual deception is serious, not because religious performances have become fashionable.

All these responsibilities bring us to the final subject: finishing the course. Acts 20:24 records Paul's determination to complete the ministry received from the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:13–14 describes forgetting the things behind and pressing toward the mark. First Corinthians 15:58 commands believers to remain steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. Then, approaching the end of his earthly ministry, Paul declares in 2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” Those words should carry particular weight with anyone who has served Christ

long enough to understand that enthusiasm is easier than endurance. It is possible to begin with extraordinary excitement and gradually become distracted, discouraged, bitter, complacent, or spiritually careless. It is also possible to experience failures, receive biblical correction, and continue faithfully rather than allowing regret to consume the remaining years. **Yesterday's achievements do not fulfill today's responsibilities, and yesterday's failures do not give the redeemed sinner permission to abandon tomorrow.** The Lord has entrusted each believer with opportunities appropriate to his circumstances. Faithfulness means continuing to obey with what remains.

One day the earthly course will end. The believer will no longer have another morning to open his Bible, another opportunity to encourage a struggling Christian, another occasion to witness to an unbeliever, or another year to correct priorities that have been neglected. The pulpit will become silent, the work will be completed, and the opportunities assigned to that earthly life will have passed. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. First Corinthians 3:11–15 explains that the believer's work will be examined, with some work enduring and other work suffering loss. Yet the foundation remains Jesus Christ, and even the believer whose work is consumed is described as saved. This judgment must never be confused with the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20. Eternal life is not being purchased through a final accounting of religious achievements. The redeemed are being evaluated for their service. God knows what was done, what was neglected, and what motives governed the work. **The Lord will not require attendance records, advertising campaigns, public testimonials, or a collection of impressive titles to determine whether His servant was faithful. The righteous Judge knows the difference between gold and stubble before the fire ever appears.**

That coming examination should encourage humble faithfulness rather than produce religious despair. The Christian who has accomplished little because of ignorance, distraction, or carelessness should not spend his remaining years merely mourning wasted opportunities. He should begin obeying the Lord with the opportunities that remain. The believer who has served for decades should not assume that long experience entitles him to abandon prayer, study, holiness, or spiritual vigilance. The one who possesses substantial abilities must not despise the servant whose circumstances permit only modest work. A faithful elderly Christian who can no longer travel may still encourage, pray, teach, or support others. A parent caring for children may be accomplishing responsibilities of tremendous importance without occupying a public ministry. A believer experiencing illness may possess fewer physical opportunities while remaining spiritually useful. God has not commanded every Christian to perform the same assignment. First Corinthians 4:2 identifies faithfulness as the requirement of stewardship, not celebrity. **The**

Christian life is not a competition to determine who can construct the largest platform. It is a responsibility to serve the Lord faithfully upon whatever ground He has placed beneath our feet.

There is also a necessary warning against measuring spiritual success exclusively by visible results. A preacher may attract thousands while corrupting the gospel. A missionary may labor faithfully with comparatively few visible conversions. A Christian may distribute Scripture, explain salvation, assist struggling believers, and receive little earthly recognition. First Corinthians 3:6 establishes the distinction: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” The servant is responsible for faithful labor; God remains sovereign over the increase. That principle does not excuse laziness, dishonesty, or careless ministry. It protects the believer from confusing human measurements with divine evaluation. Numbers may provide useful information, but they cannot replace doctrinal faithfulness. Public applause may encourage a worker, but it cannot establish eternal value. Financial success may support legitimate ministry, but it does not prove God's approval of every doctrine being taught. **The Lord has never promised that the most famous servant will receive the greatest reward. Heaven's accounting is not conducted by the same standards that govern the world's publicity departments.**

And while we speak of serving Christ, we must never lose sight of Christ Himself. Discipleship can become distorted when believers spend so much time discussing duties, standards, ministries, controversies, and accomplishments that the Saviour becomes little more than the religious signature attached to their personal ambitions. Colossians 3:17 commands that whatever believers do in word or deed should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. Colossians 3:23 adds, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” The Christian is not serving a denominational trademark, building a personal reputation, or attempting to impress a theological committee. He belongs to Jesus Christ. The Scriptures should be studied because they reveal His truth. Prayer should be offered because access to the Father has been provided through Him. The gospel should be proclaimed because He accomplished redemption. Service should be rendered because He is worthy. And holiness should be pursued because the believer has been purchased by His blood. **Christianity without Christ at the center becomes religious machinery, and machinery can make an impressive amount of noise while accomplishing absolutely nothing of eternal value.**

The ten studies in *Discipleship — Following Christ After Salvation* have therefore established one consistent truth from beginning to end: **The Christian does not follow Jesus Christ to earn salvation; he follows because Jesus Christ has already saved him.** Grace is the foundation, Scripture is the authority, the Holy Spirit supplies the spiritual

help, and the believer is responsible to walk in obedience. The Christian may stumble, require chastening, experience discouragement, or face serious limitations without losing the eternal life purchased by the Saviour. Nevertheless, none of those realities makes spiritual growth unnecessary. There remains a Bible to study, a throne of grace to approach, a body of believers to serve, a world from which to remain separate in conduct, a gospel to proclaim, and a spiritual conflict requiring steadfastness. There are genuine needs to meet, burdens to bear, opportunities to use, and responsibilities that will eventually be examined. The Lord has not commanded believers to manufacture sinless perfection in the flesh, nor has He granted permission to become permanently satisfied with carnality. He has called His people to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let this series end with something more substantial than a pleasant religious conclusion and a few agreeable words about trying harder. Open the King James Bible. Study it. Believe what God has written. Rightly divide it. Pray with thanksgiving and dependence upon the Father. Seek sound Christian fellowship without surrendering your convictions to religious personalities. Reject worldly corruption without becoming a self-righteous Pharisee. Serve according to the opportunities entrusted to you. Give cheerfully and responsibly. Tell lost sinners about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Endure hardship without confusing suffering with divine abandonment. Resist the devil through faith, Scripture, and obedience. And when years have passed, circumstances have changed, strength has diminished, and the earthly finish line approaches, remain faithful to the Saviour who purchased you. **Do not spend the remainder of your life polishing the memory of the day you were saved while neglecting the life you were saved to live. The beginning matters, but the course matters too. Salvation is settled at Calvary. Discipleship is lived out in the years that follow.**

The Apostle Paul did not reach the conclusion of his ministry announcing that he had discovered a more comfortable way to live, accumulated an impressive collection of earthly possessions, or persuaded the world to admire his accomplishments. He looked toward the righteous Judge and declared that he had finished his course and kept the faith. That testimony was not a claim to sinless perfection or an attempt to purchase eternal life through faithful service. It was the testimony of a redeemed servant who had taken his calling seriously. Every Christian should desire to reach the end of his earthly pilgrimage with that same commitment to faithfulness. There will be no opportunity to return and recover wasted decades after the course has concluded. There will be no second earthly lifetime in which to accomplish everything neglected during the first. Yet every day the Lord allows us to remain here provides another opportunity for obedience according to His word. **The Christian who understands the value of time will stop treating tomorrow as**

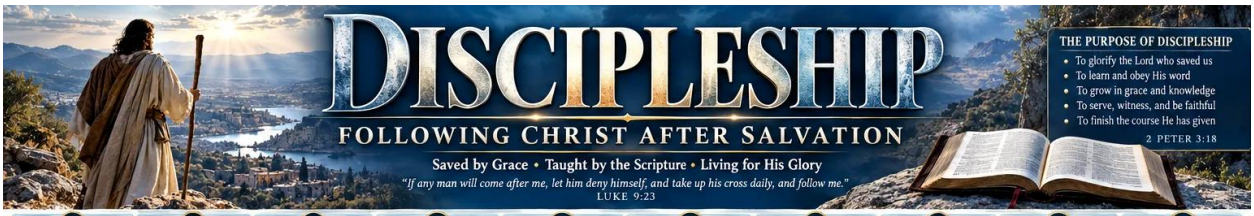
though it has been guaranteed and begin using today as though it belongs to the Lord who gave it.

And that brings us to the final verdict. **Salvation is free, but the Christian life was never intended to be empty. Grace saves the sinner, but it does not appoint him to a lifetime of spiritual inactivity. Eternal security protects the believer's standing in Christ, but it does not erase his responsibility to serve Christ. The world will continue offering its pleasures, the flesh will continue demanding satisfaction, the devil will continue opposing the truth, and religious counterfeits will continue attempting to replace biblical Christianity with something more convenient and marketable. Let them offer what they please. We have a risen Saviour, a preserved Bible, a gospel that saves, a calling worth fulfilling, and an eternal future secured by the finished work of Jesus Christ.**

The cross was not the end of the story for the sinner who believed. It was the beginning of a new life in Christ. So do not merely tell people when you were saved. Let the years that follow demonstrate that you have taken the Saviour's word seriously. Study until the truth is established in your understanding. Pray until dependence upon God becomes part of your daily walk. Serve while strength remains. Witness while opportunities exist. Stand when opposition comes. Continue when others quit. And when the final mile arrives, do not spend it staring backward at the starting line.

You have been saved by grace. You belong to Jesus Christ. There is still a course before you.

Now follow Him—and finish faithfully.



DISCIPLESHIP

FOLLOWING CHRIST AFTER SALVATION

Saved by Grace • Taught by the Scripture • Living for His Glory

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."
LUKE 9:23

THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLESHIP

- To glorify the Lord who saved us
- To learn and obey His word
- To grow in grace and knowledge
- To serve, witness, and be faithful
- To finish the course He has given

2 PETER 3:18

1 SALVATION IS THE BEGINNING, NOT THE END



- Justification by grace through faith
- Not of works, lest any man boast
- The gospel: death, burial, resurrection
- Salvation and discipleship are distinct
- Good works follow, they do not save
- Grace establishes the relationship

EPHESIANS 2:8–10
ROMANS 4:5
1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–4

2 KNOW THE WORD AND RIGHTLY DIVIDE IT



- All Scripture is given by inspiration
- Study, show thyself approved
- Rightly divide the word of truth
- Distinguish Israel and the Church
- Law is not grace
- Build your Christian life on doctrine

2 TIMOTHY 2:15
2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17
2 PETER 3:17–18

3 PRAYER THE PRIVILEGE OF THE REDEEMED



- Pray without ceasing
- Bring requests with thanksgiving
- Pray according to God's will
- Dependence, not manipulation
- Not a formula for prosperity
- Continual fellowship with the Father

PHILIPPIANS 4:6
1 THESALONIANS 5:17
HEBREWS 4:16

4 CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

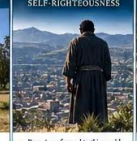


- Continue in the apostles' doctrine
- Fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers
- Each member has a function
- Leadership for instruction and maturity
- Reject religious entertainment
- Avoid false teaching and church corruption

ACTS 2:42
1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–27
EPHESIANS 4:11–16

5 COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM

SEPARATION WITHOUT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS



- Be not conformed to this world
- Renewing of the mind
- Put off the old man, put on the new
- Holiness in conduct, speech, purity
- Avoid worldly associations
- Reject legalism and Pharisaism

ROMANS 12:1–2
1 CORINTHIANS 6:14–18
EPHESIANS 4:17–32

6 SAVED TO SERVE NOT TO OCCUPY A PEW AND COLLECT BLESSINGS



- Use the gifts God has given
- Be a faithful steward
- Serve in practical ways
- Faithfulness in small things
- Give cheerfully and responsibly
- Support missions and meet needs
- Good works are fruit, not payment

ROMANS 12:1–11
1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–11
2 CORINTHIANS 9:6–8

7 YOU WERE NOT SAVED TO KEEP THE GOSPEL A SECRET



- The gospel is the power of God
- Explain sin, judgment, and Christ
- Death, burial, and resurrection
- Salvation by grace through faith
- Personal witnessing is a responsibility
- Be faithful, gracious, and bold
- Plant and water; God gives increase

ROMANS 1:16
1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–4
2 CORINTHIANS 5:18–21

8 THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMES WITH SCARS NOT A GUARANTEE OF COMFORT



- Suffering is a real part of discipleship
- Persecution for righteousness
- Not all suffering is persecution
- God's grace is sufficient
- Patience, character, and hope
- Reject the prosperity gospel
- Sometimes an open door, sometimes a prison door

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7–18
PHILIPPIANS 1:27–30
1 PETER 4:12–16

9 THE DEVIL DOES NOT RETIRE WHEN A SINNER GETS SAVED



- Recognize the world, flesh, and devil
- Put on the whole armour of God
- Stand against the wiles of the devil
- Resist through faith and obedience
- Beware of false doctrine
- Avoid sensationalism and theatrics
- Be vigilant and pray

EPHESIANS 6:10–18
1 PETER 5:8–9
JAMES 4:7–8

10 FINISH THE COURSE DO NOT SPEND YOUR LAST MILE LOOKING BACK



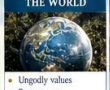
- Run with patience and endurance
- Forget the things behind
- Continue in well doing
- Avoid complacency and compromise
- Your labor will be evaluated
- Eternal life is secure, work matters
- Finish with faithfulness

2 TIMOTHY 4:6–8
HEBREWS 12:1–3
REVELATION 2:10

SALVATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

SALVATION (JUSTIFICATION)	DISCIPLESHIP (CHRISTIAN LIFE)
By grace through faith	Follows Salvation
The gift of God	Expectancy of the Lord
Not of works	Involves obedience
Instant and complete	A lifelong process
Based on Christ's finished work	Produces good works
Receives eternal life	Brings joy, growth, and fruit
Cannot be lost (John 10:28)	Evaluated at the Judgment Seat
EPHESIANS 2:8–9 ROMANS 4:5 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–4	EPHESIANS 2:10 ROMANS 12:1–2 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

THE CHRISTIAN'S THREE ADVERSARIES

THE WORLD	THE FLESH	DEVIL
		
Ungodly values	Old sin nature	Deception
Peer pressure	Sinful appetites	Temptation
Cultural influence	Internal struggle	Accusation
Opposition to truth	Must walk in the Spirit	Seeks to devour
1 JOHN 2:15–17	GALATIANS 5:16–25	1 PETER 5:8–9

THE COMMAND TO FOLLOW



"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."
LUKE 9:23

- Not a suggestion but a command
- Requires self-denial
- Involves daily commitment
- Follows the Saviour, not self
- Produces a life of obedience and service

THE END RESULT



- Faithful service and reward (1 Corinthians 3:14)
- A testimony or finishing the course (2 Timothy 4:7)
- Everlasting life with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)
- No regret over wasted opportunities
- Eternal life is secure, work matters (Matthew 25:21)

"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."
EPHESIANS 2:10

A LIFETIME OF FOLLOWING THE SAVIOUR WHO FIRST SAVED US

VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."
2 TIMOTHY 4:7