

CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS

LIFE'S UPS & DOWNS

Charting God's Truth
for Your Life

by David Stiles



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About the Author

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To learn more about Dave's resources for churches, visit:
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Introduction

A few years ago I found myself thinking about *life* during a Bible Study at a friend's house.

During our Bible Study while each of us shared some of the difficulties that we had recently encountered, the following phrase came to mind:

“Life is difficult...”

“Life is difficult” was phrase that I had first seen in print a number of years before, in a book written by the psychologist M. Scott Peck. It was the first sentence to his book called *The Road Less Traveled*.

Interestingly, as we were in our friend's living room, I noticed a large yellow vase on the mantle above their fireplace. The vase contained flowers and had the following words painted on the outside of the jar:

“Life is Good”

“So which one is it?” I wondered to myself. “Is life difficult or is it good? These phrases seem to be polar opposites of each other.”

It can be interesting to think about the word “*life*.”

The word appears many times in our popular culture. There is:

- “Life” cereal
- “Life” magazine
- people who are described as “pro-life”

In popular music there is a song called “*Life is a highway*” and even in the movies, we’ve heard Forrest Gump memorably explain that: “*Life is like a box of chocolates.*”

With so many descriptions and definitions of life, it’s easy to see how many of us can be confused when we encounter life’s ups and downs.

My hope is that resource will help.

How to Use this Booklet

This resource is designed to be used for individual study or within a small group. Throughout each chapter, questions will be given to help you reflect and integrate the concepts into your own life and discuss with others.

Part One covers initial observations that we might have about life’s circumstances. Part Two covers the work of Christ and the life that He offers. Part Three covers a view of life that includes a vibrant faith and trust in God’s grace.

Part One

Chapter One

Life's Circumstances

Chapter 1: Life's Circumstances

Parenting teenage and “pre”-teenage boys can be challenging. They are not always expressive and are prone to share only a few of their thoughts and feelings.

Even so, my wife (Sue) and I have tried to keep up a practice that we started when our boys were younger, by asking them at dinner:

“How was your day?”

When the boys were quite young and just learning to talk, they would try to ask Sue the same question, but garble the words just a little:

“Mommy, how was your day was?”

Depending on where you live, you can hear similar phrases. In many northeastern cities in the United States you might hear the famous phrase:

“How you doin’?”

You may have heard others say,

- “How’s it going?”
- “How was your day?”

When we speak about our lives and ask others about their life, many times we speak of life's *circumstances*.

Describing our circumstances is a process of describing the context or the condition of our lives.

The Highlights

If asked "How was your day?" and you have found yourself in what seem to be *positive circumstances*, you might tell someone about the "*highlights*". These highlights might be:

- a raise or promotion at work
- a good grade on a test at school
- your excitement about a sports team that is doing well

The Low points

If you have found yourself in *negative circumstances*, you might tell someone about the "*low points*":

- a problem at work
- a difficult person in your life

Neutral Events

You might also identify what you consider "*neutral*" events; events that do not seem either positive or negative; things that just simply happened.

Today's Circumstances

Let's spend a moment then, thinking about circumstances on a daily basis.

One's day might be filled with ups and downs; positive, negative and neutral circumstances.

Let's imagine a person's typical day with the following low points, neutral events and highlights:

Low points...

7:00am - overslept

8:00am - waited in traffic

2:00pm – encountered a problem at work

Neutral events...

12:00pm - worked on a project for two hours

Highlights...

11:00am - talked to a friend

5:00pm - had dinner with family

8:00pm – read a great resource called

"Life's Ups and Downs"

(hopefully this is categorized as a highlight 😊)

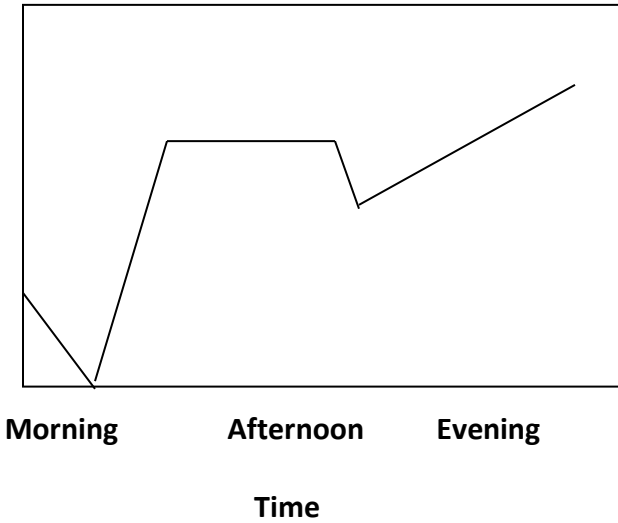
Graphing Today's Circumstances

To visually see these ups and downs, a day's events can be roughly plotted on a graph:

- highlights can be represented by a point high on the graph
- low points can be represented with a point low on the graph
- neutral events can be represented by a flat line

These points can then be connected with a solid line.

Thus in our example, the individual's day might be graphed something like this:



By quickly looking at the graph we can see that this person experienced:

- some bad circumstances in the morning
- followed by some positive experiences
- next they identified "neutral" events
- and in the late afternoon and evening they identified some positive circumstances.

Graphing Your Circumstances for Today

Spend a moment thinking about your day.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- “What were my circumstances today?”
- “How did my day begin?”
- “What happened in the afternoon?”
- “What happened in the evening?”

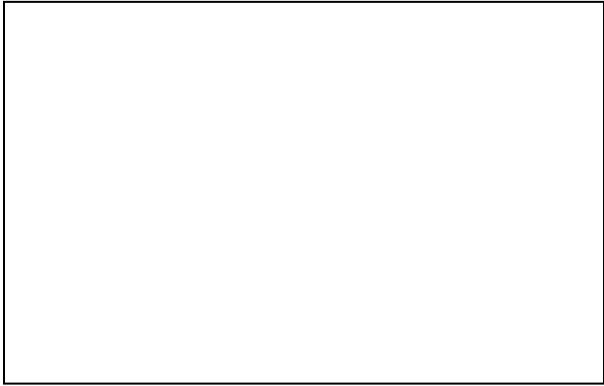
Take a moment to write down the “highlights”, “low points” and “neutral” events of the day and when they happened.

Today’s Highlights:

Today’s “Low points”:

Today’s Neutral events:

Next, create a graph of today's circumstances:



Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Time

Questions for Reflection:

1. What was the best thing about your day?
2. What was the worst thing about your day?
3. What words come to mind as you look at your graph and think about today's circumstances?

This Year's Circumstances

Not only can we reflect upon today's circumstances, but we can also think about life during this past *year*.

A year is filled with ups and downs; circumstances that we identify as positive, negative and neutral.

If you imagine an individual's year, they might identify the following low points, highlights and neutral circumstances (from January to May):

Low points:

- Jan. – suffered from a long persistent cold
- March – encountered a problem at work

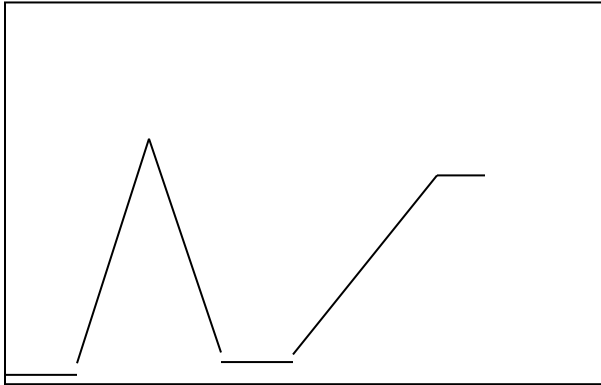
Highlights:

- Feb. – planned parent's anniversary party
- May - took a vacation

Neutral events:

- Working at the same job.

A graph of this year's circumstances might look like this:



Jan.

March

May

Month

By quickly looking at the graph we can see that this person experienced:

- some bad circumstances in January
- followed by some positive experiences in February
- next they identified a difficult circumstance in March
- and positive circumstances in April and May

Graphing This Year's Circumstances

Spend a moment thinking about this past year.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- "What were my circumstances this past year?"
- "How did my year begin?"
- "What happened after that?"
- "What happened as the year progressed?"

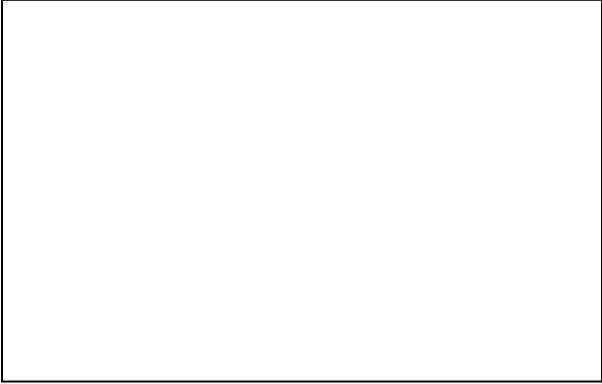
Take a moment to write down the "highlights", "low points" and "neutral" events of this year and when they happened.

This Year's Highlights:

This Year's "Low points":

This Year's "Neutral" events:

Next, create a graph of this year's circumstances in your life:



Month

Questions for Reflection:

1. What was the best thing about this year?
2. What was the worst thing about this year?
3. What words come to mind as you look at your graph and think about this year's circumstances?

A Lifetime of Circumstances

Not only can we graph circumstances from day to day, and year to year, but we can also think about circumstances over an entire *lifetime*.

A person's life is filled with ups and downs; positive, negative and neutral circumstances. As a person considers their entire life, they might identify the following low points, highlights and neutral circumstances:

Low points:

Age 8 – parent's divorced

Age 30 – unemployed for many months

Highlights:

Age 23 – graduated college started first job

Age 25 – married

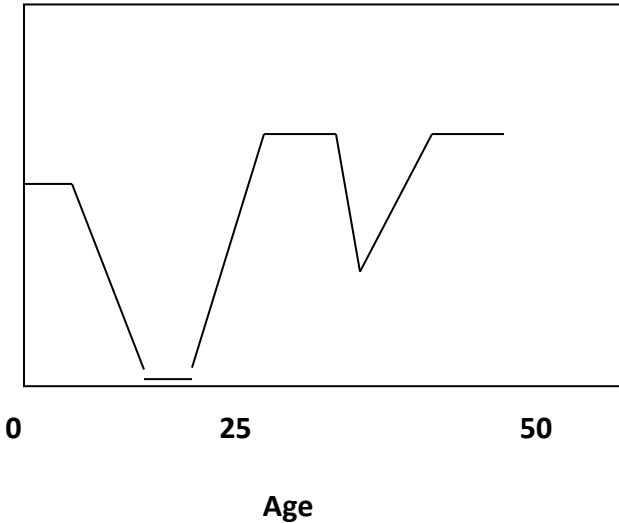
Age 31 – took another job

Age 32 - child born

Neutral events:

School/Work

A graph of their life's circumstances might look like this:



By quickly looking at the graph we can see that this person experienced:

- some negative circumstances early in life
- followed by some positive experiences in their 20's
- next they identified a difficult circumstance at 30
- followed by a positive circumstance and neutral events in recent years

Graphing Your Lifetime's Circumstances

Spend a moment thinking about your life.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- "What have been my life's circumstances?"
- "What were my circumstances in my youth?"
- "What happened after that?"
- "What has happened in recent years?"

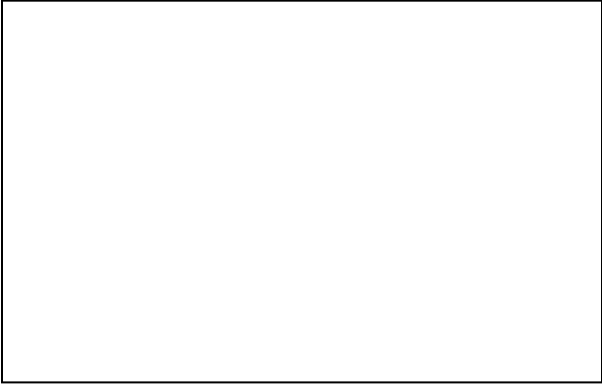
Take a moment to write down the "highlights", "low points" and "neutral" events of your life and when they happened. Then create a graph of your life's circumstances.

My Life's Highlights:

My Life's "Low points":

Neutral events:

Next, create a graph of your life's circumstances:



Age

Questions for Reflection:

1. What have been some highlights of your life?
2. What have been some difficult circumstances?
3. What words come to mind as you look at your graph and think about your life's circumstances?

Chapter Conclusion

Reflecting on our past can be challenging, but it can also be beneficial in seeing areas of growth and important spiritual realities (as we will see in later chapters).

If you have been discussing this chapter in a small group, you've had a chance to get to know others more by telling others about your life's circumstances.

In our next chapter we will add to what we've been reflecting on by discussing our expectations about life.

Chapter Two

Life as we want it to be

Chapter 2: Life as we want it to be

In the 1861 novel called "*Great Expectations*" by Charles Dickens, the central character (named Pip) is approached by a London lawyer named Mr. Jaggers who explained that an anonymous benefactor had given Pip a large inheritance.

Mr. Jaggers explains to Pip, "And the communication I have got to make is, that he has *Great Expectations*."

"I am instructed to communicate to him," said Mr. Jaggers, (that Pip) "be immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place, and be brought up as a gentleman,—in a word, as a young fellow of *great expectations*."

Pip thought, "My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale."

Pip added, "My heart was beating so fast, and there was such a singing in my ears, that I could scarcely stammer I had no objection."

Pip, we learn was quite excited about the great expectations of his benefactor.

Life as we wished it could be (Our Past)

Like Charles Dickens' characters, we may have had "*great expectations*" regarding our lives.

Take a moment to review the graphs that you made in Chapter One. As you review the positive, negative and neutral circumstances, you might be struck with the thought that what *actually* happened in your life was not exactly what you *intended* to happen or wished would have occurred.

Many people look at their past circumstances and wish that things were different. Some think about things outside of their control, like their:

- birthplace
- parents
- family of origin
- their parent's choices
- their family's economic and education opportunities

Some may think about negative circumstances in their life that were the results of *other people* such as:

- hurtful words spoken by others
- hurtful deeds done by others

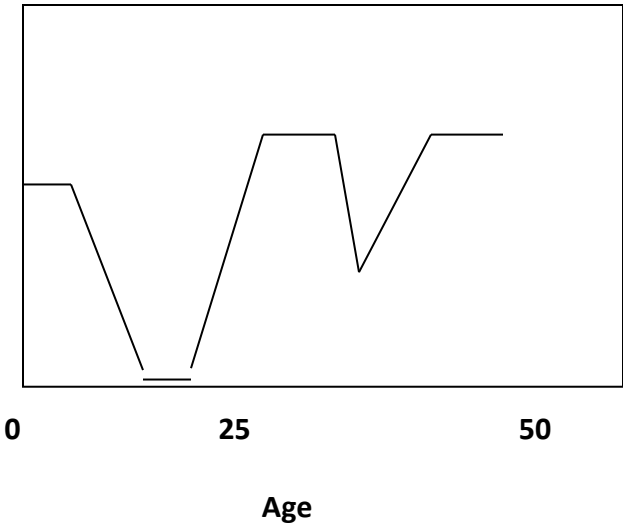
Still others may think about poor choices that they *personally* made such as their:

- choices for education or career
- words spoken to others
- actions that hurt others
- choices about relationships

Graphing Life as you wanted it

In our last chapter we looked at an example of how a person might graph their life's circumstances (and used a solid line to connect the positive, negative and neutral circumstances).

Here is an example of the *actual* circumstances that were charted for one person's life:



In this chapter, we will add a *dashed* line to our graph to identify *desired* circumstances.

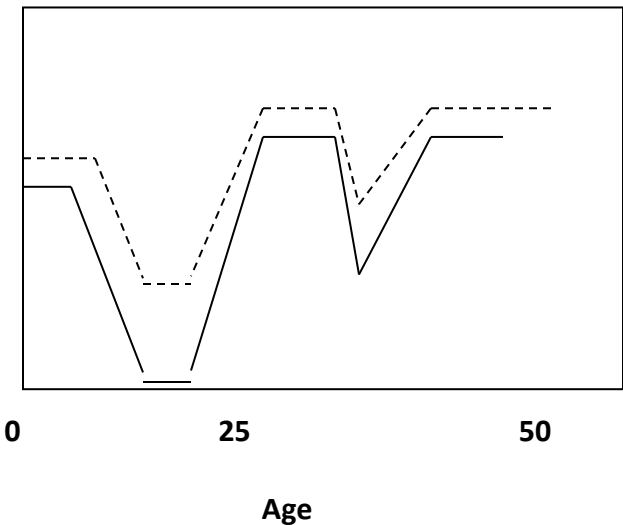
Small Improvements

Some people might look back at their life's circumstances and think,

“Life hasn't been that bad, but I wish things had been a little better.”

We could say that this is a person who wished that their life's circumstances were *slightly better*. For example, they might enjoy their current job but wish that it would pay better. Or, they might look at the negative circumstances that they experienced in life and wish that they had not been quite as bad.

In that case their graph might look this:



Solid line = actual circumstances
Dashed line = desired circumstances

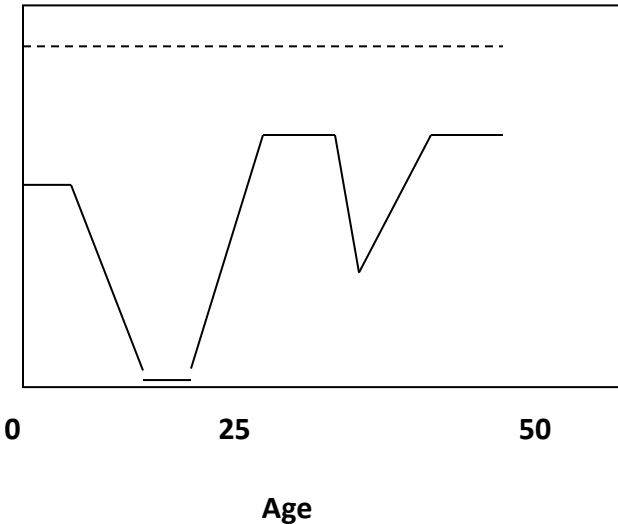
Greatly Missed Opportunities

Still others might look back upon their lives and wish that their circumstances had been much different than what they actually were.

For example, I have met several people who made some very poor choices in their youth who have told me,

“I can’t believe I threw all of those years away. It was such a waste.”

For that person, their graph of their *actual* circumstances and how they *wished* their past would have been - might look like this (with desired circumstances being far above their actual circumstances):



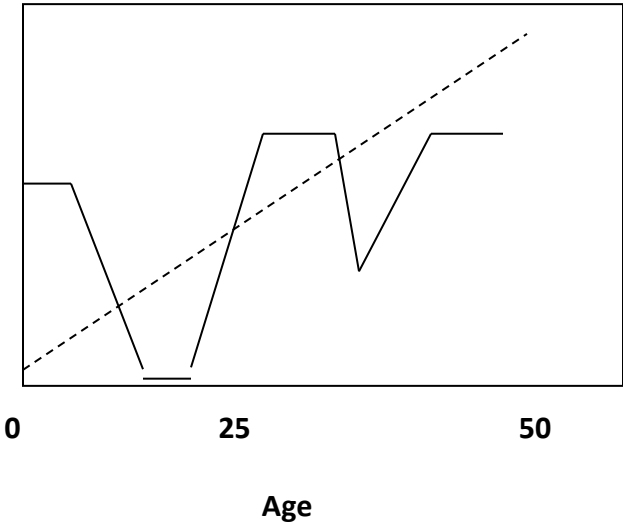
Solid line = actual circumstances
Dashed line = desired circumstances

Progressive Improvements

Still others hold the view that life should be getting:

“better and better every day and in every way.”

A person who has the expectation that their life would keep improving from birth until death might graph their expected circumstances like this:



Solid line = actual circumstances
Dashed line = desired circumstances

Graphing Your Life As You've Wanted It

Spend a moment thinking about your life. Remind yourself what circumstances you listed as low points, highlights and neutral events.

Ask yourself:

- "Over the years, how have I wished that my life was different?"

Take a moment to write down the areas that might have been different.

Areas where I wish my life had been different:

Next, re-create the graph of your life's actual circumstances using a solid line (from page 25). Then, add a dashed line for your desired circumstances:



Age

Solid line = actual circumstances
Dashed line = desired circumstances

Life as we want it to be (Our Future)

Next, let's move from reflecting about our past to thinking about our *future*.

Take a moment and think about some of the important areas of your life:

- Spiritual health
- Physical health
- Relationships (spouse, children, friends, etc.)
- Financial management
- Time management
- Work/school
- Other areas of personal growth (i.e community involvement, personal habits, etc.)

Use the following table to describe the areas that are of most importance to you.

Use the left side of the table to describe your *current state* in that area.

Next, select a date in the future. Enter that date at the top of the chart, then on the right side of the table describe where you would like to be with this area in the *future*.

(use another paper if you need more space)

Areas of Growth

	Current State	Desired State by _____ (date)
Spiritual Health		
Physical Health		
Relationships		
Financial Management		
Time Management		
Work/School		
Other		

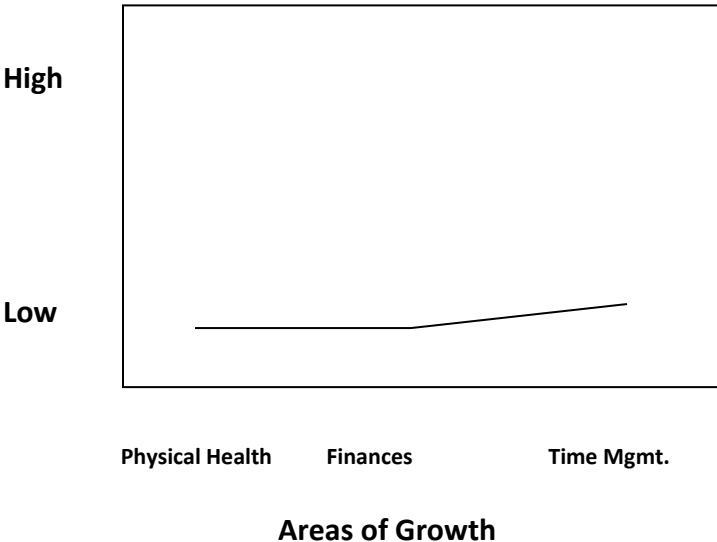
Graphing Life As It Is (Current State)

Our areas of growth can be graphed in a manner similar to our graphing of life's circumstances.

For example, a person might select the following three areas from the previous table:

- Physical health
- Financial management
- Time management

After selecting these three areas they can place a dot on the chart below to indicate their "current state" in that area (ranging from Low to High). Then they can connect the dots with a solid line. (Note: This is not a scientific measurement but one simply based on each person's perception.) Their graph, for example, might look like this:



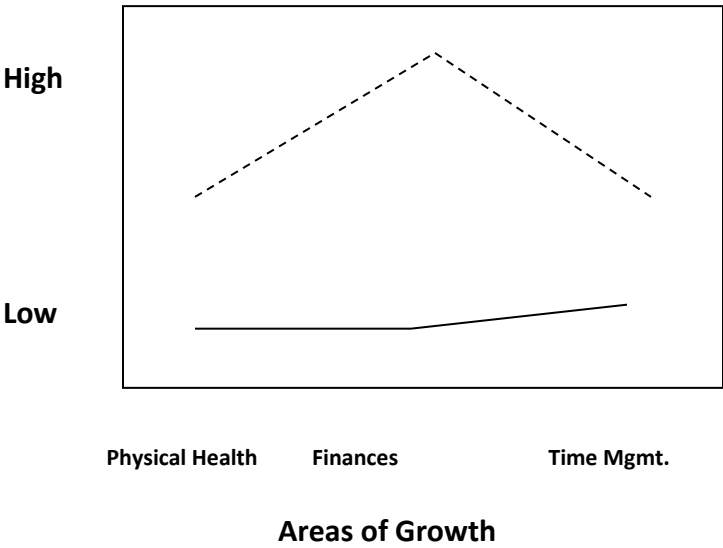
Solid line = current state

Quickly looking at this graph we can see that this individual rated themselves as “Low” in each area.

Graphing Life As We Want It To Be (Desired State)

After graphing their current state, a person might then consider where they would like each of these areas to be in the future.

After selecting a date in the future, they can then place a dot on the chart indicating where they would like *to be* in the future and then connect the dots with a dashed line.



Solid line = current state
Dashed line = desired state by _____ (date)

Quickly looking at this graph we can see that this individual would like to see growth in all three areas, with their Finances being the biggest area of desired growth.

Graphing Your Life As You Want It To Be (Current and Future State)

Spend a moment thinking about your life.

First, pick three areas of interest from the table on page 38. Then, enter the name of each area on the blank lines located below the chart that follows.

Place a dot on the graph to indicate your perceived *current state* in that area. Then, after placing dots for all three areas, connect the dots with a solid line.

Next, place a dot for your desired future state in each of the areas. Lastly, connect those dots with a dashed line indicating your desired state:



Solid line = current state
Dashed line = desired state

Questions for Reflection:

1. What date in the future did you select? Why?

2. Area 1: _____
Why is this area important to you?
What words describe your current state in this area? What is your desired future state?

3. Area 2: _____
Why is this area important to you?
What words describe your current state in this area? What is your desired future state?

4. Area 3: _____
Why is this area important to you?
What words describe your current state in this area? What is your desired future state?

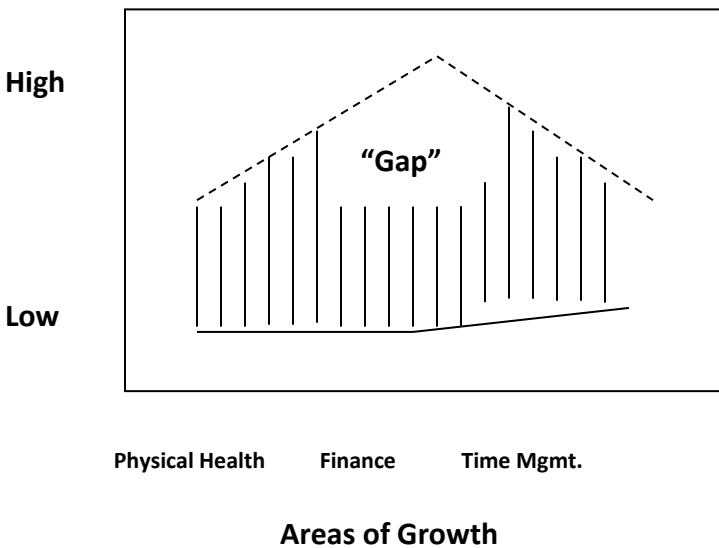
5. What words come to mind as you look at your graph and think about your life's current

circumstances and your desired future?

Looking at the Gap (Our Growth)

As you look at the graph of your current situation and your desired future state, you will notice a gap between the two lines.

In addition to representing the difference between our current state and future state, this gap displays the growth that must occur.



Solid line = current state
Dashed line = desired state

How do we bridge the Gap? (Our Growth)

Once a “gap” has been identified, the next two questions that many people ask are:

“Why is there a gap”

and

“How can I bridge the gap?”

There are many people, processes and institutions that claim to have the answer as to how to get you to an ideal future state.

Here are some popular responses...

- work harder
- have a better attitude
- use positive thinking
- leverage science or technology
- receive therapy or counseling
- receive more education
- change your relationships
(divorce, marriage, dating, etc.)
- buy a product

In the chapters that follow, we will explore a Christian perspective on growth and “bridging the gaps” in our lives.

Questions for Reflection:

1. In the world today, what seem to be the most popular solutions for “bridging gaps” between a current state and future state?
2. What are some reasons those methods appeal to people?
3. Review the list on page 44. What methods do you typically rely on for growth?

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the chance to reflect upon our expectations.

Reflecting on expectations about our *past* can be difficult, especially when we identify wide gaps between how we have wanted life to happen and how life actually occurred. In future chapters we will look at the issue of regret and dealing with mistakes in life.

Identifying hopes about our future can also be difficult because we can encounter uncertainty as to how best to “bridge the gap” between our present circumstances and our desired future state. In future chapters we will address this issue of personal growth from a Christian perspective.

In our next chapter we will add to what we have learned by examining an important spiritual truth about our lives.

Part Two

Chapter Three

The Lord of Life

Chapter 3: The Lord of Life

As we have been mapping our lives, there is one important element that we have not specifically mentioned yet in our study, and that is...God.

Without an understanding of a personal God (a God who is intimately involved in our personal lives), some might come to the conclusion that they are simply creations of impersonal objects and forces such as:

- matter
- motion
- time and
- chance

The Bible, however, tells us that we are not creations of these impersonal forces. Rather, we are the creation of a *living* God....a God who is real, involved and active in each of our lives. God, we learn in Scripture, is one who is "*living and true*".

God is our Creator

The Bible begins with these words:

- "In the beginning God *created* the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

We see in this very first passage of the Bible (and many other passages that follow) that God is our *Creator* and we (along with everything else in the universe) are His creation.

Many passages in the Old Testament declare that God is our Creator:

- “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the *Creator* of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”
(Isaiah 40:28-29)
- “I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God...I *form light and create darkness.*”
(Isaiah 45:5-7)
- God asked Job: “Where were you when *I laid the foundation of the earth?*” (Job 38:4)
- “Let them praise the name of the Lord, *for he commanded and they were created.*”
(Ps. 148:5)

The New Testament provides a similar description of God as *creator*:

- “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, *for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*” (Rev. 4:11)
- “By faith we understand that *the universe was formed at God's command*, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”
(Hebrews 11:3)

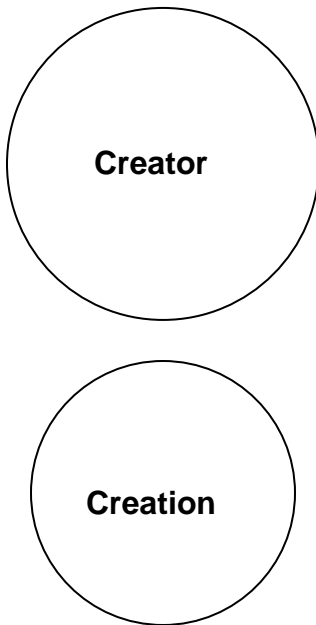
We are told in the Bible that creation was accomplished by God's decree and command. He *spoke* creation into existence:

- "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host *by the breath of his mouth.*" (Ps. 33:6)
- "For *he spoke*, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." (Ps. 33:9)

Throughout its entirety, the Bible describes God as our Creator. Thus, we are not the result of random events or chance, but the creation of a powerful and awesome, *living God*.

Graphing a View of Creator and Creation

Theology professor Cornelius van Til felt it vitally important for his students to understand the distinction between Creator and creation. Before beginning each of his class lectures, Dr. van Til would draw two circles on his chalkboard. After drawing the circles he would remind his students that the two circles represent the Christian *worldview*...a view that sees a *distinction* between our Creator and His Creation.



Other religions, it should be noted, do not make this distinction. Followers of eastern religions and new age spirituality would simply draw *one circle*, indicating that “we are all gods” and “god is part of all things.” As we have learned, that is not the view presented in the Bible.

Graphing Your View of Creator and Creation

Next, spend a moment thinking about your view of Creator and creation. Then, use the space below to draw your view:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you always held the view that you diagrammed above?
2. What about the Christian distinction of “Creator” and “Creation” is difficult to grasp? Why?
3. What about the Christian worldview is helpful? Why?

God is Lord

In addition to describing God as Creator, the Bible also tells us that God is *Lord*.

We see throughout the Bible a description of God who *rules* over all things. We are reminded in Scripture that God is not weak, He is neither dependent upon men or women, nor surprised by what men and women do, but rather He is Lord of all:

- “Our God is in heaven; *he does whatever pleases him.*” (Psalm 115:3)
- “The Lord *works out everything for his own ends—* even the wicked for a day of disaster.” (Proverbs 16:4)
- “Many are the plans in a man's heart, but *it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.*” (Proverbs 19:21)
- God says: My word “*will accomplish what I desire* and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11)
- Jesus explained, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” (Luke 18:27)
- “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? *For from him and through him and to him are all things.* To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

(Romans 11:33-36)

- God is: “the blessed and only Ruler, *the King of kings and Lord of lords*, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever.” (I Timothy 6:15-16)

Thus, we see in Scripture a description of God as Lord over all things. He is a *sovereign* Lord, in that He brings all things to pass for His glory and for His purposes. He is not dependent or limited by anything in His creation. He is Lord over all.

Remembering that God is Lord our lives

Graphically, we might represent this “Lordship” of God with a *crown*.



As an exercise, return to the charts that you created in Chapter 1:

- “Today’s Circumstances” - Page 15
- “This Year’s Circumstances” - Page 20
- “My Life’s Circumstances” - Page 25

Next, if you feel comfortable with this exercise, draw a crown above each chart - indicating that God is Lord of all things (including your life’s circumstances).

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the chance to reflect upon a few of the characteristics of the “living and true” God that is presented in the Bible.

We learned that God is the Creator of all things and that there is a distinction between our Creator and His creation.

We learned too that God is Lord. He is not limited by anything or anyone. He rules over all things and makes all things come to pass for His glory and His purposes.

Chapter Four

Our Authority in Life

Chapter 4: Our Authority in Life

After reading our last chapter, some may be asking,

“Wait a minute. How can you make such claims about God?”

“There’s no way to really know what’s wrong and what is right about religion.”

“Morality and religion are things that are only right for each person.”

These are very popular views about *truth and knowledge* in our culture. It is an argument that truth and knowledge is either completely *unknowable* or is *relative* for each person.

However, let’s consider the following example:

People who work in a particular profession gain *knowledge* to understand the *truth*. Think for a moment about:

- an electrician wiring a house
- a pilot landing an airplane
- a brain surgeon performing an operation

In each of these situations, we would want each of these professionals to *truly know* how to perform their tasks.

Few would ever say to one of these individuals,

“Do whatever you want to do, because whatever is true for you is fine for you, even though it isn’t true for me.”

Instead we are likely to say, “You better *know* what you are doing...I don’t want my house to catch on fire...the

plane to crash...or the surgical operation to be botched *if you lack the knowledge* to do this.”

Practically speaking, we could not live life without a fundamental *assumption that truth and knowledge are real*.

Christians believe that spirituality, morality and religion (whatever term one wants to use) is no different. Just as there are objective truths in other areas of life, there is objective truth in this area as well.

The Standard for Truth

The next question you might ask then is,

“How do you know what is true?”

For Christians, we believe that the Bible is our ultimate standard of truth...we see it as *authoritative*.

The “*Articles of Religion*” of the Church of England (written in 1563) declared that:

- “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation.”

Similarly the *Westminster Confession* (from 1646) explains that:

- “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.”

You may wonder,

“Why after so many years, has the Church maintained that the Bible is from God?”

We believe that the Bible is true because God has *revealed* that it is. We read in Scripture that:

- “All Scripture is *God-breathed* and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)
- “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the *word of God.*” (Rom. 10:17)
- “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke *from God* as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (II Peter 1:20-21)
- “We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the *testimony of God*, which he has given about his Son.” (I John 5:9)
- “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, *the word of God*, which is at work in you who believe.” (I Thessalonians 2:13)

Thus, Scripture itself describes itself as “*God-breathed*”, “*from God*”, “*God’s testimony*” and the “*word of God*”.

Jesus also viewed Scripture as being God’s revelation. He taught from Scripture and explained,

- “These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”
(John 5:39)

Scripture therefore, is essential to understanding knowledge and truth.

Graphing our View of Knowledge and Truth

Dr. John Frame (who has written much about knowledge and truth) has noted that there are essentially three aspects (or components) of knowledge:

- Objective
- Subjective
- Normative

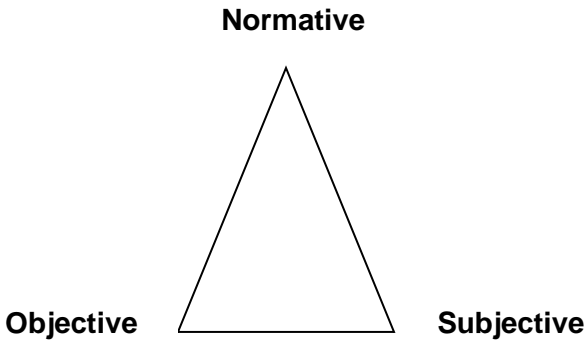
The “*Objective*” component of knowledge refers to the facts of reality (outside of one’s self). For example, an observation that “*the book is on the table*” is a fact that could be observed by an individual and verified by others.

The “*Subjective*” component of knowledge refers to a person’s internal thoughts and feelings about knowledge and truth.

The “*Normative*” component refers to the “norm” or “standard” used to judge truth. All of us have had experiences where we *thought* something was true, and then found out later that we were mistaken. The

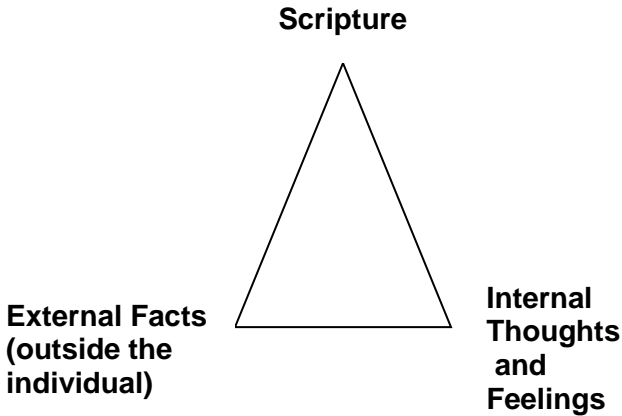
normative component (the “norm”) is our ultimate standard for truth.

Graphically, we could represent this with a triangle, with each element listed:



The Christian View

Using non-technical words, a Christian might describe their view of knowledge and truth this way:



By looking at this triangle we see the following:

The right side of triangle represents the *subjective* internal thoughts and feelings that a Christian has experienced. This is sometimes called "*the internal witness of the Holy Spirit*". The Holy Spirit, we learn in the Bible witnesses to the truth of Christianity.

- "God has revealed (His love) to us *by His Spirit*" (1 Cor. 2:10)
- "*It is the Spirit who testifies*, because the Spirit is the truth." (1 John 5:6)
- Jesus explained, "When (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment...because men do not believe in me." (John 16:8)

Thus, Christians have an inner witness from the Holy Spirit about the truth of Christianity.

The left side of the triangle identifies *objective* facts that are *external* to the individual. These facts include God's "general" revelation in nature that display His ordered universe and design. These facts are "public" in that they are available to all individuals. God's work through His people (who are called the Church) also falls into this category.

Thus, in addition to an internal witness of God's truth, all people can look to God's work in the world to know about God (to some degree).

Lastly, as we observe the Christian's triangle, we notice that *Scripture* is placed at the top (or apex) of their view of knowledge. This represents how a Christian will place their thoughts, feelings and observations under the authority of Scripture. This is helpful because our thoughts and feelings can sometimes be misguided and wrong.

One does not have to look far in Church History to identify examples where people had some very strange and even misguided ideas.

I am reminded of a booklet that several of my friends purchased early in 1988 entitled "*88 Reasons Why Jesus will return in 1988*".

Had my friends remembered the authority of Scripture, they could have saved their money. As Jesus said about His return,

- “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Matthew 24:36)

Examples abound of religious leaders who have taught some very strange things about Christianity. Some leaders have even caused harm to others through their teaching. Others have started very “toxic” and destructive groups because of their claims of having received messages from God. You might have heard someone say,

“Doesn’t the fact that Christians have acted in evil ways show that Christianity is misguided?”

My response to this question is,

“No, it does not show that Christianity is misguided, it shows that these religious leaders were misguided.”

Misguided and destructive leaders have forgotten some of the most important passages in the Bible, like:

- “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44)
- “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39)
- “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13)

Having Scripture as our authority, therefore, allows us to evaluate our thoughts and feelings (and the ideas of others) in light of God’s revelation to know what is true.

What about Christians who disagree about Scripture?

There are times when Christians have honest disagreements over the meaning of a passage in Scripture.

Fortunately, we are not alone in attempting to interpret Scripture. We can rely upon 2,000 years of reflection by the Church to help us understand the truth.

The historic beliefs and practices of the Church allow us to rely upon careful reflection made by others - not just our own interpretations or thoughts about what Scripture means.

For example, many Churches recite the Nicene Creed which was written nearly 2,000 years ago. This Creed helps to summarize the truth that is presented in Scripture. It allows Christians to remember the fullness of God's revelation and not just a selective portion of Scripture that an individual might desire to focus on.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is encouraging about placing one's thoughts and feelings under the authority of Scripture?

2. What about placing one's thoughts and feelings under the authority of Scripture is difficult?

Non-Christian Views

In contrast to the Christian view discussed on the previous pages, the modern world offers three non-Christian alternatives:

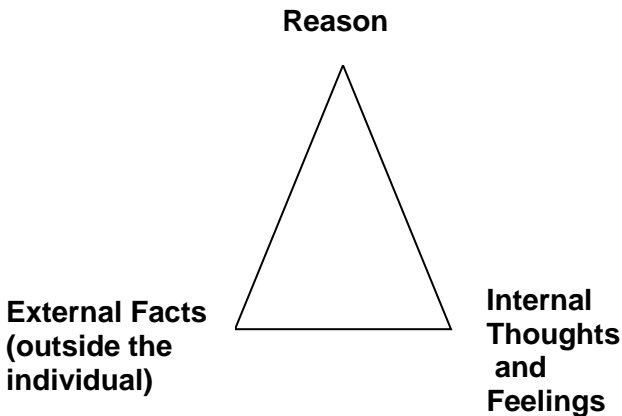
- Rationalism
- Empiricism
- Subjectivism

“Wait a minute!” you might respond. “I didn’t think this would be a philosophy class.”

It’s not...but these three views are the major non-Christian worldviews that you will likely encounter on a daily basis (even if you are not a philosopher).

The Rationalist View

The worldview of “rationalism” has its origins with the ancient Greek philosophers who held that *reason* is the ultimate judge or standard of truth. A rationalist might describe their view of knowledge and truth this way:



By looking at this triangle we see that “Reason” is at the apex as the ultimate standard (the supreme authority or judge) of truth.

You might have heard someone say:

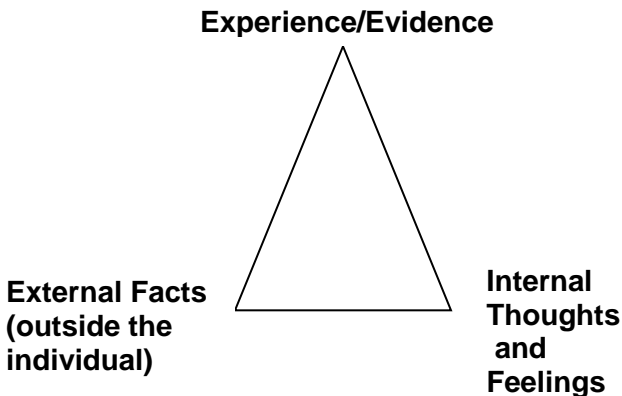
“That doesn’t seem reasonable.”
“That doesn’t make sense to me.”
“That’s not *logical*.”

These statements all reflect a rationalist worldview of knowledge and truth.

- What examples have you heard that reflect a rationalist worldview?

The Empiricist View

The worldview of “*empiricism*” also has its origins with the ancient Greeks but was popularized by John Locke in the 17th century and then by many others. It holds that *evidence* is the ultimate judge or standard of truth. An empiricist might describe their view of knowledge and truth this way:



By looking at this triangle we see that “experience and evidence” is at the apex as the ultimate standard (or judge) of truth. The other two components are placed under the “authority” of experience or evidence.

You might have heard someone say:

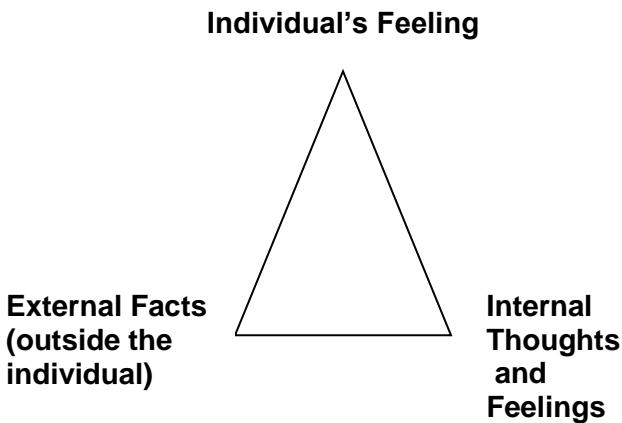
“Show me some proof for that statement.”
“If I could only *see it* then I would believe it.”

These statements all reflect the worldview of an empiricist.

- What other examples have you heard that reflect an empiricist worldview?

The Subjectivist View

The worldview of “subjectivism” holds that truth is *relative* to the attitudes of individuals. Thus, they might say: “*what is true for you might not be true for me.*” A subjectivist might describe their view of knowledge and truth this way:



By looking at this triangle we see that an Individual's feeling is at the apex as the ultimate standard (or judge) of truth. The other two components are placed under the "authority" of the individual's feeling about a situation. You might have heard someone say:

"Do whatever you want to do, because whatever is true for you is fine for you, even if it isn't true for me."

This statement reflects the subjectivist worldview.

- What other examples have you heard that reflect a subjectivist worldview?

It should be noted that a subjectivist view is impossible to hold consistently over time. When seeing something that is clearly "evil" or "wrong", the subjectivist will want it stopped.

For example, it's likely that a subjectivist would try to stop you if you told them:

- "I want to sell myself into slavery because I feel that it's right for me, even though it may not be right for you."

We should also note that individuals in the western world typically hold an amalgamation of these three major non-Christian views of knowledge. For example a scientist might be an empiricist and rationalist at work (relying on experiments and arguments that seem reasonable) yet also be a subjectivist in the area of morality because of their individual feelings about behavior and ethics.

Your View of Knowledge and Truth

You may wonder,

“Why is this important?”

It is important to understand our assumptions about knowledge and truth because *our thoughts affect our actions*.

Even if you are not a philosopher, there are many “norms” or “standards” that you may have relied upon in the past to ultimately judge the truth (and your actions), such as:

- the opinions of friends/peers
- the opinions of your parents
- what you thought was “reasonable”
- what you thought could be “proved”
- your feelings

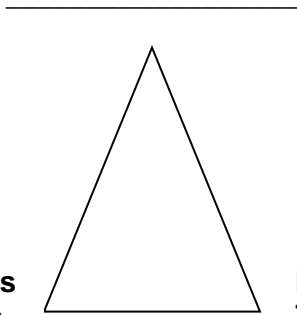
Take a moment to reflect upon your life and how you have judged the truth in the past.

Graphing Your View of Knowledge and Truth

Pick four time periods in your life. Then use the graphs below to describe your ultimate standard for truth during these time periods by writing that standard on the line at the apex of the triangle:

Age _____

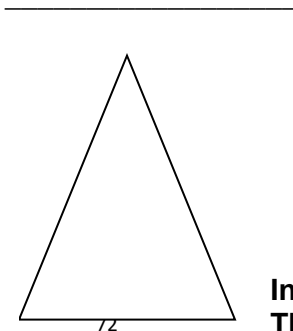
**External Facts
(from outside
yourself)**



**Internal
Thoughts
and
Feelings**

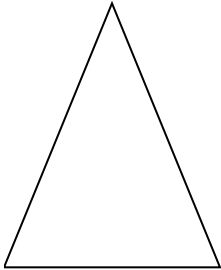
Age _____

**External Facts
(from outside
yourself)**



**Internal
Thoughts
and
Feelings**

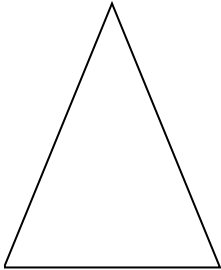
Age _____



**External Facts
(from outside
yourself)**

**Internal
Thoughts
and
Feelings**

Age _____



**External Facts
(from outside
yourself)**

**Internal
Thoughts
and
Feelings**

Chapter Five

An Eternally Living God

Chapter 5: An Eternally Living God

A bumper sticker in the 1980's read:

“He who dies with the most toys wins.”

This bumper sticker actually reflects a philosophy that many have accepted...it is known by the names of *naturalism* or *materialism*.

This view holds that God does not exist; and therefore all that we have in life are ourselves, our thoughts and our possessions.

Examples of this view can be frequently seen in popular poetry and literature:

“...the world and all that's in't, is nothing.”
(*Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare)

“...youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost.” (*The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, 1899)

“Now Catherine would die. That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn.”
(*A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway)

One major theme that has developed from these naturalistic and materialistic assumptions about life is the celebration of “man fighting against the fates.” In the novel *Moby-Dick*, for example, Captain Ahab defiantly battles a whale that represents “God” or a “god-like force” saying:

“Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I’d strike the sun if it insulted me.”
(*Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville)

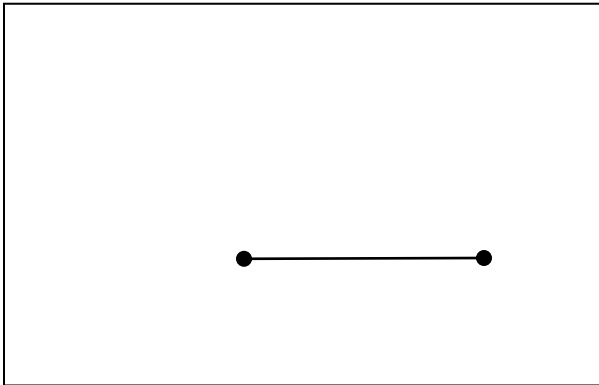
Another significant idea (or theme) that has developed in literature (and in our culture) is around the importance of the “inner life”. Adherents explain that, because of the great “nothingness” in the outward world, we must find beauty instead in our inner world.

Some authors have even claimed that there is nothing in the outward world that can match our inward world:

“no amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up
in his ghostly heart”
(*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald)

Graphing the Materialistic View

To understand this materialistic view, we might create the following graph of a person who was born in 1950 and died in 2010:



1900

1950

2010

Year

Solid line = a person's life (from a materialist's perspective)

We see in the graph above that this worldview is simply about oneself. There is no place for God, and once a person's mortal life is over, there is no "after life" or heaven.

If this is one popular view of reality, you might be asking,

"What does the Bible say about this?"

and

“Is there something more hopeful than this?”

An Eternal God

The answer is yes...in addition to describing God as “living and true” we find in the Bible that God is described as *eternal* - He is without beginning or end. Another word that we could use to describe God’s eternal nature is God’s *infinity*.

God, we learn in the Bible is infinite in:

- His being
- His wisdom
- His power
- His truth

Infinite in His being

The Bible declares that God transcends space and time. He was present before the creation of the world:

- “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”
(Rev. 22:13)

Thus, God was before the creation of anything...space, time, anything that we can see in our created world.

Infinite in His wisdom

God is also described in the Bible as one who knows all things. Scripture contains a number of passages that describe the infinite wisdom of God:

- “*To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his*” (Job 12:13)

- “Those wonders of Him who is *perfect in knowledge*” (Job 37:16)
- “The Lord knows the thoughts of man” (Psalm 94:11)

Thus, God is all-wise and all-knowing. There is nothing that He is does not know. He is perfect in His understanding and wisdom.

Infinite in His Power

In addition, God’s *power* is described as infinite.

- “He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. *Great is our Lord and mighty in power.*” (Psalm 147:4-5)

God’s absolute strength cannot be matched. He is all-powerful, infinite in strength, calling forth the stars, creating and sustaining all things.

Infinite in His Truth

We read in Scripture that God is completely true:

- “God is not a man, that he should lie.” (Num. 23:19)
- “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. *A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.*” (Deut. 32:4)
- “Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the *God of truth.*” (Is. 65:16)
- “But the Lord is the *true God*; he is the living God, the eternal King.” (Jer. 10:10)

- “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only *true God*...” (John 17:3)
- “God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time...” (Titus 1:2)
- “it is impossible for God to lie...” (Heb. 6:18)

Dr. Louis Berkhof explains that the infinite truth of God means that, God’s “revelation is absolutely reliable.”

God is absolutely reliable about what He has revealed, what He has done and what He has promised He will do.

Graphing Infinity

As finite beings we cannot *fully know* God’s eternal nature and infinity. However, God has enabled us to understand this truth in a limited way.

Mathematicians, for example, have used a line with two arrows to describe an “infinite” line (a line without beginning or end):



As we create several graphs in this chapter, we will utilize this infinite line to represent God’s infinite nature.

Created in God's Image

We learned earlier that the first passage of the Bible (found in Genesis 1:1) declares that God "created the heavens and the earth." After this general description of God's creation of the universe, the Book of Genesis then describes the creation of mankind:

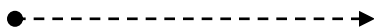
- "the Lord *God formed the man* from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7)

God, we learn, created humans in His image:

- "So God created man *in his own image*, in the image of God he created him." (Gen. 1:27)
- "When God created man, he made him *in the likeness of God*." (Gen. 5:2)
- "...for *in the image of God* has God made man." (Gen. 9:6)

So, humans are different than God; we are *created* beings who have a beginning. Thus, we are unlike God, who has no creator and no beginning or end.

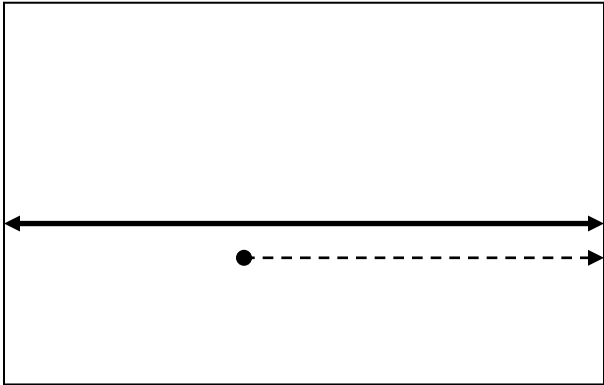
Mathematicians use a line called a 'ray' to identify a line with a starting point that continues into the future.



We might use a similar line in representing our lives.

Graphing a Life with a Beginning

When comparing God's infinite nature to a person born in 1950, we might create a graph like this:



1900

1950

2010

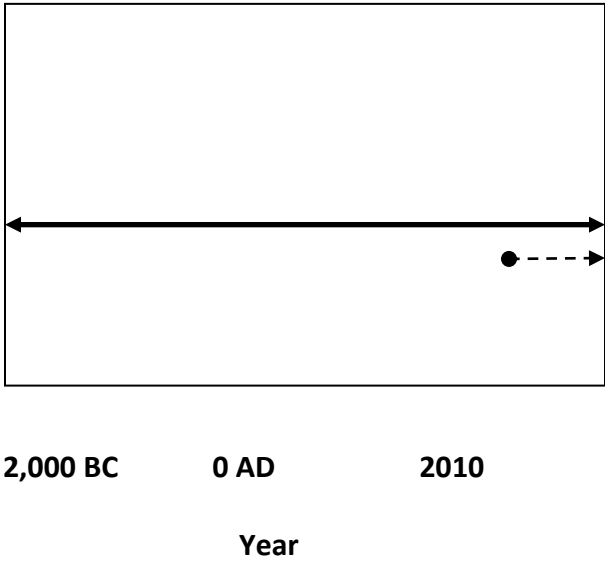
Year

Solid line with double arrows = God's infinity

Dashed line with one arrow = a person's life

Graphing a Life in the History of World

To see a “bigger picture” of God’s presence in the history of the world, we can change the timeline to reflect a time in history when the early events of the Old Testament occurred (such as the life of Abraham) and create a graph like this:

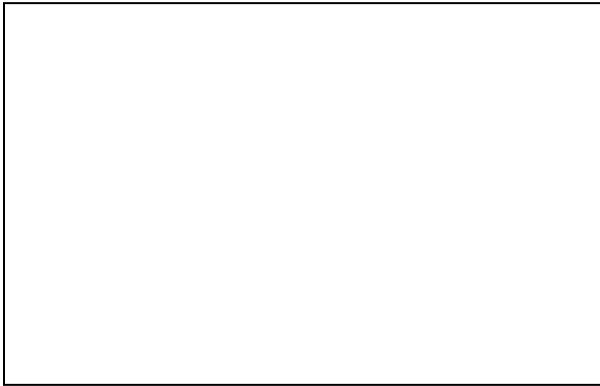


Solid line with double arrows = God’s infinity
Dashed line with one arrow = a person’s life

Graphing Your Life

Spend a moment thinking about your view of God's infinite nature and your life.

If your view is similar to the Biblical view presented earlier, draw a solid line with double arrows indicating the infinite nature of God. Then, write the year that you were born and then draw a dashed line with an arrow into the future, indicating your finite life. If your view is different, draw lines that reflect your view of life.



1900

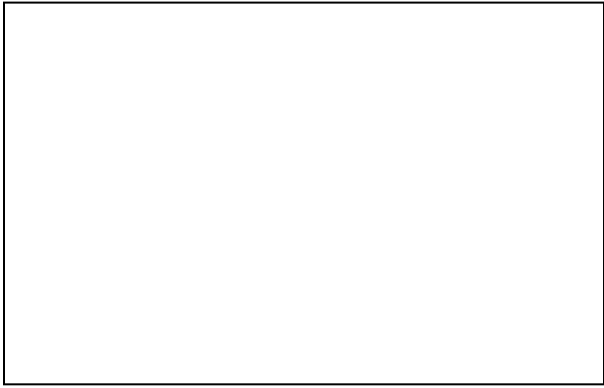


2010

Year

Solid line with double arrows = God's infinity
Dashed line with one arrow = your life

Next, change the timeline and graph your view of God's infinite nature and your life:



2,000 BC

0 AD

2010

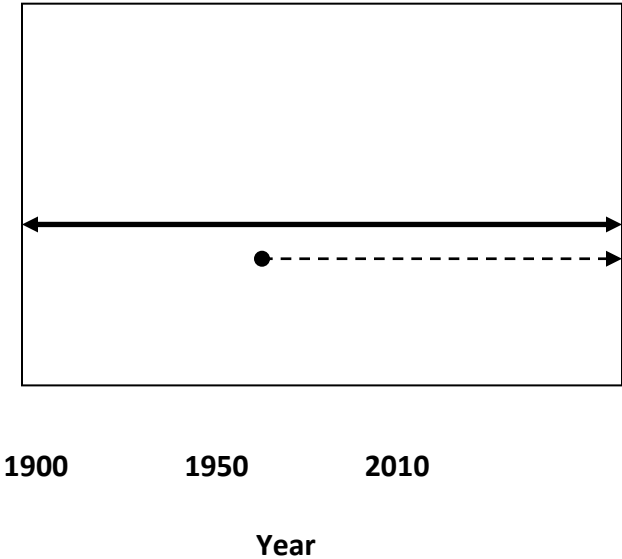
Year

Solid line with double arrows = God's infinity

Dashed line with one arrow = your life

An Eternal Soul

In looking at the following graph (which we created earlier), you will notice that the line for the individual born in 1950 continues on after this current year (2010):



Solid line with double arrows = God's infinity
Dashed line with one arrow = a person's life

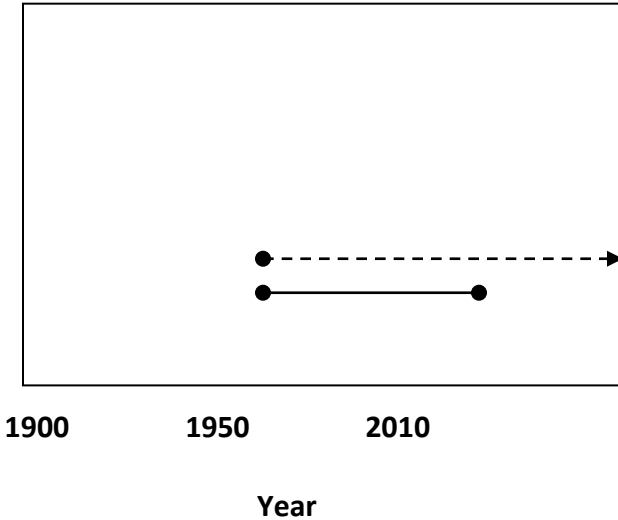
It is important to note that only God knows how long each of us will physically live on the earth, but the graph describes something else that we learn in Scripture... that each person is created to live *eternally*.

We see this first in the Book of Genesis. In Genesis 2:7, we learn that the *body* of Adam was created first, then animated with a *soul*. Unlike some religions that see the union of the body and the soul as evil, the Bible never presents such a view. In fact, we learn that after God created man and woman and all of His creation:

- "God saw all that He had made and *it was very good.*" (Genesis 1:31)

Graphing an Eternal Soul

In graphing a Christian view of the life of a person who was born in 1950 and died in 2010, we will notice that their physical body dies, yet their soul continues on:



Dashed line = a person's soul
Solid line = a person's body

The "soul" (also called a person's "spirit" in the Bible) describes the element of a person that survives after death. We learn in Scripture that the body can be killed, but the soul will endure. As Jesus explained,

- "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. " (Matt 10:28)

At death, the soul is separated from the body:

- When Jesus died he "gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:50)

- John explained, "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain" (Rev. 6:9)

Dr. Douglas Kelly notes that the state of the soul after death will be one of continuing personal identity, consciousness and memory. The follow passages in Scripture point to this truth:

- "two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus."
(Luke 9:30-31)
- Jesus explained that a rich man who had died found himself in torment and called out, "Father Abraham, have pity on me." (Luke 16:24)
- Jesus answered a man on the cross, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

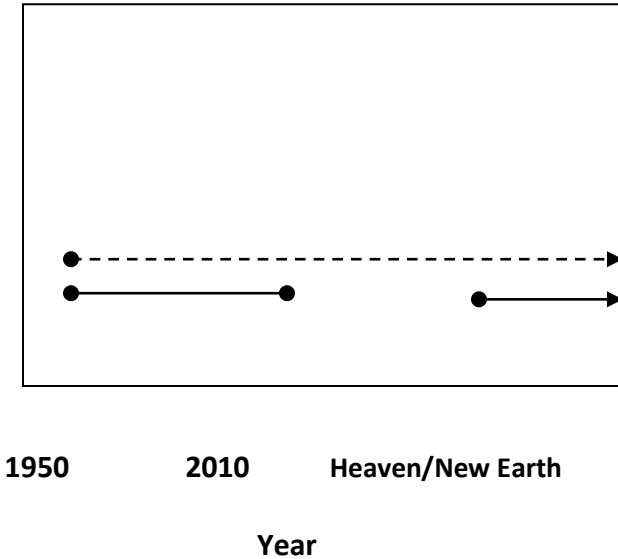
Death can be unsettling for many people. In addition to causing grief because of the sadness of not physically being with a loved one, death unsettles us because:

- as humans we were not originally created to be *mortal*, thus physical death feels "unnatural" (we will learn more about this in the following chapters)
- and because the body and soul were designed by God to be *united*. In death, the soul lives on, yet the body is in the grave. Thus, this separation of body and soul also feels very "unnatural".

Graphing a Resurrected Body

The hope that Christians have (as we will see in future chapters) is that God, in His great love and mercy will provide a new, resurrected and “glorified” body for each of His children. This new body will be somewhat like their earthly physical body (in that others can recognize a fellow Christian), yet it will also be very much *unlike* their current mortal body...because it will be a body that is *immortal* and *imperishable* (a body that will live forever in eternity with God).

We might graph this truth for a Christian who died in 2010 this way:



Dashed line with one arrow = a person's soul
Solid line = a person's body

You might ask,

“How is this possible? How could someone receive a *new* body after death?”

We will learn more about that in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the opportunity to reflect upon God’s eternal and infinite nature.

We learned that God is infinite in His being, His wisdom, His power and His truth.

We also learned that God created humans with a body and soul. At death, our body dies but our soul continues.

Christians have been promised, as God’s children, a new resurrected body. This life after death gives Christians the hope of eternal life and allows Christians to ask:

- “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”
(from Hosea 13:14 and I Corinthians
15:55)

Chapter Six

A Living God in Three Persons

Chapter 6: A Living God in Three Persons

In the previous chapter we had an opportunity to reflect upon God's infinite nature. After reading that chapter you might be asking:

“What else does the Bible say about God?”

In addition to God's eternal nature, we can also learn in the Bible that God is *one God in three persons*:

- God the Father
- God the Son and
- God the Holy Spirit

This is known as the *trinity*.

The *trinity* is a basic Christian belief about God. It is a belief that God is one substance and still three persons.

The 1662 Anglican “Articles of Religion” summarizes the Christian belief about the trinity using these words:

- “And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

Evidence for One God

The Bible affirms that there is *one* God. Unlike other religions that believe in a multitude of gods (which is known as polytheism) the Bible affirms *monotheism*; that there is only one God.

Many passages affirm one God:

- “In the beginning *God created* the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1)
- “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, *the Lord is one!*” (Deut. 6:4)
- “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; *I am God, and there is none like me.*” (Isaiah 46:9)
- “yet for us there is but *one God*” (I Cor. 8:6)

Thus, we see in Scripture that there is *one God*.

Evidence for Three Persons

We also see in Scripture that God is revealed in *three persons (the trinity)*. One of the clearest presentations of the trinity can be seen in the baptism of Jesus:

- “As soon as *Jesus* was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the *Spirit of God* descending like a dove and lighting on him. *And a voice from heaven* said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”
(Matthew 3:16-17)

At Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River we can read that:

- Jesus Christ (the Son of God) was baptized
- The Holy Spirit descended like a dove
- The Father said that He was “well pleased” with the Son

Many other passages point to God as three persons:

- “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)
- “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” (I Cor. 8:6)

We learn in the Bible that all members of the trinity are equal in possessing the divine nature and that each person in the trinity is co-eternal (existing for all of eternity).

You may wonder,

“What is the relationship like between the Father, Son and Spirit?”

There is a great mystery in fully understanding the trinity. As created beings we can only know what has been revealed to us in Scripture.

Scripture is clear, however, that the bond between the three members of the trinity is based on *love*.

We learn in the Bible that,

- “God is *love*.” (I John 4:8)
- “The Father *loves* the Son and has placed everything in his hands.” (John 3:35)

- “the Father *loves* the Son and shows him all he does.” (John 5:20)
- And as we read earlier, God the Father announced at Jesus’ baptism: “This is my Son, whom I *love*; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17)

God’s love is not self-centered but always desires fellowship with others (see I Corinthians 13). Thus, God was not one person isolated to Himself but one who always existed as three persons.

As older theologians explained it, there is “*communion of holy love*” between the three persons of the trinity, each affirming and supporting the other.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What about the Christian view of the trinity is difficult to understand?

2. What is hopeful about the bond between the three members of the trinity?

The Father

We’ve learned that the divine essence of God belongs to each of the three persons in the Trinity.

While sharing one nature, Scripture does identify *distinctions* between each person of the trinity.

In the book of John for example we see that the Father:

- "loves the Son and shows him all he does"
(John 5:20)
- desires that the Son be honored (John 5:23)
- sends the Son (John 5:27, John 8:18)
- approves of the Son (John 6:27)
- glorifies the Son (John 8:54, John 17:1)
- knows the Son (John 10:15)
- gives the Son authority (John 17:2)
- creates the Church to be a "bride" for the Son to share the blessings of Son and remain in close fellowship with Him (John 17:6)

The Son

As we have noted, Jesus Christ, the Son of God is God. He is co-divine and co-eternal:

- "In the beginning was the Word, and *the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*"
(John 1:1)
- "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58)

- Jesus said, "I and the Father are one."
(John 10:30)
- "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3)
- "for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." (I Cor. 8:6)

As God, Jesus is able to:

- forgive sins (Mark 2:5)
- be the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's being (Hebrews 1:3)
- be worshipped as God (Hebrews 1:6)

As a part of the trinity, the Son:

- does only what he sees his Father doing
(John 5:19)
- is "in" His Father (John 5:26)
- seeks not to please Himself but the Father who sent Him (John 5:30)
- comes in the name of the Father (John 5:43)
- knows the Father (John 10:15)

- does the will of the Father (John 10:18)

The Holy Spirit

We learn in Scripture that the Holy Spirit is also God:

- “no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 2:11)
- “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (II Cor. 3:17)
- “The Spirit gives birth to Spirit” (John 3:6)

One word in the original language for the Holy Spirit in the Bible is *paraklete*, which means comforter, counselor, helper and advisor.

The Spirit’s key role is to:

- *glorify the Son* and
- *mediate the Son’s presence*
(because the Son is not physically with us)

Thus the Spirit joins the Son with His people which allows Christians to have immediate access to their Heavenly Father.

As we conclude this discussion about the trinity you may be wondering,

“Why exactly is this important?”

The Relevance of the Trinity

Scripture explains that the trinity is important because:

The Son, Jesus Christ, died to bring us to His Father.

We'll learn more about this in the following chapters, but for now it is important to know that Scripture teaches that:

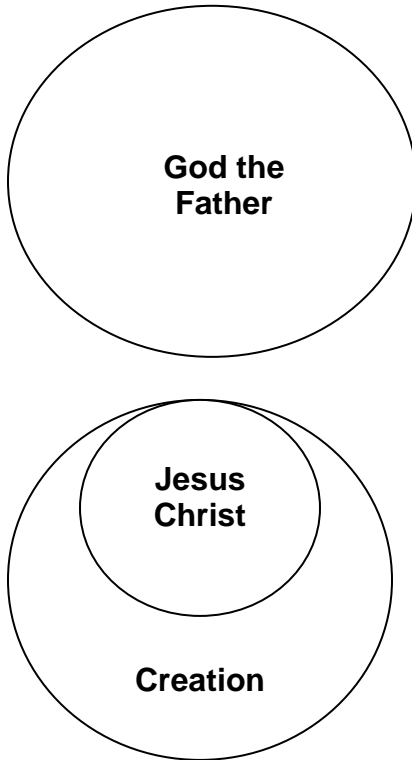
- the Father saves all those who are with the Son (John 6:40)
- the only way to the Father is through the Son (John 14:6)
- the Holy Spirit joins Jesus with his people – across space and time (Col. 1:27)
- with the help of the Holy Spirit, God's people have immediate access to their Heavenly Father and knowledge of Him (John 14-16)

Understanding the trinity, therefore, is vital for Christians in helping us understand who we worship and the work that God has done.

Differing Views of the Trinity - Arius

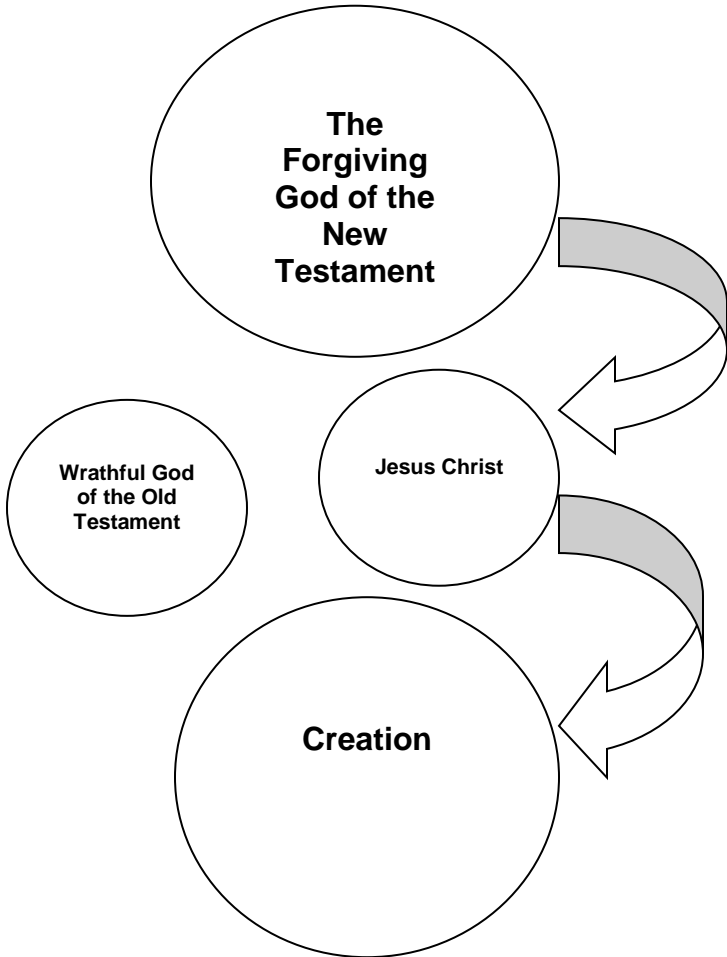
Over the years, different sects and cults have offered differing views on the trinity.

A third century writer named Arius, for example, believed that Jesus Christ was the first being created by God. Therefore, Jesus was not eternal or equal with God but part of His creation. Arius' view might be graphed like this:



Differing Views of the Trinity – Marcion

Marcion, a second century teacher in Rome supposed that a wrathful God of the Old Testament was a lower god in comparison to the forgiving God of the New Testament. In Marcion’s view, Jesus Christ was not God, but rather a spiritual entity sent by the forgiving God to show people more about Himself. Marcion’s view might be like this:



The Trinity Defined

Defining the concept of the trinity was difficult for the Early Church.

However, in explaining this relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit, Church leaders at the Council of Nicea (in 325) used the word *homoousios* to identify that the Father and the Son are of one and the same substance.

(The words in Greek are *homo* which means *same* and *ousios* which means *substance*).

The Church has consistently affirmed that the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit are of the same substance; coeternal and codivine.

Graphing the Trinity

While impossible to *fully* comprehend the Biblical view of the trinity, Dr. Bruce Ware has offered a helpful diagram to help us understand that the trinity consists of three distinct persons who share one divine nature.

To graph this important truth, select three different colored pens or markers. Next, use the legend below to identify the color that represents each person of the Trinity. Then, with each colored marker or pen, draw over the outside line of the circle below:



Persons in the Trinity	
Father =	<input type="text"/>
Son =	<input type="text"/>
Holy Spirit =	<input type="text"/>

As you complete the graph, you'll notice that:

- Each person of the trinity is *different* (for example, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father).
- Each person of the trinity shares the *same divine nature*.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you always held that view that you diagramed?

2. What additional things would you like to learn about the statement: "The Son died to bring us to His Father." Why?

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the opportunity to reflect more upon God's nature.

We learned that Christians believe in the trinity. That God is one, yet in three persons...the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We learned that Jesus was sent by the Father and died to bring people to His Father.

We learned too that the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son, and joins the Son with His people allowing Christians to have immediate access to their Heavenly Father.

Chapter Seven

Life as it deserves to be

Chapter 7: Life as it deserves to be

We have reflected much on God's attributes and His character, noting that God is:

- Creator
- Lord over all things
- Eternal
- Immortal
- Father, Son and Holy Spirit

One aspect of God's character that we have not explored (until now) is God's *holiness*.

A Holy God

In Scripture we learn that God is completely holy:

- "The law of the Lord is **perfect**, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are **trustworthy**, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are **right**, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are **radiant**, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is **pure**, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are **sure** and altogether **righteous**. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. (Psalm 19:7-10)

Spend a moment looking at the words above that describe God's law:

- | | |
|---------------|-----------|
| - perfect | - radiant |
| - trustworthy | - pure |
| - right | - sure |
| - righteous | |

...these words all reflect God's holiness.

In Scripture we learn that God is perfect in every way. He is without sin or defect. Everything about God is holy, righteous and pure:

- "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you— *majestic in holiness*, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Ex. 15:11)
- "Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and *his righteousness endures forever.*" (Ps. 111:2-3)
- "Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? *For you alone are holy.* All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."
(Rev. 15:4)
- "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."
(1 John 1:5)

Not only is God's character holy, God's holiness is also manifested in His works:

- "The Law is holy, righteous and good"
(Romans 7:12)
- "The Lord is righteous in all his ways..."
(Psalm 145:17)

Graphically Displaying God's Holiness

Like other aspects of God's person and character, God's holiness is impossible for humans to *fully* understand.

God has, however, revealed His holiness to us in a way that we can partially understand.

One way to graphically display this truth is to use a balance sheet similar to those used by accountants to list a company's assets and liabilities.

As we think for a moment of what God's "balance sheet" might include, we might list God's perfect character, His perfect righteousness and absolute holiness on the left side of the chart in the "assets" column.

If we consider God's liabilities (on the right side of the chart) we could list *none*. God has absolutely no liabilities; He is perfect in all things. In the words of Peter, God is "without blemish or defect".

A Holy God	
Assets	Liabilities
God's perfect character, perfect righteousness and absolute holiness	None - God is without blemish or defect (I Peter 1:19)

A Judging God

As one who is holy and perfect, God hates *sin*. Sins are those things that “miss the mark” and fall short of God’s holiness, righteousness and moral commands. Thus, sin is abhorrent to a holy and pure God.

We learn in the Bible that on a day called “The Day of the Lord”, God will perfectly judge the world and will rid it of every evil and sin:

- “*The Lord Almighty has a day in store* for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted and they will be humbled.” (Is. 2:12)
- “*In that day* men will throw away to the rodents and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship.” (Is. 2:20)
- “Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on *the day of the Lord’s wrath*. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth.” (Zeph. 1:18)
- “Christ Jesus, will *judge* the living and the dead” (I Tim. 4:1)
- “for you know very well that the *day of the Lord* will come like a thief in the night” (I Thess. 5:2)

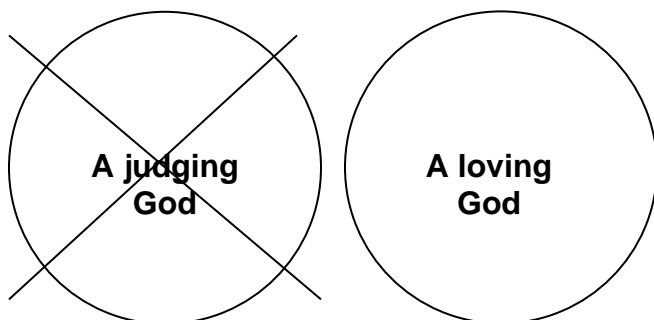
Thus, we learn in Scripture that all people will stand before God and be judged.

We are reminded of this in the Nicene Creed that Jesus:

- “...will come again in glory *to judge the living and the dead* and His kingdom will have no end.”

The nature of God being a Judge is something that many people (including many contemporary Christians) fail to embrace.

It is as if the God of the Old Testament (where we learn first that God judges) was replaced by a God of the New Testament (a God who loves). If we were to graphically display their beliefs, it might look like this:



We find in Scripture, however, that the diagram above is false. In fact, both aspects of God's nature are true:

- God is a *holy* God that *judges* humans
- God is a *loving* God that *loves* humans

Our Liabilities

In light of this, we might ask then,

- "How will God judge me?"

When most people hear that question, their typical response is:

**"I'm a pretty good person,
I will probably be rewarded by God."**

Next, take a moment and reflect on how you might be judged by God.

What “Assets” and “Liabilities” do have in your life?

How will I be judged by God?	
Assets	Liabilities

Life Compared with Society's Standards

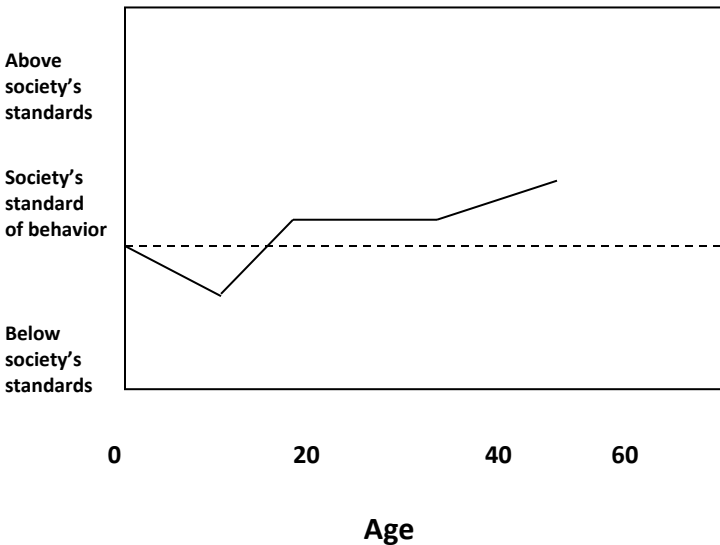
When thinking about God's judgments, many people come to the conclusion:

"I'm a pretty good person."

They might make that claim by comparing their actions with their *society's standards of behavior* (such as our government's laws or other social standards).

For example, a person may remember that they broke the law during a reckless time in their life, but might remember too that on other occasions they did things that went "above and beyond" the basic requirements (such as when they helped a neighbor).

A graph of their life in comparison to society's standards might look like this:



Solid line = a person's behavior

Dashed line = society's standard of behavior

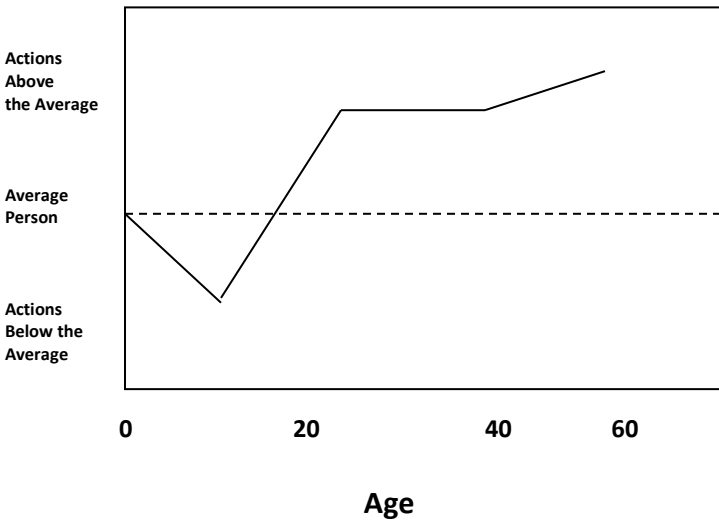
Life Compared with Other People

Similarly, many people will compare their actions to that of *other people* and come to the conclusion,

“Compared with other people, I’m not that bad of a person.”

For example, a person might remember that on several occasions they did “bad” things, but in comparison with other people (those who did “*really bad things*”) their actions don’t seem “that bad”. A person might also think about “good” things that they’ve done that other people did not do.

A graph of their life in comparison to other people might look like this:



Solid line = a person’s actions

Dashed line = average person’s actions

The Problem with Comparisons

Looking at the previous two graphs a person might come to the conclusion that:

“I’m a pretty good person.”

“I should get to heaven because I’ve done my best.”

“Compared with other people, I’m not that bad.”

The problem with these comparisons, however, is that they are not the standard that God will use to judge us.

God does not judge based on how well we do compared with our government’s laws, society’s standards or the behavior of other people.

God uses *His standards* to judge people:

- “Be *perfect*, therefore, as your heavenly Father is *perfect*.” (Matthew 5:48)

The Condition of Sin

Living up to His standard, however, is impossible for us to reach because of *sin* in our lives.

As we have mentioned, the Bible begins in the Old Testament with the book of Genesis.

After God created the heavens and the earth, He created the first man and woman, named Adam and Eve.

We learn in Genesis that God walked with Adam and Eve in a special place that He had made for them called The Garden of Eden.

Even though Adam and Eve were close to God, they failed to follow the commands that God had established for them.

Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience is frequently called “*The Fall*” – which led to separation from God.

As a result of their sin, God explained that there would be negative consequences for them and for all generations. In fact, because of the sin of our “first parents” all mankind has a *fallen nature*.

When we speak of our *fallen nature* (called “original sin”) we are referring to our natural inclination to do things apart from God.

This natural inclination turns into *actual sins* that have been demonstrated by all humans throughout all ages such as: sins of disobedience, disloyalty, deceptiveness, doubt, self-centeredness, hurtful actions to others and unresponsiveness to God.

Graphically Displaying Our Condition

As we think about our liabilities from a Biblical perspective, we might initially display this truth like this:

An Unholy People	
Assets	Liabilities
	Sin

Sin is not just external actions

As we look at the balance sheet on the previous page, many are tempted to minimize their situation by thinking of sin as only the “*very bad*” behaviors that people have done.

You might have had the thought,

“I haven’t done *that many bad things* in my life.”

It is easy to think of sin as only actions.

However, Jesus spoke forcefully against a group of religious leaders called the Pharisees who tried to minimize God’s standards by focusing only on external actions. Jesus explained that sin applies also to thoughts and attitudes:

- “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that *anyone who is angry* with his brother will be subject to judgment.” (Matthew 5:21-22)
- “You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her *in his heart*.” (Matthew 5:27-28)
- “You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44)

- “For *out of the heart* come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.’” (Matthew 15:19-20)
- “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.” (Matthew 23:25-26)
- Jesus explained that while the Pharisees were focusing on giving a tenth of their resources to God, they “neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.” (Matthew 23:23)

All Have Sinned

Thus, all people can look at their thoughts, actions and attitudes in comparison with God’s standard of perfection, holiness and righteousness and see that they have fallen short of “God’s glory”.

All people, we learn in Scripture, have the *presence of sin* in their lives:

- “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23)
- “There is *no one righteous*, not even one; there is no one who understands, *no one who seeks God*. All have turned away.” (Rom. 3:10-12)

- Everyone will “suppress the truth” because of their “wickedness” (Romans 1:18)

Updating our balance sheet with this truth, might look like this:

An Unholy People	
Assets	Liabilities
	Presence of Sin

You might ask,

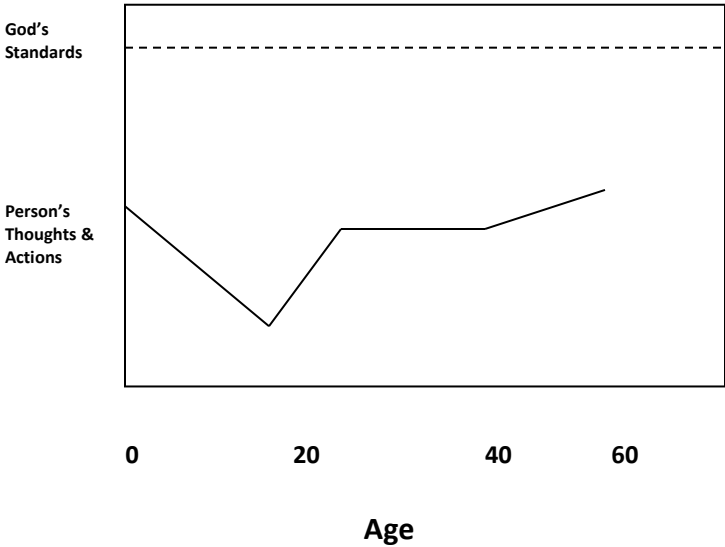
“What if people don’t know that they have sinned?”

We learn in the Bible that God has revealed His standards to all people:

- “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been *clearly seen*, being understood from what has been made, so that men are *without excuse*.” (Rom. 1:20)

Graphically Displaying the Difference

Although impossible to adequately create, an example of a person's life in comparison to God's standards might look like this:



Solid line = a person's actions
Dashed line = God's standards

Power of Sin

In addition to the *presence of sin*, we also learn in Scripture that all people are under the *power of sin*:

- “the Scripture declares that the whole world is a *prisoner of sin*” (Gal. 3:22)
- we are “in *slavery* under the basic principles of the world” (Gal. 4:3)

The Bible teaches that people are oppressed, tempted and enslaved by three sources: the *Devil*, the *world* and the *flesh*.

When the Bible refers to:

- *the Devil* (or Satan) it does envision a man with a red suit and pitchfork, but rather an evil entity that tempts and accuses people, seeking moral authority over them to keep them “in darkness”. It is important to note that the Bible does not present the Devil as a “second god” equal with our Heavenly Father, rather the Devil is a created being who is permitted by God to do evil activity for a limited time.
- *the “World”* refers to the part of our culture that is hostile to God. Because evil is widespread in our world, people are tempted to live a life “in darkness” and not in the light of God and His ways.
- *“the flesh”* refers to the “passions and lusts” (Gal. 5:24) that work “death” (Rom. 7:5) in each person. These lusts enslave people keeping them “in darkness” and away from God.

Including this truth regarding our enslavement to sin, our spiritual balance sheet might look like this:

An Unholy People	
Assets	Liabilities
	Presence of Sin
	Power of Sin

Thus, in addition to having the presence of sin, all people are enslaved by the power of sin.

The Penalty for Sin

We learned earlier that God, as one who is holy and perfect, hates *sin*. He hates all things that fall short of His holiness and righteousness and will perfectly judge the world and rid it of every evil and sin.

Thus, it should come as no surprise to learn that, according to Scripture, because men and women have been disobedient to God and in rebellion to His laws, they will receive His punishment, wrath and judgment:

- “You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; *you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies...*” (Psalm 5:4-6)
- “whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for *God's wrath* remains on him” (John 3:36)
- “*judgment* followed one sin and brought *condemnation*” (Rom. 5:16)
- “the result of one trespass was *condemnation* for all men” (Rom. 5:18)
- “All of us...(were) gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature *objects of wrath.*” (Eph. 2:3)
- “God's *wrath* comes on those who are disobedient.” (Eph. 5:6)
- “If anyone does not love the Lord—a *curse* be on him.” (I Cor. 16:22)

- “They will be *punished* with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power”
(II Thess. 1:9)

Thus, because of sin we are separated from a holy God and under God’s wrath and judgment.

So, in addition to having the *presence* and *power* of sin in our lives, we face God’s wrath and judgment as the *penalty* for sin.

Adding this truth to our spiritual balance sheet might look like this:

An Unholy People	
Assets	Liabilities
	Presence of Sin
	Power of Sin
	Penalty for Sin

What we try to do

As we look at the balance sheet above we might be quick to ask,

“What can I do to get out of this situation?”

Many who look at their spiritual situation are quick to rely on their *own efforts* to try to mitigate the problem of sin.

Graphing this effort, might look like this:

An Unholy People	
Assets	Liabilities
<i>Our Own Efforts</i>	Presence of Sin
	Power of Sin
	Penalty for Sin

Spend a moment thinking about how you have tried to get out of the problem of sin by your own efforts.

Use the balance sheet below to list your efforts (in the Assets column) that you have thought of to mitigate the problem of sin:

An Unholy People	
Assets	Liabilities
	Presence of Sin
	Power of Sin
	Penalty for Sin

The use of “our efforts” in attempting to become right with God is a common response that can be observed throughout human history.

Responding in this way to try to mitigate sin makes sense as a “natural response” because that was God’s plan for Adam and Eve (our first parents).

We learn in Genesis that if Adam and Eve obeyed God they would be rewarded, if they did not, they would be punished.

Some scholars have called this period when Adam and Eve's efforts would place them in right standing with God a "*Covenant of Works*".

Christians and Efforts

This response of attempting to use "our efforts" to become right with God can be confusing, because it seems to be advocated by many well meaning Christians.

One Christian explained recently that at his conversion to Christianity his pastor explained that he needed to:

- "love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love other people...it was just that simple. For the first time in my life, I thought, *I can do that.*"

A pastor asked recently,

- "What would happen if after 10,000 hours of following Jesus in the way He describes, we discovered that this is more than good advice?"

Still another challenged people by saying,

- "What if on Sundays we brought God the best of us instead of what's left of us?"

Thus, it seems like even well intentioned Christians are advocating using our efforts to become right with God and mitigate the problem of sin. (As we'll discover in a later chapter, God does have a plan for using good works in our lives.)

The Problem with “our efforts”

The Bible uses the word “*works*” to explain our attempts to be holy and righteous by our own efforts. We might also call this “*works righteousness*”.

As we will see, as good as our own best efforts seem, there is a mammoth problem with attempting to use “our efforts” to become right with God. This approach, we learn in Scripture *does not work*.

Some in the Early Church thought their efforts (such as attempting religious perfection by following the ceremonial law or being circumcised) in addition to their faith would make them righteous before God.

However, we learn that:

- “a man *is not justified* (made righteous) by observing the law” (Gal. 2:16)
- “Are you so foolish...are you now trying to attain your goal *by human effort*?” (Gal. 3:3)
- “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision *means anything*” (Gal. 6:15)

In another example, we learn that Paul attempted religious perfection as a Jew, explaining that he was:

- “advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” (Gal. 1:14)

Yet Paul considered all of his own efforts “*rubbish*” because he had not found:

- “a righteousness of my own that comes from the law” (Phil. 3:9)

So righteousness, we learn in the Bible *cannot be earned* by our efforts and works.

You might ask,

“Why can’t my efforts make me righteous?”

The reason is simple: *because we are sinful people.*

The Heidelberg Catechism explains, “even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. How have you tried to get right with God by your own efforts or “works”?

2. What concerns or discouragement do you have about the Christian view that “works righteousness” does not work? Why?

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the opportunity to reflect more upon God's holiness and have learned that because of our sin all people are deserving of God's wrath, judgment and condemnation.

We learned too that none of our efforts and works can put us in right standing with God because even our best efforts are imperfect and touched by sin.

So you might ask yourself,

“If we are so lost and can't save ourselves, who can help us?”

....that will be the topic of our next chapter.

Chapter Eight

The Life and Work of Christ

Chapter 8: The Life and Work of Christ

We learned in the previous chapter that because all people are sinful, all are deserving of God's wrath, judgment and condemnation:

- “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23)
- “There is *no one righteous*, not even one; there is no one who understands, *no one who seeks God*. All have turned away.” (Rom. 3:10-12)

Immediate Judgments

Interestingly, there are some places in the Bible where we can observe God delivering an *immediate judgment* to people when they sinned. One example is with Adam and Eve, where God forbade eternal life on earth and banished them from the Garden of Eden:

- “And the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Gen. 3:22-24)

Another example of God's immediate judgment is with Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to God and immediately "fell down and died." (Acts 5:5)

In thinking about God's judgment you might have wondered,

"Even though people deserve it, God's judgment and wrath doesn't seem to fall immediately on people. Why is that?"

Common Grace

Although all people are deserving of God's judgment, we can see in life that God frequently withholds His *immediate* judgment and wrath.

This is because of God's *grace* - God's gracious love towards people. This love and kindness from God, we learn, is completely undeserved and unearned - there is nothing that we have done or could do to deserve or earn His gracious love.

Because God restrains His wrath, the world has not degenerated into chaos.

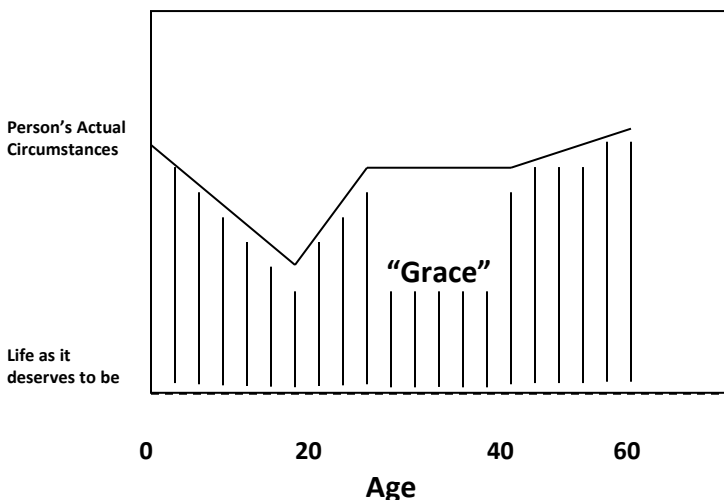
In our world today, we can see much evidence of God's grace (such as His care of creation in the ordered sequence of seasons). We can also observe a measure of domestic and political harmony and peace, and can see some progress in life (such as advances in medicine, science and culture) because of the goodness of God.

His kindness and blessings *to all the world* (to those who follow Him and those who do not) is called God's *common grace*.

It is because of God's grace that we live a life knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is also because of God's grace that we can see people's circumstances as being better than what they deserved.

Graphically Displaying God's Grace

Although impossible to adequately graph, an example of a person's actual circumstances in comparison to the life that they deserve under God's immediate judgment and condemnation might look like this:



Solid line = a person's actual circumstances

Dashed line = life as it deserves to be

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does it feel to have a life that is better than you "deserved"? Why?
2. What does it say that God would give us a life better than "we deserved"?

Final Judgment

Ultimately, however, *all people will stand before God and be judged* for their sin.

As we learned in the previous chapter, there is nothing in our “works” that can make us right with God.

And so our situation looks like this:

An Unholy People	
Assets	Liabilities
<i>None</i>	Presence of Sin Power of Sin Penalty for Sin

And so, again, you might have asked yourself,

“If we are so lost and can’t save ourselves, who can save us?”

God's Son

The Good News of the Bible is that in addition to being a judging God, God is also a *loving* God who desires a people for His own.

We learn in Scripture that even in the midst of our separation and disobedience, God offered His Son Jesus Christ to restore us to Himself.

You might wonder,

“Why did God send His Son?”

The reason, we learn, is because of God's great *love, mercy* and *grace*:

- “For God so **loved** the world that He **gave** his Son that whoever believes in him will not perish.” (John 3:16)
- “But God demonstrates his own **love** for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8)
- “This is love: not that we loved God, but that **he loved us** and **sent** his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (I John 4:10)
- “And we have seen and testify that the Father **sent** his Son to be the Savior of the world.” (I John 4:14)

And so, 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ came to earth and for three years He ministered; teaching, healing and doing miracles.

In His ministry, Christ perfectly revealed God, so that people could see God clearly and grow in their understanding of the Lord. Jesus explained that,

- “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9)

A Loving Savior

Not only can we see the great love of our Heavenly Father in the sending of His Son, we can observe *the great love of the Son* in His sacrifice for His people.

We learn that Jesus *willingly* accepted persecution, suffering and death on a Cross because of *His great love* for people:

- “the Son of God...**loved** me and gave himself to me.” (Gal. 2:20)
- “Christ **loved** the Church and gave himself up for her.” (Eph. 5:25)

The reason that Jesus willingly died on the Cross was for *the forgiveness of sins*:

- When John the Baptist saw Jesus he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who **takes away the sins** of the world.” (John 1:29)
- Jesus “shed his blood for the **remission of sin**” (Matthew 26:28)
- “Christ **died for our sins** according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3)

- “God made him who had no sin **to be sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (II Cor. 5:21)
- Jesus Christ “**gave himself for our sins** to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal. 1:4)

You might wonder,

“How was this possible? How could Jesus die for another person’s sins?”

The Incarnation

The reason, we learn in Scripture, is because Jesus is *fully divine* as God and *fully human*. This is known as the *incarnation*.

Because Jesus is fully divine (as God), He was able to perfectly follow all of God’s laws. Thus, like the Passover Lamb in the Old Testament (Exodus 12:5), Christ was a *perfect sacrifice* without blemish or defect (I Peter 1:19):

- Peter explained that Jesus, “**committed no sin**, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (I Peter 2:22)
- John said, “In him is **no sin**” (I John 3:5)

And because Christ was *truly man*, He could be a perfect *representative* for us:

- “The Word *became flesh* and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14)

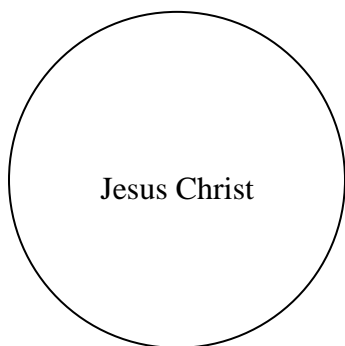
- “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, *born of a woman, born under law.*” (Gal. 4:4)
- “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been *tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*” (Hebrews 4:15)

As C.S. Lewis explained, “The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”

Graphing the Incarnation

While impossible to *fully* comprehend the Biblical view of the incarnation, the following diagram can be helpful in understanding that Jesus is fully divine and fully human.

To graph this important truth, select two different colored pens or markers. Next, use the legend below to identify the color that represents each of Christ’s natures. Then, with each colored marker or pen, draw over the outside line of the circle below:



Natures of Christ	
Divine =	<input type="text"/>
Human =	<input type="text"/>

As you complete the graph, you'll notice that:

- Without ceasing to be the Son of God, Jesus was also fully human.

The Humility of Christ

In thinking about the incarnation, one might be struck with the incredible *humility* of Christ.

Even though Jesus was God he took on human nature and suffered at the hands of others, because of His *obedience* to His Father and His *love* for people:

- “being in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but *made himself nothing*, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, *he humbled himself* and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:6-8)
- “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to *serve*, to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)
- “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he *suffered*” (Hebrews 5:8)

One author explained that Jesus’ “entire life became obedient in action and suffering to the very limit of a shameful death.”

The Resurrection

The story, however, does not end with Jesus' suffering and death. After taking our punishment and dying for our sins, God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

Paul explained,

- "...he was buried and raised on the third day...appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred..." (I Cor. 15:3-6)

Because of His obedience, Christ was exalted above all things as our risen *Lord and King*:

- "God exalted him to the highest place and give him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..." (Phil. 2:9-11)

The Nicene Creed explains,

- "On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."

Graphically Displaying the Work of Christ

To help understand the wonderful work of Christ (which theologians call “*The Divine Exchange*”) we will use a balance sheet similar to the sheet that we used in the previous chapter.

In this case, we will place the “righteousness of Christ” on the left side of the sheet. This righteousness is what Christ *earned* because of His obedience to God.

On the right side of the sheet we will identify our spiritual situation, which includes the presence of sin, the power of sin and the penalty for sin:

The Divine Exchange	
Jesus	All people
Righteousness of Christ	Presence of Sin
	Power of Sin
	Penalty for Sin

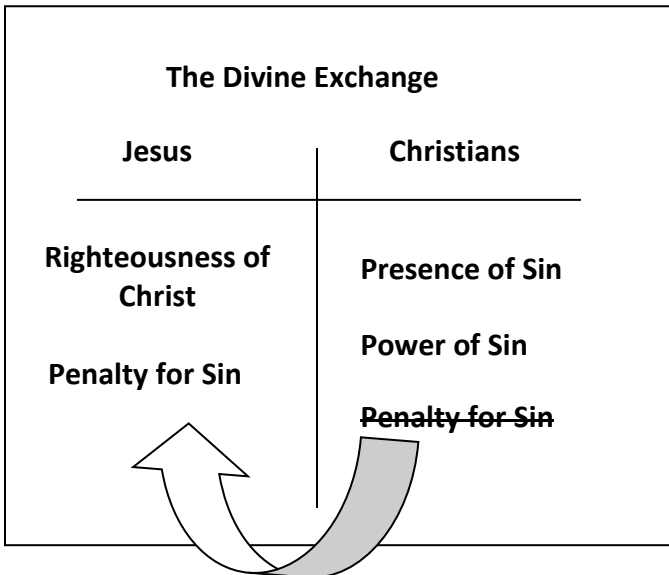
Paying our Penalty

As we have explained, the Good News for Christians is that Jesus saw our situation and willingly took the *penalty* that we deserved for our sins by *suffering* and *dying* on the Cross:

- “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by *becoming a curse* for us...” (Gal. 3:13)
- “For Christ *died for sins* once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit” (I Peter 3:10)

At the Cross we see that,

Christ freely paid the penalty for sin that we deserved.



Christ taking the penalty for sin means that there is “*no condemnation*” (punishment or death) for those people who are with Christ Jesus.

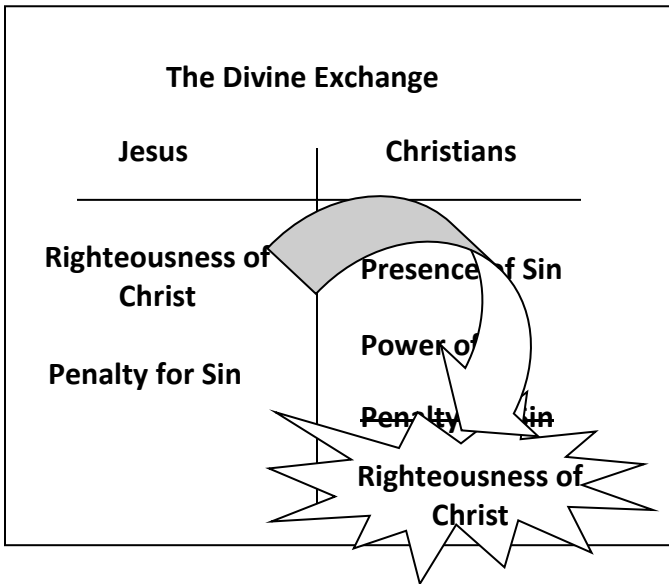
The Righteousness of Christ

We learn too that because of His great love, Jesus covers His people with His righteousness:

- “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (II Cor. 5:21)
- “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” (Rom. 3:21-22)

So, through His death and resurrection:

Christ covers His people with the righteousness that He earned.

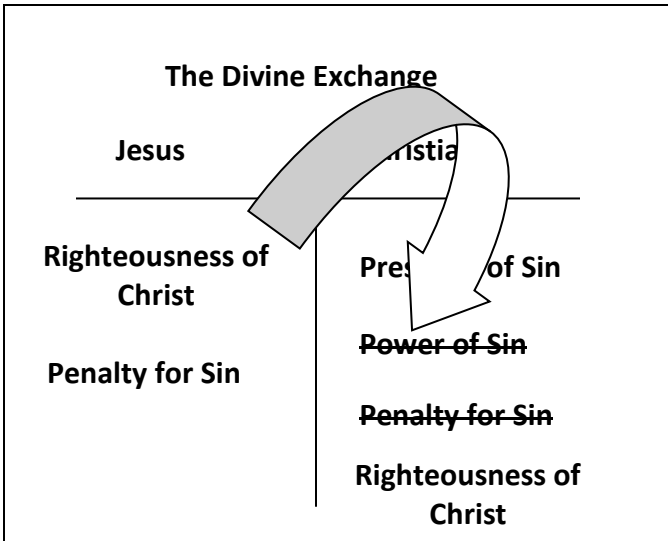


Being covered with Christ's righteousness means that God sees us "just as if" we were Christ and did not sin.

Breaking the Power of Sin

In covering Christians with His righteousness through His suffering, death and resurrection, *Christ breaks the power of sin* in their lives:

- "In the same way, count yourselves *dead to sin* but alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 6:11)
- "For *sin shall not be your master*, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14)



For Christ's people, those things that once enslaved them: the Devil, the flesh and the world do not have the same authority that they once did.

With Christ as their Lord and the power of sin broken, *Christians are free to grow in the righteousness of Christ.*

A Summary of the Work of Christ

Thus, Christians are people who are covered with the righteousness of Christ and are no longer slaves to sin nor under the penalty of sin because of the work that Christ has done.

The Divine Exchange	
Jesus	Christians
Righteousness of Christ	Righteousness of Christ
Penalty for Sin	Presence of Sin

Paul summarized the work of Christ this way:

- “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, *Christ died for the ungodly*. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be *saved from God's wrath through him!*” (Rom. 5:6-9)

Our Response to the Work of Christ – by Faith

After reading about the incredible sacrifice that Christ made, you might be asking:

“So, how can I be made right with God?”

or in the words of a person from the Bible....

“What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30)

The answer in Scripture is clear: we need to respond to God’s gracious love with *faith in Christ*. Faith is trusting in the forgiveness for sin that Christ offers. It is a belief in the truth and the promises of God:

- *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...”*
(Acts 16:31)
- *“God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*
(John 3:16)
- *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”* (John 3:36)

Thus faith is looking forward to the blessings that God has promised in Christ, because Christ is the only means of salvation:

- *“Salvation is found through no one else.”*
(Acts 4:12)

- Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
(John 14:6)

Faith is trusting Christ as our Lord and Savior.

In the words of Dr. John Frame, Christ is the one "before whom we bow, whom we acknowledge as having supreme power, authority, and personal presence in our lives."

Jesus Christ, then, is the one we look to for the forgiveness of our sins.

Our Response to the Work of Christ – Repentance

Similarly, when a person looks back upon their life, and realizes that they have fallen short of God's standards in their thoughts, words and actions, their response turns to *confession, repentance and remorse*.

To confess, means saying, "I did it." As John explained:

- "If we *confess our sins*, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Linked closely with confession is repentance. Mark records Jesus' first words in ministry as,

- "The kingdom of God is near. *Repent and believe.*"
(Mark 1:15)

A simple description of repentance is saying,

"I'm sorry, Lord. Help me do something different."

Our Response to the Work of Christ – by Grace

Paul reminded his readers that the forgiveness of sin by Jesus Christ is not appropriated by *works*. It is not accomplished by our own efforts. *We cannot earn God's favor and grace*, rather we simply accept His grace by faith.

As the theologians of the Reformation explained, salvation is accomplished through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone:

- “For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith—and this *not from yourselves*, it is the gift of God— **not by works**, so that no one can boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Paul wrote, “we know that a man is not justified (made righteous) by observing the law, but by *faith* in Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 2:16)
- “He saved us, *not because of righteous things we had done*, but because of his **mercy**. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5)

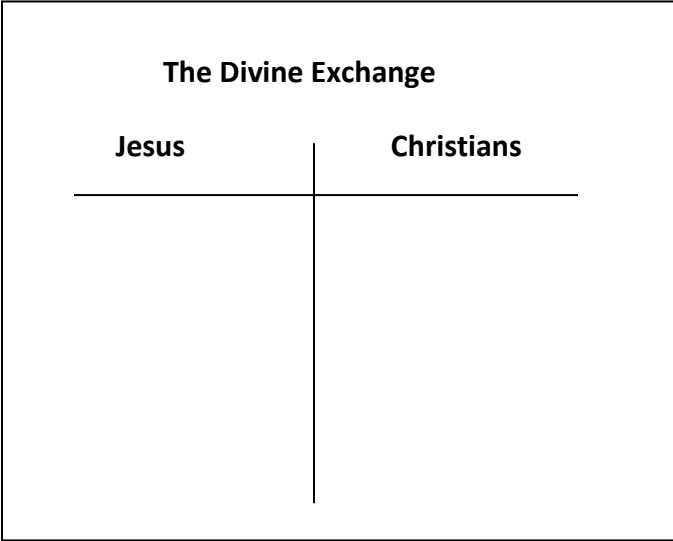
A helpful acronym for the word grace is:

G – God’s
R – riches
A – at
C – Christ’s
E – expense

...a helpful reminder that salvation is by God’s grace, not by our efforts or work.

Graphing the Divine Exchange

As an exercise, use this blank *"Divine Exchange"* sheet to identify the work of Christ for Christians:



Questions for Reflection:

Reflect for a moment upon the different elements of *“The Divine Exchange”*:

- Jesus taking the penalty for sins
- Jesus covering His people with His righteousness
- Jesus breaking the power of sin
- believers responding with faith and repentance

1. What element of *“The Divine Exchange”* is most encouraging to you? Why?

2. What element of *“The Divine Exchange”* would you like to learn more about? Why?

3. Have you responded to the work of Christ in a way described on the previous pages? When? What were the circumstances?

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the opportunity to reflect upon the work of Christ.

We learned that our Heavenly Father sent His Son Jesus to be a sacrifice for His people, even though they were deserving of God's wrath, judgment and condemnation.

We learned that by His suffering, death and resurrection Jesus paid the penalty that His people deserved. He covered His people with His righteousness and broke the power of sin in their lives.

Through faith in Christ, people can be forgiven of their sins and receive the gift of salvation that Christ offers.

Chapter Nine

Life in Christ

Chapter 9: Life in Christ

Throughout our study we've had a chance to reflect upon our ideas about *life*.

As we read the New Testament it is interesting to note that Jesus also used the word *life* throughout His teaching.

In fact, Jesus' favorite word to describe salvation was the word: *life*. He explained:

- “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*” (John 10:10)
- Jesus answered, “*I am the way and the truth and the life.* No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)
- “Now *this is eternal life*: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

At this point you might be wondering,

“So what exactly is this life that Jesus is teaching about? What happens when a person becomes a Christian?”

New Life in Christ

When someone becomes a Christian, they are transformed by the work of Christ and experience *new life in Christ*:

- “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ***made us alive with Christ*** even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Eph. 2:4-5)
- “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, ***God made you alive with Christ***. He forgave us all our sins.” (Col. 2:13)
- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a ***new creation***; the old has gone, the new has come!” (I Cor. 5:17)
- “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us ***new birth*** into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (I Peter 1:3)

This new life is called “*spiritual regeneration*” or being “*born again*.” It is God’s resurrecting power of new life in His children.

Jesus explained it this way to a man named Nicodemus:

- “no one can see the kingdom of God *unless he is born again*.” (John 3:6)

We can see many examples of this new birth in Scripture:

- “I will give you a **new heart** and **put a new spirit in you**; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”
(Ez. 36:26)
- “Everyone who loves has been **born of God** and knows God.” (I John 4:7)
- “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is **born of God....**” (I John 5:1)

This regeneration is a supernatural, gracious act of God that makes a person spiritually alive. Scripture is clear and consistent on this point: because of mankind's fallen nature, we are incapable of saving ourselves and living a new life. It is God who is the divine initiator of new birth and salvation.

Graphing New Birth

The following diagrams demonstrate God's regenerating work in the hearts and minds of believers.

Before spiritual regeneration

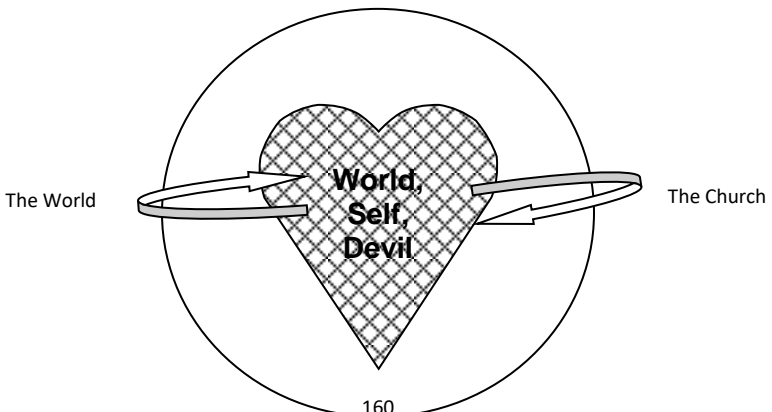
Before experiencing regeneration a person's heart and mind are "spiritually dead", consumed by the sinful nature, the power of Satan and the self:

A Heart and Mind before new birth



In relation to other people, we see that an unregenerated heart and mind seeks to *use* others for self-serving purposes.

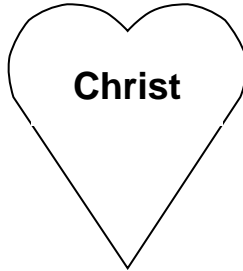
A Heart and Mind before new birth



After spiritual regeneration

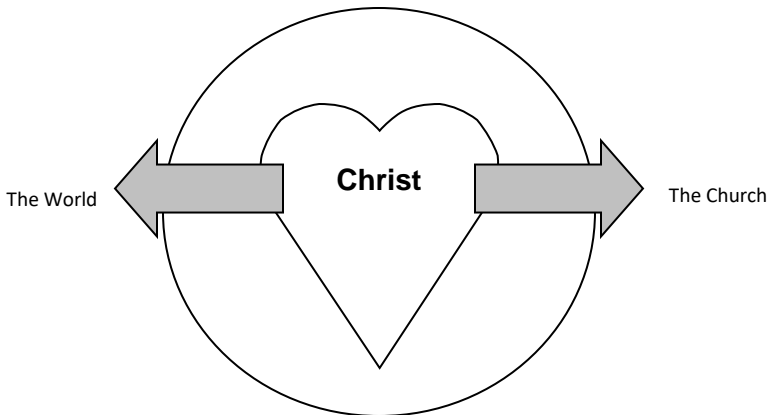
After experiencing spiritual regeneration, a person's heart and mind is made "new", filled with the Holy Spirit and made alive to Christ, with Christ as the center:

**A Heart and Mind
after new birth**



In relation to other people, we see that a regenerated heart and mind seeks to *serve others* for God's glory.

**A Heart and Mind
after new birth**



Adoption

In addition to receiving new life, the Apostle Paul explained that people who have placed their faith in Christ become God's "*children*" or "*sons of God*", adopted into God's household, because of the work of Christ. As God's children, they have received (and will continue to receive) an "*inheritance*" from their Heavenly Father:

- God "**adopted** us as His sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5)
- "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...that you may know...*the riches of his glorious inheritance*" (Eph. 1:18)
- "*you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ*" (Eph. 2:13)
- "*you are no longer foreigners or aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and member's of God's household built on the foundation of apostles and prophets*" (Eph. 2:19-20)
- "you are light in the Lord. Live as *children of light*" (Eph. 5:8)

You may wonder,

"How do I know that I am God's child?"

Paul explained that all who have placed their trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins are God's children.

He explained that the Holy Spirit is given to all believers as a "guarantee", "sign" or "mark" of their sonship:

- The Holy Spirit is “*a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*” (Eph. 1:14)
- “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” (Eph. 1:13)

Thus, the Holy Spirit “fills” Christians and “marks” them with His seal of promise as a witness to our adoption.

Union with Christ

The foundation of regeneration and adoption is a Christian’s *union with Christ*.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are united with Christ and brought into communion with Him.

Jesus used the example of a vine and its branches to explain the close union between Himself and His people:

- “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing...If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*” (John 15:5,7-9)

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Christians are “*with Christ*” and Christ is “*with us*”.

In other words, through the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ lives in His people, and His people are “*in Christ*”:

- “I have been crucified *with Christ*. It is no longer I who live, but *Christ who lives in me*.” (Gal. 2:20).
- “you have been raised *with Christ*...for you died, and *your life is now hidden with Christ* in God.” (Col. 3:1,3)
- “For we are God’s workmanship, created *in Christ Jesus* to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)

Observe these passages that use the phrase “*with Christ*”:

- made alive *with Christ* (Eph. 2:5)
- raised up *with Christ* (Eph. 2:6)
- seated *with Christ* (Eph. 2:7)
- crucified *with Christ* (Gal. 2:20)
- hidden *with Christ* (Col. 3:3)

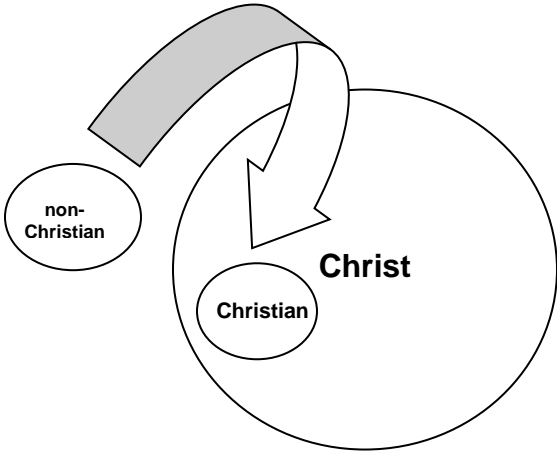
It is important to note that all of these phrases are in the ***past*** tense. This union with Christ is a completed action. This union is so strong that nothing can break it:

- “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, *will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.” (Rom. 8:38-39)

Graphing our Union with Christ

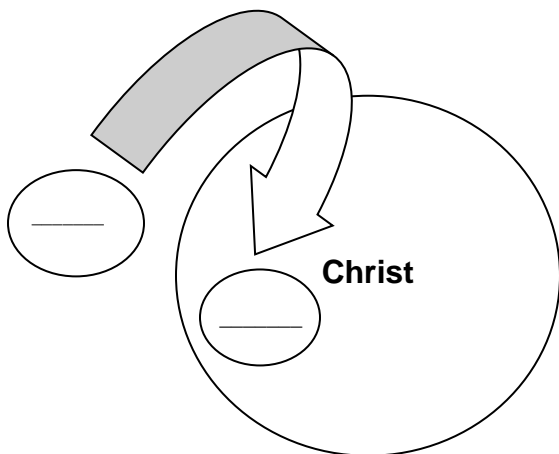
Although impossible to fully grasp, Scripture declares that all Christians are “in Christ”.

This means that when a person (who formerly was separated from Christ) becomes a Christian, they are placed “in Christ” by the power of the Holy Spirit.



Graphing your Union with Christ

If you are a Christian, write your name on the blank line outside of Christ and then on the line “in Christ”. Next, reflect for a moment on the work that the Holy Spirit has done in placing you “in Christ”.



Questions for Reflection:

1. What about being “in Christ” is most challenging to understand? Why?
2. What about being “in Christ” is encouraging? Why?
3. What about being “in Christ” would you like to learn more about? Why?

Christ's Return

The Bible is also clear about Christ's return. When the Church takes the Lord's Supper together, many Churches pray one of the oldest known Christian prayers. It summarizes the Scriptural account of Jesus:

**Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

Jesus promised His disciples that He would come again.

- "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3)

Because Christians are united with Christ, we can have *hope* that we will be with Him:

- "Since, then, you have been ***raised with Christ***, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then ***you also will appear with him in glory.***" (Col. 3:1-4)

We learn in Scripture that the resurrection of Jesus was the first of many resurrections. When Christ returns,

- "after he has put all his enemies under his feet", all who belong to him will be "*made alive.*" (1 Cor. 15:22-25)

In the Nicene Creed we affirm that Christ will bring to His people, “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is encouraging about having a future with Christ? Why?
2. What things distract you from focusing on a future with Christ? Why?

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the opportunity to reflect more upon the work of Christ and a Christian’s “life in Christ”.

We learned that because of the work of Christ, Christians:

- have new life in Christ
- are adopted as God’s children
- are filled with the Holy Spirit
- are united with Christ
- will be raised with Christ and will be with Him for all eternity.

...this is very Good News indeed.

Chapter Ten

Life in the Kingdom

Chapter 10: Life in the Kingdom

An important concept about new life, that we have not addressed (until now) is what is known as “*The Kingdom of God.*”

The focus of Jesus’ teaching and healing ministry was the announcement of *the coming kingdom of God.*

As the large crowds gathered around Jesus, pushing to get a closer look Him or to touch His clothing, He frequently taught them about God’s Kingdom. He used stories about everyday things (called parables) to illustrate the great truths about God and His Kingdom. He spoke of how finding God’s Kingdom is like finding a lost coin, a lost son, or an expensive pearl.

He encouraged them by explaining,

- “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”
(Luke 12:32)

You might be wondering,

“So, what exactly is the kingdom of God?”

In the words of Dr. George Eldon Ladd, the Kingdom of God is:

- God’s kingship
- God’s rule
- God’s authority

It is God's reign in the present and His future realm. Jesus encouraged people to *trust in God's rule* and reign, and submit to His kingship:

- Jesus explained, "*seek first his kingdom* and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you." (Matthew 6:33)
- Jesus taught (in what we call the *Lord's Prayer*), "This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, *your kingdom come*, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:9-10)

Dr. Ladd explains, when we pray, "*your kingdom come*" we are praying for God to:

- "manifest his kingly sovereignty and power to fight every enemy of righteousness and of His divine rule, and that God alone may be King over all the world."

Dr. Anthony Hoekema adds:

- "The kingdom of God...is to be understood as the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ, the purpose of which is the redemption of his people from sin and from demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. It means that the great drama of the history of salvation has been inaugurated, and that the new age has been ushered in. The kingdom must not be understood as merely the salvation of certain individuals or even as the reign of God in the hearts of his

people; it means nothing less that the reign of God over his entire created universe.”

The concept of God’s Kingdom is somewhat difficult to grasp because Scripture teaches that the Kingdom is both a:

- *present reality*
- *future reality*

A present reality

We learn in Scripture that when Christ came, He declared that the Kingdom had come and was actively working among people. Thus, the Kingdom is *a present reality that all Christians have entered*:

- “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and *brought us into the kingdom* of the Son he loves.” (Col. 1:13)

A future reality

We also learn in Scripture that when Christ comes again in great glory, Christians will be ushered *into His Kingdom*:

- “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*’” (Matthew 25:34)
- “I declare to you, brothers, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” (I Cor. 15:50)

Thus, the Kingdom is both a present reality and a future reality.

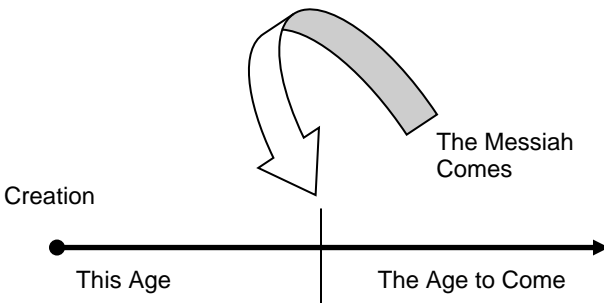
Graphically displaying the concept of the God’s Kingdom

Initial Understanding in the Old Testament

The people of the Old Testament viewed two distinct ages: “This Age” and the “Age to Come” – which would be ushered in by a coming Messiah (a savior and king):

- “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)
- "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land." (Jer. 23:5)

Thus, we could graph this initial concept from the Old Testament this way:



Understanding the Kingdom in the New Testament –

In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus was the Messiah who was prophesied about in the Old Testament.

At the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, He entered a synagogue and read a passage from the Book of Isaiah:

- "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

He concluded by saying that "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

In this proclamation, Jesus was announcing to the people of Israel (who had been in exile and captivity for several hundred years), that their exile and captivity was coming to an end with the coming Kingdom.

Because many of his hearers thought of the Kingdom of God in political and geographical terms – assuming that the coming kingdom would mean the end of their oppression by the Roman Empire - they failed to respond to Jesus' message of repentance and faith.

They could not imagine that the expected Messiah – one who was to be glorious and triumphant with "the government on his shoulders" – could be a humble carpenter from the town of Nazareth.

Instead of referring to military or political realm, Jesus would explain:

- “The Kingdom of God is within you.”
(Luke 17:21)

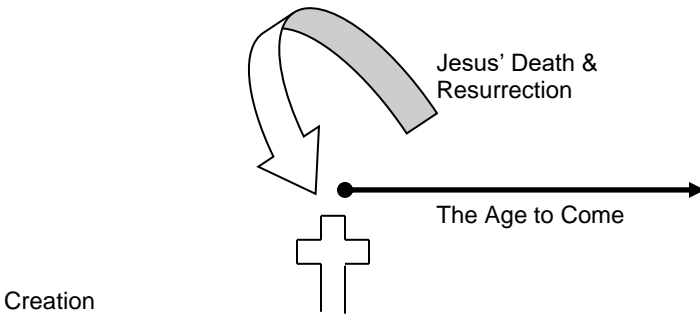
Something Different than “This Age”:

One of the central points in the New Testament is that “The Age to Come” is very different than “This Age”.

We read that:

- Christ “gave himself for our sins **to rescue us from the present evil age**, according to the will of our God and Father.” (Gal. 1:4)
- “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed *the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air*, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” (Eph. 2:1-2)

Thus, in these passages we see that Christ rescued His people from “This Age” and brought them into “The Age to Come”:



Something Realized in "This Age":

There is, however, more about the Kingdom that is revealed in the New Testament...

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God *has already arrived* (in a way that few people had anticipated) and is already working in the world.

As we have seen in history, "This Age" continued after the resurrection of Christ. (We know, for example, that God has not yet purged the earth of its evil).

Thus, the children of the Kingdom (those in Christ) live among the children of this world (those in Adam). And thus, there is a *tension*. We are living in a time when the Kingdom is *already* and *not yet*.

Jesus explained this in a parable about good seed living among weeds in a field:

- "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

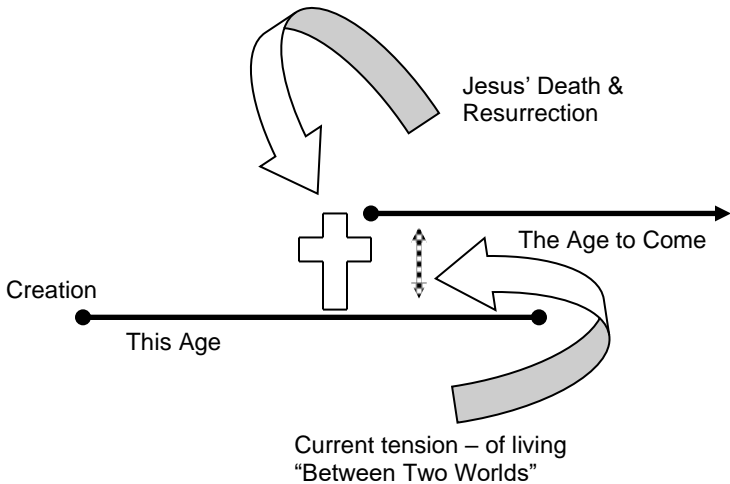
As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun

in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matthew 13:37-43)

Dr. Ladd summarizes Jesus’ teaching this way:

- “The Kingdom has come; it is here working among you. Yet wicked men still continue to live in your midst. The Kingdom has come, but the evil Age goes on. The Kingdom has come, but the wicked and the righteous must live together in mixed society until the coming of the Son of Man.”

Thus, we can modify our diagram to indicate that “This Age” continues and note that there is a tension between “This Age” and “The Age to Come”:



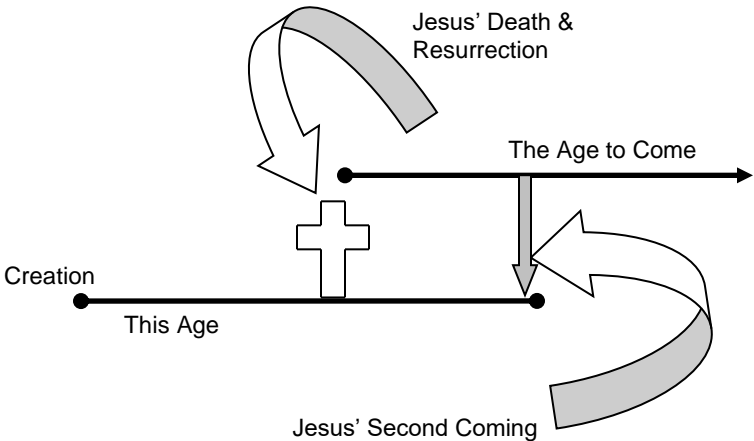
Fully realized at the Second Coming:

We also learn in the New Testament that the Kingdom will not be fully realized until Christ's glorious return. This is sometimes called the "Second Coming of Christ" (or the *parousia*).

In those Last Days:

- Satan will be bound and thrown into a lake of fire for all eternity (Rev. 20:10)
- the righteous and unrighteous will be judged (Rev. 20:12)
- Christ will be exalted - not just as the *humiliated* Savior, but the *ascended* Savior and Lord (Rev. 5)

Thus, we will modify our diagram one final time to include the "Second Coming" of Christ:



As people of God's Kingdom, Christians can have great hope in being with God in the Age to Come:

- *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live."* (John 14:18-19)
- *"so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him"*
(Heb. 9:28)
- *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."* (Rev. 21:1-7)

Implications for Believer's Daily Lives

At this point you may be wondering,

“What exactly does this mean for Christians in their daily lives?”

Let's return to the “Lord's Prayer” that we read at the beginning of this chapter:

- Jesus taught, “This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed (holy) be your name, *your kingdom come*, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
(Matthew 6:9-10)

Jesus knew that God controlled the whole earth, but His prayer was that God will come to earth and transform it, so that *earth mirrors heaven*.

Dr. Richard Pratt explains that Christ's prayer is that God would bring His kingdom to earth to such an extent that God's name would *always be kept holy* and that *God's presence would fill the earth* just as it fills Heaven.

The Apostle John described God's *presence* in Heaven with these words:

- “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”
(Rev. 21:22-23)

Christians then have an opportunity to participate in that Heavenly Kingdom....*now*.

Christians have an opportunity to experience God's presence, to walk in His ways and experience His great power over the things that they have been enslaved to - in essence, to see God bring His rule and reign to their lives and the lives of others – on earth as it is in Heaven.

God's Kingdom is powerful. God's power is at work destroying sin and preparing a place for His people. When His Kingdom encounters darkness, the enemies of God flee. As Jesus explained,

- “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28)

We learn in Scripture that Jesus has “tied the hands” of Satan, so that the enemy's possessions can be taken. By His power, then, God is redeeming those things that were once under the control of Satan.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What areas would you like to see God redeem in your life? Why?

2. What about God bringing His kingdom on earth “as it is in Heaven” gives you hope? Why?

An “Upside Down” Kingdom

As we have noted, the Kingdom of God is different than This Age.

To the modern world (that seeks success, privilege and power through self-interest, striving and accumulation), Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God seems “*upside down*”.

Jesus taught:

- “whoever humbles himself *like this child* is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 18:4)
- “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for *the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*” (Matthew 19:14)
- “the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules *like the one who serves.*” (Luke 22:26)
- “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21)
- “But many who are first will be last, and many who are *last will be first.*” (Matthew 19:30)

- “If anyone would come after me, *he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”
(Matthew 16:24-27)

- “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and *whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*”
(Matthew 10:39)

We see in these statements that Christ is calling His people to enter a kingdom with a way of life marked by service, sacrifice and humility - a radically different way of life than the lifestyle promoted in this modern world. It is a way of life that is patterned after the life of Jesus that has a willingness to totally and completely follow God.

Question for Reflection:

1. What elements of the “upside down” Kingdom are most challenging for you to put into practice? Why?

A Time of Strife

During this time of living “between two worlds”, Jesus explained that His people would be persecuted for His sake:

- “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” (John 15:20)
- “All men will hate you because of me.” (Matthew 10:22)

We learn in Scripture that life for Christians will not always be easy, however:

- James encouraged believers to “consider it joy when we face trials” (James 1:2)
- Paul said that we should “rejoice in our sufferings” (Romans 5:3)

Christians can take comfort because Jesus has promised that the Holy Spirit will be with them and give them the words to say when they are persecuted.

God may allow persecution to occur for awhile, but the ultimate destiny of His people is to inherit His Kingdom and be with Him forever.

We are Not Alone

It is also important to remember that we are not alone in this journey. In addition to the comfort that the Holy Spirit provides as an “internal witness”, we have other Christians who make up Christ’s Church.

The Church we learn in Scripture is a manifestation of the Kingdom – it is where God’s work can be clearly seen because it consists of people who have experienced God’s redemption and salvation.

The Church is also where God’s Kingdom becomes visible, as God uses it for His purposes and His glory.

Question for Reflection:

1. What encouragement do you find in knowing that there are others on this journey with you? Why?

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the opportunity to reflect upon the Kingdom of God.

We learned that the Kingdom is both a:

- present reality
- future reality

And it refers to:

- God's kingship
- His rule
- His authority

Because the Kingdom is both a present and future reality, there is a tension that all Christians experience by living in the *already* and *not yet*.

We have also learned that the Kingdom will not be fully realized until Christ's glorious return.

Christians, however, can experience life in the Kingdom now...experiencing a present reality of the Kingdom with God's presence and His power.

The Kingdom, we learned is "an upside down" kingdom...one that is marked by humility, service and sacrifice.

We learned too that Christians will be persecuted for being part of God's Kingdom...yet they are not alone – the Spirit will guide and help them – and they can gain strength and encouragement from other believers who are part of the Church.

Chapter Eleven

A Life of Rest

Chapter 11: A Life of Rest

At this point in our study, you might be thinking:

“Now that I have learned what Christ has done, how should I live as a Christian?”

To answer this question we will follow the advice of Dr. Sinclair Ferguson and differentiate between two different types of statements that are used in the Bible: *indicative* and *imperative* statements.

You might wonder:

“What do these words mean?”

In essence:

- *indicative statements* – are words that explain what is true. They explain *who Christians are* because of the work of Christ.
- *imperative statements* – are the statements of *what Christians are to do* (in the power of the Holy Spirit) as a response to the work of Christ.

In this chapter we will explore several indicative statements regarding who Christians “are” in Christ.

In the next chapter (Chapter Twelve), we will explore several imperatives – the things that Christians are to do – not to earn God’s love and favor – but to be obedient to Him.

The Lord of the Covenant

At the heart of this chapter about *indicative* statements is a message about who God *is* and what He has *done*.

God, we learn in the Bible is one who establishes *covenants* (which are binding relationships between two parties).

As we noted earlier, Adam and Eve failed to follow the “covenant of works” that God had established for them in the Garden of Eden.

Even though Adam and Eve failed, God in His great love and mercy established another covenant after their fall. This covenant however, was different – instead of being about the works of men, it was about the work of God – who sent His son to take the penalty for sins.

This new covenant was one that was both established by God and fulfilled completely by Him. Because it was established out of God’s great love and mercy, it is frequently called a “*covenant of grace*”.

At the heart of this covenant of grace is God’s declaration that through the work of His Son, God will be God to His people.

We can see many examples of this declaration in the Old Testament:

- “I will take you as my own people, and *I will be your God.*”(Ex. 6:7)
- “So you will be *my people*, and *I will be your God.*”(Jeremiah 30:22)

- You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and *I will be your God.* (Ez. 36:28)

We can observe this covenant of grace early in the Bible, as God declares to Abraham that this covenant will be one that is everlasting:

- “I will establish my covenant as *an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants* after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.” (Gen. 17:7)

In the New Testament we learn that it is Christ who fulfills the requirements of this new covenant:

- “*Christ is the mediator of a new covenant*, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” (Heb. 9:15)

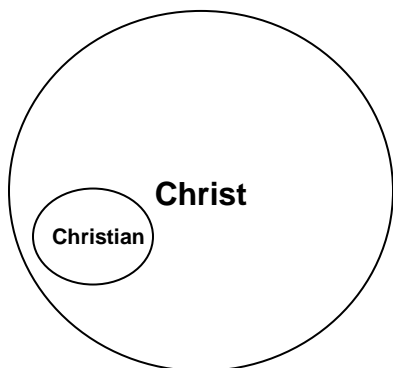
Later in the New Testament we read that Christians are promised that:

- “*They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*” (Rev. 21:3)

Thus, because of the work of Christ, Christians can rest in the *Lordship of God*. God will be their God, and they will be His people.

Abiding

As we have learned, when a person becomes a Christian they are “in Christ”.



In earlier years, Christians used the word “*abide*” to refer to remaining and resting in Christ. An earlier translation of John 15:5 translated Jesus’ words as:

“Abide in Me and I in you.”

Our more modern version translates Jesus’ words in this passage this way:

- “I am the vine; you are the branches. *If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing...If you **remain in me** and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*” (John 15:5,7-9)

Thus, one important element of being a follower of Christ is abiding – of resting and remaining in the relationship that Christ has already established – a relationship that can never be broken.

Resting in the Fatherhood of God

Just as Christians abide in their relationship with the Son, they can abide in their relationship with the Father.

As we have noted, when a person becomes a Christian they become a “child of God”. The Apostle Paul wrote:

- God “**adopted** us as His sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5)
- “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...that you may know...*the riches of his glorious inheritance*” (Eph. 1:18)
- “*you are no longer foreigners or aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and member’s of God’s household* built on the foundation of apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:19-20)

Christians, therefore, can rest in their “sonship” and “daughtership” as God’s adopted children.

Jesus taught us that we should pray to God as *our Heavenly Father* and come to Him in prayer with all of our needs and concerns. He explained,

- “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts* to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11)

As Jesus explains, God is interested in giving his children good gifts.

As God's children, Christians can find *refuge* in their Heavenly Father.

There are many passages in the Old Testament that point to the importance of finding shelter, safety and strength in the Lord:

- “The eternal *God is your refuge*, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you.” (Deut. 33:27)
- “*My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge*, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior.” (2 Sam. 22:3)
- “As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him” (2 Sam. 22:31)
- “Lord my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me.” (Ps. 7:1)
- “In the Lord I take *refuge*.” (Psalm 11:1)
- “Keep me safe, O God, for *in you I take refuge*.” (Psalm 16:1)
- “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, *in whom I take refuge*. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2)
- “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” (Ps. 34:8)

It is helpful to remember it is because of who God *is*, that Christians can find refuge in their Heavenly Father.

Among His many attributes, the Bible reveals that God is:

- **love** (1 John 4:8)
- **good** (Mark 10:18)
- **blessed** (1 Tim. 6:15)
- **glorious**
 - “To the Israelites *the glory of the Lord* looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain” (Ex. 24:17)
 - “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and *the glory of the Lord* filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:34)
 - And (the angels) were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is *full of his glory.*" (Is. 6:3)

Thus, Christians can find refuge and strength in a Heavenly Father who is glorious, loving, good, great and majestic.

Being “who we are”

Just as there are many statements in the Bible that describe who God is, there are also many statements in the Bible that declare who Christians *are* because of the completed work of Christ:

...a Christian is God’s:

- child (John 1:12)
- friend (James 2:23)
- workmanship (Eph. 2:10)
- temple (I Cor. 3:16)
- chosen (Eph. 1:4)
- treasured possession (Mal. 3:17, I Cor. 6:20)

...Christians have been:

- purchased for God by Christ’s sacrifice (Rev. 5:9)
- set free from all condemnation (Rom. 8:1)
- rescued from Satan’s control (Col. 1:13)
- chosen before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4)
- forgiven of all sins (Col. 2:13)
- given the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22)
- adopted into God’s family (Rom. 8:15)
- justified (made righteous) by His grace (Rom. 3:24)
- given free access to God (Eph. 3:12)
- given eternal life (John 3:16)

....a Christian is:

- loved by God (Rom. 1:7)
- free from sin’s power (Rom. 6:14)
- useful to his Master (2 Tim. 2:21)
- not condemned by God (Rom. 8:1)
- united with the Lord (I Cor. 6:17)
- protected from the evil one (I John 5:18)
- a new creation (I Cor. 5:17)

...a Christian has:

- access to God (Rom. 5:2)
- a place with the Father (John 14:1-2)
- the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16)
- confidence to enter the Most Holy Place (Heb. 10:19)
- peace with God (Rom. 5:1)

...a Christian cannot:

- be separated from God's love (Rom. 8:35)
- perish (John 10:28)
- be snatched out of the Father's hand (John 10:29)
- be condemned (1 Cor. 11:32)

These indicative statements all describe *who a Christian is*, because of the work of Christ.

If you are not a Christian, you might be wondering,

“What do I need to do to receive these blessings?”

As we have mentioned earlier (on page 149), God's desire is that we respond to His gracious work by *faith* – and recognize that we have sinned and not measured up to His standards. He desires that we place our trust in His Son Jesus Christ to forgive our sins as our Savior and Lord.

Questions for Reflection:

1. If you are a Christian, read the list on the previous pages again, replacing the original statements with these phrases:

Original Phrase

- a Christian is God's...
- Christians have been...
- a Christian is...
- a Christian has...
- a Christian cannot...

New Phrase

- I am God's...
- I have been...
- I am...
- I have...
- I cannot...

How did you feel as you said each phrase?

2. What is encouraging about who God has made you to be in Christ?
3. What is challenging about incorporating this truth in your life?

If you are a Christian, you might be wondering,

“How can I incorporate these powerful truths about who I am into my daily life?”

...this is an important question (and one that we could spend many pages examining). For the remainder of this chapter, though, let's limit ourselves to exploring these common issues that many people face on a regular basis:

- *worry, anxiety and fear*
- *condemnation and regret*
- *grief and loss*

...and see how the truth about who we are in Christ can help.

Worry, Anxiety and Fear

There are many things that cause people to have feelings of worry, anxiety and fear. Such as:

- worrying about what others think about you
- having a sense of anxiety about the future
- or fearful about a dangerous situation

Regardless of the cause, or how you might classify the concern, Jesus taught that we can bring *all* of our concerns to God.

Jesus explained that there is no need for Christians to worry because their Heavenly Father will provide for them:

- “Therefore I tell you, *do not worry* about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, *and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?*” (Matthew 6:25-26)

God, we have learned, is sovereign over all things...He is bigger than any problem we might feel worried, anxious or fearful about.

Thus, when we have feelings of worry, anxiety or fear, we can bring them to our Heavenly Father and find comfort in His strength, trusting in Him to meet their needs.

God in essence says:

“Rest in me. Bring your concerns, your worry, your anxiety, your fear to me. And I will give you rest.”

Jesus explained it this way:

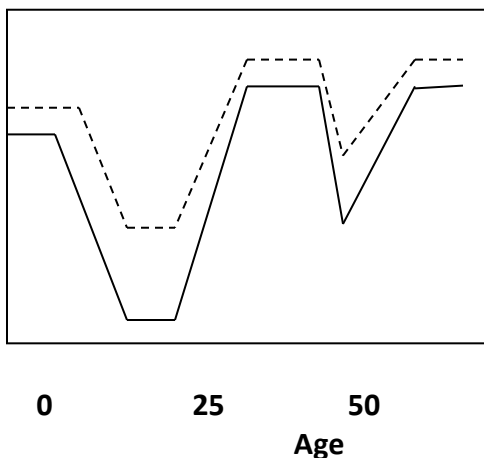
- “*Come to me*, all you who are weary and burdened, and *I will give you rest*. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and *you will find rest for your souls*. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Questions for Reflection:

1. What types of fear, anxiety or worry have you recently experienced?
2. What do you find encouraging about the ability to take your fears, anxiety and worry to God? Why?
3. What is challenging about “resting in God” and taking your fears, anxiety and worry to God? Why?

Condemnation and Regret

In Chapter Two of this resource, we graphed our desired circumstances compared to our actual circumstances:



Solid line = actual circumstances
Dashed line = desired circumstances

We noted that that many times as people reflect on their life's circumstances, they experience *feelings of regret*.

Feelings of regret can be especially strong when remembering things that were very different than we had planned or realizing that we made a bad decision.

This can also be challenging when we are reminded that some of our actions failed to live up to God's standards or were hurtful to others.

Sometimes feelings of regret are accompanied by strong feelings of shame and condemnation, as we think:

"I'm such a loser."

"God could never love me because of all of my sins."

We need to recognize that these statements are *accusations* – and are not from God. While the Holy Spirit will convict us when we do wrong (which we will discuss further in the next chapter), we have learned that Christians are no longer condemned by God.

We know that God forgives *all* who put their trust in Christ. This forgiveness is complete and absolute. There is nothing in a Christian's life that is not forgiven:

- "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16)

Thus, Christians can rest in Christ their Savior, who took the penalty for sins and transferred His righteousness to His people.

A term that the Bible uses to explain this concept is *justification* – which means that Christians are legally declared *righteous*.

- “since we have been **justified** through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1)
- We “know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that **we may be justified by faith in Christ** and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”
(Gal. 2:16)

Martin Luther explained,

- “In justification, Christ has made His righteousness my righteousness and my sin His sin. If he has made my sin to be His sin then I do not have it and I am free. If he has made His righteousness to be made my righteousness, then I am righteous now with the same righteousness as Him.”

Richard Lovelace explains that Christians will be “treated (by God) as if we were sinless, even though we are not.”

Therefore, there is now no condemnation to Christians under God’s Law.

When a Christian encounters feelings of condemnation and regret they can bring their concerns to their forgiving Heavenly Father, find comfort in His strength and reassurance in their eternal salvation.

To the Christian, God says in essence:

“Rest in me. Rest in the forgiveness that I have already given you. Look to me for reassurance of your salvation.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. What types of feelings of condemnation and regret have you experienced?
2. When you experience feelings of condemnation or shame, what percentage of your sins do you feel that God has forgiven?

_____ **% of sins that I *feel* that God
has forgiven me of**

3. Re-read the above pages (if you need to) and enter the percentage of your sins that God has *actually* forgiven you of:

_____ **% of sins that God has
actually forgiven me of**

If there is a difference between the two numbers, why do you think that is?

4. What is difficult about taking your feelings of condemnation and regret to God? Why?

Grief and Loss

A third area of adversity for many people is in the area of grief and loss.

People will frequently experience grief and sadness when a friend or family member dies.

Even in situations where physical death does not occur, people can have feelings of grief, such as after a divorce, job loss or illness.

Many times, in trying to cope with the difficult situation, people will want to figure out the details of *why* the event occurred.

Grieving people will frequently ask of the Lord,

“God, why did this happen?”

“This is so unbelievable, how could you let this occur?”

We see in Scripture that the answer that God provides is essentially:

“Rest in me. Look to my glory. Look to me for comfort.”

A grieving person might respond again, asking “I want to know *why*? Give me more details. Tell me how this could have happened?”

We see in Scripture, that God responds with the same answer:

“Rest in me. Look to my glory. Look to me for comfort.”

We find in Scripture that God frequently does not tell us *why* He does what He does:

- “The secret things belong to the Lord our God.”
(Deut. 29:29)

Christians can rest, however, in the fact that God is always working things for His good purposes and His glory:

- “And we know that *in all things God works for the good* of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”
(Rom. 8:28)
- “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but *God meant it for good*, in order to save many people.”
(Genesis 50:20)

We can see this in the Old Testament Book of Job.

Job had everything taken from him: his family, his property, his resources. And although God could have given Job the answers to his questions and the reason all of the events occurred - God does not.

Instead, He says in essence:

“Rest in me. Look to my glory. Look to me for comfort.”

Once Job sees God’s glory he replies:

- “I know that You can do all things...my ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” (Job 42:1,5)

Thus, a Christian who encounters feeling of grief and loss can bring their needs to their loving Heavenly Father, find comfort in His strength and reassurance in His eternal plans.

We are reminded in Scripture that God, in His great love and mercy, desires to comfort those who mourn:

- "Blessed are those who mourn, for *they will be comforted.*" (Matthew 5:4)

We learn too that one day God will bring an end to all mourning:

- "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*" (Rev. 21:3-4)

Questions for Reflection:

1. What types of feelings of grief and loss have you experienced?
2. What is hopeful about taking your feelings of grief and loss to God and resting in Him? Why?
3. What is difficult about resting in God's presence in the mist of feeling grief and loss? Why?

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the opportunity to reflect upon indicative statements in the Bible that explain *who Christians are* because of the work of Christ.

We learned that these statements are true because of what God has done in creating an everlasting covenant of grace with His people.

Christians, therefore, are called to “abide” or rest in God, trusting in the work that He has done and will be doing in their lives.

Christians can find refuge in God as their Heavenly Father, relying on His strength as they encounter difficulty and adversity in any area of life including fear, regret, anxiety, shame and loss.

Chapter Twelve

A Life of Becoming

Chapter 12: A Life of Becoming

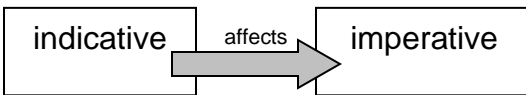
In the previous chapter we learned about indicative and imperative statements in the Bible.

We learned that:

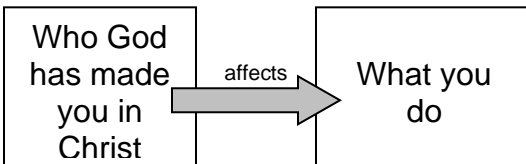
- *indicative statements* – are words that explain what is true. They explain *who Christians are* because of the work of Christ.
- *imperative statements* – are the statements of *what Christians are to do* (in the power of the Holy Spirit) as a response to the work of Christ.

...in this chapter we will explore these imperative statements in more detail.

As we reflect upon our actions, it will be important to keep in mind the following pattern:



In everyday language, we might explain it like this:



You may wonder,

“Why exactly is this important?”

The reason that this is important is because: *there are many imperative statements in the Bible...*and our thoughts can frequently be misguided about them.

Even a short statement like:

- *“you must love one another”* (in John 13:34)

...can lead people to think about their own efforts and their own righteousness in misguided ways.

Doing things in Your Own Strength

When reading a statement about what we must do (like “you must love one another”) it can be easy to think:

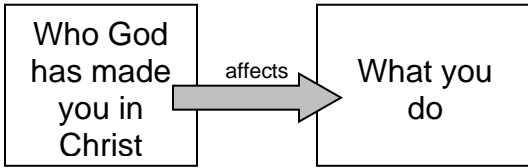
“I’ve got to do this in my own strength.”

“Somehow I’ve got to figure it all out on my own.”

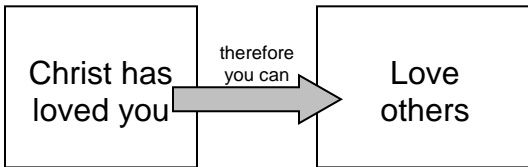
“I’ve got to dig deep and muster up the strength to follow this command.”

This is a common feeling that happens when we forget the link that exists between the indicative and the imperative.

But the truth is:



Or, in our example:



When we keep this truth in mind, we can remember that:

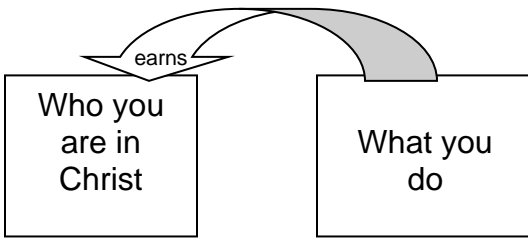
- we are not alone in life's journey
- Christ is interested in who we are and what we do
- Christ will help us as we "live life"
- we can rely and rest in His strength
- as our forgiving Savior, He will forgive us when we make mistakes

We also bring truth to the lie that "we have to accomplish this work in our strength."

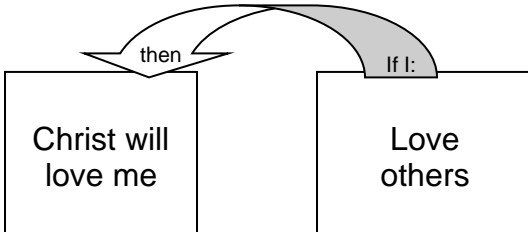
Not by works

Another common mistake that many people make is to turn these imperative statements into *legalism* and *works righteousness* – by assuming that these good works are the grounds for their salvation or that through their efforts they can earn God’s favor.

For example, a person might think, “if I help other people, God will help me.” It is as if they seek this ordering of the statements:



Or, in our example of the command “love one another”:



If we follow the flow from right to left, we can see the individual’s attempt to earn God’s favor and approval by works.

We have learned in previous chapters, however, that all of us are “fallen” people whose lives are *marked by sin*. Therefore, there is absolutely nothing we can do to merit

God's favor and love. All people are in need of God's grace and mercy in all that we do.

As Paul explained: "There is *no one righteous*...all have turned away." (Rom. 3:10-12)

You might wonder then,

"What's the purpose of *good works* - if they aren't about my performance and earning God's love what's the point?"

God's Glory

One important purpose of good works is God's glory.

- "And we, who with unveiled faces all *reflect the Lord's glory*, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."
(II Cor. 3:18)
- "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, *they may see your good deeds and glorify God...*"
(I Peter 2:12)

God gets glory by working in powerful ways in the lives of His people.

Sanctification

Another helpful way to think about good works is that they reflect:

...the saturation of the person of Christ and God's grace in a Christian's life.

This is what is called *sanctification*.

Sanctification is a process that God is working in all Christians. As the Apostle Paul reminded Christians:

- "But you were washed, *you were sanctified*, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."
(I Cor. 6:11)

In a few words, *sanctification* means:

"becoming more and more like Christ"

The Westminster Confession explains that sanctification is:

- "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness."

This means that Christians find themselves:

- thinking more and more like Christ
- acting more and more like Christ

...because of God's love and grace.

As Louis Berkhof notes, there are two important parts to sanctification:

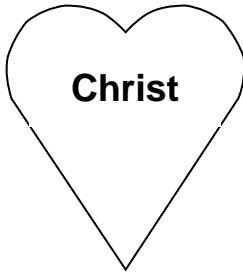
- the gradual *removal of the corruption* of human nature
- the gradual *development of the new life* in consecration to God

While these changes start in the inner life, they will begin to appear in the outer life as well.

Graphically displaying Sanctification

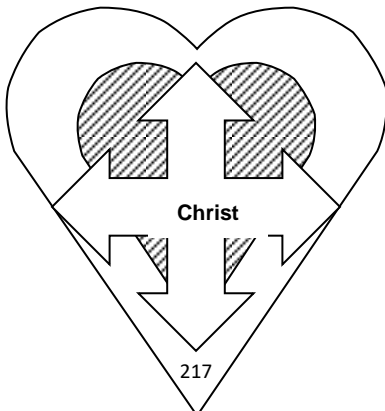
As we learned in previous lessons, after experiencing spiritual regeneration, a person’s heart and mind are made “new”, filled with the Holy Spirit and made alive to Christ, with Christ as the center:

**A Heart and Mind
after new birth**



If we could visibly see the work of sanctification, we would see God accomplishing His will within a Christian by saturating their heart with more and more of His grace in the person of Jesus Christ.

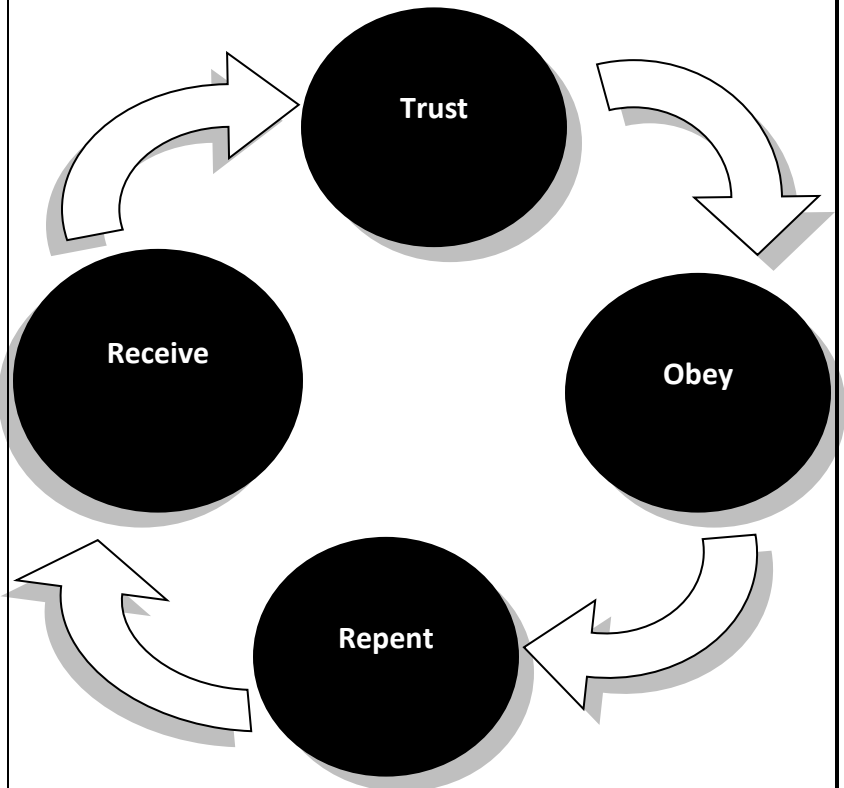
**A Heart and Mind
growing in Christ**



At this point you might be wondering,
**“So, if God is doing the work of sanctifying a Christian –
what does He expect the Christian to do?”**

The short answer is to *cooperate with His Spirit*.

In general, though, there are four responses that God calls every Christian to *do* for the purposes of spiritual growth in *becoming* more like Christ:



It should be noted that there is much overlap between these four areas and these are not always done in this

exact sequence – but you should find them to be helpful categories in understanding the responses that God desires.

Here is a brief overview of each of these four responses:

Trust – as Christians grow in Christ they will learn to rely on God in more and more ways. They will learn to rely less on their own efforts and *trust* in their loving Heavenly Father.

Obey – because Christians have been adopted into God’s family, He commands them to do His will and follow Him. Obedience applies to all areas of our lives including: who we worship, how we care for others, how we reflect God’s holiness in our lives and how we use the gifts that He has given us.

Repent – as Christians live life they will regularly come to an awareness of their own sinfulness realizing that they have fallen short of God’s holiness *because of the remnant of sin* that is still present in their lives. God requires that we confess that sin and repent of it – and He will give us the reassurance and comfort of His love, acceptance and forgiveness.

Receive – God has not left Christians to live life on their own. He has given the Holy Spirit to live within each Christian and He provides a “means of grace” to *lead and feed His people*. These are: the Bible (His Word) and the Sacraments (which are baptism and the Lord’s Supper). By receiving from God, Christians are spiritually nourished and renewed, they

are encouraged and empowered to walk more and more in His truth, and see God bring change to their lives.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Think for a moment about your life and the four responses:
 - Trust
 - Obey
 - Repent
 - Receive

How is God calling you to respond to Him right now? Why?

2. What prayer expresses your feelings right now about your life?

The following pages contain more details about each of the four responses to God: trusting, obeying, repenting and receiving.

If time permits, review the pages and questions that follow with a small group. If time does not allow this detailed study, read the pages individually as a resource for further spiritual growth.

Trust

Many Christians are deeply interested in the *blessings* of communion with God...and there are many blessings of redemption. It is truly staggering to ponder even a few of the blessings that God offers such as peace, joy, patience and kindness.

However, the most important blessing that Christians have been given is the opportunity to know the Giver of the blessings.

In fact, the goal of our salvation is *communion with God*. This means that Christians can *know God*...not just what He provides or what He can do for them.

Knowing God, communing with God, worshipping God, praying to God, following God...are all based on *trust*.

If we do not trust God, we will not seek to know Him more, we will not desire to give Him our praise and worship, we will not seek to follow Him and respond to Him in ways that He desires.

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to *trust* Him.

- "*Trust in the Lord* with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." (Prov. 3:5)
- "*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.*" (Isaiah 12:2)
- Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. *Trust in God; trust also in me.*" (John 14:1)

Another word for trust is...*faith or belief*. Still another word in modern language is...*risk*.

You may have wondered,

“Can I take this risk? Can I step out in faith and do what God is calling me to do?”

As you ponder that question, it is important to remember that God desires people to place their faith in Him, not just for the forgiveness of sins but for all areas of their life.

We can trust and rely on Him because He is *faithful*.

There are many promises of God’s faithfulness in Scripture. As Jesus explained,

- “You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. *But not a hair of your head will perish.*” (Luke 21:16-18)

Jesus, then, is saying that bad things will occur in life, “*but not a hair of your head will perish*” because our Heavenly Father is *faithful*.

There is nothing that can separate the bond that God has created between Himself and His people:

- “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, *will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ*

Jesus our Lord.”

(Rom. 8:38-39)

God will help Christians grow in their understanding of this bond that He has created by providing the “*gift of faith*” (I Cor. 12:9) so that they will rely on Him – trusting in Him and knowing more of His incredible, extravagant love for them:

- “Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart.”

(Psalm 36:5-10)

Because God is faithful and trustworthy, One who:

- “does everything well” (Mark 7:37)
- and works for the good in all things (Rom. 8:28)

...we can take Him at His word for those things that He says that we need to do in life.

We can respond to the work of His Spirit by **trusting** Him.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Think for a moment about your life and the challenges that you are currently facing. How is God calling you to trust Him?

2. What areas in your life are difficult to trust God with? Why?

3. What prayer expresses your feelings right now about your need to trust God?

Obey

Because Christians have been adopted into God's family, God desires that they do His will.

Jesus told His followers:

- "If you love me keep my commandments." (John 14:15)

Jesus taught (in the Lord's Prayer) that we are to pray,

- "*your kingdom come, your will be done*" (Matthew 6:10).

Alan Redpath, a British evangelist, noted that before we can pray, "your Kingdom come, your will be done" we must pray,

- "*My Kingdom go...*"

Christianity, we learn, is about denial of self and a desire to follow Christ. Jesus explained it this way:

- "If anyone would come after me, *he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:34-35)

Our response to Christ, then, should be like the teacher who encountered Jesus saying,

"I will follow you wherever you go." (Luke 9:57)

You may wonder,

“How do I know *specifically* what God wants me to do?”

It should be no surprise that Christians look to Scripture to discover *God’s will* for their lives.

As we look to Scripture, Christians remember that not everything imperative command in the Bible (such as the many *ceremonial laws* found in the Old Testament) apply currently to their lives. This is because *Christ perfectly fulfilled all of the Law’s requirements* - serving as both the High Priest who offers the sacrifice, and the perfect Sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. As we read in the book of Hebrews:

- “But when this *priest* had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, *because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*”
(Heb. 10:12-14)

Thus, the continual offering of sacrifices and offerings to atone for sins (as found in the Old Testament) is not applicable because of the work of Christ.

You may wonder next,

“So, what exactly does the term *God’s will* mean for me?”

We can see in Scripture that there are several uses for the phrase “God’s will”. It could refer to either:

- God’s sovereign will
- God’s moral will

Here is a more detailed description:

<i>God’s sovereign will -</i>	refers to God’s predetermined, perfect and detailed plan for everything in the universe. As we have learned, God is sovereign (He is in charge and Lord of all things) and has a plan that cannot be resisted - it will come to pass. (Job 42:2)
<i>God’s moral will -</i>	refers to the precepts and principles given to us by God in Scripture to show us how to live. It is the “rule of life” which God has laid down for his creatures to follow – which can be broken by humans.

God’s Sovereign Will

As we understand more about God’s sovereign will, God desires that we *respond humbly, praise Him for His majesty, and give Him thanks*. As Paul declared:

- “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his

judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. *To him be the glory forever! Amen.*"

(Romans 11:33-36)

God's Moral Will

Regarding His moral will, God desires is that *we know* what He desires and *do what He says*.

Jesus explained that the greatest commandments from God are:

- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37)
- "And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)

These great commandments apply to many areas of our lives. Specifically, we can see in Scripture that God desires that we:

- love and worship Him alone
- care, serve and love others
- live lives that reflect His holiness
- walk in the gifts that He has given us

Let's take a look at each of these areas of obedience in more detail...

Worship

All people worship something. John Calvin explained that the human heart is “a factory of idolatry” and C.S. Lewis has noted that,

- “the world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game – praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians and scholars.”

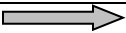

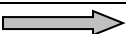


God, our Heavenly Father and King, desires to be the *object of our worship*.

- “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; *for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.*” (Exodus 20:4-5)
- “Fear the Lord your God, *serve him only* and take your oaths in his name.” (Deut. 6:13)
- Jesus explained, “*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.*” (Matthew 4:10)
- “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, *for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*” (John 4:23)

Out of obedience, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we place God above all things *in our worship*.

Loving/Serving/Caring for Others

Scripture contains many specific commands to love, serve and care for others. Here are a few examples:

Because Christ has:		We are to:	
loved us		love others	John 13:34
forgiven us		forgive others	Col. 3:13
accepted us		accept others	Rom. 15:7
served us		serve others	Gal. 5:13
given us hope		encourage others	I Thess. 5:11

Paul told Christians to,

- “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...and **over all these virtues put on love.**”(Col. 3:12-14)

The Christian life then, is a life that is no longer self-focused but one that is marked by *love* for others.





Jesus told his followers to even,

- “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.*” (Luke 6:27).
- “*love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Luke 10:27)

Out of obedience, in the power of the Holy Spirit, **we care for others** – loving them because Christ loved us.

Holiness

Other commands in the Bible refer to personal holiness. Christians are to be pure and holy just as their Father is holy. In terms of holiness we learn that:

Because Christ has:		We are:	
made you a child of God		to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God	Rom. 12:1
conformed us to Himself		not to conform to the World	Rom. 12:2
raised you with Him		to set our hearts on the things above	Col. 3:1
		to put to death the earthly things	Col. 3:3

Christians are called to search out anything in their lives that is not of God...corruption, deceit, depravity, wickedness, lies and any other kind of sin - and resting on God's grace in the power of the Holy Spirit *resist them*. As James explains,

- "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." (James 4:7-10)

Christians find that God is changing their hearts to have *a desire not to sin*:

- “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; *he cannot go on sinning*, because he has been born of God.” (I John 3:9)
- “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.” (I John 5:18)
- “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and *the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature*. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” (Gal. 5:16-18)

As Paul explains, Christians will experience an internal battle between the desire not to sin and the remnants of sin in their lives (those patterns that had developed before they were believers).

By God's grace, He helps Christians overcome sin to become more and more like Christ.

And so out of obedience, in the power of the Holy Spirit, ***we will seek to live a life marked by holiness.***

Spiritual Gifts

We learn in Scripture that Christians have a purpose:

- “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
(Ephesians 2:10)

To accomplish God’s purposes, God has equipped each person with *spiritual gifts*. The source of these gifts is the Holy Spirit, and the purpose is for God’s glory and to help others.

Scripture contains several lists of spiritual gifts, including: wisdom, knowledge, healing, faith, administration, and encouragement.

We are to operate in our gifts, not independent of others, but connected to others who God has also redeemed - the Church.

Different phrases are used to describe the Church:

- Christ’s Body (Col. 1:24)
- Christ’s Bride (Rev. 21)
- the “People of God” (1 Peter 2:10)
- Members of the “Household of God”
(Eph. 2:19)

We see in Scripture that God will use our unique God-given gifts, combined with the unique God-given gifts in others to help people:

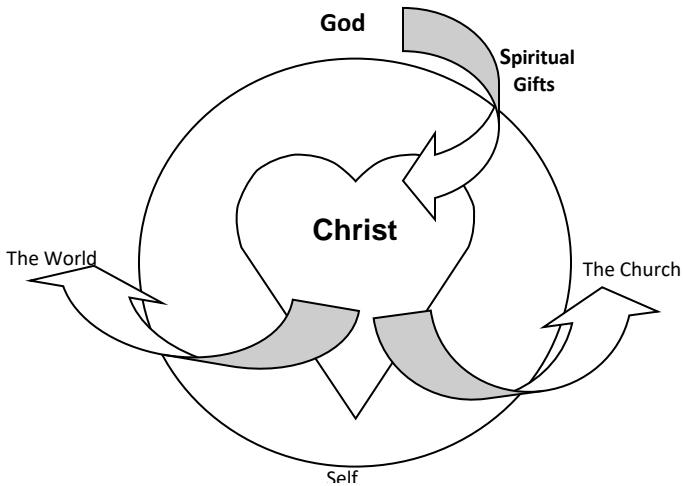
- “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working,

but the same God works all of them in all men.” (1 Cor. 12:4-6)

Graphically Displaying God's Gifts

Although impossible to fully capture - we might graphically display how God gives gifts to help others this way:

A Heart and Mind Gifted by God for service to the Church and the World



And so out of obedience, in the power of the Holy Spirit , ***we will seek to live a life using our spiritual gifts to help other people.***

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect for a moment on the areas that we've explored in terms of obedience:

- love and worship of God
- care and love of others
- living lives that reflect His holiness
- walking in the gifts that He has given us

What area would you most like to grow in?
Why?

2. In terms of worship – what gets in the way of keeping God as the object of your worship?
3. In terms of loving others – who is God specifically calling you to love and serve right now?
4. In terms of holiness – describe one or two areas of your life that you would like to see God transform?
5. In terms of spiritual gifts - What spiritual gifts have you seen in your life? What gifts would you like to grow in? Why?
6. What prayer expresses your feelings right now about your need for walking in obedience?

Repent

As Christians respond to God by trusting and obeying, they will soon recognize their inabilities and failures to fully follow Him.

We all sin and “miss the mark” of God’s holiness and perfection. Some of our mistakes are willful, self-centered decisions while others are unintentional, yet both occur because of the *remnant of sin* that is still present in our lives.

The response that God expects when we sin is to simply *confess and repent*. We learned earlier that:

- confession simply means saying, “I did it.”
- and repentance simply means saying, “I’m sorry, I want to do something different.”

We find in the Bible that this was a very common response when people encountered God – not only did they recognize **God’s holiness** - they also recognized **their own sinfulness**:

- When Isaiah saw the Lord “seated on a throne, high and exalted”, Isaiah recognized that he was a man “of unclean lips” (Is. 6:1,5)
- When Simon Peter saw a miracle, “he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8) Jesus immediately told him “Don’t be afraid.” (Luke 5:10)
- When John saw Jesus in His glory, John “fell at his feet as though dead” but Jesus replied, “*Do not be*

afraid. I am the First and the Last.”

(Rev. 1:17)

We see in these passages that after these men recognized their sinfulness and confessed that they had sinned, God immediately gave comfort to them.

Twice in the passages above, Jesus said:

- “Do not be afraid.”

Richard Lovelace explains that this process of identifying sin is a lifelong process that involves,

- “...a gradual detection process by which the particular forms in which sin expresses itself in our lives, our characteristic flesh, are uncovered to our view.”

Here is a prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer* that is helpful for confessing and repenting of sins:

“Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
In thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

After confessing our sins, we can remember that God immediately gave comfort to His people. For Christians He reminds us that His forgiveness is complete:

- “If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One; and he is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins.” (1 John 2:1,2)

When we confess and repent, God will give us the reassurance and comfort of His love, acceptance and forgiveness.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is encouraging about the response of repentance?

2. What is God calling you to confess to Him and repent of right now?

Receive

As we have been learning about “becoming more and more like Christ” you might have be wondering:

“How could I ever do that? That seems so far out of reach.”

There is an element of truth to that statement. We cannot become like Christ on our own strength...but with God, in His strength, all things are possible.

What we learn in Scripture is that because of His great love, our Heavenly Father desires to *lead and feed* His children.

You might wonder:

“How does God *lead* Christians?”

We find that God leads Christians *by His Holy Spirit*.

We have learned already that the Holy Spirit *dwells* within every Christian, because in the words of Dr. J.I. Packer “everyone who believes ‘receives’ the Holy Spirit”.

As we learn in the Book of Acts:

- Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. *And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* (Acts 2:38)

Jesus explained,

- “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, *streams of living water* will flow from within him.” (John 7:38)

The Spirit is a sign (also called a *seal*) indicating that the believer belongs to God:

- God “set his seal of ownership on us, and *put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit*, guaranteeing what is to come.” (2 Cor. 1:22)
- “Having believed, you were *marked* in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13)

We also learn that the Holy Spirit *helps* every Christian:

- “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you*. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:26-27)
- “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, *are being transformed* into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:18)

So it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Christians are able to become more and more like Christ.

You also might wonder:

“So, if God leads by His Spirit, how does God *feed* Christians?”

As a Father and Good Shepherd, we learn that God *sustains his children* and *feeds His flock* by two primary means. These are called His “*means of grace*”.

We are fed by His:

- Word and
- His Sacraments

One way to think of these is to understand that:

- *the Word* is the Good News about Christ that is ***heard***
- the Sacraments are the Good News about Christ that are ***seen***

The Word

We have noted already that God’s Word is true. As Jesus explained in his last message on the “Sermon on the Mount”:

- “everyone who **hears these words** of mine and puts them into practice **is like a wise man** who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24)

Christians therefore, can “feed” on God’s Word so that they might know more about their Heavenly Father...growing in their wisdom and understanding.

The basic message for Christians that is found in God’s Word is that:

- Christ was crucified (Gal. 3:1) to take our curse (Gal. 3:13) and that we have been made holy because of His work (Heb. 10:10) and have been reconciled with the Father. (Rom. 5:11)

Although we cannot fully *comprehend* God, God will use Scripture to help Christians *apprehend* more and more about Himself, His works and His will for them.

The Sacraments

The word “*sacrament*” refers to God’s revealing of Himself to our space and time in a special, sacred way.

We have learned already that God is one who relates to humans in *covenants* (a binding agreement between two parties). It is interesting to note that in the Bible, for every covenant that God created, there was some type of *physical sign* (such as a tree in the Garden of Eden, a rainbow for Noah, circumcision for Abraham and a throne for King David).

In the New Covenant that God established through Christ, the physical signs are *baptism* and the *Lord’s Supper*. These are physical signs of the Lord’s uniting Himself in His

Son Jesus Christ and the Church's participation in that union.

The sacrament of Baptism is *a one-time event* (a picture of the once and for all union with Christ) with a focus on entrance into the covenant community, forgiveness of sins, the cleansing of guilt and entrance into ministry.

The sacrament of communion (also called the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist) is a picture of *the ongoing union* that Christians have with Christ, and is celebrated on a regular basis.

A good definition of a Sacrament is this:

“A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward grace.”

Christians do these “outward signs” because Christ specifically commanded His followers to do them:

- “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19)
- “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “*Take and eat*; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “*Drink from it*, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.” (Matthew 26:26-29)

Thus, when we participate in the Sacraments we are doing as Jesus commanded.

When Christians participate in the Sacraments, they:

- “remember” - that Christ came to earth as a servant and willingly died, was buried and was raised again *for them*.
- “receive Christ” - by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is “the Bread of Heaven”.

This “receiving of Christ” has been surrounded in controversy for many years, as people have debated how Christ could really be present in the Lord’s Supper.

However, it is important to remember Paul’s words:

- “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks *a participation* in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break *a participation* in the body of Christ?”
(I Cor. 10:16)

Thus, as Christians participate in the sacraments, the “*real presence*” of Christ is there.

And not only are Christians *nourished* through the work of the Holy Spirit, they are also *united* with others “in Christ” who are also celebrating the Sacraments (the “heavenly banquet” in the case of the Lord’s Supper). As Paul explains,

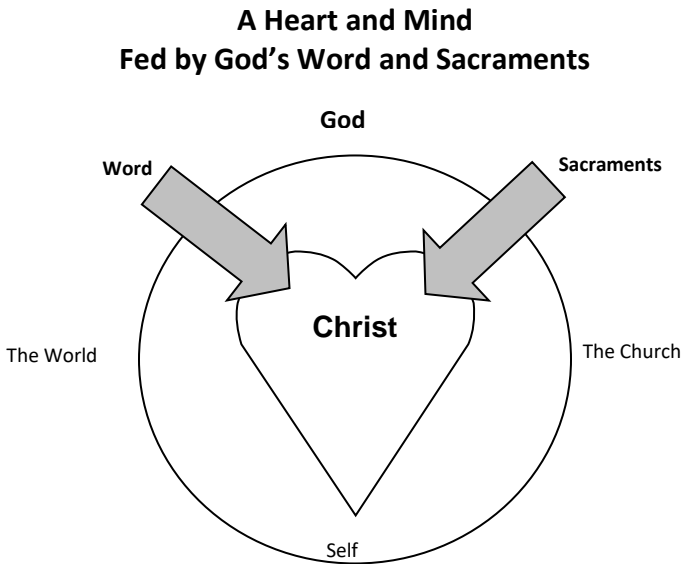
- “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” (I Cor. 10:17)

As one of the earliest Christian prayers expressed,

- “As this bread that was broken was scattered upon the mountains, and gathered together, and become one, so let thy church be gathered from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom; for thine is the glory and the power, through Jesus Christ for ever.”

Graphically Displaying the Word and Sacraments

Although impossible to fully capture - we might graphically display how God leads and feeds a Christian heart this way:



Questions for Reflection:

1. What do you need to receive from God?
2. What steps would you like to take to receive more from God by His Word?
3. What steps would you like to take to receive His sacraments?

The Result of Sanctification

As we conclude this chapter, you might wonder,

“So, what are the results of these responses to God – of trusting, obeying, repenting and receiving?”

In one word: *maturity*.

J.I. Packer explains that we are in need of spiritual maturity because *we do not have it*. In fact, he explains that in comparison to spiritual “redwoods” that preceded us, modern Christians “are spiritual dwarfs”:

- “A much traveled leader...has declared that he finds North American Protestantism, man-

centered, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent and sentimental, as it blatantly is, to be 3,000 miles wide and half an inch deep.”

Our goal is to *know God closely*...that is our greatest blessing as Christians, and will eventually be our ultimate reality:

- “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. *They will see his face*, and his name will be on their foreheads”
(Rev. 22:3-4)

Our goal too is to appear before Him without spot or blemish – *being holy as He is holy*. As Peter explained:

- “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Peter 3:11-12)
- “make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”
(2 Peter 3:14)

While our goal is to appear before God without spot or blemish, we know that we can never reach that goal while still on earth in our sinful body.

Therefore Christians need *God’s grace*, not just at the moment of their salvation, but every moment of their lives.

Understanding God’s grace is something that Christians grow in, as they seek to do God’s will and be the person

that God desires them to be. As Peter reminded his readers,

- *“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 3:18)

Maturity, then, is not something that will happen overnight. As Alan Redpath has explained,

- "The conversion of a soul is the miracle of a moment, but the manufacture of a saint is the task of a lifetime."

The Gift of Joy

Not only does maturity in Christ bring holiness and knowledge of God...it brings *joy*. The Apostle James wrote that we need to:

- *“consider it joy when we face trials”*
(James 1:2).

Paul said that we should,

- *“rejoice in our sufferings”* (Romans 5:3) and
- *“be content in all circumstances”* (Phil. 4:11)

The writer of Psalms explained:

- *“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence”*
(Psalm 16:11)
- *“My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you—*

I, whom you have redeemed.”
(Psalm 71:23)

As we live our lives we will find that there will be ups and downs – but by God’s grace we can experience great joy. By His Spirit, we can rejoice in who God is and what He has done in our lives.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have had the opportunity to reflect upon what Christians are to do as a response to the work of Christ.

We learned that it is important to remember that who we are in Christ affects what we do.

Good works we discovered are done by Christians to glorify God and reflect the saturation of God’s grace in more and more ways in a Christian’s life. We learned that this saturation of God’s grace is called sanctification.

We learned too that Christians are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification by trusting, obeying, repenting and receiving.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Jesus talked a lot about *life*.

In a parable about a son who had gone far away and then returned, He explained that God was like a loving father who welcomed his prodigal son home, who said,

- “this son of mine was dead and *is alive again*; he was lost and is found.” (Luke 15:24)

Jesus explained too that He is the source of life:

- “I have come *that they may have life*, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

On another occasion Jesus explained,

- “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has *eternal life* and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to *life*.” (John 5:24)

And Paul reminded his readers that the:

- “The Holy Spirit *gives life*.” (2 Cor. 3:6)

My hope is that you have found this resource helpful in learning more about life - and finding your life in Christ - for the forgiveness of sins, for peace about your past, for finding God’s purpose for your life and communion with God.

That is my prayer for you.

Soli Dei Gloria

Notes

Many of the ideas and concepts contained in this booklet have come from notes taken over many years of listening to seminary lectures and sermons, so providing sources and footnotes has proved challenging.

In the notes below I have attempted to give credit where credit is due – but I have no doubt left some concepts, phrases and quotes unattributed.

Page

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- 81 categories of God’s infinity from Herman Bavinck
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