

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

**A STUDY OF
13 QUALITIES OF
SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

by

O. William Cooper

**This book is intended to be used for the furtherance of
the Gospel of Christ.
It is not for sale or resale.
All rights reserved.**

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

A Study of 13 Qualities of Spiritual Growth

by
O. William Cooper

Copyright © 1998, 2002 by Logos Ministries Inc.
4742 Westbury Drive
Fort Collins, CO 80526

First edition – May 1998
Second edition – June 2002

Library of Congress Card Number: 98-93153

ISBN 1-57502-860-3

"The Scripture text of the New American Standard Bible is used by permission of the Lockman Foundation, a corporation not for profit, LaHabra, California 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, all rights reserved."

**This book is intended to be used for the furtherance of
the Gospel of Christ.
It is not for sale or resale.
All rights reserved.**

IN MEMORIUM

REVEREND HENRY D. ZIMMERMANN

Rev. Zimmermann was a German missionary to China. During the years the Communists posed a threat to most anyone who traveled, he traveled hundreds of miles on foot. Many missionaries traveled in a chair carried by four men. Rev. Zimmermann walked hundreds of miles. Consequently, while other missionaries were held up by the Communist bandits, Rev. Zimmermann traveled on foot and was never held up.

He lived by faith. During most of his life, he never received a stated salary. He depended upon God to provide his needs. Only at the insistence of American authorities did he agree to accept a small stipend late in his life.

He worked hard. When he came to America, he cared for a farm to provide food for the mission home he founded in Hackettstown, New Jersey. He preached at least once a day and often two or three times. Most of these sermons were prepared while riding on a tractor or doing farm chores. He expected God to provide. The mission he founded was a faith mission. There was no denominational backing. He never asked anyone for money for mission needs. With no money in hand, he promised to buy a farm for the mission on a given day. When the day came, he paid cash for the farm and never asked anyone for a cent. God provided.

He was a powerful preacher. He knew the Scriptures and believed them with all his heart. He tried to live as the Scriptures taught. Now, he wasn't perfect, but he was faithful. He saw it as his responsibility to challenge believers to obey the teaching of the Word.

He was a big, robust man. Late in life, he was severely limited when hit by a falling tree. He tried to do everything for himself and never to be a burden to anyone. Though partially paralyzed, he stood tall and straight.

He was patient with my inexperience. Though years of experience with God had taught him otherwise, he was always patient with my "better ideas and modern ways." Never once did I hear those painful words, "I told you so."

His faith and humble presence have been a constant example and blessing to me. My father-in-law has gone to be "present with the Lord," but will never be forgotten. To his memory, I humbly dedicate this work.

O. William Cooper

O. William Cooper

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IN MEMORIUM	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
ABIDING IN CHRIST	3
PRAYER.....	17
HOLY ANGER.....	41
PURE IN HEART.....	53
SELF-CONTROL.....	59
STEADFASTNESS	65
APPROVEDNESS	71
BLAMELESS	75
CONTENTMENT	85
GUILELESS	89
HOPE	95
FAITH.....	105
PEACEMAKERS	119
IN CONCLUSION.....	133

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the process of writing this book, I have discovered, again, just how much help I have received from others in the process. They are, in fact, the ones who made this possible. I cannot imagine how many times they saved me from embarrassment; how many times they had to ask, "Is this really what you meant to say?" It is fair to say that without their help this book would never have gone to press. I cannot imagine how many things Eve Lichtenwalter, Rev. Mary Neil, my wife Ruth, my son Kiel have brought to my attention in the proof reading of this volume.

DeWain Stoll has again brought his artistic skill to the creation of the cover. I am very grateful.

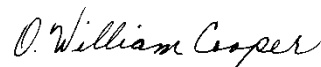
A computer whiz I am not. Again, my friend Peter Stone has brought order out of the chaos I can produce on a computer screen. Pete, you will never know how much peace I experience because I can rely on your great skills.

The names of these people appear again and again on the acknowledgment page of books I write. They are a team that I could not do without.

The Spiritual life retreat in Tipton, Indiana, encouraged me to write this volume and present the material at their retreat beginning April 30, 1998. The material from the first volume has been presented to other groups and they too have encouraged me to prepare this volume. For their encouragement and positive response I am deeply grateful.

My sincere wish for each one is that they will be rewarded abundantly for the support, the work and participation each one has brought to this effort. May God richly bless all the effort and help you have generously provided.

With a grateful heart,



Bill Cooper

INTRODUCTION

During 1995 and 1996, we made a study of the qualities of spiritual growth entitled "**Imitators Of God.**" This study produced several insights that gave direction to our understanding.

As we taught courses in Bible and led retreats concerning spiritual growth, several things stand out:

- a. Many people do not know the Biblical meaning of the qualities of spiritual growth.
- b. Some feel that these qualities are natural for some people, but not for everyone. Because of this understanding they have dismissed the idea that these qualities were intended for their lives as well.
- c. People view spiritual growth as a suggestion, an option for those so inclined, not as a command of God.
- d. Still others in the church were not familiar with what we mean when we speak of spiritual growth.

As people have discovered the nature of these qualities, there has been a genuine interest in making each one a part of their lives. This has been exciting to observe.

Out of that study grew an awareness that there are a number of other qualities of spiritual growth that we had not touched. That awareness led to the study from which this volume emerged.

The title, "**Partakers of the Divine Nature**" is a quotation from Scripture. It is found in II Peter 1:4 where the apostle said,

*For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. II Peter 1:4 (emphasis added)*

Peter's statement is very carefully stated – "in order that by them (promises) you might become partakers of the divine nature..." In the Greek text, this statement is in the subjunctive mood. This simply means that it expresses contingency, possibility. Our translator chose wisely when he used the words "might become partakers..." The fact that one has become a Christian, "having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." (II Peter 1:4b) does not necessarily assure that he/she will grow in spiritual qualities. In fact, there is ample evidence that many become Christians and never grow in the likeness of Christ. To become a partaker in the divine nature is possible, but not assured.

The word "partakers" is "koinonos" (κοινωνός) and means "to have in common," "to be partner." Luke used this word in Luke 5:10, to describe the business partnership between the families of Peter, Andrew, James and John.

The word "nature" is phusis" (φύσις) and means "what a person is by origin, or birth." It is what one is naturally." In Galatians 2:15, Paul described his conflict with the apostle Peter. In that context Paul said, "We are Jews by nature..." In II Peter 1:4, he said "we might become sharers in the divine nature." The divine nature is what God is.

Peter spoke carefully when he said that God "has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

excellence for by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature..."

These words are filled with awe and silent reverence. Imagine! God has gifted us with everything necessary so that we might have the divine nature in common with Him. He offers us the opportunity to become "partners in the divine nature." It doesn't mean that we are divine or even flawless. It becomes possible for people to see what we are and thereby understand a bit about who God is. The family resemblance shows. Knowing our faults and the rebellions of which God has cleansed us, it boggles the mind to think that God would even consider such an unimaginable gift.

Observe that Peter said, "He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature." In this statement, Peter indicated that our becoming "partakers of the divine nature" takes place through these "precious and magnificent promises." These promises are the gift from God and the source of that dramatic change of character that enables us to be "partakers of the divine nature."

There are a growing number of Christians who realize they do not understand spiritual growth. They want to learn. They want to grow in the likeness of Christ.

The qualities of spiritual growth in this study may be more demanding than some of those in the previous study. As I have discussed these qualities with Christian people, I have also found that the response is even more exciting.

It is our hope that in the 13 chapters of this volume we can gain insights into the nature and meaning of each quality of spiritual growth. We want to describe what the New Testament says about each one. As you study these great gifts of God, may the nearness of His presence be sensed in all its fullness.

O. William Cooper

O. William Cooper

Ebenezer House
Livermore, Colorado
April 12, 1998

ABIDING IN CHRIST

Abiding in Christ is a relationship that is poorly understood in the church. The three words, "abide in Me" make a great wall-plaque, but if you delve beneath these comforting words, there is little understanding.

There are 12 different words in the Greek text that are translated "abide." Only the word "meno" has application to "abiding in Christ."

"Meno" (μένω) -

The word means, "to stay in a given place," "to continue in a relationship," "to abide," "to continue," "to dwell," "to pitch your tent," "to take up residence," "to claim as your own, as in land." This is the way land was claimed in the desert. This is the way the west was settled. We have a saying; "possession is nine-tenths of the law."

"And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. John 5:38

Jews persecuted Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath. In His defense, Jesus accused these Jews of not having God's word abiding in them. In this situation, the use of the word "abide" suggests that God's word was not a resident part of their values and thoughts. If applied to "abiding in Christ," the idea of abiding would suggest that it means more than personal location. It suggests that Christ is an integral part of every thought, value decision and priority that one has.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. John 6:56

This was a difficult statement for the Jews and even the disciples to hear. Indeed, 6:56 indicates that many of Jesus' disciples stopped following Him after this statement. This statement was odious to Jews because they knew that the law strictly forbade both the consumption of human flesh and any form of blood.

Jesus, however, did not speak literally. You will remember that in the Passover celebration, He said, "This is my body." He said these words, however, while holding a piece of bread. It was a symbol of peace and forgiveness. Jews only ate bread with persons with whom they were at peace and not in conflict. This is the reason the Pharisees chided Jesus for eating with the tax collectors.

Again, Jesus said, "This is my blood of the new covenant." He said this, however, while holding a cup of wine. A meal and a cup of wine were the means by which covenants were sealed. He was saying that this sealed, made binding the new covenant vouched for in His blood.

In effect, Jesus was saying that those who were forgiven and sealed in the new Covenant had taken up residence in Him and He in them. The forgiven and sealed were bound in a covenant relationship with Him. This tells us something about this abiding. This is not universal. It is a uniquely Christian relationship. It is open only to those who have heard the invitation of Jesus and have responded to His offer of forgiveness and restoration.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

The multitude therefore answered Him, "We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" John 12:34

In this, His last public discourse, Jesus hinted at the way he would die. The response of the crowd is understandable. The Old Testament teaches that the Messiah would continue eternally. This was the crux of their question. In this discussion, however, they gave us an insight into the meaning of "abiding." Their statement, "the Christ is to remain (abide) forever," suggests that the Christ would live eternally. Abiding, here, however, is more than sustained breathing. It encompasses carrying out one's purpose in life as we fit into the kingdom of God. "Abiding," in this instance, contains an eternal element. It is to continue and carry out the purpose for which the Father sent Him to dwell among people until it is time for Him to come again to gather His own. If we are to "abide in Christ," then there is this element of timelessness involved. We are to continue the purpose for which God gave us life until Christ comes to take us home.

"I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. John 12:46

On the last day of the feast, just prior to Passover, Jesus cried out in the words of this verse. This is interesting because on this night they would light the huge menorah (candleholder) on the roof of the temple and it would light up every street and alleyway in Jerusalem. On that day He cried out, "I have come as light into the world." In the balance of this verse, Jesus adds to our understanding of "abiding." He said, "Everyone who believes in Me may not **remain** in darkness." The word "remain" is our word for "abide." Here, the word means to be captive in darkness. It is the inability to escape the darkness. Believing in Jesus emancipates the disciple from the darkness of sin. "Remain" or "abide," in this instance, describes being kept in a relationship. Abiding in Christ identifies a relationship in which the Lord keeps us. It is not a forceful keeping, but one motivated by a loving response.

John, chapters 13-17, took place during the upper room celebration of the Passover. The paragraph, 15:1-10, is part of that section of the book. We mention this because the tone of the entire section is devoted to comforting the frightened disciples. It was becoming clear that Jesus was going to die rather than become an earthly king. This was unsettling for the disciples, to say the least.

This paragraph, 15:1-10, focuses upon the relationship between Jesus and His followers. The concept of "abiding" is an integral part of that relationship; indeed, it is the central focus. Throughout these verses, Jesus used the image of the grapevine, which they understood very well, to describe a relationship, abiding, which they did not understand at all. Jesus said,

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. John 15:1

In this brief, simple statement, Jesus gave us several pieces of information about abiding.

- a. **"I am the vine."** – Jesus is the energy, the source of this abiding relationship.
 1. The disciples knew that the vine was the source of life for the branches. Separate a branch from the vine and it is dead. Abiding involves an awareness that our spiritual life comes directly through Jesus Christ. There is no other source.

ABIDING IN CHRIST

2. It is equally clear that the vine is the source of the identity of the branch and its fruit. We draw our identity from him. What we produce, in terms of spiritual fruit, is a direct reflection of His character.
- b. **"My Father is the vinedresser."** – This statement produced several images the disciples would understand quite well.
 1. A vinedresser was the one who planted and nurtured the plants. They owed their existence to his efforts and constant care.
 2. The plants existed for his benefit. He was the total beneficiary of their growth efforts.
 3. The plants belonged to him. They were totally under his control. Their future was totally in his hands.

In each of these understandings it appears that Jesus was giving information concerning the abiding relationship between Himself and His followers. Abiding is a dependant relationship. The abiding one takes on the identity of the vine, Jesus; places his/her own identity in submission to that of Jesus, becoming a vessel for His power, identity and purpose.

Jesus continued the explanation in verse two:

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. John 15:2

Notice that Jesus said of the Father, the vinedresser, "Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit." The purpose of this abiding relationship is to bear fruit. In the church, the idea of "bearing fruit" often takes the connotation of evangelism, of getting more people to accept the forgiveness Christ offers. In this explanation, bearing fruit is a way to describe the reproduction of His character in those who follow Jesus. Bearing "more fruit" means to become more and more a reflection of who Jesus is. Part of the reason for holding this position is the fact that when you get to verse 10, Jesus was talking about obedience, not witnessing. This pruning/cleansing preparation to bear more fruit is the work of the vinedresser, the Father, rather than the fruit, Jesus' followers. It is something that He does in us, not a super-human effort on our part.

Observe that Jesus spoke of the "pruning." There is an understanding that is as common as it is unfounded. Some people feel that the purpose and direction of the Christian faith is to make people happy. The Scriptures do not support such an idea. Repeatedly, the Scriptures point to our purpose, as believers, is to be "imitators of God," living His life after Him.

In order to understand this verse appropriately, we must understand how vineyards were developed in that time. We tend to think of a vineyard in which the vines grow up and spread out on wires three or four feet above the ground. That was not the situation in first century Israel. Vines grew along the ground. We must remember that it seldom rained there. What moisture a vine received came from the dew which formed each night. Days were very hot and nights were very cold. Because of this, large stones were placed next to the vine. The stones, heated by the sun during the day, caused condensation in the cold night air and water formed at the stalk of the plant. The plant grew along the ground rather than up to the stretched wires as we have them. Where the branches touched the ground, water would form and at the place where grapes should form there was often mold and mildew. This would stunt if not prohibit the formation of good grapes. The vinedresser would place a small stone under the branch at this point. This would bring needed

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

heat to the branch and in drying, the mold and mildew would be destroyed. We know that this was a common practice in that day. Indeed, it is still practiced by some of the Arab farmers in Israel.

Let us also look at the Greek words of the text. The word translated "prunes" is "kathairei" (καθαίρει). The word for "lift up" is "airei" (αίρει). So, is it "prune" or "lift up"? You will observe that the letters "airei" appear in both words.

The honest answer is "We do not know." There are some pieces of information you will need as you make up your own mind.

- a. The word translated "prunes" is (καθαίρει). The root of this word really means "to cleanse." Now, pruning is one form of cleansing. The removal of the mold and mildew and placing a small rock under the branch that lay on the ground is another way to cleanse.
- b. A careful study of the Nestle-Aland text indicates that there is no textual problem with the use of the word "katharos."
- c. In verse three, Jesus said, "You are already clean "katharos" because of the word that I have spoken to you." Whatever Jesus meant by "clean," it had already been accomplished in the lives of these disciples. As previously indicated, "clean" could reflect either one of these understandings.
- d. In verse six, Jesus spoke of branches removed from the vine and cast into the fire to be burned. The idea of removing a branch is not totally foreign to what Jesus was saying.
- e. We know that the practice of placing a stone under a branch to get it up off the ground so that it would get the benefit of the sun was practiced in that day and is still. It is their way to make an unproductive branch productive again.

As you can see, there is good reasoning to accept either of these positions. This author's inclination is to see this verse supporting the idea of lifting up rather than cutting off. At the same time, he feels generous understanding toward those who hold the opposing position.

Our purpose, however, is not to debate the details of the content of this paragraph. We rather are interested in what this paragraph, and particularly this verse, tells us about abiding in Christ. The purpose of being "in Christ" is to bear fruit. Christ deeply desires that those who abide in Him bear "more fruit." This is our purpose, our reason for being.

Jesus gave additional information in verse three.

*"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
John 15:3*

Again, throughout this entire paragraph, Jesus was talking about the relationship between He and His followers. Taking seriously the teaching of Jesus will lead to an inner cleansing. This abiding relationship involves a cleansing in order that the character of Jesus may be reproduced in our lives. The word for "clean" is "katharizo" (καθαρίζω). This is not something that was always clean and pure. It is something, though once defiled, has been made spotless from the taint of disease or sin. The vinedresser would remove anything that would inhibit the pure growth of the grapes. This was accomplished through the teaching of Jesus. This is an integral part of what it means to abide.

Jesus said,

ABIDING IN CHRIST

*"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me."
John 15:4*

This abiding is a mutual relationship. This abiding, this taking up residence has a dual significance in this verse. In that culture, people refused to associate with persons with whom they had serious differences. Indeed, they would refuse to be in the same building with that person. This was the whole point of the Pharisees problem of Jesus associating with what they considered unredeemable "tax collectors and sinners." When Jesus said, "abide in me and I in you," He was saying that He chose us, despite our wayward past, because He dearly wanted to be identified with us, because He saw something of great worth in us. He wanted us to choose to be with Him because we want our lives to reflect the holiness, purity and godliness He is, not because we feel compelled to do so. Let it be very clear. It is divine motivation and initiative that is responsible for the transformation of our lives. Human initiative, in this direction, would be totally unproductive.

Secondly, Jesus revisited the image of the vine and branches. He mentioned, again, the fragile situation of the branch. It has no life of its own. The branch has no identity of its own. It draws its identity from the vine to which it clings for life. For strong emphasis, He mentioned again that the branch depends upon the vine for its fruitfulness. Fruitfulness, here, is not the production of grapes. It is the growing reproduction of His character in our lives. Growth in godliness is not something we accomplish by trying harder. It is something that Jesus accomplishes in us by the infusion of His life and identity in our character.

In the first century use of the Greek language, emphasis was accomplished by repetition. Jesus said, again,

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Basically, this verse provides strong, serious emphasis, more than new information. There is repetition, here, of the fact that Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. He stressed, again, that taking up residence in Jesus and opening ourselves to His taking up residence in us is the required condition if there is fruit to be borne. He said again, but more firmly, that without Jesus there is no hope of our bearing fruit, our becoming more Christlike without His help and His life.

Jesus then turned to the negative side.

*"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.
John 15:6*

Jesus dealt with the consequences of not abiding in Christ. Again, this is a part of the vineyard care the disciples had often seen and done. Jesus was saying that failure to abide in Christ is costly.

There is a contrast between verses five and six. Verse five describes the benefits of abiding – "bears much fruit." This suggests the branch accomplished the purpose for which it was planted and nurtured. Verse six is just the opposite. It describes the cost of not abiding. Drying, gathering and burning were all too familiar to the disciples. They saw it every year. Remember that the idea of burning/destruction was their understanding

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

of both spiritual and farming failure. Out of this understanding grew their understanding of Gehenna – the place of burning.

In verse seven, Jesus turned to another facet of abiding.

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. John 15:7

Like verse six, this verse is a conditional statement – "IF this happens, THEN that will be the result." Jesus gave two conditions in this statement:

- a. "If you abide in Me"
- b. "If my words abide in you,"

Both of these conditions focus on a cultural situation that existed in the time of Jesus. People would associate with other people with whom they had no quarrel whatsoever. You will remember that the Pharisees attacked Jesus because he associated with Zacchaeus, whom they considered unredeemable. The Pharisees would have nothing to do with the traitorous tax collectors that collaborated with the Roman authorities. When Jesus said "if you abide in Me," He spoke of a situation where they were in harmony with His purpose and mission. He spoke of a situation where His followers were so committed to following Him that the sacrifice of life was not too much to ask.

When Jesus said, "If my words abide in you," He was saying that if they accepted His teachings and commands without disagreement this would be the result.

One of the results of abiding is that prayers will be answered. Observe that this conditional statement is written in the form of a promise. This was very important to these people. They were familiar with the fact that the idols were considered to answer prayer, but they never did. This was the situation with Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Jesus was saying that they could count on their prayers being answered if they would abide in Him.

The use of the conditional form suggests that abiding is not required. One can choose not to abide in Christ. This, however, would be a great disappointment to the Lord and a tragic loss to the individual.

There is an issue that requires attention at this point. Some people look at this verse as Jesus' offer of a blank check to His followers. The question arises, what would happen if one asked for something that was wrong or at least not good for us? Observe that Jesus prefaced this by placing the limitation upon His promise – "If you abide in me..." It is appropriate to hold that those who "abide in Him" would also ask for the things that would please Him and fulfill His will for our lives. This is a generous offer, but it is not a blank check.

Because this is written in conditional form, it is fair to assume that Jesus also was saying that failure to abide would produce a situation where prayers would not be answered. This is more than not getting what one wants from God. Prayer is the medium of communication between people and God. Abiding in Christ opens the door to unlimited fellowship with God at a level they had never known before.

"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. John 15:8

There are a number of benefits derived from abiding in Christ. One among them is the fact that having produced fruit, having become increasingly like Jesus, we will bring glory to the Father. Our reputation or achievements do not necessarily glorify God. Our purpose

ABIDING IN CHRIST

as saints is to bring glory to the Father. We accomplish our purpose for living by bearing fruit; by living a life increasingly like the character of Jesus.

Observe that Jesus mentioned an additional benefit – "prove to be my disciple." There are a number of people who claim the name of Jesus who wonder if, indeed, they are Jesus' disciples; if they are saved. One of the benefits of abiding is that we have certainty that we are, indeed, His disciples. This does not mean that we hear a deep bass voice confirming our place in God's family. It does mean that we know, by faith in Him; faith in the Scriptures, that we are His. It removes the element of doubt.

Jesus, in verse nine, turns His attention to yet another facet of abiding.

*"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.
John 15:9*

This verse exposes us to some other pieces of information about abiding.

1. Abiding is the foundation upon which the relationship of agape love is established and shared between the believer and God. For the pagan idolater, fear is the foundational relationship with the idol being worshipped. Just the opposite is true of the relationship of the saint who abides in Christ. There is love. There is no fear.
2. Verse nine begins with the words "just as." The Greek text begins with the word "as." This identifies the fact that a comparison is in progress. The love relationship between Jesus and the Father is the pattern; it is comparable with our relationship with Jesus. This is helpful information. We can observe the relationship between Jesus and the Father and learn a lot about how our relationship with Jesus lives on day by day.
3. The form of the verb "abide" is "Aorist Active Imperative." Simply put, this is a command that focuses not on the time of the action, but on the act of abiding. It stresses just how important it is for us to abide.

In this passage, abiding is the essential ingredient through which God shows His love for us and through which we share our love for God. Our "abiding" is instructed by the abiding relationship between Jesus and the Father. That relationship is expressed in mutual love and respect as revealed in the death of Jesus on the cross. Abiding is an essential ingredient in the purchase of our redemption.

Abiding is an essential ingredient in our relationship with Christ. It is not just an option. As we grow in our "abiding" relationship with Christ, there will come a desire for obedience to His plan and will for our lives; a desire to reflect His character in our daily lives and conduct. If there is no "abiding," then we must ask serious questions about our relationship with Christ.

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. John 15:10

This is a conditional statement and must be seen in this light.

- a. **"IF you keep My commandments"** – keeping Jesus' commandments, obedience to His commands is doing the things that He commanded us to do in the Gospel records. In the book, "Imitators of Christ," we have discussed, at length, the quality of obedience. I would recommend this for your reading. In short compass, obedience is doing the things Jesus commanded us to do because we want to do them.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Obedience is **NOT** doing the things Jesus commanded because we are afraid of the consequences if we fail to do them.

- b. **(THEN) "you will abide in my love."** The word "then" is in parenthesis because it is not written in the text, but is clearly understood to be a part of the sentence. In short, obedience is a requisite to abiding in Christ.

The force of making this statement conditional adds great emphasis to the words of Jesus. IF there is no obedience, THEN there is no abiding relationship. Abiding tacitly depends upon active obedience- keeping the commandments of Jesus.

In this verse, Jesus said, "You will abide." The Greek is a bit more expressive; "You will abide and keep on abiding." This form stresses the enduring quality of abiding. It begins and becomes a way of life, a style of life, not a single action.

Jesus said, "You will abide in my love." Love is not a place, but a quality of relationship. It is not different from "abiding in Christ." It, rather, defines one facet of what it means to "abide in Christ." It involves sharing a most intimate relationship with Christ, characterized by agape love. It makes us, unendingly, the object of His self-giving affection. In order to accomplish this, He becomes partner and participant in everything we do, say, think and are. Conversely, we become partner and participant in all that He is, does and wills.

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 1 John 2:6

In the paragraph 2:1-6, John described, for these believers, what it means to "come to know Him" (Christ), to be "in Him." Three times in this paragraph, in three different ways, John made "come to know Him," "in Him," and "abide in Him" contingent upon obedience to the commandments of Jesus. It is impossible to separate "abiding" from obeying. They are inseparable ingredients one of another.

Observe what John said in verse six. "The one who says he abides in Him, ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." The idea of "walking" is a description of a person's lifestyle. It is the way a person lives life. Saying that one abides is not enough. Walking as Jesus walked, living as He lived is essential to "abiding." The life and conduct of Jesus become the essential ingredient in the unique pattern for "abiding in Christ." The evidence that we are "abiding in Christ" is that we are busy doing the things that He did, the way He did them.

I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. 1 John 2:14

In this verse, John continued the same idea he pursued in the previous paragraph. Speaking to the "fathers," he spoke of "knowing Him," as he had in verse four. Speaking to the "sons," however, he spoke of "the word of God abides in you." This is not a parallel description of "abiding in Christ."

John wrote of "the word of God," the Scriptures abiding in these young men. This gives us a glimpse of his description of the meaning of "abiding." People did not have personal copies of the Scriptures. They, therefore, committed numerous passages to memory. As with us, we learned a number of passages as little children. We are not momentarily

ABIDING IN CHRIST

aware of the presence of these verses in our memory. At a crucial, appropriate time, the words of the verse flood back into our memory as if we had just memorized them. This is the word of God "abiding in us."

We do not think, momentarily, moment by moment, of the fact that we abide in Christ. Like the verses of Scripture, however, we are moment by moment participating in what Jesus is and does, just as He continually participates in everything that we are about.

Continuing in the same chapter, John said,

And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:17

The word "but," in this sentence, suggests that there is a contrast in it.

- a. "The world is passing away."
- b. "The one who does the will of God abides forever."

It is clear that part "b" deals with eternal, heavenly existence. Part "a," however, is the opposite of eternal, heavenly existence. The difference between the two is quality of life rather than duration. Scripture makes it clear that the punishment of the wicked is as eternal as the blessing of the righteous. "Abiding in Christ" identifies a quality of blessing that never ceases.

And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 1 John 2:28

In this verse, John identified some of the consequences of "abiding in Him."

- a. "We may have confidence" when He appears.
- b. "We may not shrink away from Him in shame" when He returns.

These two consequences both deal with our inner response when Christ comes again. "Abiding in Him" assures us that we need not fear how Christ will evaluate our lives when He returns to claim His own.

Again, because we "abide in Christ," we need not be ashamed of the way we have lived our lives. You may remember that several verses identify the fact that "abiding" requires obedience to His commands. Because of this we will have no need to fear or be ashamed. In the following chapter, John makes an interesting statement that requires careful study.

No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 1 John 3:6

The word "abides" is "menon" (μένων). It is a Present Active Participle. John chose the form of this word very carefully. In simple terms, the Present Active Participle can be described in this way:

- a. A participle describes action that is proceeding; it is in process.
- b. The Present Active form stresses ongoing action.

John used two form designations to strongly emphasize the idea that "abide" really means "abide, keep on abiding and never stop abiding." John described a relationship that begins and continues unchanged into eternity. That is how changeless "abiding in Him" really is.

Observe, also, what seems to be a frightening statement that John makes – "No one who abides in Him sins." At first blush, this would seem to exclude all of us. The Greek text is a bit more helpful. The word translated "sins" is "hamartanei" (ἁμαρτάνει). In

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

form, this word is Present Indicative Active. This simply means that the action is ongoing. One might translate this part of the sentence, "No one who keeps on abiding sins and keeps on sinning." John did not say "people who abide never sin." He did say, "People who go on abiding do not make a lifestyle of sinning." This would exclude some, but it does not present an impossible standard.

Now look at the closing part of the sentence – "no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him." Again, at first blush this could present an impossible situation. Here, however, as in the previous paragraph, it is really less dramatic than it seems. The word for "sins," is "hamartanon" (ἁμαρτάνων). As in the case of the word "abides," the form is exactly the same – Present Indicative Participle. This is a very strong form that describes ongoing, continuous action. It would be appropriate to translate these words, "No one who sins and goes on sinning (or makes sinning a lifestyle)."

The words "seen" and "knows" have exactly the same form – Perfect Active Indicative. In plain English, this form was used to describe completed action whose consequences continue. This is a way of strongly asserting that people who practice sinning experience the consequence that they will not see God – a reference to heaven. Also, people who sin as a way of life cannot "know God." Two pieces of information are particularly interesting here.

1. "Know Him," as we observed in 2:4, is another way of talking about "abiding in Christ."
2. The word for "know" is "ginosko" (γινώσκω). As you may remember, there are two basic words for "knowing" in the Greek:
 - a. "Oida" (οἶδα) – to know fully, absolutely
 - b. "Ginosko" (γινώσκω) - to begin to know and continue to discover

The latter, of course, is the one John used. The sinning lifestyle will prevent a person from an ongoing discovery of the person and character of Jesus. The converse is implied. The person who does not make sinning a lifestyle will begin to know and never stop discovering deeper depths of the person and character of Jesus.

Abiding in Christ results in an ongoing discovery of the person, character and heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a blessing!

John continues with this theme in the balance of this chapter.

*And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.
And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. 1 John 3:24*

The forms chosen in this sentence are very familiar. The word translated "keeps" is a Present Active Participle. As indicated previously, in I John 3, this form doubly stresses ongoing action. One might translate it, "One who continually keeps His commandments, abides and never stops abiding in Him."

The message stated here is a repeated emphasis on both ongoing obedience and abiding. Without habitual obedience, there can be no abiding in Christ.

The next part of this verse gives an additional piece of information about abiding. John said, "And He in him." Abiding is a reciprocal relationship. In the same way that we abide in Christ, Christ also abides in us. In this intimate relationship, He is a vital participant in everything that we are and do. This is a sobering thought. It causes one to want to

ABIDING IN CHRIST

exert extreme diligence to be pure and holy so that Jesus would not be offended by our failure to live an increasingly holy life.

The closing portion of this verse gives us yet another piece of information about abiding in Christ. John said, "And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." In the English text, it is difficult to discern between two possibilities:

- a. Did John say that our knowing is by the Spirit that Jesus gave us?
- b. Did John say Christ's abiding in us is by the Spirit Christ gave us?

If you diagram this part of the sentence, it is clear that the Spirit Christ gave us enables us to know and increasingly discover that Jesus abides in us.

And

| we | know

||| by this

|| that He abides in us

| by the Spirit

| who He has given us.

It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to inform our hearts that Christ has taken up residence in us. There is a holy ambivalence in this discovery:

1. It is tremendously exciting to learn that Christ would live His life in and through me.
2. It is equally awe inspiring to realize that Christ would dwell in such a faltering servant.

Thus, the only way to describe our considered response is ecstatic awe and worship.

CONCLUSION

We need to review the pieces of information we have discovered in observing these verses.

1. John 5:38 – Christ is an integral part of every thought, value decision and priority of our lives.
2. John 6:56 – Abiding is not universal; it is a uniquely Christian relationship.
3. John 12:46 – Abiding eternally is more than sustained breathing; continuing to breathe; continued living. It encompasses carrying out one's purpose in life as we fit into the kingdom of God.
4. John 15:1 – 10
 - a. Jesus is the driving force, the source of this abiding relationship.
 - b. Abiding involves an awareness that our growing spiritual life comes directly through Christ.
 - c. Abiding also involves an awareness that our identity comes from Jesus. What we produce, in terms of spiritual fruit, is a direct reflection of His character.
 - d. In abiding, we owe our existence to His efforts and constant care.
 - e. We exist for the benefit of God. He is the total beneficiary of our growth.
 - f. In abiding, we belong to Him. We are totally under His control. Our future is completely in His hands.
 - g. In abiding in Christ, we become a vessel through whom His power, identity and purpose flow.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

5. John 15:2 – The pruning involved in preparation to bear more fruit is the work of God, not a super-human effort on our part.
6. John 15:3 – In abiding, God removes anything that would inhibit the pure growth of the fruit. This is accomplished through the teachings of Jesus.
7. John 15:4 –
 - a. Abiding is a mutual relationship.
 - b. In abiding, Christ chooses to take up residence in us despite our wayward past, because He dearly desires to be identified with us.
 - c. In abiding, Christ wants us to choose to be with Him because he wants our lives to reflect the holiness, purity and godliness that He is.
 - d. In abiding, our growth is expressed in the reproduction of His character in us.
 - e. Abiding in Christ produces growth in godliness. It is not accomplished by our trying harder. Christ accomplishes this growth in us by the infusion of His life and identity in our character.
8. John 15:6
 - a. The benefit of abiding in Christ is that we bear much fruit.
 - b. Failure to abide leads only to destruction.
9. John 15:7
 - a. Abiding is not assured. One may choose not to abide, but it is at devastating cost.
 - b. In abiding, we have the promise of Jesus that our prayers will be answered.
10. John 15:8
 - a. As we become increasingly like Jesus, we will bring glory to the Father.
 - b. We accomplish our purpose for living by bearing fruit, by living a life increasingly like the character of Jesus.
 - c. A benefit of abiding is that we have demonstrable evidence that we are His disciples.
11. John 15:9
 - a. Abiding is the foundation upon which the relationship of agape love is established and shared between the believer and God. This love relationship eliminates the propensity to fear when one encounters God.
 - b. The love relationship between Jesus and the Father is the pattern we emulate in our love relationship with Christ.
 - c. Abiding is the essential ingredient through which God shows His love for us and through which we share our love for God.
 - d. Abiding in Christ is expressed in mutual love and respect as demonstrated in the death of Jesus on the cross.
 - e. Abiding is demonstrated by our obedience to His plan and will for our lives.
12. John 15:10
 - a. There is an enduring quality to abiding.
 - b. Love is the quality of the abiding relationship.
 - c. In abiding, Jesus becomes partner and participant in everything we do, say, think and are.
 - d. In abiding we become partner and participant in all He is, does and wills.
13. I John 2:6
 - a. Walking (living) as Jesus walked is essential to abiding.

ABIDING IN CHRIST

- b. Evidence we are "abiding in Christ" is that we are busy doing the things He did, the way He did them.
14. I John 2:14 – Abiding in Christ identifies a quality of blessing that never ceases.
15. I John 2:28
- a. Abiding assures us we need not fear how Christ will evaluate our lives.
 - b. We need not be ashamed of the way we lived when Christ returns.
16. I John 3:6
- a. Abiding in Christ is an unchanging relationship.
 - b. Those who "abide" do not make sin their lifestyle.
 - c. The person who does not make sin their lifestyle will begin to know and never stop discovering deeper depths of the person and character of Jesus.
17. I John 3:24
- a. Abiding is a reciprocal loving relationship. In the same way we abide in Christ, He abides in us.
 - b. Christ is a vital participant in everything the abiding one is and does.
 - c. The Holy Spirit enables us to know and increasingly discover that Jesus abides in us. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to inform our hearts that Jesus has taken up residence in us.

PRAYER

Prayer has been described as a personal conversation with God. This is true, but it involves much more than that. There are several words in the Greek New Testament that are all translated "prayer" in our English translations. We will attempt to deal with each one. Whole volumes can be written on prayer. We will limit our focus on prayer as it relates to spiritual growth.

I. "Proseuche" (προσευχή)

This word means "to pray earnestly." It is an expression of worship. It is "to beseech" or "supplicate."

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Matthew 5:44-45

This is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus described the difference between conventional wisdom and divine wisdom.

- a. Conventional – Love your neighbor; hate your enemy.
- b. Divine – Love enemies; pray for those who persecute you.

In these verses, Jesus talked about the benefits of praying for one's persecutors.

- a. You will be sons of your Heavenly Father.
- b. You will do the things He does.

Jesus said that prayer is a means by which we emulate the actions and attitude of God as He deals lovingly with those who choose to be His enemies. It is a partnership where we work with God to bring good to those who do us harm. In this, they will see the love of God in our actions.

"And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. Matthew 6:5

This paragraph is also part of the Sermon on the Mount. In this verse, Jesus dealt with the inner personal attitude in prayer. It focused on a situation they had all seen repeatedly - Pharisees stood on the street corners saying prayers. They were not really praying; they were saying prayers. Their attention was not on talking to God, but on impressing people.

When Jesus said, "You are not to be,..." he forcefully described a state of being rather than a specific action. Jesus was saying that prayer must completely focus on God with no selfish, secondary agenda. Praying is talking with God and nothing else. Because this is true, it is superfluous to be concerned about beautiful oratory in prayer. God is not impressed by it, and prayer should be directed to no one else. There is no room for any form or level of hypocrisy in our experiences of prayer.

"But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." Matthew 6:6

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

In this verse, Jesus gave us at least three pieces of information:

- a. Prayer is a personal, even private experience with God.
- b. Prayer is a private experience for which God chooses to give public reward.
- c. Prayer is intended to focus attention upon God and not on ourselves.

*"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.
Matthew 6:7*

Jesus drew a contrast between prayer directed to God and that which was directed to pagan idols. Pagan, ritualistic prayer was composed of beautiful, but meaningless phrases which were designed as much to impress people as they were to petition their deity. Prayer is, therefore, a common, conversation between a believer and God.

Jesus evaluated idolatrous prayer as being intended to secure results. The securing of these results was based upon the length of the prayer and the eloquence of the words used. Christian prayer has no place for this. There is no inherent value in the length of a given prayer. It is a vital communication between God and His child. Length of speech and polished beauty of wording are of no consequence.

"Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him." Matthew 6:8

Jesus emphasized the teaching of the previous verse by instructing them, "Do not be like them." This statement is in the subjunctive mood. This is the way Jesus phrased a number of His more serious exhortations. This is an instruction that Jesus intended His audience to take quite seriously.

Observe that Jesus also said in this verse, "Your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him." Jesus was saying that prayer was not a means of communication to acquaint God with previously unknown information. Before we make the petition, God knows the need. Much of the time, prayer is an attempt to tell God something that He already knows. This raises the question, "If God knows what I need before I ask, then, what is the purpose of prayer?" Scripture does not deal directly with this question. There are several pieces of available information at this point.

1. Not all prayer is petition, so in such cases, prayer is an appropriate exchange.
2. There are times when prayer is just intimate, personal sharing between friends.
3. Often in our petitioning, asking is helpful to us rather than to God. If everything came without our recognizing need and asking, we would be apt to take it more for granted than we already do.

There is widespread agreement among scholars that what we call "the Lord's Prayer," Matthew 6:9-13, is a general pattern for prayer rather than a necessary formula. If this is the case, and it appears that it is, then this pattern identifies some important ingredients of prayer:

- a. Reverence – "Hallowed by Thy name."
- b. Adoration – "Thy will be done as in heaven, so on earth."
- c. Petition – "Give us this day our daily bread."

And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. Matthew 14:23

PRAYER

This experience took place following the feeding of the 5,000. We recall that there are several places in the Gospel record where Jesus went alone, either early or late, to pray. Throughout the New Testament we are instructed to emulate the life of Jesus. We will need to follow Him in seeking quality time to be alone with God. It was important for Jesus. It is even more vital for our spiritual walk.

"But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath;" Matthew 24:20

This passage was part of Jesus' description of the coming destruction of the temple. He stressed the acute danger for the people when this tragedy came about. He instructed them to pray that it would not happen in winter (rainy season) because of slow travel in the mud. Pray that it would not come on Sabbath because they could only travel a very short distance on Sabbath.

Notice that He said, "Pray that your flight..." He spoke of prayer, here, as an intense petition. True, some people only think of prayer as asking God for something. Petition is a vital form of prayer, but not the only one. Petition, properly understood, celebrates the divine bounty that He longs to freely bestow upon His people.

"Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you." Mark 11:24

These words followed Peter's reminding Jesus that the fig tree He cursed had already withered. Observe the way Jesus spoke. He did not say "Ask and it will be done." He said, "All things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have them and they shall be granted you." Asking God for what one needs is not "the gimmies." It is rather evidence of our partnership with God. It is a way of life to ask and never stop asking for His benefit and not our own. In the text, the word "believe" is a Present Active Imperative. This gives us some important information:

- a. It is a command. It is essential if we would be obedient.
- b. We do not have "Present Active Imperative" in English, but we can describe it. One might translate Jesus' words, "Believe and go on believing." It describes a way of life, a lifestyle, not just a single action. The atmosphere of our petition is expectation. If there is no insistent expectation, then there has really been no request and nothing will happen.

Observe also the words of the text "All things for which you pray and ask..." "Praying" and "asking" are not the same. They are different words and are not presented as synonyms. In the Greek text, one might translate the words, "All things praying you ask." In this form, the text stresses that asking is just one form of prayer. We do well to remember the difference and refuse to limit our time of prayer to asking God for whatever it is we want.

This is a conditional promise. IF we believe we have received the things we pray for, THEN "they shall be granted." Noticed that it says, "you have received." The Aorist focuses on the accomplishment of the action rather than the time of it. It is a way of stressing the fact that it is already accomplished.

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." Mark 11:25

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Many people struggle with this teaching. Jesus dealt with the integrity of prayer. The implication of this statement is that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us. Many people cannot believe that God really meant this.

The way Jesus presented this message is significant. He specifically associated forgiveness of people with whom we have difficulty, with our experience of prayer. This suggests that purity of heart and clarity of conscience are vital prerequisites for prayer. People often wonder why their prayers appear to go unanswered. This could be one reason.

The word translated "forgive" is in the Present Active Imperative form. This gives us some additional information:

- a. It is a command. To do less or to omit this command would be disobedience.
- b. One might translate the word "forgive and go on forgiving." This is an ongoing experience rather than a singular action. It describes a way of life. It is the atmosphere in which we must always come to our time of prayer whether or not we are making a request. Forgiveness is a foundation upon which prayer is built.

Who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation. " Mark 12:40

This verse is alarming. Jesus talked about the scribes and the poor widow. He applauded the poor widow and condemned the Scribes. He accused them of several expressions of pride and arrogance:

- a. They walked in long robes.
- b. They sought long greetings in the market place.
- c. They sought chief seats in the synagogue.
- d. They sought chief places at feasts.
- e. They devoured widow's houses.
- f. For pretense, they made long prayers.

If you look at this list, you will notice that they are presented in such a way that each is as important as the others. The pretense of prayer is as bad as the pride of seeking to have special treatment and acknowledgment by people who seem less important. Pretentious prayer is as much an expression of pride as seeking the special attention at gatherings.

These long prayers were intended to impress people and not to communicate with God. Whatever its form, prayer has only one basic purpose, to communicate with God. Jesus was so offended by the pretense of the Scribes that He said, "These shall receive greater condemnation." The implication of Jesus' statement is important. There must be a parallel between our life and our experience of prayer. Nothing short of this can be acceptable.

Prayer is an intensely personal experience. It has nothing to do with others or what they may think of the person who prays. It is a personal encounter between God and the one who speaks to Him in prayer.

"Keep watching and praying, that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Mark 14:38

This experience took place at Gethsemane. Peter and the other disciples were having difficulty staying awake while Jesus prayed. Jesus urged them to watch and pray. He presented prayer as the enabling for those times when the need was greater than their physical

PRAYER

strength could sustain. This suggests that God is both able to respond to this appeal, and desires to do so. Prayer unleashes the power of God upon the situation of our weakness.

Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Luke 6:28

This verse is part of Luke's report of the Sermon on the Mount. Many Christian people have difficulty taking this statement seriously. To them, it seems unnatural, impossible. Jesus just could not have meant for us to do this. Not only did Jesus say it; He presented it as a very emphatic command. In effect, if we do not "pray for those who mistreat us," then we cannot say that we love Jesus according to John 14:15.

In Luke 6:27-30, Jesus listed eight different ways we must relate to those who mistreat us:

- a. "Love your enemies."
- b. "Do good to those who hate you."
- c. "Bless them that curse you."
- d. "Pray for those who mistreat you."
- e. "If they hit you on the cheek, offer them the other also."
- f. "Whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt."
- g. "Give to everyone who asks you."
- h. "Whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back."

Observe that in each case, the recipient of our kindness is undeserving. If you reflect upon this list, some are more difficult than the others. When we pray for people who mistreat us, however, we will find this even more difficult. We know that if we pray for such a person, God will surely forgive and bless them far beyond anything that we might do. This suggests that there is absolutely no place for hate and revenge in our prayer relationship with God. One of the benefits of prayer is that it will help us to obey the command of Jesus to love those who are seemingly unlovable.

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, Luke 18:1

This is the story of the importunate widow. It is a source of some confusion for some believers. The problem, for them, is that they do not understand why one needs to persist in prayer once the request has been made known to God. The confusion is extended because Jesus used the illustration of a judge who granted the widow's request so that she would not weary him with her repeated request. It sounds as though Jesus taught that we need to badger God to get what we want.

Jesus identified His purpose in telling this parable. "He was telling them a parable to show (teach) that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart (grow weary.)" Prayer is encouraging; the opposite of "losing heart."

Jesus had been talking about conditions prevailing when the kingdom of God comes. He described intense opposition and then told them this parable. He said if they persist in prayer, he would "avenge them speedily."

Observe the question Jesus asked in verse eight,

"I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

This is the story of the importunate widow. This is a way of saying that expectant faith is a vital part, the foundation upon which a vital life of prayer is built. It appears that many times people pray and would be surprised if God, in fact, did as they asked. God will answer when we pray expecting Him to answer.

These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. Acts 1:14

This verse provides some important information about effective prayer.

- a. Prayer may be corporate. In this instance there were at least 120 persons involved. This need not be the case. A single individual may pray effectively for a given need.
- b. The term "continuing steadfast" is a dramatic term. It is a compound word for purposes of emphasis.
 1. It literally means "be strong toward," "to persevere."
 2. The form of the word is "Present Active Participle." It is like saying that it is an ongoing action that continues to be ongoing. It is more a way of life rather than a single action.
 3. In two ways, Luke focused attention on the fact that this experience of prayer was ongoing and would not stop.
- c. They prayed with "one mind." The word thus translated is "homothumadon" (ὁμοθυμαδόν). It is a compound word, for emphasis.
 1. Homou – same
 2. Thumos – passion

As indicated in the previous volume, this word describes a singleness of passion, an intense participation in the body of Christ, the church. Within the body, there were differences, but there was an overarching, unique passion for Christ emanating from one and all. Unity in the body is absolutely essential if prayer is to be effective.

And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Acts 10:4

Cornelius, though a Roman centurion, worshipped Jehovah. This tells us a lot about him. As a Roman officer, he was required at the risk of his life, to pledge his life to serve the Emperor and to participate in the worship of the Emperor. He risked his life even more to take a faithful stand for Jehovah.

We mention this reference to prayer because it gives us some specific insights into the relationship of prayer. Observe that the angel said, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God." The way this sentence is written, "prayer" and "alms" are equal and inseparable. The giving of alms, which we know had to do with building a synagogue for the Jews, was part and parcel with his prayer to God.

Observe that the angel said that his "prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God." The word "memorial" is "mnemosunon" (μνημόσυνον). It suggests "to be mindful." It is that which perpetuates an important memory. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament was in the account of the woman who poured expen-

PRAYER

sive perfume on Jesus' feet. (Matthew 26:13 and Mark 14:9). Notice what the Gospel writers said,

"Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of in memory of her." Matthew 26:13

Whenever we read, mention, preach or teach these passages, the devotion of this woman is remembered again.

In Acts 10:4, "the prayers and alms" ascended before or "in the presence of/in the face of" God. It is not clear if this is to remember God or to remember what Cornelius had done. It appears the angel described the purpose of Cornelius' prayer. He prayed and built the synagogue to remember and cause others never to forget the great mercy of God.

This tells us two things about prayer:

- a. Prayer is a means by which we remember and celebrate the mercy of God.
- b. Prayer is inextricably linked to every other godly act in the life of the believer.

Observe, also, that though Cornelius believed in God and served Him, he did not understand all he needed to know concerning his faith. He prayed and God provided a means whereby Cornelius would understand what he needed to know concerning the grace of God.

And on the next day, as they were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. Acts 10:9

Luke reported that this took place at about the sixth hour. This would be noon by our time table. The significant thing about this is that noon was not one of their regular times for prayer. Jesus went to pray some time before dawn. Devout Jews, and I believe this included Peter, would also go to pray before the sun came up and again at sundown.

The text says that Peter's purpose in going to the upper room of this house was to pray. So far as Peter was concerned, there was no burning issue he needed to present before the Lord. This leads one to assume that either God placed it upon Peter's heart to pray or else Peter just wanted to talk to God, or both.

Whichever motive was uppermost in Peter's mind, we do not know. It is clear that this was a very timely season of prayer. If you read the remainder of the paragraph, 10:9-16, you will see that God used this intimate conversation with Peter to give him a vision that would drastically change the way he thought and the direction of his ministry.

Verse 17 tells us that God used this precise time to bring the servants of Cornelius to the door of the house where Peter was a guest. Though there is no supporting evidence either way, it appears that God used the time Peter just wanted to talk with God in order to give him that special vision and prepare him for the ministry that was approaching at that very moment.

As we reflect upon the message of this verse, it appears that one of the results of prayer is that these are times that God chooses to prepare us for the things we will soon encounter. There is a place to pray, asking for nothing, seeking only to share His gracious presence, wanting only to enjoy the fellowship He extends.

And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:2-3

Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch. Observe that they with other church leaders "were ministering to the Lord and fasting." The word "ministering" is "leitourgos" (ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΟΣ). It identifies a broad range of serving. Since they were ministering "to the Lord," it seems reasonable to assume that Luke meant that they were busy performing public service, either inside or outside the church on behalf of God. Luke also reported that fasting was also involved. In this intense ministry, the Holy Spirit commanded them to "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul."

In the beauty of this experience, these church leaders continued to fast and also prayed. In view of the context, it appears their prayer had to do with thanksgiving for divine direction as well as intercession on behalf of the ministry to which the Holy Spirit had called Barnabas and Saul. It is exciting when people give thanks and praise God for His guidance as they also plead for guidance for fellow servants of the cross.

Repeatedly through the Old and New Testaments, times of prayer were the times when God revealed both Himself and His will to those who prayed. That is the case in this instance as well.

And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

There are a number of times and circumstances in life when we know God will hear our prayer; God is able to do whatever is necessary; God is faithful to keep His promise to give what the believing heart requests. The problem is that we honestly do not know what we should request. We do not know what is best to solve our problem. Our limited vision keeps us from discerning what really serves God and His kingdom most effectively. Paul said that at such times it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to help our weakness and limitation. Paul's expression is very graphic. The word for "helps" is "sunatilambano" (συναντιλαμβάνω). It is three words in one.

- a. Sun – "with," "together"
- b. Anti – opposite
- c. Lambano – "to take hold of," "seize."

Paul took the strongest, most emphatic word possible to indicate that the Holy Spirit stands at our side to assist us in our limited grasp of what is needed in the face of a serious situation. Also, this is a Present Active form. This help, by the Holy Spirit, is not a casual, isolated incident. It is the lifestyle of the Holy Spirit to help and keep on helping our weakness.

Paul continued by saying, "The spirit Himself intercedes for us." The word for intercedes is "huperentunchano" (ὑπερεντυγχάνω). This, too, is a compound word:

- a. Huper – on behalf of
- b. Enteuxis – This term comes from the royal court. A person in trouble may need to appeal to the king as Paul "appealed to Caesar." The common person, however, may not know how to approach the king properly. He may not even know how to

PRAYER

arrange to be able to present his cause before the king. If he has a friend in the court, that friend knows how to approach the king. He knows how to arrange for the audience. He knows how to present the cause so that the king will understand the depth of the friend's need and gain the relief the commoner did not know how to request for himself. Paul said, with surprising emphasis, this is what the Holy Spirit does when we do not know how to pray.

The form of the word "intercede" or "pleads" is Present Indicative Active. The Holy Spirit pleads and keeps on pleading before the throne of God until what our helpless heart needs most deeply is provided in abundance.

Observe the way Paul wrote about the intercession of the Holy Spirit. He said, "...the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words..." It is not just that the Spirit prays for us. Paul was stressing the fact that there is an intensity of prayer, by the Holy Spirit, that is far greater than our greatest intensity in prayer.

We sometimes pray and in great mercy, God says "no" and does not give our request because it is not in accordance with His will for our lives. When the Spirit intercedes for us, He always pleads for that which He knows is the Father's will for our lives. How blessed we are!

Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, Romans 12:12

Chapter 12 is the beginning of the application section of the book of Romans. In this section, Paul will give a long list of exhortations designed to apply what he has taught in chapters 1 – 11. Verse 12 is part of a longer sentence – Romans 12:10-13. In this sentence, Paul listed ten different exhortations for the Christians in Rome. This sentence is part of a longer list of 30 exhortations in this paragraph.

In this verse, Paul said, "(Be) devoted to prayer." The Greek text is slightly stronger. The word translated "devoted" is really the word for "patience." "hupomeno" (υπομένω). Paul made a very strong statement. You may remember from the previous volume, that "hupomeno" is a military term that originated with and described the Trojan army. They would fight and never flee in defeat. They would "stand under orders" until the last soldier died, but they would never break ranks and flee. Paul urged these Roman Christians to pray as the Trojan soldiers fought. Pray and never let the appearance of failure cause you to do anything different.

Also, the word "devoted" is a Present Active Participle. This form utilizes two different ways to strongly emphasize that they should pray and never consider giving up praying and go on praying without ever thinking of giving up. Paul urged them to make irrevocable prayer the style of their lives.

This is sometimes difficult for us to grasp. We want to pray for a need, lift it up before God, mark it off our list and go on to other things. Paul instructed us to take hold of the throne of grace and pray and never stop praying until the need of our brother or sister in the faith has been gloriously met by the power of God. We are to be warriors of prayer.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, Ephesians 6:18

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

In this paragraph, Paul instructed the Ephesian Christians to put on the whole armor of God. In the midst of these instructions, you find this verse. The words "prayer" and "petition" are exactly the same words we have observed repeatedly in this chapter.

The interesting thing about this verse is the way Paul instructed them to pray – "Pray at all times in the Spirit." Unfortunately, most of the time we think of prayer as a "solo" experience. It is something that we do all by ourselves in relation to God the Father.

Paul said, "Pray at all times in the Spirit." This is an instruction to view every time of prayer as an encounter in which we are guided by the Spirit to pray in such a way that our prayer is pleasing to God. This is the cooperative ministry to which Paul exhorts us.

Paul said, "be on the alert with all perseverance..." Unfortunately, many people think of prayer as a casual experience. Paul gave an instruction that pointed in just the opposite direction. Our times of prayer should be at the peak of alertness. He described an urgent situation.

Notice, also, that Paul described a situation of supportive prayer. He instructed them to be alert to pray for all the saints. Our alertness should reach out to all the saints, no matter who they might be. They are important for us to support and lift up in prayer.

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 1 Timothy 2:1

In the vernacular of the church, we tend to identify all communication with God as "prayer." Paul approached the subject differently in this passage. He identified four different kinds of prayer:

- a. **Entreaties** - The word is "deesis" (δέησις). This word identifies a great expression of need. The emphasis is on the NEED presented.
- b. **Prayers** – The word is "proseuche" (προσευχή). This is the word that is used of prayer in general. There is no stress on the content or the intensity of this communication with God.
- c. **Petitions** – The word is "enteuxis" (ἐντευξις). This is the same word that was used in Romans 8:27 where we described one person interceding on behalf of another. This intercession for another in deep need is the basic idea behind this word.
- d. **Thanksgivings** – The word is "eucharistia" (εὐχαριστία). From this word we get our word "eucharist." It literally means "to give well." It is to give gratitude freely. It is to offer up thanks for the many things God does on our behalf.

Paul urged Timothy and the band of believers under his care to pray and never stop praying in all its varied forms for all men, for the king and everyone in positions of authority. These are the same people who were and had been subjecting the members of the church to great pain and persecution. Paul urged them, nevertheless, to pray for the salvation of these persecutors.

Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. 1 Timothy 5:5

This verse is part of Paul's instructions for Timothy concerning the widows in the church. In this verse, Paul gives three characteristics of the true widow:

PRAYER

- a. **"She has been left alone"** – This is the woman who has been bereaved of her husband, but who is also abandoned or left totally without helping family.
- b. **"She has fixed her hope on God"** – She has placed all her confidence on God and looks nowhere else for strength and support.
- c. **"Continues in entreaties and prayers night and day."** – As we saw earlier, there are several forms of prayer;
 1. "Entreaties" – "Deesis" (δέησις). This is prayer which focuses on intense need.
 2. "Prayers" – "proseuche" (προσευχή) As indicated earlier, this is the most general identification for prayer.

We have included this verse in the study because of the way it is written. Paul mentioned two things about this abandoned widow:

1. She placed her total confidence on God.
2. She was totally committed to prayer and presenting the needs of the church before God.

This total abject confidence in God is the foundation, the basis upon which the ministry of prayer is carried out. Without this total, unique confidence, prayer is just so many words.

Pray without ceasing; 1 Thessalonians 5:17

This verse is a brief phrase of only three words. It is one exhortation in a list of 16 altogether. These exhortations cover a host of subjects. The way they are written suggests that they are interrelated and equally important.

Paul said, "Pray without ceasing." The word for "pray" in this verse is "proseuche" (προσευχή) as we have seen before. The interesting thing about this brief phrase is its form.

The word translated "without ceasing" is "adialeiptos" (ἀδιάλειπτος). This is a compound word combining three words in one for great emphasis.

- a. a – not
- b. dia – through
- c. Leipo – to leave.

It was Paul's intense way of saying that under no circumstances should you stop.

"Pray" is in the Present Imperative form. It is the strongest way of saying "pray and keep on praying and under no circumstances should you ever stop. There is no stronger way to say or emphasize this command.

Again, the command is for us as well. We must increasingly come to the place where we sense the need and delight to come before the throne, not as a daily routine, but as a way of life that permeates everything we do all the time.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit. James 5:14-18

James made it clear that there was a divinely prescribed manner of prayer for the sickness within the church. The elders were to pray for the sick person. The promise was given that such a person would be raised up if the elders prayed in faith.

Here again, the Scriptures bring prayer and righteousness together. Prayer offered by the righteous will accomplish great things for God and His people.

James dealt with the problem of unconfessed sin. In effect, he said that unconfessed sin would hinder our prayers. This is corroborated by other statements in the New Testament. The reverse side of this issue also is true. If they confess their sin to each other, pray for one another, healing will take place.

James used the example of Elijah. Elijah prayed and there was no rain for three and a half years. He prayed again and it rained. Rain was an important element in that culture. The fact that a righteous man – Elijah – could pray and it would cease raining, was shocking. He could pray again and it would begin to rain. This was a tremendous miracle. That is the way God answers prayer.

*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.
1 Peter 3:7*

Peter, a married man, had a good understanding of how a man should treat his wife. He gave three specific illustrations of what he meant:

- a. "Live with your wife in an understanding way."
- b. "Live with your wife as with a weaker vessel."
- c. "Grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life."

Paul gave instruction in this direction as well.

The interesting thing about this verse is the closing statement in the verse, "so that your prayers may not be hindered." The words "so that" do not appear in the Greek text. Rather you find the words "unto the." Though the words are not the same, the idea and intent are similar. Both sets of words suggest purpose. "Unto the" (εἰς το) is not as emphatic as "in order that."

Nevertheless, Peter clearly states that the way a man treats the wife God gave him has a direct effect upon the way he prays and the way his prayers are answered. The New Testament identifies other qualities of character that have a direct effect upon our prayers. The quality of the heart and life affect the character of our prayer life. This is what David meant when he said,

If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear; Psalm 66:18

If we would have a vital, effective life of prayer, it behooves us to live a life of intense obedience and a burning desire to follow the example of Jesus.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 1 Peter 4:7

Peter drew the attention of his readers to focus on the way they relate to people who reject the gospel. He also reminded them that the end of all things was at hand. In this verse,

PRAYER

Peter gave his readers two exhortations – "Be of sound judgment; be of sober spirit." The Greek text reads differently – "be disciplined therefore, and be morally alert unto the prayers." Whichever translation one chooses, the point remains – prayer requires discipline and moral alertness to deal with the tensions faced by the believer in times such as these.

This is a way of saying that watchfulness over our minds and determined moral purity and moral alertness have a direct effect upon our prayer life. We can thus, improve our relationship with God in prayer by guarding our minds more carefully and increasing our moral sensitivity. The converse is also true. If we become spiritually undisciplined and allow our moral alertness to waver, there will be a debilitating effect upon our relationship with God in prayer.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; Jude 20

At the conclusion of his epistle, Jude provided his readers with a list of ten exhortations. In the midst of this list, this verse appears – Jude said, "Praying in the Holy Spirit."

The word "praying" is "proseuchomai" (προσεύχομαι). This is the most common and most general term for prayer in the New Testament. The form of this word is Present Participle. The use of this form gives the word a double emphasis.

- a. Present tense – this describes action that begins and does not stop.
- b. Participle – this describes action in process.

The use of this form strongly emphasizes the author's intent that this is to be a way of life and not an isolated action.

Jude spoke of ongoing prayer "**in the Holy Spirit.**" We need to describe what Jude meant when he spoke of praying in the Holy Spirit. We tend to think of prayer as something we do alone. Jude's statement gives us more careful input on this subject. This is not the only place in the New Testament where this statement is made. The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf in all prayer. In intense, traumatic situations we do not know how to pray. In these situations, the Holy Spirit prays for us. This was Paul's message in Romans 8:26. Though we do not often think of it in these terms, prayer is our partnership with the Holy Spirit as we commune with God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. "AITEO" (αἰτέω)

This word means to ask, but in a very specific sense. It was only used when people of a lesser position made a request of one in a higher position – a child petitioning the parent; a student petitioning the teacher; a commoner petitioning the king; a human being petitioning God. Jesus never used this word when making a request of the Father.

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you." Matthew 7:7

Jesus was talking about asking God for what one needed. This is a request and it is being made to the sovereign of the universe by a humble human being. It is most fitting that Jesus chose to use this word. It is not a humiliation. It is, rather, an attempt to put the statement in a very honest stance. Though we are not God's equals, still He has promised that if we ask, He will grant our request. It is a picture of how God views His people. He does not stress the greatness of His power and position. He rather sees our need as an op-

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

portunity to demonstrate His greatness and bring resolution to our dilemma as well. Observe that there is no room for movement in this promise. If we ask, God will respond.

*"Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."
John 11:22*

Mary and Martha were upset because Jesus did not come until Lazarus had been buried. Against such a background, Jesus gave this promise.

We must remember that the word for prayer or asking, in this verse, describes the powerless petitioning the Powerful. The message, here, about prayer is that despite our helplessness, we can ask for the impossible with the certain confidence that God will meet the need. This is the privilege in grace that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, Ephesians 3:20

This is one of the famous doxologies of Paul. In this beautiful doxology, however, Paul spoke honestly, but with promise firm.

The word "ask" is "aiteo" (αἰτέω). The emphasis in Paul's benediction is on God's abundance. It is impossible for us to ask for something so large as to tax God's ability to supply it. This verse highlights the limitless bounty of God placed at our disposal just for the faithful asking. The Greek text is yet more graphic. One might translate it, "Now being able/powerful beyond everything to make above superabundance what we ask or perceive." Paul strained for superlatives extreme enough to adequately express what God will do when we ask in faith.

A major facet of petition prayer is the awareness of the available unbounded storehouse and the faith to expect its delivery to our needs.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, Colossians 1:9

In this passage, Paul described the process by which he determined his petition. In verses 4-8 he recorded the report he had received concerning this church. Based upon this information, Paul determined the nature of his prayer for them. In 1:9-12 the makeup of the petition is revealed:

- a. v. 9 – That they may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- b. v. 10 – Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.
- c. v. 10 – Please Him in all respects.
- d. v. 10 – Bear fruit in every good work
- e. v. 10 – Increase in the knowledge of God
- f. v. 11 – Be strengthened with all power in accord with the limitless power of God.
- g. v. 11 - Attain all steadfastness and patience.
- h. v. 12 - Joyously giving thanks to the Father.

This is a marvelous request. This would be a great blessing to every congregation. It is a tall order, but much less than God is able and desirous to bestow upon His people.

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him

PRAYER

ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. James 1:5-6

In these verses, James focused on two major themes:

- a. God's lavish desire to answer prayer
- b. The unequivocal requirement that we expect God to answer our prayer with abundance.

Repeatedly, the Scriptures stress both God's immeasurable abundance and His burning desire to give His people what they need.

The burden of this passage is that our unwavering expectation is absolutely essential to receiving what we need and request from God.

James picks up this theme a bit later on in his epistle.

You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:2-3

In these verses, James described an expression of rampant selfishness. There are no boundaries on this selfish focus. It is deemed appropriate to kill, fight and quarrel in order to satisfy the selfish, insatiable cravings.

In a subtle way, the author drew a comparison between the believers and non-believers in these verses.

- a. Unbelievers would kill in order to satisfy their lustful cravings.
- b. Believers will ask God for things knowing full well their selfish motives are as wrong as those of the unbeliever.

James chided these believers because their means of accomplishment may differ from the sinner, but their motives were the same.

He dealt with the problem of unanswered prayer. In effect, he said that there is no such thing as an unanswered prayer. Some are refused, but none are unanswered.

James gave three responses to their problems:

- a. "You do not have because you do not ask" This is usually a problem of pride - the "I-can-do-it-myself" syndrome. Pride always stands in the way of a positive answer to prayer.
- b. You ask with wrong motives – Selfishness will always be refused. When our prayer is simply an attempt to satisfy our lust for things, the answer must be "no."
- c. Their "friendship with the world" hindered their prayers.

Jesus was saying that there was no essential difference between the motives of selfish saints and those of the world.

The problem of unanswered prayer is not based on lack of facility with words. It has to do with our allegiance and the quality of our lives.

III. "Erotao" (ἐρωτάω)

This word for prayer describes a request between equals. It is the word one king would use when making a request of another king. It is interesting that when making a request of the Father, Jesus never used the word "aiteo" (αἰτέω) which identifies a supplicant making a request of one far superior to himself. When making a request of the Father, Jesus always used the word "erotao" (ἐρωτάω) which identifies a request between equals.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;" John 14:15, 16

Jesus was busy trying to console His disciples after telling them that he was going to die. He gave the disciples a conditional promise, "IF you love me (then) you will keep My commandments and I will petition the Father and He will give you another Helper."

Two things in these verses attract our attention about prayer.

- a. It is conditioned upon obedience. Repeatedly the New Testament informs us that obedience is central to answered prayer.
- b. The confidence Jesus expressed in the promise He gave. The word for "He will give you" is "dōsee" (δώσει). The form of this word is Future Indicative Active. One might translate the word "He will give and keep on giving to you." The word stresses the fact that this is not just a one time action, but something God can always be expected to do. It also stresses the fact that there is no room for doubt or exception in this promise. If you are obedient, God will keep on giving you another Helper (the Holy Spirit) forever.

"I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; John 17:9

Too often people assume that the ministry of Jesus ended with the ascension. That is not the case. This verse teaches dramatically that Jesus is continually occupied in intercession on our behalf before the Father. Again, the word for "I ask" is "eroto" (ἔρωτῶ). The form of the word is Present Indicative Active and as we have previously indicated, one might translate it, "I ask and keep on asking on their behalf." Jesus' ministry of intercession before the throne of the Father never ceases on our behalf. Intercession is not a single request. It is rather an intense petitioning of the throne of God on behalf of the need we perceive in the kingdom.

IV. "DEOMAI" (δέομαι)

Originally, this word meant "to beg." Eventually it came to identify a prayer. It meant "to beseech." It is an intense form of the expression of deep need.

"Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." Matthew 9:38

Finding people to do the work of the Lord is always a difficult task. Jesus urged His disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest (God the Father) to send harvesters. It is appropriate to plead with God to send the necessary people to invest their lives in his kingdom. God will hear the intense cry of our hearts concerning this need. In this form, prayer is a petition of unusual intensity. It grows out of the confidence that God recognizes this great need and is able to meet it.

"But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:36

In this chapter, Jesus described the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. In the intensity of this description of coming tragedy, He said, "keep on the alert at all times

PRAYER

praying..." Some translations have the wording, "begging that you be counted worthy to escape..." It appears that this wording correctly describes the intensity of the conditions and the necessary prayer.

There are times and conditions that call for intense, insistent calling upon God to deliver in time of dire need. Often, we are reluctant to acknowledge the intensity of our need. It is almost as if it were inappropriate for us to express to God the depth of our need. The truth is that God welcomes the honest, intense expression of our need. It allows God to demonstrate both the greatness of His power and the breadth of His mercy toward us.

"Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. Acts 8:22

Peter and John were sent to Samaria concerning those who were becoming Christians there. They placed their hands on the believers to receive the Holy Spirit. A man named Simon offered them money if they would give him that authority. Peter was furious because of this outrageous request. This verse was Peter's response.

The wording of our translation does not convey the emotional tone of Peter's words. He was really saying, "This is so terrible you should get down on your knees and beg God to forgive you."

Some people are offended by the thought of begging God for anything. They feel it is demeaning to God to think He would not answer unless we beg. That is not the point. If you notice the passages in which this term is used, all of them deal with conditions and situations that were drastic in nature. The "begging" has to do with the severity of our situation, not the disposition of God.

God's people are sometimes, perhaps often, confronted with such dire situations. It is entirely appropriate for the intensity of our petition to match the direness of our circumstance. Indeed, in such situations, it would be the only honest way to pray.

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:31

The church presented a serious dilemma to Jewish religious leaders. Peter and John had been commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus. They not only preached, they healed a man who had obviously been infirm. They were called before the council and commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John gave their beautiful response.

But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard. " Acts 4:19-20

They were released because the council could find no punishable fault in them. Peter and John went back to the gathering of believers.

The group prayed and asked God for boldness to preach the Gospel and heal the sick. Verse 31 describes what happened when they prayed. "And when they had pleaded with God the place where they had gathered together was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness."

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

This was not a gathering of preachers, but a meeting of new Gentile converts to faith in Christ. This was a gathering of the laity. They pleaded with God for boldness to share the Gospel and God heard their pleading.

- a. The place was shaken.
- b. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.
- c. Their prayer for boldness was answered.

God has not changed. He yearns for people who cannot be threatened into silence, but will when threatened seek for greater boldness to proclaim the Gospel even to those who did the threatening. God waits eagerly for a depth of commitment in prayer that pleads with Him to give one holy boldness to share the Gospel. By the way, how long has it been since the "amen" of our intense prayer was answered by an earthquake?

V. "PARAKALEO" (παρακαλέω)

This is a compound word and is made up as follows:

- a. para – beside
- b. kaleo – to call

Our word "paraclete" comes from this combination. It is the way we identify the Holy Spirit. It means "to invite," "to console," "to beseech," "to comfort," "to intreat."

"Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? Matthew 26:53

The word "appeal" in this verse is a translation of the word "parakaleo" which means to pray.

Judas and the band of soldiers had just taken Jesus into custody. Peter took out a sword and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. Jesus reprimanded Peter and this verse is part of that conversation.

As you can tell from the text, this is a more relaxed, less intense expression of prayer and petition. Though this is a tense situation, Jesus does not treat it so. He was going to be taken into custody and eventually put to death, but He talked about being able to intreat the Father, if He wanted to do so, to gain the help of angels.

Many times the difference between petition that is highly charged and intense and those that are less intense is the level of confidence the person has in the power of God. Jesus knew the Father would send the angels if He really asked and so the tense situation was defused. In our desire to grow spiritually in the area of prayer we must remember that the level of our confidence in God's dependability in answering prayer affects the intensity of our petition.

And entreated Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, that she may get well and live." Mark 5:23

You will remember that Jesus had visited the east side of the Jordan River and healed a demoniac and a huge herd of pigs drowned. In verse 17, the people entreated Jesus to go away. In 5:23, Jesus had crossed back to the west side of the Jordan and Jairus entreated Jesus to cure his dying daughter.

PRAYER

In both verses, the word "entreat" is "parakaleo" (παράκαλέω). As you look at both of these verses, note that the seemingly helpless make their entreaty of One they believe can remove the tension and pressure from their troubled lives.

When one is falling from the 10th floor of a building, no one must urge them to pray. It is instantaneous. The troubled times, however, when one is not falling from the 10th floor, seem different. It is almost as though we feel it is a lack of faith to ask God for help. We feel we can and must solve it for ourselves.

In these verses, it is clear that they needed help and they turned to Jesus to do what they could not do. In both instances Jesus met their need.

It is fair to assert that people more often entreat God for help because of the intense pressure of trauma rather than because they know their loving heavenly Father cares deeply about their lives and wants to minister to their weakness. We begin to see spiritual growth not in the intensity of our petition, but rather in the confidence with which we approach God and the motive that brings us to our knees.

VI. "Deesis" (δέησις)

This word means "a wanting," "a supplication," "petition for a need." This word is always addressed to God. The focus of this word is on the sense of need involved.

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. Luke 1:13

Zacharias and Elizabeth had no children. The text indicates that their petition/supplication had been heard and answered. There is no limit regarding what one might petition before God. Zacharias' request apparently dealt only with the problem of their childlessness. This kind of petition, which was only addressed to God in the New Testament, is appropriate for the child of God for any need they might have.

There are a number of believers who pray regularly, but they would be shocked if the prayer was answered. God answers prayer. This is just one of a host of instances in Scripture where prayers were answered.

And then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. And she never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. And at that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Luke 2:37-38

Luke wrote about Anna the prophetess. In these verses, Luke gave us several pieces of information about prayer.

- a. He spoke of "fasting and prayer." In the New Testament, fasting is often reported in conjunction with prayer. Despite what some may think, it is not a way to pressure God to answer when otherwise He would not. Fasting is a way to focus our attention and desire so that we will become more sensitive to what God wants to share with us.
- b. She fasted and prayed night and day. This does not mean that Anna never slept. It does mean that when she was awake, she was preoccupied in prayer concerning the redemption of Jerusalem. She had prayed for this request many years. It was

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

not in vain. God honored her prayer and she saw the Redeemer of Jerusalem before the time of her death. There is a place under God to pray "without ceasing" until God in His perfect timing and love graciously answers our petition. This, of course, means that persistence in prayer involves a high level of patience – waiting for God's time – and faith – the unseen certainty that God indeed will answer.

- c. Prayer is a valid life-consuming ministry before God. Too often we are unable to see prayer as a valid ministry. Healing the sick – yes. Preaching the Gospel to people who have never heard – yes, but not a life of prayer. This sometimes grows out of the idea that these people do not expect prayer to be answered.
- d. Answered prayer carries with it the need for confidence that God has heard and answered prayer. Observe that in verse 38 Anna continually talked with those who also looked for Jerusalem's redemption about seeing the infant Messiah. Sometimes persistent prayer requires that we act in faith upon the basis of our petition.

*And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers; the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same; but Yours eat and drink."
Luke 5:33*

This verse describes a serious contrast. It is not that John's disciples fasted and prayed and Jesus' disciples did not. The contrast had to do with their understanding of fasting and prayer.

- a. **The disciples of John** – They saw fasting and prayer as a necessary ritual. It was not identified with some pressing need. It was something they did with some regularity no matter what circumstances were.
- b. **The Disciples of Jesus** – Fasting and prayer were also a part of their lives. After the Transfiguration, Jesus dealt with the demon-possessed boy and said that this kind comes out only by fasting and prayer. Fasting and prayer were not recurring rituals for the disciples of Jesus.

The difference was that Jesus and His disciples saw fasting as a way to show intensity of concern in a desperate situation, whereas John's disciples saw this as a regular ritual that was a reminder of the intensity of their failures rather than a celebration of grace.

You also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many. 2 Corinthians 1:11

The Greek text is a bit more direct. "You also labor together in prayer for us, that by many the gift for us the gift through many thanksgivings may be given for us." This verse offers some important information about prayer.

- a. People who pray for those in "active ministry" are in fact partners in that ministry. It is as much a part of the ministry as healing the sick or preaching the Gospel. They, in fact, "are laboring together."
- b. The ministry of prayer results in the giving of thanks.
- c. The prayer for those in "active ministry" is indeed the gift of grace.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. James 5:16

PRAYER

There are two different words for prayer used in this verse.

- a. "Εὔχομαι" which means "to wish," "to pray to God for one's desires."
- b. "δέησις" This word stresses a sense of need. It represents people who will serve quietly and responsibly. It represents a greater sense of need than Εὔχομαι.

James taught that there is a definite link between answered prayer and our confession of our faults to one another. In other words, if we come to God with a clean heart, our prayers will be heard.

He also mentioned that when we pray for each other from a pure heart, we can expect to be healed – our prayers will be answered.

James summarized this teaching by saying that intense prayers (δέησις) of the righteous man will be most effective. He illustrated his message by using Elijah as an example. He prayed and it did not rain. Later he prayed again and it began raining.

*"For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, And His ears attend to their prayer, But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."
1 Peter 3:12*

Peter quoted from Psalm 34:15, 16, where David extolled the righteous. Peter understood, as David did, God's unswerving commitment to hear the prayer of the righteous person. Righteousness is an essential ingredient in the life of meaningful prayer. Some people think of prayer as wearing down God's resistance so that He will answer. The biblical picture is of God eagerly waiting to answer the prayer of the righteous.

VII. "Enteuxis" (ἐντευξις)

This is the word for prayer that focuses on a petition to or for someone who is in a superior position.

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:4-5

In this chapter, Paul dealt with a problem that faced the church in many generations – people invent new, unbiblical rules for Christians to follow. Paul took a stand against such unbiblical requirements.

Observe, in these verses, the position of prayer with respect to the word of God. They are inseparable. Prayer receives guidance and direction from Scriptures. In these verses, Paul said prayer and Scripture sanctify, set apart for God, everything that God created.

CONCLUSION

Prayer as an area of spiritual growth covers a large number of verses for our consideration. We need to review what we have discovered.

1. Matthew 5:44, 45 – We must learn to pray and beseech God for our enemies.
2. Matthew 5:44, 45 – Prayer is a means by which we can emulate the actions and attitudes of God as He deals lovingly with those who choose to be His enemies.
3. Matthew 5:44, 45 – Prayer is a partnership with God to bring good to those who do us harm.
4. Matthew 6:5 – In prayer, the focus must be on talking with God and not on impressing people.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

5. Matthew 6:5 – There is no room for any form or level of hypocrisy in our experiences of prayer.
6. Matthew 6:5 – There is no room to be concerned about beautiful oratory in prayer. God is not impressed with it.
7. Matthew 6:6 – Prayer is ultimately a personal experience with God. This is true even in corporate prayer.
8. Matthew 6:6 – Prayer is a private experience for which God chooses to give public reward.
9. Matthew 6:6 – Prayer is intended to place exclusive attention upon God.
10. Matthew 6:7 – Prayer is a common conversation between a believer and God.
11. Matthew 6:7 – There is no inherent value in the length of a prayer.
12. Matthew 6:8 – Prayer is not an attempt to tell God something He already knows.
13. Matthew 6:8 – Sometimes prayer is just intimate personal sharing between friends.
14. Matthew 6:8 – Intimate personal sharing with God, meditative prayer, is the example Jesus set. Following His example will call us to do the same.
15. Matthew 24:20 – Petition, properly understood, celebrates the divine bounty that He longs to freely bestow upon those who love Him.
16. Matthew 11:24 – We are commanded to "ask." It is disobedience to fail to ask.
17. Matthew 11:24 – Properly understood, asking God for what is required to serve Him is not "the gimmies." It is rather evidence of our partnership with God. It is a way of life to ask and never stop asking for His benefit and not our own.
18. Mark 11:25 – Forgiveness – a restored harmony with those who have offended us – is a vital ingredient in both effective prayer and our own forgiveness.
19. Mark 11:25 – Forgiveness is the atmosphere of effective prayer.
20. Mark 14:38 – Prayer is the enabling for those times when the need is greater than our strength can sustain.
21. Mark 14:38 – Prayer unleashes the power of God upon the situation of our weakness.
22. Luke 6:28 – There is no place for broken relationships in our life of prayer.
23. Luke 18:1 – Prayer is encouraging, the opposite of "losing heart."
24. Luke 18:1 – Prayer is a moment by moment lifestyle ("at all times") rather than an occasional experience.
25. Luke 18:8 – Faith is an essential ingredient in meaningful prayer.
26. Acts 1:14 – In corporate prayer, singleness of passion "with one mind" is absolutely essential to effective prayer.
27. Acts 10:4 – Prayer is a means by which we remember and celebrate the mercy of God.
28. Acts 10:4 – Prayer is inextricably linked to every other godly act in the life of the believer.
29. Acts 10:9 – One form of prayer is asking for nothing, seeking only to share His gracious presence.
30. Acts 13:2, 3 – A neglected form of prayer is that of thanksgiving for divine direction and blessing.
31. Acts 13:2, 3 – Intercession on behalf of others and the ministry to which God by the Holy Spirit has called them is the ministry of the church, not just the clergy.
32. Romans 8:26, 27 – We have two weaknesses that affect our prayer in extreme situations:

PRAYER

- a. Wisdom – Our human limitation renders us incapable of knowing what we need to request from God.
 - b. Power – Our human limitation renders us helpless to pray with the proper intensity in regard to the tragic dilemmas we sometimes face.
- In such cases, the all-knowing Holy Spirit is aware of what we need and intercedes for us in that respect.
- Also, the omnipotent Holy Spirit prays for us with an intensity of which we are incapable.
- 33. Romans 12:12 – Patient persistence in prayer is as equally important as perseverance in tribulation.
 - 34. Romans 12:12- - Prevailing in prayer is not a way to pressure God. It is rather a declaration of our faithful concern.
 - 35. Ephesians 6:18 – "Praying at all times in the Spirit is a joint ministry with the Holy Spirit." Prayer is not so much an action as it is a moment-by-moment way of life.
 - 36. Ephesians 6:18 – We are to pray for all the saints with great alertness. If we fail to do so, we are disobedient.
 - 37. I Timothy 2:1 – We are commanded to pray for believers as well as unbelievers.
 - 38. I Timothy 2:1 –Our prayer life must encompass a whole range of prayer, not just petition.
 - 39. I Timothy 5:5 – There is scriptural precedent for a life of prayer, not just once a day.
 - 40. I Timothy 5:5 – Total, abject confidence in God is the foundation for the ministry of prayer.
 - 41. I Thessalonians 5:17 – There must be a sensing of a need and delight of coming to the throne of grace as a way of life, a constant preoccupation.
 - 42. James 5:14-18 – Prayer is appropriate for every situation in life.
 - 43. James 5:14-18 - God will answer faith-filled prayer.
 - 44. James 5:14-18 – There is an essential link between confession, praying and answered prayer. Righteousness is an essential ingredient in prayer.
 - 45. I Peter 3:7 – The way a man treats his wife affects the way he prays and the way his prayers are answered.
 - 46. I Peter 3:7 – The quality of the heart and life affect the character of our prayer life.
 - 47. I Peter 4:7 – Watchfulness over our minds, determined moral purity and moral alertness, have a direct effect upon our prayer life.
 - 48. I Peter 4:7 – Our relationship with God in prayer will increase as spiritual discipline increases. It will decline as spiritual discipline decreases.
 - 49. Jude 20 – "Praying in the Spirit" is a way of life, not an isolated action.
 - 50. Jude 20 – Prayer is a partnership with the Holy Spirit in our communion with God the Father.
 - 51. Matthew 7:7 – God obligated Himself, unequivocally, to answer when we pray.
 - 52. John 11:22 – Despite our helplessness, we can ask for the impossible and God will do it.
 - 53. Ephesians 3:20 – It is impossible to ask for something beyond God's ability to provide.
 - 54. Ephesians 3:20 – A major facet of petition prayer is our confidence God will deliver all that we need.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

55. Colossians 1:9 – God delights to provide beyond our ability to imagine, all that is needed for the church to grow.
56. James 1:5, 6 – Our unwavering expectation is absolutely essential to receive what we need from God.
57. James 4:2, 3 – Our failure to "ask" limits our ability to receive from God.
58. James 4:2, 3 – There is no room for selfishness or wrong motive in asking God for what we need.
59. James 4:2, 3 – Pride will hinder us from asking God for what we need.
60. James 4:2, 3 – "Friendship with the world" will hinder our prayers.
61. John 14:15, 16 – Answered prayer is conditioned upon obedience.
62. John 14:15, 16 – There is no room for doubt in the life of prayer.
63. John 17:9 – Intercession is not a single request. It is rather an intense petitioning of God's throne on behalf of kingdom needs.
64. Matthew 9:38 – Intense beseeching of God grows out of certainty that God recognizes great need and is more than able to meet it.
65. Luke 21:36 – God welcomes the honest, intense expression of our need.
66. Acts 8:22 – In dire situations, the only honest way to pray is to beseech God with great intensity.
67. Acts 4:31 – God waits eagerly for a depth of commitment in prayer that pleads with Him to give holy boldness to share the Gospel.
68. Matthew 26:53 – The level of our confidence in God's dependability in answering prayer affects the necessary intensity of our petition.
69. Mark 5:23 – Spiritual growth in prayer is not measured by the volume of intensity of our petition, but in our certainty God will answer; also the motive behind our petition.
70. Luke 1:13 – God answers prayer.
71. Luke 1:3 – There is no limit regarding what a child of God might petition before Him.
72. Luke 2:37, 38 – Fasting and prayer are a way to focus our attention and desire so that we will become more sensitive to what God wants to share with us.
73. Luke 2:37, 38 – Persistence in prayer requires a high level of patience – waiting for God's time – and faith – the unseen certainty that God will answer in His time.
74. Luke 2:37, 38 – Prayer is a valid life-consuming ministry before God.
75. Luke 2:37, 38, – Persistent prayer requires that we act in faith on the basis of our petition.
76. Luke 5:33 – Fasting and prayer are a way to show the intensity of concern in a desperate situation.
77. Luke 5:33 – Fasting and prayer are not a regular ritual to remind one of the intensity of failure.
78. II Corinthians 1:11 – People who pray for those in "active ministry" are partners in that ministry.
79. II Corinthians 1:11 – The ministry of prayer ultimately leads to the giving of thanks.
80. James 5:16 – If we come to God with a clean heart, our prayers will be heard.
81. I Peter 3:12 – Righteousness is an essential ingredient in the life of meaningful prayer.
82. I Timothy 4:5 – Prayer receives guidance and direction from Scripture.
83. I Timothy 4:5 – Prayer and Scripture sanctify, set apart for God, everything He created.

HOLY ANGER

Christians repeatedly sidestep the issue of anger because we see it in ourselves. We have often dealt with the issue facetiously by referring to it as "righteous indignation." Careful observation of our thoughts and actions would reveal that as often as not, our "righteous indignation" is really "unholy anger."

There is a better way, "holy anger," to which we are called and encouraged throughout the New Testament.

Four different words, in the New Testament, are translated "wrath" or "anger." Each of these words adds to our understanding of this quality. We will observe each word separately.

I. "Orge" (οργή)

This Greek word means "intense desire," "mental excitement," "a violent passion," "to be very indignant," "to be filled with wrath." It is an emotion of rage that is not as sudden as that described by the Greek word "thumos," but much more lasting. Again the word "thumos" deals more in terms of thought whereas "orge" deals more in action. It is akin to the Hebrew word "ragadz" (רָגַז). This word describes the violent emotion of anger or fear. It is "to tremble or shake because of the extent of one's anger." "Thumos" will be discussed in detail a bit later.

The word "orge," in the New Testament, is used to describe the righteous anger of Christ and His followers as well as the outrage of non-Christian individuals. It also is used to exhort believers to flee from unrighteous anger. We will look at these types of expression.

A. Divine Anger

And after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. Mark 3:5

This experience took place in the Capernaum synagogue. The Scribes and Pharisees had come from Jerusalem to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath. These men were looking desperately for something with which to accuse Jesus.

Jesus asked them if it was lawful to do good or do harm on the Sabbath. They would not answer. At this point, Jesus looked at them in anger. Mark tells us that Jesus was "grieved at their hardness of heart." The holy anger of Jesus was a response to their "hardness of heart." Their false motives and the deception of their presence triggered Jesus' anger.

Because Jesus was guilty of no sin, this was a holy anger responding not against the Jewish leaders, but against the evil of their actions and motives in view of the consequences that Jesus wanted them to avoid.

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John 3:36

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

The context of this verse describes the people who had heard the teaching of Jesus and had seen His miracles and still refused to obey the commands of God and the instruction of Jesus.

The contrast, in this verse, is between those who **believe** on the Son and those who do not **obey** the Son. Believing in the Son includes obeying Him. Those who believe have eternal life. Those who do not obey the Son will not see life and they will experience the wrath (anger) of God.

Anger is the divine response to disobedience or rebellion. Again, this is not because God was thwarted, but because of the great compassion He had for them.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, Romans 1:18

In the paragraph, Romans 1:19-23, Paul spells out "the unrighteousness of men" which he mentioned in 1:18. In this verse, Paul explained that the "wrath" of God or anger, will be the lot of unrighteous people who rebel against God's law and instruction.

Again, this is the divine response to sinful action and lifestyle. It is the response of holy rage against the sinfulness of rebellion. This suggests that it is appropriate to respond to the evils of our neighbors with a holy anger like that of God the Father, but only out of compassion, not uncontrolled rage.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Romans 12:19

To adequately understand this verse, one must first understand the meaning of "revenge." It is **not** getting back at someone for what they did to you, though that is a common understanding of the term. It is a compound word that literally means "from justice." It is the response of justice to unjust events – actions, words or ideas.

There are at least three reasons why Paul instructed his readers not to take revenge.

1. If the offended party takes revenge, it is an eye for an eye. The motive, in that instance, is ego protection. The problem here is that the offended party is imperfect and is trying to punish one who is also imperfect. Because God is absolutely holy, He is in a position to dispense real justice against the evil of rebellion.
2. God's purpose in "revenge," in bringing justice to the human experience, is not to destroy the individual, but to draw that rebel closer to Him. That purpose cannot be realized if the motive of "getting even" is also in play. Human "revenge" wants to inflict pain, harm or even death.
3. Paul suggests that all rebellion ultimately is against God. This is what David lamented when he cried, "Against Thee, Thee only I have sinned." Ps. 51:4

In this verse, Paul gave us an additional piece of information about holy anger. It is the response of justice whose purpose it is to bring the rebel back into a restored relationship with God.

One must deal with the issue of eternal punishment. Remember, divine justice and mercy, though different, are inseparable. So long as we will cooperate, God chooses to deal with us in mercy. However, if our rebellion continues throughout life, God's justice demands that rebellion be punished.

HOLY ANGER

Holy anger is motivated by **the desire to restore rather than the desire to destroy**. It is to deal with evil and rebellion as God does.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Ephesians 5:6

Ephesus, the seat of the immoral worship of Diana, was well known for its loose living lifestyle. These new believers had come out of that immoral culture. In this paragraph, 5:3-14, Paul drew a contrast between the way these people had lived and the way God wanted them to live. In 5:1, 2, Paul described the way believers should live – "Imitators of God." In 5:3 ff. Paul contrasted this virtuous life with the way these Christians had lived – fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting, idolatry, etc. He concluded saying the wrath (anger) of God comes against people who do these things.

It is not that God has no bridle on His temper. It is that God is deeply concerned with the present and future consequences of disobedience. God does not want them to suffer the consequences of such actions. This anger reflects the depths of God's concern, not the bitterness of not getting His way.

Holy anger is an intense expression of our concern lest the disobedient person suffer the present and future consequences of rebellion. It is an intense love.

For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, Colossians 3:6

"These things" refers to the qualities of the former lives of these Colossians, as listed in verse five – "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed." It also deals with the list in 3:8 – "anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive speech."

It is interesting that in 3:6, the word "wrath" "orge" (ὄργη) is used to describe an emotional expression of God, but in 3:8 the same word identified a sinful quality from the former lives of these Colossian believers. This requires explanation. There is no textual problem with the use of the word "orge" in 3:6 or 8 in the Greek text. The text does not explain this situation. It appears that "anger" "orge" can be used to describe an expression which is holy as well as one which is immoral. The difference between the two kinds of anger lies in the motive. Motive is what makes God's wrath holy. As previously indicated, holy anger grows out of God's love and compassion for the rebel. Love makes anger holy. On the other hand, self-concern is the central purpose of the anger that characterized the former lives of these Colossian believers.

Hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. 1 Thessalonians 2:16

Paul spoke of Jews who killed Christ and the prophets and threatened the work of Paul and the other apostles. From history as well as the Scriptures, it is clear that the religious leadership, the elite among Israel, were the ones who brought about the Crucifixion of Jesus. This verse gives us at least three pieces of information about divine anger.

1. Divine anger is consistent. Whether rich or poor, unnoticed or the elite of the culture, the wrath of God will lash out at anyone who hinders the spread of the Gospel of His grace.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

2. The fury of God's wrath burns against anyone who stands in the way of spreading the gospel of His grace. Love fuels God's wrath because He wants everyone to know and experience the gift of His transforming grace.
3. God's wrath is invincible. There is no way for the enemies of God ultimately to hinder or topple the work of God in reaching out to the lost. His wrath will successfully consume every power that attempts to thwart the purposes of His kingdom.

"And the nations were enraged, and Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." Revelation 11:18

This verse is part of what the apostle John saw when the seventh angel blew the trumpet. The 24 elders worshipped God proclaiming His eternal omnipotence. In response to these acts of praise, John viewed that ultimate conflict – the evil nations were enraged and the Almighty eternal God began His reign.

In this ultimate conflict, the wrath (orge) of God confronts the rage of the nations. In this atmosphere of confrontation, the judgment of the faithful begins. The dead are judged – the bondservants, prophets, saints and those who fear God's name receive their rewards. In this judgment, those who destroy the earth are destroyed.

God's wrath is not always instantaneous, but it is not less threatening because it taries. Granted, sometimes God acts instantly – look at the Exodus and God's interventions in the book of Judges. This demonstrates the tremendous control God exerts over His anger. God's anger is not the venting of His spleen. It is God's intervention to keep the rebel from destroying His plan for the world and an effort to extend mercy to the very last, possible moment to those who stand against His word.

B. Exhortations to Flee Unrighteous Anger

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:31, 32

You will notice that in 4:31, 32 there are two contrasting lists. Look carefully at the first list:

1. **Bitterness** – "piokros" (πικρός) – This is an extreme form of wickedness, especially in relation to speaking evil of others.
2. **Anger** – "thumos" (θυμός) – This is a very agitated set of feelings, an outburst prompted by strong inner indignation. It is a sudden outburst brought on by hatred. It is more violent outburst from inner indignation and distress.
3. **Wrath** – "orge" (ὄργή) – This is the wrath that burns against another and often from a self-protective point of view. It is more protracted than "thumos," but more lasting.
4. **Clamor** – "krauge" (κραυγή) - Imitating the shrill cry of the raven - This is a disturbance of intense controversy.

HOLY ANGER

5. **Slander** – "blasphemia" (βλασφημία) - This is injurious speech, usually against God. It is to rail at someone with great intensity and fury, but not always with accuracy.
6. **Malice** – "kakia" (κακία) - It is the opposite of excellence; it is to be malicious and vicious.

The second list, however, is just the opposite: Kindness, tenderhearted and forgiving. Each of these expresses a concern for the needs of others and in most instances this is particularly true when they are weak and fail.

You will observe that the six characteristics in the first list are negative. They represent a strong, serious attack upon another human being with the intent to do harm. This is the piece of information that these verses suggest for our consideration. Here, the purpose of wrath is to do personal harm to another human being. Wrath, in this instance, makes no effort to build up or forgive the weakness of others. It is the opposite of the love that motivates the wrath of God.

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. Hebrews 4:3

The text quoted from the Psalm 95:11, "As I swore in my wrath, 'they shall not enter my rest.'" The author quoted God passing judgment on the rebellious. The reference to "rest," in this Psalm, is a reference to heaven. Both the Old and New Testament clearly indicate that God patiently waits for the rebel to keep His commands. If, however, the rebel continues to refuse God's offer of grace, the justice of God requires eventual punishment.

The author of Hebrews has described God's wrath (anger) as His response to the catastrophe caused by the unwillingness of the rebel to repent and turn from his destructive ways. God's wrath has to do with His burning desire that no one be destroyed by his or her rebellious ways.

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Colossians 3:8

In the paragraph, 3:5-11, Paul recorded two lists of undesirable characteristics. He indicated that all ten of these negative characteristics were true of the Colossian believers prior to their conversion.

As indicated earlier, in 3:6, wrath (orge) describes a holy, loving quality of God, but also describes the former sinful lifestyle of these Colossian believers.

By the way Paul wrote this verse, he has made wrath (orge) as despicable as shameful speech.

If you carefully read the following paragraph, 3:12-17, wrath is seriously contrasted with compassion, kindness, meekness, forgiveness, longsuffering, etc. This is a terrible denunciation of the quality of wrath.

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. Ephesians 4:26, 27

These two verses contain four commands. The word translated "be angry" is in the present passive imperative form. In simple English, we break this down as follows:

- a. **Present** – This is an ongoing action.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

- b. **Passive** – The subject is being acted upon rather than committing the action.
- c. **Imperative** – This is a command.

One might more carefully translate the word "be being made angry continually."

Holy anger is not an action, but a response of compassion that expresses a burning desire to keep the rebellious from destroying themselves and condemning themselves to eternal punishment. This is, in part, what Peter meant when he said,

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9

Paul's statement, "Be angry and yet do not sin," gives us two pieces of information about anger.

1. It is possible to express anger in an unholy manner.
2. It is just as possible to express anger in a manner that is holy; a manner that is sinless.

Paul continued, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." Holy anger cannot be continuous. Holy anger, by definition, cannot be both holy and unending. It seeks a turn in the relationship that allows it to subside, rather than an opportunity to take revenge over wrongs done.

Again, Paul continued, "Do not give the Devil an opportunity." The way this is written indicates that the endless wrath finds at least its initiation, if not its whole life, in the deception of the Devil.

For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, Titus 1:7

In this passage, Paul outlined the qualities that must be found in a person who is an elder in the church. One of these qualities is "not quick-tempered." The word for "quick-tempered" is "orge" (ὄργη). Paul wrote this part of the statement in such a way that it is very emphatic.

If you look carefully, you will note that 1:7-9 contains two contrasting lists, one negative and the other positive. "Quick-tempered" is part of the negative list. It appears that both lists make up Paul's understanding of what it means to be "above reproach." If this is the case, and it appears that it is, then the person who is "quick-tempered" is not "above reproach."

This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. James 1:19, 20

In verse 19, there is a contrast between being "quick to hear" and "slow to speak" and "slow to anger." In this contrast, "slow to speak" and "slow to anger" are good and "quick to hear" is very good. James does not say that hearing is good and speaking and anger are bad. He said, in effect, being "quick to hear" is good and "slow to speak" and "slow to anger" are also good. This suggests that anger, as such, is not bad. It becomes bad when it is a quick response. Anger is amoral, neither good nor bad. It becomes good or bad on the

HOLY ANGER

basis of its motive. There are times when anger, for the Christian, like the wrath of God, is the only righteous response to the situations in an evil environment.

Though the text does not specifically say so, in 1:20, the anger described is not holy. The message about anger is simply that unholy anger is not only useless, but also it is really counter-productive. Our purpose, as believers, is to achieve the righteousness of God. Unholy anger will keep us from accomplishing this goal.

C. The Anger of Non-Christians

And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. Matthew 18:34

This, of course, is a picture of unholy anger. This anger is vengeful. The master was not angered by a desire to restore the servant. His anger moved him to design torture and demand repayment. Holy anger seeks to protect and restore while unholy anger determines to inflict pain and destroy.

And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' Luke 14:21

This is the story of the host whose invited guests boycotted his feast. Angered by this rejection, his instructions to bring the city outcasts to participate in the feast were an act of revenge. It was a way of getting even with his unfaithful friends. Unholy anger is vengeful. Holy anger is motivated by tough love. Another example of unholy anger is found in the parable of the Prodigal Son "But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began entreating him." Luke 15:28

This is part of the parable we call "The prodigal son." The older son became angry because his irresponsible younger brother was accepted back into the family with a feast. This anger was not holy. It was a vent for his selfish displeasure; a plea for his bruised ego, not a desire to show compassion and restore the errant one. This gives us an insight into the opposite or holy anger. Holy anger, therefore, must be based on compassion. It must bear no signs of getting even or of selfish concern. Holy anger risks the self rather than protecting the self.

"Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people, Luke 21:23

In this passage, Jesus taught about the coming destruction of the temple. In verse 23, Jesus talked about the coming wrath of an invader upon the people of Jerusalem. This is a picture of military brutality. This wrath "anger" is in no way redemptive. It grows out of greed and hatred. It cares nothing for life or the quality of life. It is wrath that rapes women and slashes helpless infants. It seeks to increase its wealth and fame at the expense and even the life of the weaker groups.

Holy anger, the opposite of this anger, has the basic ingredient of compassion and concern. It is love that is tough enough to risk misunderstanding in order to seek what is hon-

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

estly best for the person involved. Holy anger must be selfless, willing to risk loss in order to restore the one against whom the holy anger has been roused.

But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. Romans 2:8

Paul was dealing with Christians who passed judgment upon others while doing the same things themselves. He asserted that the judgment of God would fall upon such people.

There is a relationship between unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. This, of course, deals with unholy anger. Each of these qualities has a basic, selfish quality about it. The source of anger, here, is basically selfish. It is revenge growing out of self-concern.

Again, holy anger is just the opposite of what Paul described in this verse. It is void of selfishness. It seeks the restoration of the errant and the protection of the guilty. The dangers they face are the cause of this intense emotion.

II. "Parorgidzo" (παροργίζω)

This is a compound word made up as follows:

- a. Para – beside
- b. Orgizo – to provoke, enrage.

This is a highly intensified form of the word "orge" which we have been studying. It points especially to that which provokes to wrath. It suggests a less continued state than "orge." The first keenness of the sense of provocation must not be cherished, though righteous resentment may remain.

But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first Moses says, "I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, By a nation without understanding will I anger you." Romans 10:19

This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 32:21. Israel did not know or acknowledge that God had used the adversity of their lives to draw them nearer to Him. It was as if the nations took turns devastating Israel. They did not take kindly to this tragic experience. For decades they had been looking for someone who would champion their cause. The anger of which Moses spoke was not holy. It was a suppressed desire for revenge that Israel could not put into action because of their weakness.

Paul gives us an insight into this kind of anger. Though it is unholy, God can and did use it to cause His people to turn to Him.

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

To new believers coming out of a culture of debauched idolatry, Paul wrote to describe how the Christian lives in a non-Christian world. In this verse, Paul dealt with believing fathers concerning the care of their children. He instructed them not to provoke their children to anger. The Greek text is stronger. "Fathers, absolutely do not provoke your children." The word "provoke" is "parorgidzete" (παροργίζετε). In this instance, the word was used to describe a confrontation that infuriated the powerless party. This, of course, is unholy anger. It is a reaction against what is perceived to be unfair confrontation.

HOLY ANGER

The opposite of this unholy anger is an anger that is not only compassionate, but also ultimately fair in its dealings. This is an important piece of information about holy anger.

III. "Thumos" (θύμος)

The word "thumos" (θύμος) literally means, "to breathe hard." It was used to describe slaughter or to burn up as a sacrifice. Where our previous word "orge" deals more with outward, active emotions, "thumos" deals with more inward feelings.

Usually, "orge" describes ongoing, burning anger while "thumos" describes a flash of anger that dies down almost immediately.

Idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, Galatians 5:20

In this passage, "anger" "thumos" is one of 17 negative characteristics, "deeds of the flesh" Paul mentioned just prior to the list of the "fruits of the Spirit." In our New American Standard version text there are only 15 listed. This translation has omitted murders and heresies. These "deeds of the flesh" are not only negative, they focus on the self; they take extreme forms – i.e., drunkenness. They lead to disobedience in its many forms – i.e. factions.

He also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. Revelation 14:10

This verse is part of the third angel's announcement of judgment upon those who worship the beast. In both the Old and New Testaments, divine judgment is represented as "the wine of the wrath of God." We must keep in mind that in the first century the death sentence sometimes was carried out by forcing the convicted person to drink a mixture of wine and hemlock. Tradition states that the apostle John died in this manner.

In this verse, both "anger" "orge" (previously studied) and "wrath" "thumos" (this study) are used to describe the anger of God expressed in judgment. With vivid images, the angel described how God's justice would ultimately punish the rebellious. Holy anger, both "orge" and "thumos," are not perpetual. There comes a time when the compassion must give way to the pain of justice. It is a sad necessity, not a vengeful satisfaction.

And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. Revelation 16:19

In the Greek text, the words which our text translates "fierce wrath" is "the anger (orge) of the wrath (thumos) of Him." Revelation 19:15 has the same expression. In this verse, John described the pouring out of the bowl of the seventh angel.

This is a way of describing an extremely intense expression of wrath. Up to this point, we have emphasized the fact that holy anger is compassionate. At this point, however, we must deal with the wrath of God that destroys and does not rebuild. We need to keep in mind that this is a picture of final things. There have been many opportunities to repent and turn to God. These have all been rejected and turned aside. As indicated earlier, the compassion and mercy of God are linked with the justice of God. If people will repent of

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

their sin and turn to Him, God will forgive and restore. On the other hand, if people are unwilling to turn to Him, He will, ultimately, bring justice to bear upon them. That is what John has described in this passage.

IV. "Cholao" (χολάω)

This word identifies a greenish hue. It identifies gall or bile. It is "to be bilious, irritable or enraged." It identifies the serious discomfort of the many forms of anger.

"If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath that the Law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath? John 7:23

It was the time of the great feast. Jesus did not come for the entire feast time and the people were searching for Him and debating about Him. Upon His arrival, He healed a man on the Sabbath. The rulers of the Jews accosted Him for what they considered a blasphemous crime. The Jewish leaders interpreted the commandment about the Sabbath to mean that one could save a life on the Sabbath, but you could not improve a person's life on the Sabbath. Jesus' miracle was an effort that improved the life of the man.

Jesus confronted them with the logic of their own Sabbath observance. They would circumcise a baby on the Sabbath, but became "angry with Him for healing a man on the Sabbath."

Jesus statement, "are you angry with Me..." would be viewed in two ways:

1. Jesus would see it as a selfish fury because he was a threat to their popularity. It was, indeed, that.
2. The rulers of the Jews would view it as righteous indignation at His violation of one of the Ten Commandments.

Their great anger or distress grew out of what they considered an affront to the God of Israel, and not so incidentally, a crushing blow to their popularity. The Jewish leaders were moved by this unholy anger, to destroy Jesus and not to restore Him.

CONCLUSION

This study disclosed a long list of information concerning "holy anger." Look carefully at the list, again:

1. Mark 3:5 – Holy anger is motivated by compassion, not hate.
2. John 3:36 – Holy anger does not satisfy the bruised ego.
3. Romans 12:19 – Holy anger deals with evil and rebellion as God does.
4. Ephesians 5:6 – It is an intense form of love.
5. Colossians 3:6 – Love makes anger holy.
6. Colossians 3:6 - There is no self-concern in holy anger.
7. I Thessalonians 2:16 – Divine anger is consistent.
8. I Thessalonians 2:16 - Mercy fuels the anger of God.
9. I Thessalonians 2:16 - God's anger is invincible.
10. Revelation 11:18 – God's wrath is not always instantaneous, but it is not less threatening because it carries.
11. Ephesians 4:31, 32 – Divine anger purposes to build and restore.

HOLY ANGER

12. Hebrews 4:3 – Holy anger springs from the burning desire to preserve the rebellious from self-destruction.
13. Ephesians 4:26, 27 – Holy anger is not an action, but a compassionate response to self-destructive behavior.
14. Ephesians 4:26, 27 - It is a continuing, ongoing response to rebellion.
15. Ephesians 4:26, 27 - Properly motivated, anger is not sinful.
16. Ephesians 4:26, 27 - We are commanded to be angry, but not grudgeful.
17. Ephesians 4:26, 27 - Holy anger supports the work of God's kingdom; just as unholy anger gives the devil an opportunity.
18. Titus 1:7 – Holy anger is essential if we would be "above reproach."
19. James 1:19, 20 – Unholy anger will keep us from achieving the righteousness of God.
20. Matthew 18:34 – Unholy anger determines to inflict pain and destruction.
21. Luke 14:21 – Unholy anger is vengeful.
22. Luke 15:28 – Holy anger risks the self in order to protect and preserve the rebellious.
23. Romans 2:8 – Holy anger is unselfish.
24. Romans 10:19 – God will use even unholy anger, in others, in order to cause His people to return to Him.
25. Ephesians 6:4 – Holy anger is ultimately fair in its dealings.
26. Galatians 5:20 - Holy anger is the opposite of "deeds of the flesh." It is a quality motivated by God's Spirit.
27. Revelation 14:10 – Holy anger is not perpetual. There comes a time when compassion must give way to justice.
28. Revelation 16:19 - Holy anger is as just as it is compassionate.

As you reflect upon this list, two things keep coming to your attention:

1. Holy anger is expressed in compassion.
2. Holy anger is unselfish. It is even self-sacrificing.

This is certainly a different view of anger than we normally hear. Nevertheless, it is the picture of holy anger one finds in the New Testament. There is no doubt that we experience anger. The question we must face is this, Is it holy anger?

PURE IN HEART

There are three words in the Greek text that are translated "pure" in the English translation. The words are":

- a. "Eilikrines" (εἰλικρινής)
- b. "Hagnos" (ἀγνός)

In the eleven instances where these words are translated "pure," not one refers to the "pure in heart." We will therefore limit our consideration to the study of the third word, "katharos."

When people think of the pure in heart, there are a number of images that come to mind. Some would admit to thinking of a person so holy that they would have no association with the likes of us. Others would think of an individual "so heavenly minded they are no earthly good." These are images which in no way reflect what the New Testament has in mind when this term is used.

"Katharos" – (καθαρός)

This word means "to cleanse something that had become unclean." It is "to make clean," "to purge," "to purify." This is the source of the English word catharsis.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8

In Matthew chapters five through seven, the apostle recorded what we refer to as the "sermon on the mount." In this passage, Jesus described the lifestyle of those who make up the kingdom of God. One among these teachings is this verse. In order to benefit from this teaching of Jesus, some words need to be clarified.

The word "pure" is "katharos" (καθαρός) which was previously defined. Jesus did not speak of one whose life had never been darkened by the taint of sin. He spoke, rather, of those who had been sullied by the taint of sin, but had been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Being transformed, the things they once loved, they now hate: the things they once hated, they now loved. It is appropriate to compare these people with those whom the apostle Paul spoke of as "imitators of God" in Ephesians 5:1, 2.

Jesus spoke of the "Pure in **Heart**." The word "heart" is "kardia" (καρδία). This word was used in two ways:

- a. It identified the main organ of the human body. This organ not only supplies life-giving blood to the whole body, but also provides sustenance to the body.
- b. The heart is also identified as the seat of the spiritual nature and character. It is the moral center of life. More than a pumping organ in the human chest, the heart includes the will, the emotions and choices of the mind motivated by one's relationship, or lack thereof, with Christ. It is the moral and spiritual center of the life of the believer.

When Jesus spoke of the "pure in heart," He identified a person who, like all of us, was once dead in trespasses and sins. He spoke of one who had been cleansed of his past sins and rebellion by the blood of Christ. He spoke of one who stood before God the Father clothed in the righteousness of Jesus; a person whose cleansed heart was now forgiven of the past and blameless in the present.

Jesus told us two things about such a person.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

1. The "pure in heart" are "blessed." The word for "blessed" is "makarioi" (μακάριοι). This word is translated "happy." It is a declaration of blessedness. Unlike our common understanding, it is more a declaration, an ascription of blessing than an honored state into which one has been raised. The word comes from a root that means "long," "or "large." In the Jewish mind, the chief evidence of a happy or blessed life was length of days and wealth. If you look at the people in the Old Testament, particular emphasis was placed on how long they lived – Methuselah 969 years. Dealing with this understanding, Jesus said the pure in heart are "blessed." They are given the affirmation of God that they associated with length of days.

This is a way of saying that the pure in heart pleased God in a very special way. God surrounded that life with the obvious blessing – length of life. Though this is quite obvious, there are other, less visible, benefits God showered upon "the pure in heart." There is an intimate relationship of oneness they shared with God. It is not measured in terms of intimate presence of God they share can make even the worst of circumstances a joy. This is what Paul meant when he spoke of rejoicing in suffering.

2. Jesus said, "the pure in heart...shall see God." He did not explain this affirmation. We need to remind ourselves that the Sermon on the Mount is a description of the lifestyle of the citizens of God's kingdom. It is not that the pure in heart receive a blessing that peacemakers, the gentle and the merciful cannot have. It rather describes the consequences "pure in heart" produces. The truth is that the kingdom citizens will increasingly experience the blessings ascribed to each of the kingdom characteristics.

You will remember that at the most intimate time in the relationship between God and Moses, the patriarch asked to see God's face. As you know, that request could not be granted lest Moses die. Nevertheless, God allowed Moses to see His back. Reflection on this situation causes us to wonder if "seeing God" was not so much a visual experience as it was a privileged intimate relationship God could grant to those with whom He was well pleased.

At the other end of the spectrum, Revelation also deals with "seeing God." John used the visual, graphic description of heaven as clad in gold, pearl and precious gems. The most pervasive picture we have of heaven, however, is that we shall share the eternal, intimate presence of God. These bits of information and reflection cause one to conclude that "seeing God" is both a real, visual experience in eternity and an intimate, personal relationship with God that is beyond description in human language here and now.

Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. Romans 14:20

Again, in this verse, the word "clean" is the Greek word "katharos" which we have been observing in this study. In Romans 12 to 16, Paul dealt with specific situations concerning living one's faith in a pagan culture. In this particular section, Paul dealt with differing understandings concerning what foods the believer could and could not eat.

In the discussion, Paul said, "all things are indeed clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense." A piece of meat is neither pure nor unclean in and of itself.

PURE IN HEART

Indeed, the eating of a piece of meat is neither pure nor unclean of itself. The "good" meat, which God created, becomes a tool for evil when the partaker uses it and in so doing causes another to stumble.

In this verse, Paul has given us some information about "purity of heart." Motive is the designator of purity. Being pure in heart" has to do with one's motives. Obedience and a longing to be like Jesus motivate the heart.

The other side of this understanding is equally important. Purity of heart is not a list of things one does not do. It is rather doing everything in sincerity and following the pattern of divine love.

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 1:5

The word "pure," in this verse, is "katharos" which we have been observing so far in this study. In this paragraph, Paul exhorted Timothy on the way to teach those dabbling with false doctrines. Paul identified the goal of their teaching as "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

Verse five suggests several pieces of information concerning "purity of heart." Love does not emanate from a determined decision to love. It rather finds its origin in a pure heart. Purity of heart establishes the quality of life in which love can flourish.

It is not accidental that purity of heart is mentioned in the company of "sincere faith" and a "good conscience." The repetition of the word "and" lends an important, strong emphasis. Grammatically, it places "pure heart" "good conscience" and "sincere faith" in company with each other. Indeed, love proceeds equally from all three.

In this verse, Paul also suggested that purity of heart was one of the goals of his teaching. This can be no less true now.

But holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 1 Timothy 3:9

The word translated "clear" is "katharos" (καθαρός). This gives insight into the use of the word "pure" rather than the phrase "pure in heart." As used in this verse, the word "pure" identifies the conscience void of everything that would deter it from its intended use. That is precisely what a pure heart is. A pure heart is free from everything that hinders it from being the abiding place God always intended it to be; the throne room He always intended to occupy. You will find the same idea in II Timothy 1:3

Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. II Timothy 2:22, 23

There is a contrast in the paragraph 2:14-26, between righteousness and unrighteousness. In verses 22 and 23, the contrast continues:

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

RIGHTEOUSNESS	UNRIGHTEOUSNESS
Pursue righteousness	Youthful lusts
Pursue faith	Foolish, ignorant speculations
Pursue love	Quarrels
Pursue peace	
The cleansed	
The sanctified	
The gentle	

Paul identifies each of these positive qualities "with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart." This tells us that the "pure in heart" are among those who pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.

These verses also suggest that the quality of "pure in heart" is the foundation for prayer among the righteous.

*To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.
Titus 1:15*

Paul made some interesting observations in this verse. In effect, he said a pure and a defiled and unbelieving person can look at the same thing and each see something different. The pure would see something pure. The defiled, looking at the same thing, would see something defiled. The pure quality of the believer's heart informs what he/she sees. Purity of heart gives the believer a vantage point from which to view even the difficulties of life. The pure have the ability to see the pure, or its potential, in any situation. This is a divine quality. God looks at our wretched sinfulness and weakness and sees purity and strength. This is what enabled the angel to say to Gideon, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior." Judges 6:12

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:22

The author wrote to suffering, persecuted Jewish Christians. This verse is an exhortation to the persecuted believers to draw near to Christ, our High Priest. The author wrote, "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." The reference to "pure water" is a reference to temple worship. On the Day of Atonement, the worshippers would bathe in one of the numerous baths located on the south side of the temple mount before going to make their sacrifice. They bathed and prayed in this clean, flowing water.

The author gives an insight into the meaning of "pure" in these words. At the temple bath, the worshipper was cleansed of everything unclean. "Pure" was that which prepared the worshipper to enter into the place of prayer; the presence of God. It is to be free of all that would be offensive to God's presence.

This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. James 1:27

PURE IN HEART

The religion, of which James spoke, is the external form; the ceremonial service; the religious requirements so prominent in Jewish worship. James modified this by referring to it as "pure religion." This is religious practice that is sincere, exactly what it appears to be.

James then identified the expression of "pure religion" as two-fold:

1. Expressing loving, needful compassion for those in dire straits
2. Practicing the things that Jesus taught – obedience to God.

This reflects both the vertical and horizontal responsibility in everything that one does. It is the visible, external practice that honestly reflects the inner purity of the heart.

Observe that James strengthened and emphasized his message by adding "undefiled" to the idea of purity. Purity of heart is the foundation upon which righteous compassionate conduct is based.

And the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles. Revelation 15:6

John described the seven angels with the seven plagues. In this verse, the word "clean" is "katharos" (καθαρός), the word we have been studying.

Observe that John said the seven angels "came out of the temple clothed in linen clean and bright." This is a reference to temple worship. There are no instructions for what the Hebrew people should wear to the temple for worship. There are lengthy, careful instructions concerning what should be worn by those who serve in the temple. One of these instructions is that the garments must be made from pure, white linen and they must be washed in clean water.

John gives us another glimpse of the meaning of the word "pure." In this instance, the word means something made completely of linen with no foreign additives – inwardly untainted - and not blemished by any kind of impurity – outwardly clean.

Purity of heart describes a believer whose sincere, inner devotion is untainted and whose outward, visible compassion accurately reflects this faith.

And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. Revelation 21:18

Again, the "pure gold," mentioned in 21:18, contains the same message. "Pure gold" is that which contains nothing but gold. Accordingly, a pure heart is one that contains the motives God intended it to express.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of pieces of information about purity of heart that have surfaced in this study. Let us take another look at the list:

Matthew 5:8

- a. The pure in heart are blessed.
- b. The pure in heart shall see God.

Romans 14:20

- a. Motive is the dynamic of purity.
- b. Purity of heart has to do with motives – obedience and a longing to be like Jesus.
- c. Purity of heart is not a list of things one cannot do.

I Timothy 1:5

- a. Love does not emanate from a determined decision.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

- b. Purity of heart establishes a quality of life in which love can flourish.
- c. Purity of heart must be found in company with "good conscience" and "a sincere faith."
- d. Purity of heart is one of Christ's desires for His people.

I Timothy 3:9

A pure heart is free from everything that hinders it from being the abiding place God intended it to be; the throne room He always intended to occupy.

II Timothy 2:22, 23

- a. Pure in heart can be found among those who pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.
- b. Purity of heart is the foundation for a life of prayer among the righteous.

Titus 1:15

- a. Purity of heart gives the believer an alternative vantage point from which to view even the difficulties of life.
- b. The pure in heart can see the pure, or its potential, in any situation – a divine quality.

Hebrews 10:22

- a. Purity prepares the worshipper to enter into the presence of God.
- b. Purity is to be free from all that would be offensive to God's presence.

James 1:27

Purity of heart is the foundation upon which compassionate conduct is formed.

Revelation 15:6

- a. Purity of heart is to be free from any foreign element.
- b. It is the heart of a believer whose sincere inner devotion is untainted and whose outward visible compassion accurately reflects this faith.

Revelation 21:18

- a. A pure heart is one that contains those motives God intended it to express.
- b. Purity of heart expresses the compassion you see in Jesus.

Throughout our study of the qualities of spiritual growth, we have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that these qualities are commanded and that they are present active in form. This is not the case with "purity in heart." This grows out of the fact that "purity of heart" is both a condition of life as well as a quality of life in which one grows

Purity of heart is a difficult quality to foster. There is no single action one can start or stop in order to create it. Instead, it is a matter of motive that chooses to be an imitation of who Jesus is. It is choosing, each day, to be as pure in compassionate action toward people in need as in devotion to obedience to God.

SELF-CONTROL

When people think of the word "self-control," they call to mind an image of a person who by monumental effort can force the human body to do exactly what they want it to do. It is like being the successful arm-wrestler over the human will.

Initially, we need to differentiate between the words "discipline" and "self-control." These words are similar, but they are not synonymous. The word "discipline" has both a general and a spiritual description. From a human point of view, "discipline" has to do with submission to control by self or others, the subjection of the self to a form of rule or method. Athletic training, such as year-round fitness training in the different sports regimens, is one of the most obvious examples.

From a spiritual perspective, "discipline" is what the believer is willing to do to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He increasingly makes self-control a characteristic of our imitation of who Christ is in our lives. It is the way we, as Christians, cooperate with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to produce self-control.

"Self-control" from a human point of view, has to do with exercising control over one's self, including the emotions, words, thoughts and actions. That is not the way the word is used in the New Testament.

From a spiritual perspective, "self-control" is probably not the best choice of words. It is not so much that the believer controls himself or herself. It is that the believer submits the self to the control of the Holy Spirit as we will see when we look at the passage in Galatians 5:22. The believer submits the self to the Spirit's control by exercising discipline over the self and the will as the Holy Spirit does His transforming work to enable us to become more and more like Christ.

The word translated "self-control" in our text is translated "temperate" in the King James Version of the Bible. There are three different Greek words that are so translated. We will deal with each separately.

I. "egkrateia" (ἐγκράτεια.)

This is a compound word that is formed as follows:

- a. en – in or at
- b. kratos – vigor, power, strength

It is the word that they used to describe continence. It was used to describe self-control in one's appetites. It is to be temperate. It has been described as the controlling power of the will under the operation of the Holy Spirit of God.

And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you." Acts 24:25

In the context, an attorney named Tertullus accused Paul before the Governor, Felix. Paul discussed specific issues with the governor, who was very knowledgeable about the Christian faith. Paul talked with him about "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come." There is a vital link between righteousness, self-control and coming judgment. The text does not identify the connection, but it appears that self-control is an expression, an evidence of righteousness. Again, self-control appears to be one of the qualities being sought as an evidence of righteousness in the coming judgment.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 1 Corinthians 9:25

In this passage, Paul defended his apostleship before the Corinthian church. He used the illustration of a runner who exercises self-control in the form of discipline to prepare to win the prize. Self-control, here, is described as a discipline, a regimen required to prepare and sustain an athlete to succeed in the race. In verses 26 and 27, Paul applied this illustration to his ministry. He disciplined his body lest in preaching to others, he should become a castaway.

In this discussion, Paul gave us information about self-control. It is the spiritual discipline required of the faithful to enable them to overcome spiritual adversaries. As athletic discipline forces the body to develop increased strength to withstand the opposition, so this spiritual discipline requires spiritual exercise to develop spiritual strength sufficient to overcome the opposition of our common enemy.

Paul indicated that the discipline touched every part of the athlete's life. By the same token, he is inferring that the spiritual regimen of self-control must touch every part of the life of the believer.

Observe that Paul's illustration applies to everyone in the race. In this light, it is appropriate to assume that self-control is an essential part of our daily Christian walk.

The imperishable prize Paul mentioned is our eternal reward. In this, Paul tells us that self-control is absolutely essential as one pursues that eternal reward.

What does self-control look like? There are hosts of expressions of this quality. Look at these biblical examples. Self-preservation, in its myriad of forms, is one of the strongest human drives. Esther had to choose between serving God's people and the probability of losing her own life. She controlled her own need to survive in order to preserve God's people, Israel. This took indescribable self-control.

Paul was imprisoned in Macedonia and many other places because of his witness for Christ. Self-preservation would have urged him not to take such risks. Paul exercised self-control of this basic human drive and continued to preach until, as tradition teaches, he was martyred for his faith.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:22-24

There are several pieces of information about self-control in these well-known verses. First, the text clearly states that each of these nine qualities are the "fruit of the Spirit." The word "fruit" is "karpos" (καρπός). It is, the product, the progeny of a living organism. Metaphorically speaking, as in this instance, fruit is that which we can see which comes from the power that works within us invisibly producing this fruit.

Self-control is not produced by super-human efforts to inhibit common human responses. This quality is evident in the believer's life when the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit actively works in the life to produce it. It is the clear, visible evidence that the Holy Spirit has produced this beautiful quality that we are helpless to produce by super

SELF-CONTROL

human efforts. Because this is true, it is appropriate to say that self-control, as Paul described it, is a uniquely Christian quality that is never found in the lives of unbelievers.

Paul said, "Against such there is no law." One can fairly assert from this that the quality of self-control is good, even for those recipients of its benefits who are outside the Christian community. It is a blessing when received by anyone in the human community.

Look at verse 24. Paul spoke of those who "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." It is appropriate to assume Paul suggests that these nine fruits of the Spirit are the byproduct of the Holy Spirit's enabling of the believer to crucify the flesh. Because this is true, it is not appropriate for the believer to take credit for this spiritual growth. It is appropriate to give praise to God whose Spirit has enabled us to "crucify the flesh with its passions and desires." Anyone who has tried desperately and failed to produce self-control in his or her life can readily understand this vital truth.

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; And in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; 2 Peter 1:5, 6

In 2 Peter 1:1-11, the author described a detailed process of spiritual growth. It is the same type of process Paul described in Romans 5:3

In 2 Peter 1:5, 6, Peter used the word "supply" once, but inferred it seven more times. The word translated "supply" is "epichoregeo" (ἐπιχορηγέω). It is a compound word:

- a. epi – upon
- b. Choregeo – to furnish

It means "to furnish besides," "to fully supply," "to contribute substantially."

Now look at these two verses. Peter said that moral excellence is "fully supplied," "furnished beside" faith. In other words, one must have faith before moral excellence can be added to it. Faith becomes the foundation upon which moral excellence is built. In the same way, knowledge is added to moral excellence. Moral excellence is the foundation upon which knowledge is built.

Self-control is added/supplied to knowledge. Knowledge is the foundation upon which self-control is built.

In other words, self control does not just happen. It is built upon the foundation of faith, moral excellence and knowledge.

Peter did not stop there. He said that perseverance was furnished to self-control. Self-control is the foundation upon which perseverance is built. Without self-control, perseverance cannot be built up.

In the same way, godliness is added to perseverance. Perseverance is the foundation upon which godliness is built.

Brotherly kindness is fully supplied to godliness. Godliness is the foundation upon which brotherly kindness is built.

Agape love is fully supplied to brotherly kindness. Brotherly kindness is the foundation upon which agape love is built.

In essence, Peter said that self-control is the foundation upon which perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and agape love are built. Peter has provided an insight into the process of spiritual growth and in so doing has described the vital role self-control plays in that process.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

In 1:8, 9, Peter reminded us that these qualities including self-control, as they grow, enable us "to be useful and fruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." In some manner, self-control lays a foundation for us to be fruitful and useful in God's kingdom. This occurs as we increase in the "true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Peter continued by saying that the presence of these qualities enables us to see our spiritual condition clearly and enable us to remember how we were purified from the sins of the past.

II. "Nephalios" (νηφάλιος)

This word, like the previous one, is translated "self-control," but its meaning is a bit different yet still related. It means "to abstain from wine," "to keep sober," "to be discreet."

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2

In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul lists a number of qualities that must be found in people in several situations in the church – bishops, women, older men, etc. In this particular verse, Paul described the qualities that must be found in a person who is to be a bishop. The word "bishop" is "episkopos" (ἐπίσκοπος). It means one who oversees the entire life of the church. There were "overseers" in every local church in the first century. From this verse, it is clear that self-control is an essential quality in the life of one that would be a leader of God's people. It is on an equal footing with such qualities and conditions as "Husband of one wife, prudent, respectable, hospitable and able to teach."

In this instance, Paul was saying that it is essential that a bishop should not be addicted to alcohol. Drunkenness was a serious problem in both the Old and New Testament times, as it is today. One suspects that if Paul were writing today he would add drugs to the prohibition against addiction to alcohol.

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 1 Timothy 3:11

As previously mentioned, in this paragraph, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Paul provided Timothy with guidelines for church leadership and Christian living. If you read through the chapter, you will notice that this verse is placed in the middle of Paul's instructions concerning deacons. This suggests that this verse is an aside, but equally as important as his message concerning deacons.

Notice that Paul sets up a contrast – "Do not do this..., but do this." He contrasts malicious gossip with temperance. Temperance is the call to exercise control over the appetite for wine. By contrast, malicious gossip is the inability to keep from passing along pieces of information, whether true or false, that destroy the reputation of another. In so doing, the individual hopes to be considered a person "in the know." Self-control, or temperance, in this instance, is specifically focused upon controlling the appetite for alcoholic beverage. As indicated earlier, this is a completely different word than previously discussed, but it touches on the same issue in a very specific, focused way.

III. "Sophron" (σώφρον)

This word refers to being "sound in mind," "moderate in opinion and passion," "to be discreet," "to be temperate." This was Paul's way to say that the thinking of Christians

SELF-CONTROL

and particularly their leaders, should avoid extremes of thought. It is to know exactly what you believe, but at the same time be very mindful that there are others who might hold other viewpoints which also may have some value.

For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, But hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, Titus 1:7, 8

In this paragraph, Paul gave instructions for the lifestyle and conduct of an overseer. These leaders of the church must be exemplary in their conduct. Here, Paul described what that means. Self-control is one of eight very positive qualities that Paul insisted upon in the life of a church leader. The way Paul wrote this sentence, self-control is equally important with being just and devout. It is as important as refuting those who deny sound doctrine.

If you look at verses seven and eight together, you can see that Paul has established a series of contrasts here much as he did in Galatians chapter five. Observe that most of the characteristics listed in verse seven deal with a life out of control, especially dealing with a temper out of control. It is not that the self-controlled person has no strong feelings or appetites, but rather that these feelings and appetites are firmly under control.

Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Titus 2:2

Apparently, both Timothy and Titus were young men and young Christians who displayed great promise as Christian leaders. Dealing with women and older men would be a bit of a problem for a young church leader. Thus, Paul singled out these people for special attention.

Older people were held in great respect in terms of wisdom and example. Understandably, younger Christians tended to be a bit less moderate in their thinking than people with much more experience. Paul wanted to emphasize that we must count on the discretion and moderation of the older men to influence the more extreme tendencies of the younger counter-parts in the church. In this, he was saying that the physical expression of self-control grows out of a mental attitude of inclusiveness with others who might hold a differing position which was also biblical. Self-control is the acting out of a moderate frame of mind initiated by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.

It appears that Barnabas was a good example of this teaching. He was apparently older than Paul. It is certain that he had much more moderation when it came to dealing with the weaknesses of John Mark.

CONCLUSION

At one level or another, most of us have a view of what self-control is. A greater issue appears to be discovering how to add and increase this quality in our daily walk of faith. Our study has provided some helpful information.

1. Simply trying harder does not produce self-control. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told to try harder to increase our self-control.
2. Self-control is a "fruit of the Spirit." If self-control is to grow in our lives, it can only be as the Holy Spirit produces it in us. This should be a specific object of intense prayer.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

3. According to the apostle Peter, self-control is a part of a process of spiritual growth. Rather than a goal, self-control is a byproduct of what God does in our lives increasing faith, moral excellence and knowledge.

Thus, it is appropriate to conclude that if self-control is to grow and increase in our lives, it will only be as we increasingly open our hearts to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. He will instruct us concerning the way to express self-control in all that we do. He will work His power in us to do what we are helpless to accomplish on our own in terms of bringing every thought and action under His control and direction. This is in order to show a radical world the moderation of the mind of Christ.

STEADFASTNESS

There are three different root Greek words in the New Testament, which are translated “steadfast” in English versions.

I. **"Hedraios" (εδραιος)** - This word means "sedentary," "immovable," "settled." It is literally "to be seated," "moral firmness." It is used to describe one with a moral stance that cannot be swayed or deviated.

*But he who **stands firm** in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. 1 Corinthians 7:37*

In this passage, Paul taught the Corinthian Christians about the wisdom of not marrying when they were being persecuted for the cause of Christ.

The words "stands firm" are a translation of the word "steadfast." In this particular verse, Paul gave us an insight into the nature of steadfastness. Observe the way Paul worded this sentence. He said, “But he who stands firm in his heart...” Steadfastness is a quality of the heart. The heart, the deepest recesses of your will, is the place where one acts upon one’s choices and priorities. In this case, that action was to stand firm, to be absolutely immovable in his/her decision concerning marriage. It is to be so totally committed to your decision that you are unconditionally unwilling to abandon that decision to serve God.

It is not stubbornness. This unfortunate quality is simply an anger motivated determination not to change. Steadfastness, on the other hand, is a determination, motivated by faithfulness, to stand fast in one’s commitment to serve and obey God.

Paul continued with additional information concerning steadfastness. He said, “Being under no constraint but has authority over his own will.” This describes the atmosphere in which steadfastness is developed. This suggests, that steadfastness is not developed because Paul had no other choice than to stand firm. The apostle had every possible option open before him, but in spite of the seriousness of the choice, he was still able to stand firm against evil. Paul showed the depth of his steadfastness by exercising his authority over his will more completely than ever before.

Steadfastness is the choice to refuse to give in to evil because one wants to be faithful to God.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:58

In this paragraph, Paul talked about the mystery of the resurrection. His message was that because God gives us victory through Jesus Christ His Son, therefore, they should be steadfast. Paul identified three Christian qualities in this verse:

1. Steadfast
2. Immovable
3. "Always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Having listed these three together, Paul suggested that they work together. There is a synergism between them. They are more effective and productive together than they would be separately.

In this verse, Paul also points out another piece of information concerning steadfastness. Paul said, "Knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." The atmosphere of our daily Christian life is steadfastness, that choice to stand unequivocally in obedience to God. This quoted statement also tells us that this unswerving position, though it may appear futile and unproductive, really is not wasted, if we are "in the Lord."

David demonstrated this quality of spiritual growth on several occasions. In I Samuel 26:11, Saul was trying to kill David. In the course of events, David had the opportunity to kill Saul. Under overpowering pressure, David refused because Saul was God's anointed. It took immense steadfastness for David to resist the natural impulse to kill his enemy and to allow God to solve the problem and eventually place him on the throne of Israel.

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. Colossians 1:23

The passage in which this verse is found describes the greatness of Christ and challenges us to stand firm as His servants.

Observe that Paul said, "If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast." The conditional nature of this statement suggests that our steadfastness is not carved in stone. It is possible to abandon our steadfast stance. The "steadfastness" is the attitude in which one's continuing takes place. This is a conditional statement ("if (condition)..then..."(result). The condition is quite interesting. Paul did not describe a single act or event. He said, "If you continue..." The word "continue" is "epimeno" (ἐπιμένω) which means "to remain," "to persevere or abide." This describes an ongoing process. It is like saying "keep on keeping on."

II. "Bebaios" (βέβαιος)

This word means "to be firm and secure". it is "to maintain the boldness of our hope." Like "hedrios," "bebaios" describes a firm stand. There are some differences, however, between the two. Whereas "hedrios" focuses on the irrevocable choice to stand firm in obedience to God, "bebaios," is a firm stand to maintain and retain our boldness in hope. "Hedrios" deals with resisting evil. "bebaios," on the other hand, was a way of maintaining our boldness in the midst of serious opposition.

For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense. Hebrews 2:2

The word "unalterable" is "bebaios" (βέβαιος) which means "to make secure," "to be firm." It is "to confirm truth." It also was used to describe the authority and validity imparted or attributed to a person or thing. This is something or someone who is secure, unmoved by trauma. This very situation of immoveableness confirms the faith and dependability of that person's faith.

*For we have become partakers of Christ, if we **hold fast** the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; Hebrews 3:14*

STEADFASTNESS

This verse establishes a strong emphasis by repetition. The word “bebaios” means "steadfast." The word “hold fast” is "katecho" which means “to hold down,” “to seize upon,” “to withhold.” The verse would really read. We are made partakers of Christ, if we seize upon the beginning of our confidence unflinchingly unto the end.”

Paul spoke of being “partakers of Christ.” The word “partakers” is “metoche” (μετοχή) which means “to belong,” “to share.” This is a compound word:

1. meta - amid
2. eco - to hold, possessed with, relation.

It means "to relate with intimately." Paul said, "We relate intimately with Christ if we seize upon the beginning of our confidence, our relationship with God unflinchingly to the end." This means that steadfastness is essential to a belonging relationship with Christ.

This does not mean that we must be flawlessly steadfast in a moment. It does mean that day by day we must be increasingly steadfast in our unflinching commitment to Christ.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, here Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:19-20

This verse is part of a paragraph in which the author encourages the readers to a higher level of faithfulness in their Christian walk. In this verse, the author spoke of our hope as “sure and steadfast.” These two qualities are interesting.

1. **Sure** - “asphales” (ἀσφαλής). This compound word means “not fail.” We would translate it “secure,” “safe,” “totally certain.”
2. **“Steadfast”** - “bebaios” (βέβαιος) and means “to be stable,” “to be firm.”

You will note that they are somewhat related. This indicates that the author used these words together as a way of emphasizing the message he wanted to convey.

The author spoke of a special hope, born of God’s unchangeable oath, which is sure, absolutely secure and steadfast, totally irrevocable. The author followed this by describing the results - “which entereth into that within the veil where entered as a forerunner for us.”

This is beautiful. A hope completely secure and absolutely irrevocable enables us to enter into the intimate, immediate presence of God. It suggests that the quality of steadfastness is a vital ingredient in opening the way into a deep personal relationship with God.

Stephen was part of a mission so effective that "a great many priests were becoming obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7) When falsely accused before the Sanhedrin, he boldly proclaimed the truth he knew would infuriate the Council. Nevertheless, Stephen proclaimed the Gospel, rightly accusing the leaders of not keeping the law, of resisting the Holy Spirit and of being murderers of "the Righteous One." He knew it would cost him his life, and it did. Still, he remained steadfast.

III. "Histemi" (ἵστημι)

This word appears in several forms in the New Testament. Each of these forms are translated “steadfast”.

A. “stereos” - (στερεός) -

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

This word means "to be solid," "to be hard," "stiff." It is "to turn resolutely." It is what an army does when it establishes a line from which it will not retreat no matter what may happen.

And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51

Following the transfiguration, Jesus determined to go to Jerusalem to come to grips with the task the Father had established for him. Luke described this determination by the words "He resolutely set his face." Jesus knew that there were people and forces that would try to keep him from his appointed task. He turned resolutely toward what He knew would be pain and death, determined to do exactly as the Father commanded.

So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily. Acts 16:5

This chapter tells the story of Paul's Macedonian vision. Paul took the decisions of the Jerusalem Council to the churches near Macedonia. In using these decisions, the churches developed a firmness in their faith they never knew before.

This picture of steadfastness is a resolute determination which produces an intense new strength not previously present. You find the same picture in Colossians 2:5

*But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.
1 Peter 5:9*

In this chapter, Peter gave them a series of eleven exhortations. These deal with a variety of topics affecting the expression of our faith. In this verse, Peter urged his readers to resist the allure of the adversary. Observe the way Peter expressed his exhortation, "resist him firm in your faith."

The word "firm" "steadfast" describes the solidity with which we must totally reject the appeal of Satan.

Peter continued by saying "knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." This steadfastness is a quality of life that must be shared throughout the Christian community.

This is a military picture. Like a soldier, the Christian is prepared to resist the aggression of the forces of evil by placing his/her body in harms way if necessary to repel the devil's attempt to defeat the children of God. This is one implication of the quality of steadfastness in the Christian life.

B. "Stereoma" (στερέωμα)

This word is related to "stereos." It is primarily "a support," "a foundation." This word denotes strength.

For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:5

In this chapter, Paul talked about being built up in Christ while under intense opposition. In this verse Paul rejoiced in the orderliness and firmness of their faith in Christ. As you

STEADFASTNESS

can see in the text, there is a relationship between discipline or order and the stability of one's faith.

Steadfastness assumes the ongoing struggle between the forces of evil and the forces of righteousness. If there are no forces of evil, then the idea of steadfastness is unreasonable and illogical.

Tragically, most of us do not know if we are steadfast or not. This is because steadfastness is only discernable when one's faith is under severe attack. Most of us have not experienced an intense level of burning, blistering persecution.

If steadfastness comes only in the crucible of persecution and oppression, then how can we discover if we are steadfast or not? How can we intentionally grow in steadfastness if we do not encounter strong opposition?

Ultimately, only experience in the battle with evil will reveal our steadfastness. In the meantime, however, there is something that we can do. In daily living, we encounter very low levels of opposition in our encounter with evil forces and non-believers. There is a principle in the New Testament that is expressed in these terms:

"And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.'" Luke 19:17

If we stand fast in little things, it will strengthen us and prepare us to be totally steadfast when the time comes for that ultimate encounter with the forces of evil. Again, If we stand for the truth, no matter what others may think or do, our steadfastness will be tested and demonstrated to be real.

The church, in many generations, has demonstrated the quality of steadfastness. The church in China grew stronger under the devastating pressure of Communism. Out of the unspeakable brutality of the Roman arena grew a church with a steadfastness they never knew before. These are two examples, but there are many.

As pressures and opposition increase in the western world, we must determine before God that the steadfastness of our commitment will grow ever stronger.

CONCLUSION

We need to look back over the information we have accumulated in this part of the study.

1. I Corinthians 7:37 – Steadfastness is a quality of the heart.
2. I Corinthians 7:37 – It is not stubbornness.
3. I Corinthians 7:37 – Steadfastness is the choice to refuse to give in to evil because one wishes to be faithful to God.
4. I Corinthians 15:58 – Steadfast, immovable and "always abounding in the work of the Lord" work together in synergism.
5. I Corinthians 15:58 – Steadfastness is the atmosphere of a vital Christian life.
6. Colossians 1:23 – Steadfastness is not carved in stone. It can grow. It can also be abandoned.
7. Colossians 1:23 – Steadfastness is an ongoing process.
8. Hebrews 3:14 – Steadfastness is essential to a belonging relationship with Christ.
9. Hebrews 6:19, 20 – Steadfastness is a vital ingredient in opening the way into a deep personal relationship with God.
10. Acts 16:5 – Steadfastness produces an intense new strength not previously present.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

11. I Peter 5:9 – The steadfast person is prepared to resist evil forces by placing himself/herself in harm's way, if need be, to repel the devil's attempt to defeat God's people.
12. Colossians 2:5 – There is a relationship between discipline (steadfastness) and the stability of one's faith.
13. Colossians 2:5 – Steadfastness is only discernable when one's faith is under attack.

APPROVEDNESS

There are three different words in the New Testament that are translated "approved." Each contributes to our understanding of this quality.

I. "Dokeo" (δοκέω)

This word means "to think," "to be of good reputation," "to be acceptable," "to be tried." It was used to describe a giant timber that would stand under great pressure. It is the result of intense, convincing testing that demonstrates patient perseverance under fire.

For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. Romans 14:18

In this passage, Paul dealt with principles of conscience. Some could eat certain foods, but others could not. Some observe one day; others observe a different day. Paul stressed the fact that we will all give account of ourselves before God.

In verse 18, Paul used the word "dokeo" to describe a situation where we will all stand before two tribunals:

- a. We will give account of our lives before God.
- b. People will carefully watch our lives to see if we really stand the test of intense opposition.

Notice that the terms "acceptable" and "approved" are used together and tied together by the word "and." This identifies a special relationship. When the way one lives is acceptable or well pleasing to God; it can also approve that person to those around him or her.

Again, in Romans, Paul wrote:

Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Romans 16:10

Paul spoke of Apelles as "approved in Christ." This means much more than being forgiven of our sins. "Approved in Christ" refers to that experience of standing firm in our faith under intense opposition and persecution. Paul used this word again in I Corinthians:

For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you. 1 Corinthians 11:19

Some point to this verse to prove that people are chosen to be heretics. Paul's message is that the vast difference between those approved and those unapproved helps us identify those who are approved among us.

In this instance, Paul used the word "approved" to describe a situation in which God carefully examines the way we live our lives. Because one stands firm, God approves of his or her life.

In II Timothy, Paul used this word in a slightly different way.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

Paul instructed his young protege to serve with intensity. One might miss Paul's intent because of the use of the word "diligent." This word is "spoudadzo" (σπουδάζω) and de-

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

scribes "earnestness," "zeal." In the king James Version the word is "study." It is to pursue our ministry with great diligence. Here approvedness does not refer to our response to persecution and suffering. Paul suggested that God affirms the ministry of those who diligently and zealously pursue the task to which He called them. Here approvedness is God's affirming evaluation and response to who we are and how we serve.

Paul gives us another piece of information about the word "approved."

Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we should appear unapproved. 2 Corinthians 13:7

Paul's message is crucial. Like much of spiritual growth, approvedness is not a goal for a life, but rather the byproduct of faithful service. This is extremely important.

II. "Sunistemi" (συνίστημι)

This is a compound word that is composed as follows:

- a. Sun – with
- b. Histemi – to stand

This word is found only in the writings of Paul in 2 Corinthians and Romans. It means, "to commend."

For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. 2 Corinthians 7:11

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul had to chastise these Christians for the unchrist-like conduct that occurred in the church. Here, he described the real nature of their repentance – he gave eight illustrations of their life-change that accompanied their sorrow for sin. This is real repentance. As the definition of "approvedness" indicates, they so completely changed their lifestyle that it approved them, it demonstrated that they were purifying their lives with God's help.

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? I am speaking in human terms. Romans 3:5

In Romans 3, Paul answered the outlandish questions that some might ask. This question was based on the premise that our words and actions demonstrate the inner quality of our lives. The question would be an attempt to excuse disobedient living because it would focus attention on the mercy and righteousness of God. The word "demonstrates" is a translation of the word "sunistemi." Paul, in this instance, expands our understanding of approvedness. It is a demonstration of the inner quality of Godlikeness in physical, everyday life. Though the verbal witness of the early church was effective, repeatedly, the early church witness often was convincing because of the things they did and the way they did them.

This use of the word "approvedness" describes the actions of a Christian life that meet with the approval of God and the understanding of those who do not believe.

APPROVEDNESS

III. Apodeiknumi (ἀποδείκνυμι)

This is a compound word and is made up as follows:

- a. Apo – from or away
- b. Deiknuo – to show

This word means, "to demonstrate," "to exhibit," "to accredit," "to set forth."

This word is used in the book of Acts where Luke wrote,

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—Acts 2:22

The word translated "attested" is "apodeiknumi" (ἀποδείκνυμι). Acts chapter two records Peter's powerful sermon at Pentecost. According to Peter's statement in this text, Jesus was approved of God to this international audience by three things:

- a. Mighty works
- b. Wonders
- c. "Signs which God did by Him in your midst."

Notice that nothing is said about His words or sermons. Peter suggested that the approvedness of Jesus was demonstrable. Some of them had seen Jesus do mighty works like the feeding of the 5,000. They had observed the wonders that Jesus performed when He healed the leper and restored the sight of the blind man. There were people present who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. Some in this crowd had been present when Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead as they carried his body to its burial. None of this was just words. These were actions to which first-hand observers could bear witness.

Sometimes, when the church is not at its best, our witness is more in our words than in the demonstrable difference in our conduct and works that people can observe and document. We are called upon to live our lives in such a way that the quality of our character and the nature of our work for God will be such that both God and people can approve.

The question is, how can we do this? The answer is simple, but difficult. Jesus by both the quality of His life and the power of His actions was approved of God to these people. We will be "approved" when the quality of our character though not as holy as His still moves in that direction. We will be approved when our faith increasingly expects God to keep His word and do greater things than have been done in the past. It will be neither instantaneous nor complete. It will be a process of growth. Like all spiritual growth, our approvedness will increase as we increasingly become like our Lord.

CONCLUSION

1. I Corinthians 11:19 – Approvedness becomes obvious when factions develop within the body.
2. I Corinthians 11:19 – Approvedness comes from God.
3. II Timothy 2:15 – Our contribution to approvedness is diligence and zeal as we seek to grow in grace.
4. II Corinthians 13:7 – Approvedness is not a goal. It is a byproduct of faithful service. This is important when a majority of the people in the church are totally uninvolved in faithful service.
5. II Corinthians 7:11 – Approvedness follows godly sorrow and eager zeal to allow God to change our lives.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

6. Romans 3:5 – Approvedness is an inner quality of life expressed in godly actions that meet with the approval of God.
7. Acts 2:22 – Jesus was "approved" by God to Israel by miracles, wonders and signs.
8. Acts 2:22 – Approvedness is demonstrable.
9. Acts 2:22 – Approvedness is easy for the world to see when the actions accurately display the inner life quality.

BLAMELESS

There are five different Greek words that are translated "blameless" in our translations. They are:

- a. "Anegkletos" (ἀνέγκλητος)
- b. "Anaitios" (ἀναίτιος)
- c. "Amomos" (ἄμωμος)
- d. "Amemptos" (ἄμεμπτος)
- e. "Antilego" (ἀντίλεγω)

There is a subtle difference between being "unblemished" and being "unblamable."

- a. Unblemished signifies that there is no blemish for which one might be called to question. Jesus was unblemished. He could honestly say, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46) He was sinless.
- b. Blameless or unblamable – signifies that there is nothing on the record for which one might be called into question. It does not suggest that the person is guiltless. It simply suggests that there is nothing on the record for which the person might be prosecuted.

This is a difficult concept for many Christians because they are keenly aware of their past sins. In their minds, being blameless suggests that the person never did anything for which they could be blamed. They are certain that only Jesus could fit that situation. This is not what the idea of blamelessness suggests.

I. "Anegkletos" (ἀνέγκλητος)

This is a legal term. It signifies that for which a person cannot be called to account. It is that for which one cannot be charged. The word does not suggest that the person is flawless. It is not just that one is acquitted of the charge. It insists that there cannot even be a charge. This is the idea behind our justification. Though there is no doubt of our past guilt, we stand before God as though we had never sinned. The record is clean and cannot be challenged.

Who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:8

Paul wrote this verse to Corinthian Christians who came out of a debauched, idolatrous culture. The list of their past sins was lengthy. They are, however, recipients of the grace of God in redemption. In this redemption, God has wiped the slate clean. It is not just that God has forgiven the past sins. Those sins are not on the record. There is no charge that can be made. They are no longer guilty of any crime. In the sight of God, they never committed the long list of sins. They are blameless. Jesus, according to this passage, is the one who confirms our blamelessness.

And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. 1 Timothy 3:10

The words "beyond reproach" are a translation of the Greek word "anegkletos." This word for blameless is used in a different way here than it was in I Corinthians 1:8.

- a. In I Cor. 1:8, it was used to describe what God does to cancel the guilt of the past, our lifestyle prior to salvation. This is getting the slate clean.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

- b. In I Timothy 3:10, Paul talked about keeping the slate clean after God wiped away our guilt of the past.

In this passage, Paul was talking about the requirements for being a deacon in the church. He said that the deacon needed to be tested to make sure that his past sins had been forgiven and that he has lived a life beyond blame; a lifestyle in grace against which no one could make a charge of disobedience. This also indicates that blamelessness can be demonstrated or identified.

Namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, Titus 1:6, 7

Paul wrote to Titus to advise him of the qualities he must seek as he chose overseers in the local churches for which he was responsible. In these verses, Paul described, at least in part, what being "above reproach" involves. You will remember that the word translated "above reproach" is really "blameless." Whatever else is involved in being "above reproach" or "blameless" includes bringing up children who are believers. It involves living a life of no rebellion, no loose-living, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain.

But hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, Titus 1:8

Observe that Paul begins this verse with the word "but." This indicates that he was pursuing a contrast. The word "blameless" does not appear in this verse, but this is a description of what is involved in being blameless.

Again, Paul was saying, not only that God had forgiven in these areas, but the overseer must live his life in Christ after forgiveness so that no such charge could be placed against him.

II. "Anaitios" (ἀναίτιος)

This word literally means "not the cause," "to be totally innocent," "to be guiltless." The issue here is that the person is innocent. It is not that he did something wrong and was then forgiven.

"Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent?" Matthew 12:5

Jesus was engrossed in debate with the Pharisees because His disciples picked and ate grain on the Sabbath. In irony Jesus said, "Have you not read in the law..." He referred to the fact that on the Sabbath priests break the Sabbath (perform work) and are "innocent." This word "blameless" identifies a specific situation. Technically, the priests violated the letter of the Law – They worked on a day when no work was to be performed. These priests are not just **considered** innocent; they **are** innocent. By a careful move, Jesus pointed out an Old Testament situation where the spirit of the Law superceded the letter of the Law.

BLAMELESS

We must keep in mind that in each observation of a word meaning "blameless," we are dealing with the spirit of the Law, not the letter.

III. "Amomos" (ἀμωμος)

This word means "to be unblemished," "to be without blame," "to be faultless," "to be without any shortcoming." Though Jesus was blamed for many things, he was completely faultless.

Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, II Peter 3:14

Peter was reporting to these believers concerning the coming of a new heaven and a new earth "in which righteousness dwells." In view of this promise of God, Peter urged them to be spotless and without blemish in Christ.

The idea of being "spotless and without blemish" comes from the Old Testament instructions concerning the animal sacrifice. This animal must be without flaw of any kind. There could be no spot on the coat, no sickness, no broken or ill-formed bones. The animal must be in excellent health and appearance.

This gives us an insight into the meaning of blameless. It is to be without flaw; without anything that would be a blemish on one's character. We will deal with the practical application of this idea shortly.

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. Ephesians 1:4

These young Christians were converted out of a debauched, idolatrous culture where the fertility goddess, Diana, was worshipped in orgies. Paul described their privileged position in Christ. He chose us in love, even before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless. Christ's intention for His bride, the church, is that we should be holy – pure - and set apart exclusively for Him, and blameless – without any shortcoming. This sounds a great deal like flawless perfection. Only Jesus can be flawlessly perfect. In the New Testament the word "perfect" does not mean without mistake, but complete. It is to be what God expects of us at this moment. Spiritual growth is an ongoing process, not an achievement. To be blameless is to be increasingly without character blemish, but never absolutely so this side of glory. In our text, the words "to be" are a translation of the word "einai" (εἶναι) which is a Present Active Infinitive form. This form suggests action that begins and does not cease. We are to be holy and blameless and never stop being holy and blameless.

That He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. Ephesians 5:27

Paul, in this passage, continued to teach these Ephesian believers how to live a Christian life in an idolatrous culture. Paul paralleled the relationship of the church to the Lord with a marriage relationship. As a bride comes to her groom meticulously beautiful, so the church comes to her Lord with past sins forgiven and increasingly free of every flaw of character. The bride will not be perfect until promoted to her heavenly home, but there will be an observable transformation that enables her to become increasingly like her Lord.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

The form of the Greek words translated, "that we should be holy and blameless..." is a Present Active Subjunctive. One might translate these words, "We should be holy and blameless and continually be holy and blameless." This is not a change we make by trying harder. It is a work of love God continues to accomplish as we seek His help to be more like Him.

One might wonder how we get the idea of continuous action in this case. The words "be holy and blameless" are in the Present Active Subjunctive form. When the subjunctive is in the present form it suggests ongoing, repeated action.

That you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, Philippians 2:15

The Philippian church had experienced severe division and disturbed relationships between its members. Paul used the example of Jesus; the well known "kenosis passage," Philippians 2:1-11, to illustrate the mental attitude that breaks down such divisive barriers. Paul described an attitude of "do all things without grumbling or disputing" as evidence of innocence and blamelessness. A life free of grumbling and disputing is one ingredient in blamelessness. Blamelessness will always portray us in contrast with the worldly community in which we reside.

Yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— Colossians 1:22

In this verse, Paul used two words, both of which are sometimes translated "blameless." The word here translated "blameless" is "amomos" and the word translated "beyond reproach" is "anegkletous," which we observed earlier. The use of two similar words to describe a single situation almost always accomplishes two things:

1. It adds strong emphasis.
2. Because similar words are slightly different from each other, their use together tends to broaden and deepen the understanding of the issue at hand. That is exactly the case here.

The use of the word "and" ("kai" in Greek) following the words "holy" and "blameless" adds additional emphasis and suggests the equality and inseparability of the three qualities. Paul suggested that it is as necessary to be holy as it is to be blameless. It is as necessary to be "beyond reproach" as it is to be holy and blameless.

Paul used the image of the human body as a parallel for the church. He then described how Jesus sacrificed Himself in order to claim us for Himself, a church that really is without blame.

And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. I Thessalonians 3:12, 13

Paul wrote an impassioned letter to the church at Thessalonica. He was lonesome, anxious to see them. In verses 12 and 13, Paul identified his prayer for them. In so doing, he presented several pieces of information about blamelessness.

BLAMELESS

1. Blamelessness requires an intense expression of selfless love between members of the body of Christ, the church.
2. This agape love, as indicated in the previous volume, is a uniquely Christian expression. Blamelessness, therefore, must also be a uniquely Christian experience.
3. Our blamelessness exists within the confines of a life of "holiness before our God." This means at least two things:
 - a. We are set apart for God, just as the Old Testament sacrifice was set apart, available for no other use.
 - b. We are to be free from contamination or pollution in terms of our relationship to God. This reinforces the idea that blamelessness is a uniquely Christian experience.
4. Blamelessness is not an isolated experience for here and now. The purpose or direction of blamelessness is our preparation to spend eternity in the presence of Christ.

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? Hebrews 9:14

In Hebrews chapters 5-10, the author focuses his attention on the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus over the Aaronic priesthood. In order to accomplish this task, he used the image of the Old Testament sacrifice to make his point.

The sacrificial animal had to be an unblemished specimen. It had to be the first-born of its mother. There could be no blemish on the coat of this lamb. It could not be a sickly animal. It could have no broken bones. It could not be the "runt" of the flock.

In a spiritual sense, the permanent sacrifice for our sins had to be blameless in every respect. It is this blamelessness of our sacrifice that assures us that our conscience is cleansed from dead works and we are enabled to serve God.

In this instance, the word translated "blameless" suggests the sinlessness of our eternal sacrifice, Jesus Christ. We might add, our own sacrifice will never be sufficient. You will find this same emphasis in I Peter 1:19

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, Jude 24

The author closes this brief epistle with a beautiful benediction. The "Him" in this verse is Jesus. The author identified two things that Jesus does:

- a. "Keep you from stumbling" – stumbling is a description of returning to the sinful ways of the past. Jesus is able to keep us from doing this.
- b. Present us to His Father without blemish. This is a wedding picture where the groom presents his bride to his father. Jesus is able to present us to His Father without any shortcoming. This is not because we are flawless, but because of His mercy and grace, we stand in His righteousness, not our own.

And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless. Revelation 14:5

This is the picture of the 144,000 singing before the heavenly throne. In verses four and five, John described this host. He said these things about them:

- a. They are not defiled with women.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

- b. They kept themselves chaste.
- c. They follow the Lamb.
- d. They were purchased from among men – First fruits to God.
- e. There was no lie in their mouth.
- f. They are blameless.

The first five descriptive statements identify what John meant by saying, "they are blameless." In summary form, John said these people are pure and possessed of integrity. This is at least part of what he meant by "blameless."

If you look carefully at the first paragraph, in chapter 14, you will notice that verses 1-3 begin with the word "kai" "and." You will also notice that verse four does not begin with the word "and," but verse five picks up this trend again. This often suggests that the verse which does not begin with "and" is a commentary by the author. If you read verse three and then verse five, it is as though it should immediately follow verse three. It seems clear that verse four is such a commentary or explanation. This adds additional emphasis for verse five. Verses three and five describe for us what blameless means in this situation.

IV. "Amemptos" (ἀμειπτος)

This is a compound word. Very often authors will use a compound word for purposes of emphasis. That appears to be the case with this word. It means "to find no fault" "to be irrefragable," "to be faultless," "to be unblamable." This suggests that it was not just that they did not find fault, but that there was no fault to find.

And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. Luke 1:6

Luke gave a descriptive picture of the spiritual life of Elizabeth and Zecharias. What a recommendation! Many people appear to be righteous in the sight of other people. They may or may not be so. Elizabeth and Zacharias were righteous in the sight of God.

The verse also says that they "walked blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements (ordinances) of the Lord." In the two statements in this verse, Luke has pointed out that in the eyes of both God and other people, Elizabeth and Zecharias lived in such a way that no one could accuse them of anything. That is really what this word means by being blameless. This is quite surprising because people of that day believed that if a couple were childless, this was a punishment from God for their terrible sins.

That you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, Philippians 2:15

In this verse, both the word "amomos" "above reproach" and "amemptos" "blameless" are used. It is appropriate to ask the question, "Why did Paul feel it was necessary to use two words that are both sometimes translated "blameless?" Again,

- a. "Amemptos" means "without blame," "faultless," "irrefragable." It does not suggest that the person was always faultless.
- b. "Amomos," however, means "to be unblemished," "to be without any shortcoming." This is what Jesus meant when he said, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin." (John 8:46)

BLAMELESS

Having used the life of Jesus as an example, Paul gave these Philippian Christians a list of exhortations describing the way they should live a holy life in a debauched community. He taught them that they must demonstrate that they are "blameless," "innocent" and "above reproach" to a community that was "crooked and perverse."

Paul suggested that a life void of "grumbling and disputing;" a life void of "selfishness and empty conceit;" "a life of humility and concern for others" is at least part of what makes up a life that is "blameless," and "above reproach."

Paul, in this verse, speaks of being "children of God." This is another instance where the Scriptures speak of these qualities of spiritual growth as uniquely Christian in nature.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. Philippians 3:6

The Philippian epistle was written to a group of Christians who were undergoing severe persecution and who did not get along well with each other. In the present passage, Paul defended his apostleship by describing how ceremonially righteous he had been before he came to know Christ.

Paul had just described the "true" or "spiritual" circumcision. Part of this description is that the true circumcision does three things:

1. They worship by the Spirit of God.
2. They boast only in Christ Jesus.
3. They do not trust in the flesh.

Paul used himself as an illustration of one who had a lot in his life that seemed to make it worth while to trust in the flesh. He described his rich Jewish heritage of which every Jew would be justly proud. Among these claims was the fact that concerning righteousness pertaining to the Law, he was "amemptos" "without blame." Paul did not claim to be divinely perfect. He did claim that there was nothing his fellow Jews could possibly point to in his life for which He was blamable.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I Thessalonians 5:23

This is the beginning of Paul's benediction at the close of the epistle. In this beautiful prayer, Paul identified several pieces of information concerning blamelessness:

1. In this verse, Paul made two basic requests:
 - a. "The God of peace sanctify you entirely."
 - b. "May your spirit, soul and body be preserved completely without blame."This tells us that blamelessness touches every part of our being – spirit, soul and body.

The way the sentence is written suggests that the two requests are equally important and vitally linked to each other. The blamelessness is a part of this entire sanctification. In the same way, sanctification is the means by which God produces this blamelessness in us.

2. This is something God does, not something that we do. God sanctifies entirely. He completely preserves the believer blamelessly at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

3. This blamelessness is an ongoing process, not an instantaneous act. Paul spoke of this being true "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This has not come to pass even now.

V. "Antilego" (ἀντίλεγω)

This word means "to speak against," "to dispute," "to gainsay." As you look at these descriptive statements, you can see that the word identifies a situation where one person accuses against another. It is a situation where such accusations are unfounded. That is the reason our version translates the word "above reproach." Jesus was accused of many things, but none of these were valid. It is interesting that this form was used only by Paul in the Pastoral Epistles.

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, I Timothy 3:2

In this verse, Paul gave a list of qualifications a man must possess if he is to serve in the office of elder. It is interesting that the first quality on the list is "above reproach." This does not mean that the elder/overseer must be divinely flawless. Only Jesus is capable of that level of obedience. It does mean that though people may make allegations against him, not one of them will prove to be true. In New Testament writing, a list tends to be placed in the order of their importance. Though every quality Paul mentioned in 3:1-7 is very important, still being "above reproach" is at least as important as the other qualities and perhaps more so.

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. I Timothy 5:3-7

In this paragraph, Paul gave instructions concerning women who were truly widowed and destitute. Paul warned these widows against making "wanton pleasure" or "voluptuous living" a priority of life. Such a life of selfish pleasure would tend to lead these women astray.

Paul said, "Prescribe these things..." (I Timothy 5:7) He did not specify which things he had in mind. Everything up to verse seven is a part of the same paragraph. One would assume that he intended to include at least the instructions given in 5:1-6 if not all the instructions included in the paragraph, 5:1-16.

Whatever his intent may have been, there are a number of practical and social instructions included in the paragraph. It would appear that he was saying that "above reproach" involves not only obedience to the laws of God, but their practical responsibilities to family and community as well.

CONCLUSION

As in most other cases, our temptation is to try to become blameless by strategy and trying harder. We are unable to accomplish this.

BLAMELESS

Blamelessness is the product of choosing to live in obedience to the commands of Jesus. Because blamelessness is a process, we can become increasingly blameless as we recognize our inability to accomplish this on our own and invite the Lord to work this purifying process in us one day at a time. It is a process, not an action.

We need to study what we have seen in this review of the verses concerning blamelessness.

1. It does not mean divinely flawless.
2. I Cor. 1:8 – Jesus is the one who confirms our blamelessness, not other people.
3. I Tim. 3:10 – Blamelessness can be demonstrated in human interaction and experience.
4. Titus 1:6, 7 – Blamelessness is not identified by any single act or quality. It involves a host of qualities i.e. – "Not rebellious, not self willed, not quick tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain."
5. Matthew 12:5 – It is to be innocent.
6. II Peter 3:14 – It is to be without flaw.
7. Ephesians 1:4 – It is an ongoing process, not an achievement.
8. Ephesians 1:4 – It is Christ's intention that the church should be pure, without shortcoming.
9. Ephesians 5:27 – Blamelessness is not achieved by trying harder. It is a work of love that God continues to accomplish in us as we seek His help to be more like Him.
10. Philippians 2:15 – The ingredients of blamelessness include a life steeped in humility; unlike the world around us.
11. Colossians 1:22 – We are made blameless and beyond reproach by Christ.
12. I Thessalonians 3:12, 13 – Blamelessness requires selfless love between members of the body of Christ.
 - a. It is a uniquely Christian expression.
 - b. It exists within the confines of a life of holiness before our God.
 - c. The purpose of blamelessness is preparation to spend eternity in Christ's presence.
13. Jude 24 – It is to stand before God without any shortcoming, not because we are perfect, but because of God's mercy and grace.
14. Revelation 14:5 – Blamelessness includes being pure and honest.
15. Luke 1:6 – It is to be, in the eyes of God and others, so no one could accuse of error.
16. Philippians 2:15 – It is found in the children of God.
17. I Thessalonians 5:23 – It is a process that God works in us, not an instantaneous act.
18. I Timothy 3:2 – Blamelessness is as important in the life of an overseer as temperance, prudence, respectability, hospitable, and the ability to teach.
19. I Timothy 5:7 – Blamelessness applies to both the spiritual (keeping the law, etc) and the cultural – giving care to widows, etc.

Again, we need to stress the fact that many of the qualities of spiritual growth usually appear in the Present Indicative Active form. This describes ongoing action. This is not always the case with blamelessness. This is because blamelessness is a condition or situation that is both produced and goes on being produced, all at the same time. This understanding is essential if one would properly understand what blamelessness means.

CONTENTMENT

Two related New Testament words are translated "content" or "contented."

I. "Arkeo" (ἀρκέω)

This word originally meant "to raise a barrier," "to ward off." Eventually it came to mean "to be satisfactory," "to be content," "to be enough," "to suffice," "to be sufficient." It is related to the word "airo" (ἄιρω) which was used to describe "the expiation of sin," "the removal of error."

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," Hebrews 13:5

Contentment, in this verse, is posed as the opposite of covetousness. This is not surprising, since one of the ten commandments identifies a number of persons and areas God's people should not covet.

The verse suggests that the basis for contentment is the awareness that God will never desert or forsake us. God's presence and provision are the basis of contentment. This assumes that God is more important to the believer than any list of things one might wish to possess. God's presence produces contentment.

The New Testament word for "covet" is "epithumeo" (ἐπιθυμέω) and means "to set your heart upon," "to long for rightfully or otherwise," "to lust after." If "contentment" is the opposite of coveting, then it would be to sense no burning need for that which one does not have. Observe that the author wrote, "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have..." Thus, coveting and contentment are both qualities of character. It is not so much specific acts one performs, but rather the quality of the character which will express itself in covetous actions, words and desires. Again, contentment is a quality of character that expresses itself in actions, words and desires that feel no need to be preoccupied with that which one does not have. Contentment does not find its worth or discover its meaning in things it might possess. Contentment knows its worth with or without things.

Luke tells us that the soldiers questioned Jesus about their situation. Jesus responded to their question.

And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, "And what shall we do?" And He said to them, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." Luke 3:14

This is an interesting response. Each of the three instructions that Jesus gave dealt with areas where the soldiers were known to be extreme and abusive in their conduct against the Jews. Their discontent with their wages expressed itself in their actions that extorted money and possessions from helpless people in the community. Here, again, the idea of contentment has the element of being free from the bondage of lusting for things. This lusting for things grows out of the mistaken notion that things and money can bring a sense of worth and fulfillment to an otherwise meaningless life. Thus, contentment is the awareness of one's value before God that negates the drive to possess.

Paul wrote to Timothy:

"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." I Timothy 6:8

Again, the possession of more than food and clothing is not wrong. We must remember the situation out of which Paul spoke. In that day, the possession of food, clothing and shelter was all that a person needed to survive as a viable part of society. Though this is still true in some parts of the world, it is not the case where most of us live.

In this passage, Paul was admonishing his young protege concerning the tendency of coveting to detract from one's ministry. This was Paul's way of urging Timothy to see that his first priority must be obedience to the call of God to ministry. Everything else must be less important than this. He was not saying that things were evil. He was saying that lusting for things, as a priority in life, can seriously detract from the priority of ministry and service to God. Again, contentment assumes that the most important thing in life is the presence of God and our opportunity to please and serve Him.

II. "Autarkeia" (αὐτάρκεια)

This is a compound word that is made up as follows:

- a. Autos – self
- b. Arkeo – sufficient

It is "to be content," "to show competence," "to experience sufficiency." It is interesting that the word that describes self-sufficiency is used to describe contentment. It is difficult to trace the reasons for the development of words in most any language. In this case, however, it might not be that difficult. It appears that it is saying that there is a link between self-sufficiency and contentment. The inner strength that understands one's own worth is a basic ingredient in contentment. As someone has said, "contentment is not to have everything, but to enjoy what you have." It is the ability to not panic even though you do not have everything. It is the ability to be comfortable not possessing everything that others possess because one is at ease with his or her own ability, competence and worth. It is the ability to feel cared for even though others have things you do not have; the ability to not need everything in order to be content and secure.

To the Philippian Christians Paul wrote,

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Philippians 4:11

Contentment is not measured by the extent of one's list of possessions. Neither is it measured by the extent of one's comfort. It is an attitude of the heart toward life and the values that give life meaning.

It is not that Paul thought of things as evil; they are not. He himself had possessed a great deal and experienced a high level of luxury as a leading Pharisee. Paul had simply learned that things were not the measuring stick in life. If his situation was one of abundance, he knew how to use that abundance to advance his ministry and not let it distract him from his primary objective. On the other hand, if his situation was meager, he knew how to continue to focus on the priority of serving God and be at peace with the little with which he was surrounded. It all had to do with the level of his focus on his priority - serving God with every fiber of his being.

There are many people whose financial situation enables them to have anything they might want. They have it all, but do not have contentment. Again, there are many people,

CONTENTMENT

like Mother Theresa, who have almost nothing to call their own. However, their level of contentment is so high it nearly defies measurement.

In I Timothy chapter six, Paul dealt with his protege about the dangers of focusing on money and things. In that passage he said,

But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. I Timothy 6:6

There are two pieces to Paul's message about things that represent gain in this verse.

- a. **Godliness** – this is an intense drive to be and do what we learn in Scripture that God does. This is always good.
- b. **Contentment** – this is being at ease concerning our competency and sufficiency that keeps all things in perspective behind the priority of life – serving and pleasing God.

This statement gives us several more pieces of information concerning contentment. Contentment works in concert with godliness in the drive to serve God as the priority of life. On the other hand, godliness gives a qualitative element to the contentment we are admonished to cultivate. When these two qualities work in concert, the result is one of great gain.

Godliness involves doing, saying and thinking as God does, says and thinks, but it is more. Godliness has an attitude called contentment. Without this attitude, godliness is not complete. Contentment is one of the ingredients that makes godlike actions, words and thoughts godly. It is to be so much at peace because God is the central priority of our lives that nothing else is as important as His presence.

If one is to increase in contentment, then this effort will be enhanced by a growing level of godliness in the everyday aspects of life. Again, the level of one's godliness will be enhanced by the steady growth in contentment experienced in the person's life.

We all know sour saints who would not steal or cheat because God forbids it. However, they grumble incessantly because non-Christians steal and cheat them, but their faith will not allow them to reciprocate. This is the opposite of contentment. Contentment is one of the qualities of character that make godliness meaningful.

So, how does one increase in contentment? Reflect upon the verses we have studied in this chapter. As one increases in godly actions, words and thoughts, so will he or she increase in contentment. The two qualities of character are linked together.

We must make a determined, intentional effort to focus upon God as the central priority of life. It is to ask, in every decision, in what way will this course of action make Jesus Christ more completely the central focus of my being than ever before?

One must remember that spiritual growth is something that God does in our lives, not the result of extra-ordinary effort to change on our part. We must have the will to change. We must also realize that only God can change a life.

It is a fair assumption that the more one treasures the presence of God, the less will be one's lusting for things. This does not suggest that things are evil. It does suggest that unless they are kept in their proper priority they will lead to evil. This is what Paul meant when he said, in I Timothy, "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil..." It is the key to living a life of contentment in a world filled with discontent.

It is important to review what we have learned about contentment.

1. Hebrews 13:5 – Contentment is the opposite of covetousness.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

2. Hebrews 13:5 – The basis of contentment is the awareness that God will never desert us.
3. Hebrews 13:5 – Contentment grows out of the conviction that God is present and provident.
4. Hebrews 13:5 – God must be more important to the contented than any list of things they may desire.
5. Hebrews 13:5 – Contentment is the opposite of coveting. Thus, it is to sense no burning need for that which one does not have.
6. Hebrews 13:5 – Contentment is a quality of character.
7. Hebrews 13:5 – Contentment does not find its worth or discover its meaning in things it might possess.
8. Luke 3:14 – It is being free from the bondage of lusting for things because God is one's first priority.
9. I Timothy 6:8 – Contentment assumes that the most important thing in life is the presence of God and our opportunity to please and serve Him.
10. There is a link between self-sufficiency and contentment.
11. Contentment is not to have everything, but to enjoy what you have.
12. Philippians 4:11 – Contentment is not measured by the extent of one's list of possessions or comfort.
13. Philippians 4:11 – Contentment is an attitude of the heart.
14. I Timothy 6:6 – There is a link between godliness and contentment.
15. I Timothy 6:6 – Godliness gives a qualitative element to one's contentment.
16. I Timothy 6:6 – Contentment is the attitude of godliness.
17. I Timothy 6:6 – Contentment grows as we focus upon God.
18. I Timothy 6:6 – We differ from the world. We are called to a life of contentment in a world filled with discontent.

GUILILESS

Occasionally, the meaning of two words is so much alike that one wonders if they are identical. These words, however, express nearly the same meaning not an identical one. For clarity's sake, in such instances, one must carefully delineate the ways in which the two words differ; the ways in which they are similar. Guileless is one such word. It is similar to "purity," but not identical.

There are three different words that are translated "without guile" or "no guile" in the New Testament. Look at the definitions of each one.

a. "Adolos" (ἄδολος)

This is a compound word:

1. "A" – means not
2. "dolos" – "to decoy," "to trick," "to bait," "to be crafty," "to be deceitful," "to use subtly."
3. This word is sometimes translated "sincere," "unadulterated."

b. "Akakos" (ἄκακος)

This word means "to be without evil," "to be simple," "to be guileless," "to be unsuspecting," "to be innocent," "to be free from the admixture of evil."

c. "Akeraios" (ἀκέραιος)

This word literally means "unmixed," "innocent," "the absence of foreign substance," "to be pure," "to be sincere," "to be harmless," "the simplicity of a single eye," "discerning what is evil so as to choose only what glorifies God."

As you look back over these definitions, you will observe that each has some similarity to the others, but each one, also, has a distinguishing characteristic. This is more evident if you look at the following table.

THE WORD	THE SIMILARITIES	THE UNIQUENESS
"Adolos"	Sincere, unadulterated	Not crafty, not deceitful, not a decoy
"Akakos"	Free from admixture	Simple, unsuspecting innocent
"Akeraios"	Absence of foreign mixture, to be pure	Discerning what is evil so as to choose only what glorifies God.

As you review these definitive characteristics, you observe that the common thread in all three words is the freedom from foreign mixture. There is, however, a certain uniqueness, a subtle emphasis in the meaning of each word.

Now, if you look at the meaning of "purity of heart" or "holy," you will observe that both words carry the idea of "purity" "freedom from admixture." You will notice this presence in the above table. There is, however, a uniqueness to these words as well.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

- a. **"Holy"** – has the unique emphasis on being set apart for God. Again, the freedom from foreign mixture is the nuance similar to guileless.
- b. **"Pure"** – The unique element here is the idea of cleansing. This has to do with the similarity to guileless in that it is cleansing which removes the foreign mixture.

I. **"Dolos" (δόλος)**

The root of this word means "to decoy," or "to be a decoy," "to be crafty," "to be deceitful," "to use a trick," "to bait someone," "to use subtlety."

You will note that "dolos" and "adolos" are quite similar. The meaning is essentially the same. The difference between the two is that "dolos" has the negative "not" as a separate word where "adolos" uses the "a" at the beginning of the word to indicate that it is a negative form. "Dolos" would be the stronger, more emphatic of the two forms.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" John 1:47

In the previous paragraph, 1:35-42, Philip introduced Peter to Jesus. Philip told Nathanael they had found the Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael was shocked and used the common saying, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Rather than argue the point, Philip invited Nathanael to "come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, He said, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" In this brief sentence, Jesus provided some interesting information about being without guile:

- a. The exclamatory way in which Jesus spoke suggests that a guileless Hebrew, even in that day, was most unusual. It seems certain He would have to say the same about your nationality and mine.
- b. Guilelessness is possible for a human being. It is a divine characteristic, but this does not exclude it from being possible in the life of a human being.
- c. The way Jesus spoke suggests a quality of life at a level that is well above what one would anticipate in the lives of other individuals.
- d. The word Jesus used, with the separate word to indicate a negative idea, makes this a very emphatic statement.
- e. Again, the word Jesus used, "dolos" indicates that Jesus saw Nathanael as a person who was sincere – exactly what he appeared to be. Nathanael was a transparent individual in his personality. He had no reason or need to present himself in such a way as to deceive others. He could be himself without fear of what others might say or think.

But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? 2 Corinthians 12:16, 17

On occasion, Paul dealt with a very serious subject by speaking in jest. This verse is one such instance. He spoke of the way he tried not to be a financial burden to the Corinthian church. Though the Philippian church had been financially supportive of Paul's ministry, the Corinthian church had not. In Paul's statement of jest, however, he gave us insight into the nature of guile and guilelessness.

- a. Guile, deception, can be used by the crafty to take advantage of the unsuspecting.

GUILELESS

- b. To be guileless, therefore, renders one increasingly incapable of deceit, of taking advantage of others.

All spiritual growth, including guilelessness, is a process, not a final achievement. We can become more guileless today than yesterday. We will not become perfectly guileless before we "cross over" to that "land that is fairer than day."

- c. In verse 17, Paul stressed, even more strongly, the fact that he had not baited or craftily led them astray

For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 1 Thessalonians 2:3

In one sense, Paul defended the way he conducted his ministry. On the other hand, he explained to the young Christians why he had dealt with them as he had.

Observe what he said, "Our exhortation was not of deceit..." The word "exhortation" is "paraklesis" (παράκλησις). This is a compound word:

- a. para – to the side
- b. kaleo – to call.

It is the word used to identify an attorney, one who stands at your side when you face the court. It is also the New Testament word to identify the Holy Spirit. The "exhortation" of which the apostle spoke is a gentle urging on the part of the apostle. There is a measure of comforting as well as giving information and instruction.

In this verse, Paul lists three negative qualities that do not define his actions:

- a. "**Error**" – "planes" (πλάνης) means "to go astray," "to wander," "to lead into error."
- b. "**Uncleanness**" (ἀκαθαρσίας) is also a compound word:
 - 1. "a" – negative
 - 2. "καθαίρω" – to purify

This is a picture of things that are impure. With the negative attached to the front of the word, it identifies something that is "wretched within." It is a very strong emphasis on impurity. There is, however, a negative to this part of the sentence. Paul said that there was no impurity.

- c. "**Deceit**" – "dolos" (δόλος) – "to bait," "to snare," "to be crafty," "to use subtlety or guile."

The use of the word "or" between these three words suggests that the three are inseparable; they are on an equal footing. Observe that they all deal with leading into error and impurity.

In this verse, Paul gave us another insight into the nature of "guile." "Guile" involves leading others into error. It is more than causing people to think one thing when another is true. On the other hand, guilelessness is just the opposite. Guilelessness will cause a person to think that a statement is true because it is. It will not cause a person to stray into impurity, but will rather protect them from it.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 1 Peter 2:1

Peter gave instructions to new believers. This verse is a list of five negative qualities these Christians are to avoid in their lives.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Malice - "kakia" (κακία)-	badness, wickedness, injurious, worthless, depraved, maliciousness.
Guile - "dolos" (δόλος)	to decoy, to trick. It is to use subtlety to catch a person off guard so as to take advantage of that person.
Hypocrisy - "hupokrisis" (ὑπόκρισις)	It is to speak a false part, to pretend, the word was taken from the stage. It is to condemn by deceit. This is the object of the command, do not bear false witness.
Envy "phthonos" (φθόνος)	The displeasure or discomfort one experiences when one becomes aware of the success or prosperity of another.
Slander - "katalalia" (καταλαλία) – compound word	To talk against, to make discourse against another, backbiting, slander

These five negative qualities focus attention on the need for at least two positive qualities in the life of a growing Christian.

1. **Sincerity** – It is to be exactly what one appears to be. One of the Pharisee's problems with Jesus was that they could not trap Him in the things He said. This was because He was sincere; He was and said what He appeared to be. One of the problems with hypocrisy is that because of elaborate pretense, people seldom know where we stand. Because of this our example is, to that extent, unclear and our witness is flawed.

Evil speaking deals in much the same direction. If you talk against a person to his/her face, because you care deeply about their life and witness, that is love that is tough and caring. If, however, you talk against a person because you do not care for the person or talk behind their back, then this is slander. In many instances, slander is done under the guise of caring. This is hypocrisy of the first order.

Guile intentionally seeks to decoy and trick the individual. This being the case, there is really no place for sincerity and integrity in this negative quality. The question must be asked, why does a person need to use guile? Those who have strength and confidence in themselves and their position have no need for guile. It is appropriate to assume that in most cases, it stems from a lack of self-confidence or fear of failure.

2. **Love** – Love is an active expression of affection without boundaries or need for response. Where there is agape love, there is no need for malice or guile. It is not just that malice injures a person. It is worse than that. Malice acts as it does because it intends to do harm. It intends to create an image of another individual that is bad or abusive.

Envy, for instance, is more than wanting what another individual has. In the process of desiring their possession, position or reputation, one inevitably does damage to that individual. Again the issue is **love**.

*Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;
1 Peter 2:22*

GUILELESS

This is a quotation from Isaiah 53:9. In this passage, the prophet gave us a picture of the suffering Messiah. Peter was giving instructions for slaves who were Christians. Peter used the suffering of Jesus as an example to follow. He told them that it was no honor to receive a beating you deserve from your master. It was to their honor, however, to receive a beating that they did not deserve and do so following the example of Jesus. In the quoted words of Isaiah, he gave us an insight into the nature of guile/deceit. There are some assumptions it is fair to draw from this verse. First, guile is a sin. It was not found in Jesus and should not be found in those who claim His name and follow His example. If guile is a sin, then to be guileless is a Christian virtue, commendable in the lives of God's children.

For, "Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile. 1 Peter 3:10

As Peter was so often want to do, he quoted from the Old Testament to support his statements and ideas. In this instance, it was Psalm 34:12, 13. In this paragraph, Peter was talking with Christians about how they should get along with each other. The apostle was saying that there is absolutely no place for one Christian to deal with another in terms of deceit or trickery.

Observe, however, the rest of his statement. Peter said that our words could have a definite affect upon our quality and length of life. This is particularly true in terms of speaking evil and deceit. This suggests that our conversation, especially words of deceit and evil, have an affect upon the quality of our lives. Peter does not give details. It appears, however, that he was saying that deceit has a damaging affect upon the quality and extent of our lives.

II. "Adolos" (αδολος) This is a compound word which means "not to decoy," "not to trick," "not to bait," "not to be deceitful or crafty." The word was sometimes translated "sincere" or "unadulterated."

Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 1 Peter 2:2

The word "pure" in this verse, is "adolos." It is that which is exactly what it appears to be. Nothing about it would cause one to believe something that was not true. The "pure" word of God is the good news of salvation just as it claims to be.

We are called upon to be guileless – to be as genuine as we appear to be and want others to see that we are. We are to so live that nothing in our demeanor would deceive or trick anyone, particularly those who are searching concerning the faith or those who are new to the faith in Jesus Christ.

III. "Akakos" (ακακος)

This word means "not bad," "innocent" "unsuspecting," "harmless," "simple."

For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. Romans 16:18

The word "unsuspecting" is "akakos." The unsuspecting person is transparent in their relationship to others. They can be taken advantage of because deceit and subterfuge would

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

not enter their minds. In this verse, Paul contrasts these saintly folks with those who are masters of smooth talk.

We have all seen the smooth-talking deceiver take advantage of someone and on occasion may have been the victim. We are not good at being vulnerable and possibly deceived because it seems to take something away from our worth and stance in the eyes of others. Growth in guilelessness may allow us to be misused, but in the process our increasing purity and sincerity will stand out for all to see.

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; Hebrews 7:26

The word "innocent" is "akakos." The author said that we need a high priest who was "innocent," one who was harmless, simply what he appeared to be as opposed to the deceitful priests that characterized the levitical system.

We are to be just that "innocent." Believers who grow spiritually are called upon to be so transparent in their faith and their relations with others that we would never be harmful or mislead the unsuspecting.

CONCLUSION

We have seen several pieces of information concerning the nature of guilelessness. Let us review these again:

1. John 1:47 – Guilelessness is possible in the life of a believer. Some people would contend that though this is a divine quality, it will not be found in the lives of people.
2. John 1:47 – It is a divine characteristic that we can emulate.
3. John 1:47 – It is to be sincere, transparent in one's relationships with other people and with God.
4. II Corinthians 12:16, 17 – Guile can be used to take advantage of the unsuspecting. To be guileless, therefore, is to increasingly become less and less deceitful to others. It is to become more and more transparent in every relationship.
5. II Corinthians 12:16, 17 – Guilelessness is a growth process, not a final achievement.
6. I Thessalonians 2:3 – Guilelessness will cause people to think something is true because it is true.
7. I Thessalonians 2:3 – Guilelessness will not cause people to stray into impurity, but will protect them from it.
8. I Peter 2:1 – Guilelessness focuses attention on sincerity and love.
9. I Peter 2:22 – Guile is a sin. Therefore, the opposite of guilelessness is a Christian virtue. It is commendable in the lives of Christians.

HOPE

The word "elpidzo" (ἐλπίζω) is the word translated "hope" in the New Testament. It means, "to expect" "to confide," "to trust." It is to anticipate, usually under great pressure.

When one studies the spiritual growth quality of hope, it is necessary to explain why it is appropriate to think of hope as such a quality. In the minds of some people, hope is an inner quality that some people have naturally and others have less if at all. It is like some people seem jovial by nature, others are not. It is not something that one honestly can cultivate. You will find part of this explanation as we look at the verses where the word "hope" is found. At the conclusion of this part of the study, we will deal more directly with this explanation.

I. THE SOURCE OF HOPE

Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the Revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:13

In this epistle, Peter deals with people who are struggling with oppression and deprivation. Peter urged them to be alert, be ready for action in the fight against evil. Our hope is based solely upon the grace of God that will be ours at the revelation of Christ. The hope to which Peter referred is eternal life in heaven, but it is more. Eternal life and heaven carry with them the righting of irreversible wrongs done to us in this life. One thinks of the innocents who die in a time of war. Our hope clings to a time when there will be no more war. One thinks of the evil actions and life styles that people commit and seem to go unpunished. Our hope clings to a situation where righteousness will thrive forever. In that scenario, evil cannot go unpunished. This is a way of saying that our future hope of redemption and heaven rest solely upon the grace of God that finds its epitome at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

'Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover my flesh also will abide in hope;' Acts 2:26

This is part of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. He was quoting from Psalm 16:8. As you read the quotation, it is clear that David's hope is based upon the presence and help of God. If God is not with him, then David has no hope at all. Talking about the resurrection of Jesus, Peter announced that it is certain that death and the grave are not the final victor. Hope, like contentment, is not dependent upon surrounding conditions, but on the greatness of God upon whom that hope is founded.

But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" Acts 23:6

Paul defended himself before the Sanhedrin where he was humiliated and physically abused. He knew that in the council there were Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection of the dead, and Sadducees who did not believe. He announced that he was a Pharisee, from a family of Pharisees and he was on trial because of the hope, the active anticipation of the resurrection and eternal life in God's presence. This, of course, caused a riot in the Council.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

The hope, of which Paul spoke, was the anticipation of victory over death, our last enemy. Hope, however, is more than just escaping the finality of death. It is a confidence that God is victor over the forces and consequences of evil. This confidence affects the way we serve, the way we expect God to be victor over every evil attack both in history and in our lives. It influences our choices and our decisions to stand firm for righteousness.

Having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. Acts 24:15

There are those who confuse hope and optimism as synonyms. They are not. The orator Tertullus made accusation against Paul before the governor. This verse is part of Paul's defense. Note that Paul's hope finds its source in God alone. This hope is a uniquely Christian quality of character. The general understanding of optimism is not that restrictive. The pagan and atheist may be optimistic. Only the child of God can have the hope Paul described

A clarification is in order. Many people think that resurrection is only for the Christian. Look carefully at the verse again. Paul here speaks of a resurrection both for the righteous and the wicked. The resurrection of the righteousness is to eternal life in the blessed presence of God. The resurrection of the wicked is to separation from God.

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Romans 15:4

Hope is not a natural ingredient in the life of a believer. It is rather a quality of character that is developed as we grow in grace. Paul taught the Roman believers that it was the commission of God for strong believers to bear the infirmities of the weaker family members. In this context, Paul instructed strong believers that the Scriptures were written for our instruction in order that hope may grow out of our perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures. Hope grows as believers persevere firm in their faith. Again, hope grows as we discover the encouragement of the Scriptures for the daily faithfulness to God in the struggles of obedience.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

When Paul spoke of the "God of hope," he indicated that this is a quality of the divine nature. It is a uniquely Christian character quality. It is something God produces in us, not a quality we develop by changing ourselves.

Read the verse again. The purpose of God's filling our lives with joy and peace is that we may overflow in hope. Paul announced that joy and peace were the product of the presence of God. It is God who develops these qualities in the lives of His children. Further, the joy and peace God provides are integrally involved in the production of abounding hope in the believer.

Observe, also, that Paul announced that this takes place in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is reasonable to assume that without the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, there would be no peace.

HOPE

*But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:13*

Paul established a priority order among the great qualities of Christian character, but he did more. Hope works in concert with faith and love. Again, this is only possible for the child of God.

Observe how Paul put it: "Now abide faith, hope and love..." One might translate these words, "Now abide and keep on abiding faith, hope and love..." These qualities of character are not single events, but are ongoing expressions of Christian conduct that never cease.

This verse also indicates the superiority of love over faith and hope. Indeed, both faith and hope grow out of the expressed love of God.

For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. Galatians 5:5

It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enable us to wait, with eager expectation, the hope of righteousness. This comes by faith. That being the case, this is a quality that will be found only in the lives of Christians.

Observe that Paul said, "We...are waiting..." This is in stark contrast to those who attempt to work for their hope of redemption.

Paul talked about "the hope of righteousness." This is a reference to their hope of redemption. It is an eager expectation not only of forgiveness, but also of committed service to God in the present and the joy of His eternal presence in the future.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, Ephesians 1:18

This verse is part of Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Christians. He prayed that God would "give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

This is the source of their hope. It is a gift from God. In 1:17, Paul indicated that this gift of God is a "spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the full knowledge of Him." Our hope grows out of a God enabled discovery of Him by His revelation and not by our intellectual search. This hope is the product of God opening the eyes of our understanding to a full revelation of Him.

One of the ways God reveals Himself most clearly and completely is in the Scriptures. It is doubtful this revelation of God, which produces hope, will be fully grasped unless we are deeply immersed in the Scriptures.

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2:12

Paul was talking to these Christians about the condition of their lives before they came to know Christ as their savior. This verse, in dramatic fashion, stresses the fact that this hope is a uniquely Christian quality of character. Notice, however, that for purposes of emphasis, Paul approached the idea from the negative side. Observe his list:

- a. "Separated from Christ."
- b. "Excluded from the commonwealth of Israel"

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

- c. "Strangers to the covenants of promise"
- d. "Without God in the world"

These people had no hope. Each of the four categories listed would leave them hopeless. When you put the four together, their chances of hope are emphatically lessened. This is Paul's strongest way of saying that our hope is tied uniquely to our relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27

This verse adds another dimension to our understanding of the source of our hope. We have observed several passages that identify God as the unique source of our hope. This verse, however, adds additional information to that fact.

God is the source of hope as Jesus Christ takes up residence and ownership control of our lives. Christ sits upon the throne of our lives to uniquely guide and govern every choice and action. Hope comes from God through the governance of Jesus as Lord of life.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope; 1 Timothy 1:1

As Paul opened this epistle, he identified his apostleship. He pointed to the fact that he was commanded to be an apostle by Jesus Christ, who is also God. To that affirmation of his apostleship, Paul added the words "who is our hope."

The source of hope for Paul, and for every Christian, is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the source of our hope. If a person has no relationship with Jesus Christ then he/she has no hope at all.

Again, this is another way to say that hope is a uniquely Christian quality of character.

Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; Titus 2:13

We tend to associate our hope with heaven. It is this, but there is more. Our hope is inextricably tied to the Second Coming of Christ. There are several epistles written to persecuted Christian congregations: Hebrews, Philippians, Revelation, etc. In each one, the author exhorted the believers to look to Jesus. It was not just to remember what He did and why He did it, but to be encouraged by the fact that He will come again in great glory. Our blessed hope is completely linked to the appearing of the glory of Christ.

II. THE CONTENTS OF HOPE

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? Romans 8:24

Paul dealt with the nature of hope. It is intangible. It requires a serious element of faith or trust. When he said, "Hope that is seen is not hope..." he was saying that hope is not like a measured amount of a chemical element in a flask. The moment hope can be realized in human experience, it is reality and is no longer hope. Hope requires the ability to trust.

For the Law made nothing perfect, and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. Hebrews 7:19

HOPE

Hebrews chapters 5 – 10 form a prolonged contrast between the ancient Jewish priesthood and the priesthood of Jesus. In the context, the author pointed out that the Aaronic priesthood was set aside because it was weak and useless. He also concluded that "the Law made nothing perfect." The word "perfect" is "teleioo" (τελειόω) and means "completeness," "to be filled full," rather than flawlessness. The old Law brought nothing to completeness or fulfillment. The contrast here is that the priesthood of Jesus does what the old Law could not do. The author describes this contrast by saying, "on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." This verse gives us some additional information about our hope:

- a. There is some level of hope in the old Law, but the hope of new life in Christ is an even better hope than the former one.
- b. This new, better hope is a vehicle, a means through which "we draw near to God." Part of the purpose of this hope is to enable a stronger relationship with God.

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, That being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7

This verse gives us a glimpse into the nature of our hope. It includes receiving the grace of God in our justification. Having been justified, we become heirs of God. As Paul said, in Romans 8:17, "Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ..." This is a part of what Paul meant when he spoke of our "hope."

If you look carefully at the text, 3:4-7 makes up the entire sentence. Verse five gives us additional insights into this hope. Paul taught that God, in Christ, saved us "according to His mercy." The mercy of God is part of our hope.

Paul also mentioned, in verse five that this mercy takes form through the washing of regeneration and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. This is part and parcel of the hope of eternal life that grips our hearts.

III. THE NATURE OF HOPE

Constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 1 Thessalonians 1:3

Paul opened this verse by listing three descriptive qualities of the Thessalonian Christians:

- a. "Work of faith"
- b. "Labor of love"
- c. "Steadfastness of hope"

The way this sentence is written poses these three descriptive phrases as equals. Hope is the basis, the foundation upon which "works of faith" and "labors of love" are built.

This verse gives us some additional information about hope:

1. "The steadfastness of hope" – The believers hope requires "steadfastness." The word translated "steadfastness" is "hupomone" (ὑπομονή) which usually is translated "patience," "to stand under authority." The use of this word assumes some degree of intense opposition that the believer must resist.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

2. Paul spoke of the source of this steadfast hope as being in two directions:
 - a. "hope in our Lord Jesus Christ"
 - b. "In the presence of our God and Father"

This hope is founded upon both Jesus Christ and the Father. Paul, however, suggested something further. Notice he said, "in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father." This hope is in Christ as He is in the presence of our God and Father. More than once, Paul referred to the intercessory ministry of Jesus in the presence of the Father. Paul's message is not just that the source of hope is in Jesus and the Father. It includes this, but adds that the basis of this hope is also in the intercessory ministry of Jesus as He takes His place in the heavenly Holy of Holies pleading before the Father on our behalf. In our struggle with evil, we are not alone.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, Hebrews 6:11

In this chapter, the author warns of the danger of "falling away." There is intense debate between the Calvinists and Arminians, about what the author meant by this term. In verse eleven, however, the author exhorts these persecuted Christians to be diligent.

Observe how he said it, "Show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end." It is fair to assume that without this diligence, this hope would not be fully realized.

Notice, also, that the author added the words, "until the end." From the Arminian perspective, these words and other statements in chapter six suggest that one can lose that full assurance of hope.

Who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:21

Again, writing to persecuted believers, Peter reminded his readers of the sacrifice Jesus made for our sins. The resulting hope is in God. It is based upon the resurrection of Jesus and the glory the Father gave to Him. This is one more piece of evidence that "hope," as defined here, is a uniquely Christian experience and relationship.

Observe, also, that Peter links "faith" and "hope" together. Without faith, there can be no hope. Again, without hope, faith is, by that much, incomplete. These two qualities of Christian character compliment each other.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; Ephesians 4:4

In verses four through six, Paul stressed "oneness" in seven different ways: One body, one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."

In these verses, Paul points out that our hope is universal among believers. It does not differ by culture, government, form or current fads. As God called Paul, He also called us.

The word "hope," in this verse, has a slightly different focus than we have previously observed. Paul talked about "called in one hope of your calling." The words "called" and "calling" though from the same root word are different in meaning.

- a. "Called" – "kaleo" – means "called" "commanded."

HOPE

- b. "Calling" – Klesis" – means "calling," "vocation," "invitation."

In one sense, the "hope of your calling" has to do with resurrection and eternal life as we have seen previously, but it is more than that. It includes the focus with which we seek to serve Christ in sharing the Gospel and presenting God's love in our daily contacts. It is the burning desire to be such a faithful servant that He can one day say, "Well done..."

IV. THE RESULTS OF HOPE

rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, Romans 12:12

There is considerable confusion about the nature and results of faith in general and hope in particular. Non-Christians have portrayed the Christian faith as dull and sad. Unfortunately, some believers have bought into this idea. Paul described believers in a different light. He spoke of "Rejoicing in hope." The rejoicing is not a response to pleasant circumstances. It is our response to life whatever the circumstances may be.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. I Thessalonians 4:13

In the early church, there were places where there was confusion concerning what happened to the Christian at death. In this verse, Paul dealt with that issue. Paul pointed out this is an area of stark contrast between the Christian and the non-Christian.

- a. **The Christian** had hope beyond death. Paul spoke of the resurrection and eternal life.
- b. **The non-Christians** have no hope beyond death. They do have grief. The word "grief" is "lupeo" (λυπέω). It means, "to experience great pain," "to endure great distress." It is an intense unresolvable sorrow.

Paul did not say that we do not sorrow in the experience of loss. He said we do not grieve as non-Christians who have no hope.

This also tells us something about hope. Our hope protects us from inescapable grief. This happens because our hope points to life beyond death. Hope delivers us from grief so intense there is no resolution for it.

In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:17-20

We need to remember that the author of this epistle was writing to encourage believers who had suffered great persecution and lost everything except each other. In this lengthy sentence, the author has laid out several pieces of information about our hope:

1. The believer's hope rests upon the changeless promise of God.
2. This hope is a gift from God – "the hope set before us."

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

3. Hope is absolutely essential for the Christian in the struggle to be faithful. – "Who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."
4. One of the purposes of our hope is to encourage us when the struggle seems more than we can bear.
5. This hope is an anchor, sure and steadfast, for the soul.
6. Observe that this hope also includes the intercessory ministry of Jesus as He entered within the veil in the heavenly tabernacle to serve as our priest forever. It is one of the things that struggling Christians depend upon in the midst of their pain.

This hope was the refuge for the first century Christians who sang hymns of their faith as they were burned at the stake in Rome. This hope was the anchor of the soul sustaining Christians as they knelt in prayer as the lions were released in the Roman arena. It is fair to assume that without this hope, Christians in every era would not have been able to joyfully face pain and death for their faith.

For the Law made nothing perfect, and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. Hebrews 7:19

Again, in chapters 5 through 10 of Hebrews, the author draws a sharp contrast which shows the superiority of the priestly ministry of Jesus to that of the Aaronic priesthood. The author spoke of the incompleteness of the law on the basis of the fact that it was "weak and unprofitable."

In Jesus' priesthood He brought a new hope. This hope dealt with more than resurrection and eternal life. It dealt with a once-for-all sacrifice for sin that need not, could not be repeated even once, let alone annually.

The author went on to say of this hope, "through which we draw near to God." This is a throne room picture. If a king were kindly disposed toward a subject or the cause he pleaded, he would invite the subject to come closer to the throne than otherwise permitted and plead his cause. In such cases, the king was kindly disposed to grant the subject's request.

The whole purpose of God's redemptive process was to draw us sinners to Him. This hope is the vehicle whereby the way is opened for us to "draw near to God."

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 1 Peter 3:15

Peter wrote to Christians undergoing intense persecution. Peter wrote about giving an "account" of our hope. The word "account" is "apologia" (ἀπολογία) and means "a verbal explanation of one's hope." Hope, in this instance, is more than resurrection and eternal life. It means to be prepared to explain your faith and the transformed life that gives you the hope of resurrection and eternal life.

Observe also that Peter precedes this exhortation with another, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." This means that among all the forces clamoring for our allegiance, we must sanctify, set apart Jesus Christ as Master and Owner of our hearts' allegiance. His commands, alone, merit our unrestricted obedience. His purposes, alone, receive our unreserved commitment. This is part of the picture of the source of our hope. It grows out of and is intensified by our total determination to make Christ Lord and Master of our lives.

HOPE

And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1 John 3:3

This verse gives us two major pieces of information about hope:

1. **It helps define hope.** John speaks of "this hope." This can mean that there are other facets of hope. The context of the verse speaks of the coming of Christ. Speaking of the Second Coming, John made two declarations:
 - a. We shall be like Him.
 - b. We shall see Him as He is.That is the way John defines hope in this instance.
2. **It identifies one of the results of this hope.** John said, "everyone who has this hope fixed on him purifies himself, just as He is pure." This hope leads to purification of life.

Literally, one should translate these words, "purifies and never stops purifying himself. This describes a way of life, rather than a single act. The purpose of this purifying is to become increasingly like Jesus – "just as He is pure."

The word "purifies" is "hagnidzo" (ἁγνίζω) and means, "to cleanse from defilement." The word is used both literally and ceremonially.

It comes from the refiner's trade. Intense heat was applied to the metal in order to release all foreign material and remove it so that what is left is pure. It is like our word "cathartic."

The word also is used ceremonially. Before a priest can go to serve at the altar, he must be purified. He needed to submit to ceremonial washings and prayers before he was considered pure and prepared to serve at the altar.

CONCLUSION

I. The Source of Hope

In section I – The Source of Hope, the different authors identified several facets of the source of our hope:

- a. The grace of God
- b. The presence and help of God
- c. It is in God.
- d. The instruction of Scripture
- e. It comes by the power of the Holy Spirit
- f. It comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- g. It comes through Christ's control of our lives.
- h. It is tied to the Second Coming of Christ.

If you review this list, you will observe that God, in Christ, is at the very center of the growth of the quality of hope in the believer.

II. The Contents of Hope

- a. It requires faith.
- b. It is the vehicle whereby we draw near to God.
- c. It involves our redemption in all its many facets.
- d. It involves the mercy of God.
- e. It requires the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

f. It involves an intense relationship in the family of God – "heirs...joint-heirs." Unlike most qualities of spiritual growth, hope does not require that we move from a bad quality to a good one. It rather is a necessary firm foundation upon which other spiritual qualities may grow.

III. The Nature of Hope.

- a. Hope is the foundation on which "works of faith" and "labors of love" are built.
- b. It is the outgrowth of the intercessory ministry of Christ.
- c. Diligence is required if full assurance of hope is to be realized.
- d. Faith and hope are inseparably linked.
- e. Our hope is universal among believers.
- f. Hope includes diligence to be a faithful servant.

The idea that hope is the foundation upon which spiritual growth is built is strengthened in this portion of the chapter. Though God is the source of our hope, it does not begin or grow without our intense diligence and faithful service.

IV. The Results of Hope

- a. Hope is our source of rejoicing even in hardship.
- b. Hope delivers from the unresolvable grief at times of loss experienced by unbelievers.
- c. Hope is an anchor of the soul.
- d. Hope enters within the veil, to avail us of the powerful intercessory ministry of Christ.
- e. Hope enables us to draw near to God.
- f. Hope is the enabler for witness.
- g. Hope motivates believers to purify themselves.

This portion of the chapter causes one to realize just how important hope is in our daily Christian walk. Without hope, other spiritual qualities are at least diminished if not defeated.

At the beginning of this chapter, it was mentioned that we need to address the appropriateness of dealing with hope as a quality of spiritual growth. Hope is an essential ingredient in the formation of every other quality of spiritual growth. It is the necessary atmosphere in which qualities of spiritual growth can thrive. Hope is the necessary mindset required if believers would even dare to strive to grow more and more in the likeness of Jesus. It is the basis for the attitude that it is possible for one to become increasingly like Jesus, despite what they know about their own background of rebellion and disobedience.

One needs a motive to grow in Christ's likeness. It is not easy, but it is worthwhile. That motive can be found in the hope of the coming of Christ. Hope is the source of the encouragement that every believer needs in order to continue the struggle against the forces of evil. It is the encouragement we need in order to carry out our determination to be more and more like Jesus when our human nature dictates otherwise.

FAITH

Faith is expecting God to be God. We think of faith as expecting the shocking impossible. Faith is a gift from God, it cannot be increased by trying harder. Faith is not a decision. It is a gift from God to every person He has elected to believe that grace has been extended to them. It is a vital ingredient in each experience the believer shares with God. Faith is an essential part of every facet of spiritual growth. There is one basic word that is translated "faith" in the New Testament. We will attempt to look at it very carefully.

"Pistis" (πίστις)

This word means "to be persuaded," "to be totally convinced," "a conviction of spiritual truth," "a belief, "an assurance concerning spiritual truth," "to trust."

Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled, and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. Matthew 8:10

Jesus watched the centurion with astonishment. In this statement, Jesus suggested a piece of information concerning faith.

- a. Faith is a measurable quality of character. Jesus determined that the faith in the centurion was greater than the faith He had seen in Jewish people.
- b. The fact that Jesus was astonished suggests that though faith is a gift of God, the way a person receives that faith and nurtures it seriously affects the way it grows in our lives. One might say the measure of God's gift of faith is established by our depth of desire and willingness to use the gift.
- c. Jesus measured the centurion's faith by the extent of his willingness to trust the power of Jesus.

And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven." Matthew 9:2

This is the story of the four men who let the paralytic man down through the roof of a house. Matthew's statement immediately captures one's attention, "When Jesus saw their faith..." Here, Matthew indicates that the expression of one's faith is an observable quality of life.

It has been my privilege to observe such a man. My father-in-law was a faith missionary. During most of his life, he never had a stated salary or wage. He trusted God for every need of life. Others might be surprised if God did provide. He expected God to provide, acted upon that faith and would have been shocked if God had not provided. The fact is that God did provide for his every need and for all the missionaries for whom he was responsible.

Granted, some may cover a lack of faith under the pretense of a business-like way of working. Still others may cover irresponsibility by saying they are trusting God. Still there are those beautiful experiences where we see one who expects God to be God and would be stunned to discover anything else.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." And at once the woman was made well. Matthew 9:22

This is the story of the woman with the issue of blood. In 9:21, the woman said, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." There was no healing power in the cloak of Jesus. That is not what the woman meant. She was absolutely convinced that if she could touch His cloak, the symbol of Jesus' power, she would be healed. This is monumental faith. When Jesus experienced her touch, he turned and confirmed her undaunted expectation, saying, "Daughter, your faith has healed you." It was not her great risk or monumental efforts, it was her faith that enabled her healing of this dreaded medical problem.

All during Jesus' ministry and for years before, this woman had been totally isolated from all people and interchange with them. Still she acted on her total conviction that Jesus could and would heal her. That is faith.

Then He touched their eyes, saying, "Be it done to you according to your faith." Matthew 9:29

Two blind men came to Jesus. He asked, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They answered, "Yes, Lord." Jesus touched them and said, "according to your faith will it be done to you." The level of their faith was sufficient to bring healing to their blind eyes. The way Jesus said this suggests that some others, in this same situation, might not have been healed. This suggests that the level of one's faith has a direct affect upon what God will do on their behalf.

In Matthew 15:28, Matthew tells the story of the Canaanite woman's daughter. Jesus' statements could not shake the woman's certainty that Jesus could and must deliver her daughter from the demons who possessed her. Again, it was her faith, her determined expectation that brought deliverance to her troubled daughter.

And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you." Matthew 17:20

Following the Transfiguration, Jesus and the three disciples returned to see the other disciples involved in a serious debate. They had been asked to deliver a demon-possessed boy. They could not do it. Jesus delivered the boy and the disciples wondered why they couldn't do this. This verse was Jesus' answer.

Their little faith prevented them from freeing the boy from his demon-possession. It is appropriate to assume that sufficient faith would enable them to deliver the boy. Faith is the enabling quality in the release of those possessed by demons.

Jesus continued by describing the results of faith. He said that just a little faith – like a mustard seed - would enable them to do the impossible. He said it another, more emphatic way: "Nothing will be impossible for you." He illustrated this strong statement by saying, "you can say to this mountain, 'move from here to there and it will move.'" This verse illustrates the tremendous power of just a little bit of faith.

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree,

FAITH

but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it shall happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." Matthew 21:21-22

The ability to resist doubting is a vital part of the description of faith. In explaining the episode at the fig tree, Jesus made this surprising statement. Jesus said that if they did not doubt, they could do greater things than he had done to the fig tree. He said they could say to this mountain, "Go throw yourself into the sea and it would be done." Doubt is the chief restriction on faith. There are a host of things that can be expected if one has faith. They cannot occur if one doubts.

In verse 22, Jesus gave us one of the vital results of faith – "you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." There is a necessary link between faith and answered prayer. Without expectant faith, prayer is just so many words.

And He said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" Mark 4:40

In the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was asleep on a pillow in the back of the boat. Being frightened of drowning, the disciples wakened Jesus. Having stilled the storm with His calm command, Jesus spoke the words of this verse.

Jesus' words give us an additional insight. Faith dispels fear. The greater one's faith, the lesser the incidence of fear. Trust in God increases one's certainty that God can and will care for their needs.

"But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. " Luke 22:32

Jesus spoke these words to Peter. In this exchange, there are a few insights into the nature of faith.

1. Our faith is the target of Satan's attempt to destroy our relationship with God.
2. The strengthening and preservation of faith is accomplished by the intercession of Jesus rather than by our heroic efforts.

And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. Acts 3:16

Peter and John went to the temple to pray. There they encountered a beggar. Rather than give the crippled man money, they healed him. Peter explained to the curious crowd how the beggar was healed. He stressed the fact that they knew this beggar who had been a paralytic. Peter explained that faith in the name of Jesus was responsible for the transformation that had taken place. He suggested that there is power in the name of Jesus. It is faith that releases, that makes available this mighty power in Jesus name.

Another bit of information in Peter's explanation concerns the direction of faith – it comes to us through Christ. It does not come through our piety or good works, but through Christ.

Observe that the healing that comes through faith in Christ is complete. It is totally sufficient for the need that is presented for God's merciful attention.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. Acts 6:5

This passage describes the choosing of the seven men who would be set apart to wait on tables. There were seven men chosen, but Luke describes the quality of life for only Stephen.

Observe that Luke tells us that Stephen was "full of faith". This is an interesting description. "Full" in this instance, is a physical description. To be "full of faith" is like a bottle being full of water. It is the same word that was used to describe the 12 baskets "full" of food left over after the feeding of the 5,000. Luke used a physical image to describe a spiritual situation. In the same way that a cup is full of water, so Stephen had overflowing faith; faith sufficient to avail him of the power in the name of Jesus.

Observe, also, that Luke associated "full of faith" with "full of the Holy Spirit." This is no accidental association. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is vital in the activation of the power of God through faith in the name of Jesus.

In verse eight, of this chapter, Luke said that Stephen was also "full of God's grace and power." It is no wonder that Stephen did "great wonders and miraculous signs among the people."

The important thing about these observations has to do with the company faith keeps – the Holy Spirit, God's grace and God's power. These are not four isolated qualities. They are rather interdependent upon each other; a mutually supporting and enabling of each other. Where you find great faith, you will find clear evidence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You will discover the grace and power of God in full expression and glory. Seeking the gift of greater faith will not be answered without an increased evidence of the Holy Spirit's power and God's grace and limitless power. These all work together."

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. Acts 11:24

Barnabas was sent to Antioch to investigate the reported conversion of Gentiles. In the midst of this story, Luke pauses to make a statement about Barnabas. Luke said Barnabas was "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith." This is our second observation of a man who was both "full of the Holy Spirit" and "full of faith."

Observe that Luke also said Barnabas was "a good man." Faith and the filling of the Holy Spirit are vital ingredients in "goodness."

This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, Acts 14:9

This is an interesting passage. Paul could see that this man, though crippled from birth, had faith to be healed. One wonders, What did Paul see? What does faith look like? In some way, Paul could tell. In some way faith is an observable quality.

There is also corroborating evidence that faith is the quality that enables healing to take place.

And He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Acts 15:9

FAITH

At the Council at Jerusalem, Peter addressed the body concerning the salvation of the Gentiles. In this report, Peter said, "He (God) purified their hearts by faith." Purifying is something God does, we cannot do it. God, however, activates the cleansing process when His desire to purge our lives is met by our faith. Where there is no faith, there can be no cleansing. Faith is an essential ingredient in the purifying of our lives.

Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 20:21

Paul preached his farewell address to the believers in Ephesus. In the midst of this address, Paul used the words of this verse. In this verse, Paul described his message to both Jews and Greeks. The Good News, in the book of Acts, was preached repeatedly. These people must repent toward God and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In this message, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is an indispensable ingredient in our redemption.

Because Paul preached this message to both Jews and Greeks, we may assume that this is a universal message. For both Jews and Greeks, without faith in Jesus Christ, there can be no redemption.

But some days later, Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. Acts 24:24

Paul preached the Gospel before Felix. In Paul's message to the governor, he talked about "faith in Christ." To rich and poor, kings and servants, the message of the Gospel was always the same – one must have faith in Christ. It is not like placing a sacrifice before an idol. It is rather an inner certainty that God because of His mercy will forgive my past and change my present and future.

To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. Acts 26:18

Paul defended himself before Agrippa in this verse. Describing his Damascus road experience, Paul said, quoting Jesus, "So that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

Sanctification has two foci – It focuses upon the purifying of the human heart. It also focuses upon the setting apart of the believer for the service of God. Paul talked about those "who are sanctified by faith in Christ." Faith is a vital ingredient in the sanctification, the setting apart for purity and service of the child of God.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." Romans 1:17

Paul described a life of righteousness. He spoke of it as a "righteousness that is by faith." This is a way of saying that righteousness that is not by faith is not righteousness at all.

Paul added to this emphasis by his quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, "The righteous will live by his faith." Faith is the foundation upon which a life of righteousness is lived.

Observe that this righteousness is "from God." It is not produced by human effort. It does not just happen. It is "from God" and is made available by faith.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? Romans 3:3

Faith is not universal. As Paul said, "What if some did not have faith?" This is one more piece of evidence that suggests that faith is a uniquely Christian quality of life.

Paul also said, "Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?" If God is faithful - "full of faith" - then faith is a divine quality that His children must constantly seek to emulate as they are enabled by God Himself.

Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; Romans 3:22

In this brief verse, Paul has given some information about the quality of faith.

1. Righteousness is from God, but it is available through faith in Jesus Christ.
2. Faith is universal among believers, whether Jew or Gentile.

Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; Romans 3:25

Paul continued his description of justification by faith in this verse. It is clear that God presented Jesus as a sacrifice to atone for sins. This verse adds to that understanding by saying that this atonement becomes effective through faith in the blood of Jesus. It is automatic. It is only made available as the sinner expresses faith in the ability of the blood of Jesus to cleanse one from all sin.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Romans 3:27-28

Paul continued his teaching about righteousness that comes through faith. Because faith comes from outside ourselves and can be produced by no human effort, it effectively does away with the boasting which erupts from some people. Faith and faith alone can avail us of the sacrifice of the blood of Christ.

Since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. Romans 3:30

Because the exposure of the Jew and Gentile are different, the redemption process for the two is slightly different, but the results are identical. Justification for the Jew is "by faith." Faith is the agent, the means by which justification is received. On the other hand, the Gentile is justified "through" the same faith. The Gentile has no worthiness that would entitle him to justification. The Gentile has no symbolic act which suggests justification. Still God offers this eradication of the past to unworthy Gentiles as to Jews. The faith is identical for the Gentile and the Jew.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, Romans 4:5

In this verse, Paul differentiates between faith and works. If a man works, his pay is his "due." However, if a man trusts God for his salvation, his faith, which is a gift from God,

FAITH

is reported as righteousness. Our faith is recorded as righteousness even though it is God's gracious gift.

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. Romans 4:13

In this verse, Paul differentiates between faith and works. If a man works, his pay is "due" him. However, if a man trusts God for his salvation, his faith, which is a gift, is reported as righteousness. In effect, faith, God's gift, IS righteousness. It is the way the righteous live.

As Paul continued to describe the value of faith, he gave us another insight. Faith is the source, the means by which righteousness is realized.

And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, Romans 4:19-20

Paul used the illustration of Abraham to demonstrate the results of faith. Faith continues because of who God is. Faith is not diminished by the reality of opposing unfavorable information. Faith is not in favorable circumstances, but in God whose power never changes, whatever the circumstance.

The dependability of God's promises increases one's faith even in the face of increasingly negative circumstances. Faith is not static. It can increase and it can decrease. The cause of the increase in faith is the fact that the person is absolutely persuaded the power of God is sufficient to meet every possible negative situation.

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1-2

Justification is ours by faith. It is the means by which justification becomes ours. This becomes the means by which we have peace with God through Jesus Christ.

Our access to grace through Christ, is facilitated by faith. Faith opens the door of access to grace when we are otherwise unable to gain that access.

By the same token, faith is thus the cause of our rejoicing in this hope of the glory of God.

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; Romans 9:30

Gentiles who did not attempt to find righteousness by their works, obtained a righteousness by faith. This gives us some insights into faith.

- a. Faith enables righteousness when works cannot do so.
- b. Faith is not affected by national or racial lines.

Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, Romans 9:32

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

In this verse, Paul described these Jews as pursuing righteousness. We may assume that the opposite of this statement also could be true. It also is possible not to pursue righteousness by faith.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Romans 10:17

This is Paul's definitive statement about the origin of faith. Faith comes by hearing the message of the Gospel. He said that when people hear the message of the Gospel, they discover it is possible to trust the grace of God in salvation and in righteousness and they do so.

If you look at verse 16, however, Paul makes it clear that hearing the gospel does not automatically result in faith. Paul affirms this idea by his quotation from Isaiah, "Who has believed our message..." Isaiah 53:1

Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; Romans 11:20

Paul dealt with the reason we as Gentiles were accepted before God. It is because Israel failed to respond to God's grace. Because of this, we were grafted into their place. Paul gave these Gentiles a warning that is helpful. He reminded them that their "grafted in": standing is by faith and, therefore, there is no room for us to boast.

For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. Romans 12:3

Paul spoke of "the measure of faith God has given you." This brings us some information about faith.

1. Faith comes from God.
2. There are different measures of faith for different people in the family of God.
3. This, too, is a part of the grace of God.

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; Romans 12:6

In Romans 12:6-8, Paul talked about several spiritual gifts – prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership and showing mercy. In each instance, Paul instructed that these gifts should be used in proportion to their faith. The greater one's faith, the greater their use and effectiveness of the gift God has given.

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. Romans 14:1

There are some children of God whose faith is "weak." This describes a level of faith. If there are those whose faith is "weak," then it is fair to assume that Paul also suggested that the faith of some is "strong." People differ in appearance. They also differ in their eager response to the faith God has entrusted to them. This verse also suggests that strong faith is not license to pass judgment upon weak faith. It is rather an opportunity to encourage one with weak faith that their faith may increase.

FAITH

But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. Romans 14:23

Roman Christians, probably Jews, struggled over "clean" and "unclean" foods. Paul wrote this passage to clarify the issue for them. In his instructions, Paul gives us two insights into the nature of faith.

1. To act when doubting brings condemnation. To act in faith brings divine approval.
2. A principle surfaces here. Whatever is of faith is righteousness. Everything that is not of faith is sin. Faith is the dividing line between sin and righteousness.

That your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:5

Faith is not blind. It has a solid foundation. Paul pointed out that faith is not founded on human wisdom. As great as human wisdom has been shown to be, it is not sufficient as a foundation for faith.

Paul continued with the positive statement. Faith rests upon God's power. Because God is Almighty, this limitless power serves well as a basis for our faith.

To another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:9

In this passage, Paul described the way spiritual gifts are given. Faith, in this instance, differs, to a certain degree, from the gift of faith. Granted, both saving faith and the gift of faith come to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Still there is a difference between the two. They differ in purpose.

- a. **Saving faith** is the gift of God, through the Holy Spirit, that enables one to believe on the blood of Christ to save from sin and present us faultless before the throne of God's glory.
- b. The gift of faith is the gift of God through the Holy Spirit upon one who is already a child of God. This gift enables the believer whose ministry is to trust God at a far greater level than other believers. This gift is on the same level with all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2

In Paul's description of love, he gives us some important information about faith.

1. Paul describes faith as capable of the otherwise impossible.
2. Faith, though great and powerful, is incomplete without love.

None of the gifts of the Holy Spirit form a full life on their own. They, rather, are inter-linked to each other to enable the child of God to become all God intended him/her to be.

Paul's statement about faith and love is very strong. If I have faith to remove mountains, but lack love, I am nothing. I am incomplete. I am unprepared to make a difference in the world.

But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Paul identified three major qualities of the Christian life – faith, hope and love. He did not place them in priority order. He did something still stronger. He identified love as greater than both of the others. Faith is a great gift. It has a great impact on the recipient and on those around him. Faith, however, is not as great as love.

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 1 Corinthians 15:14

This is another of Paul's statements that was designed to make an impression on his readers by shocking them. The whole purpose of his writing this passage was to stress the importance of faith. Still he did not overstate his case. If Christ is not risen, both Paul's preaching and their faith are without foundation. Faith is only a dependable foundation if Christ rose from the dead and thus validated His Messianic claims and established our faith. The truth of the resurrection is central; it is absolutely essential if our faith is to be more than wishful thinking.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 1 Corinthians 15:17

Paul continued his description of the importance of the resurrection in this verse. The implications are tremendous. If Christ were not raised from the dead, then our faith is futile because it is founded, specifically, on the resurrection. Going one step further, if Christ is not risen, then our futile faith leaves us in our sin. This adds a strong emphasis to Paul's statement in 15:14.

Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. 2 Corinthians 1:24

One of the strongest products of faith is that it enables the child of God to stand firm in the face of struggle. It is one thing to come to faith. It is quite another to stand firm in the face of adversity. Faith enables the child of God to stand firm.

But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore also we speak; 2 Corinthians 4:13

Paul quoted from Psalm 116:10 to express his conviction. In this, he has given us another glimpse of faith. Faith is the basis of Christian teaching. The Christian faith cannot be taught as mere knowledge or fact. The possession and experience of faith are essential to the teaching of the Christian life. The belief of which Paul spoke, in this verse, is a conviction that Jesus Christ is indeed risen from the dead and that the Father will raise us with Him also. The result of this will be thanksgiving.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

This paragraph deals with Paul's ambivalence about living to meet the needs of these Corinthians, or dying and being with Christ. He confessed that his preference would be to go to be with Christ, but for their sake he would stay and minister to their faith until Christ called him home. Against this background of confidence and commitment, Paul said, "we live by faith, not by sight. There are insights here.

1. Our entire life and relationship with God will always be on the basis of faith, not knowledge. We will never be relieved of the need to trust.

FAITH

2. No matter what the circumstances may appear to be, our life and the decisions about it are always on the basis of faith. Circumstances will sometimes appear impossible. We do not live and make decisions on the basis of what things appear to be. We live and make decisions on the basis of faith in the fact that Jesus Christ is greater than any circumstance. It appeared that Israel was doomed at the Red Sea. Moses practiced his faith and the impossible turned into a great victory. At the crucifixion, it appeared that what Jesus was and had come to do had been defeated. The resurrection contradicted the appearances of three days before.

But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 2 Corinthians 8:7

Paul spoke with them about financial generosity. In his instructions, he reminded them that they excelled in several areas – faith, speech, knowledge, complete earnestness and love for Paul and his associates. They also should excel in generosity.

Paul first spoke of their excelling in faith. For this to be true there must be levels in the expression of faith. One must be able to express faith above another. Also, if that is the case, and it is, it follows that one must be able to increase in faith to the point that they too may excel. That is the happy truth out of which Paul spoke.

Not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, 2 Corinthians 10:15

Faith also is used to identify and describe the entire Christian experience. Paul expressed his hope for these believers, that "your faith continues to grow." Faith is not static. Paul wished for them that their faith would grow and continue to grow. This makes faith a process rather than an action. That, of course, is exactly what faith is. This is a bit contrary to what many church people think. They deal with all of the gifts that come through the Holy Spirit as something to accomplish and have it completed. Paul emphasized this process idea by the case in which it is written. It is a process that begins and never stops. It is as if he would say, increase in faith and never stop increasing in your faith.

Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. Galatians 2:16

Paul showed great teaching skills. He made the same point three different ways.

- a. He said what it is not – We are not justified by works of the Law.
- b. He said what it is – We are justified through faith in Jesus Christ.
- c. He said what it is again.

The fact that justification cannot be achieved by works of the law removes boasting. The fact that justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ gives rise to limitless praise for His wonderful gift to us.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. Galatians 2:20

Paul continued his contrast between works and faith. Earlier in his life, Paul had given himself completely to seeking justification through works of the law. Now he had learned that this was futile and he gave himself fully to trusting in Jesus for his justification. Faith was the foundation upon which the entirety of his life was lived every day. Faith is the foundation of a life in which Christ lives through the person. Paul's faith was not in his background or heritage. His faith was in the Son of God who lovingly gave Himself so that Paul might be justified and restored in relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

This study has included a lot of information. We need to reflect upon all of it to see what we have gained.

1. Matthew 8:10 – Faith is a measurable quality of Christian faith.
2. Matthew 8:10 – It is a gift of God, but will grow as the believer desires and nurtures it.
3. Matthew 8:10 – It is expressed by our willingness to trust the power of our Lord.
4. Matthew 9:22 – Faith and its benefits are not the product of great risk or monumental effort, but of eager determination to expect God to do whatever is needed.
5. Matthew 9:29 – The level of one's faith has a direct affect upon what God will do on our behalf.
6. Matthew 17:20 – Lack of faith can hinder what God will do. The intensity of faith will open the door for God to do the impossible things He longs to do.
7. Matthew 21:21, 22 – Doubt stands in the way of the miraculous God is eager to do for us.
8. Mark 4:40 – Faith removes fear by expecting God to do whatever is needed.
9. Luke 22:32 – Our faith is Satan's target to neutralize our relationship with God.
10. Luke 22:32 – Strengthening of faith is accomplished by Jesus' intercession rather than by heroic effort.
11. Acts 3:16 – Faith opens the door to the mighty power of God in Jesus' name.
12. Acts 3:16 – The work of faith is complete – the healing was total.
13. Acts 6:5 – Faith will be found in the company of the Holy Spirit, God's grace and God's power.
14. Acts 11:24 – Faith and the filling of the Holy Spirit are vital ingredients of goodness.
15. Acts 15:9 – Faith is the essential ingredient in the purifying of our lives.
16. Acts 20:21 – Faith is the universal ingredient in the redemption of the lost.
17. Acts 24:24 – Faith is that inner certainty; that gift of God that will enable the sinner to believe that God will forgive the past and change the present and the future.
18. Acts 26:18 – Faith is a vital ingredient in the sanctification, the setting apart the child of God for purity and service .
19. Romans 1:17 – Righteousness is from God, made available through faith.
20. Romans 3:3 – Faith is a divine quality that His children must constantly seek to emulate as God enables them.
21. Romans 3:27, 28 – Faith and faith alone can avail us of the sacrifice of the blood of Christ.
22. Romans 4:5 – We have no righteousness. Like Abraham, our faith is recorded as righteousness even though it is God's gracious gift.

FAITH

23. Romans 4:13 – Faith is the source, the means by which righteousness is realized.
24. Romans 19, 20 – Faith is not static. It can both increase and decrease.
25. Romans 5:1, 2 – Faith opens the door of access to grace when we are otherwise unable to gain such access to the glory of God.
26. Romans 9:30 – Faith enables righteousness which works cannot do.
27. Romans 9:30 – Faith is ethnically, culturally and racially blind.
28. Romans 10:17 and Isaiah 53:1 – Hearing the Gospel does not necessarily result in faith.
29. Romans 11:20 – Our standing before God is by faith.
30. Romans 12:3 – Faith comes from God. There are measures of faith in different believers.
31. Romans 12:6 – The greater one's faith, the greater one's use and effectiveness of the gift God has given to them.
32. Romans 14:1 – People differ in their appearance and their eager response to the faith God entrusted to them.
33. Romans 14:23 – Everything that is not of faith is sin. Faith is the dividing line between sin and righteousness.
34. I Corinthians 2:5 – Faith rests upon the solid foundation of God's almighty power.
35. I Corinthians 12:9 – The gift of faith, which differs from saving faith, comes to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
36. I Corinthians 13:2 – Faith is incomplete without love. Faith is interlinked with every other gift of God.
37. I Corinthians 13:13 – Love is greater than faith and hope.
38. I Corinthians 15:14 – The resurrection is central to our faith.
39. II Corinthians 1:24 – Faith enables the child of God to stand firm in adversity.
40. II Corinthians 4:13 – The possession and experience of faith are essential to the teaching of the Christian life.
41. II Corinthians 5:7 – Our entire relationship with God will always be on the basis of faith, not knowledge. We will never be relieved of the need to trust.
42. II Corinthians 8:7 – There are levels in the experience of faith. One must be able to increase in faith.
43. II Corinthians 10:15 – Faith is alive, it must grow. It is a growing process rather than an action.
44. Galatians 2:16 – Faith is the means of our justification.

PEACEMAKERS

There are five words in the New Testament that are translated "peace." Only one of these words deals directly with the quality of spiritual growth. The other four deal basically with being quiet rather than being peaceful.

At first blush, one might wonder if "peacemaker" really qualifies as a quality of spiritual growth. This is a valid concern. It is appropriate to explain why it was chosen as a spiritual growth quality. First, it is one of the qualities one finds in God. In several places the Scriptures speak of "the God of peace." One might express this as "the God who is characterized by peace." Because our God is "the God of peace;" because our spiritual growth is a journey to become increasingly like God: it is, therefore, appropriate to think of peacemaking as a quality of spiritual growth. Second, since peacemaking is spoken of in positive terms, it is appropriate for us to consider it a quality of spiritual growth. Thirdly, we are commanded to be "at peace." We, therefore, can only be obedient; we can only become increasingly like Jesus if we are also people of peace.

"Eirene" (εἰρήνη)

This word means "peace," "prosperity," "quietness," "rest," "set at one again." It is a peacemaker – to harmonize, to make peace, to be peaceable. It comes from the root which means to flow as opposed to rocks which obstruct water flow and cause "white water."

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9

This verse is commonly referred to as one of the Beatitudes. These qualities are generally understood to be the characteristics of the kingdom of God. One among these characteristics is peacemaking. This verse gives us a few pieces of information about the nature of peace.

1. Peace is a byproduct of life, not a goal to be sought.
2. Making peace is a source of joy. The word "blessed" means "happy."
3. It is possible for people to bring about peace.
4. Peacemakers will be "called sons of God." At first glance, this seems to suggest that no one else would be called "sons of God." That, of course, is not true. The intent is clear. A son is taught, in every way, to be a reflection of his father. This is what Jesus taught repeatedly concerning Himself. That is what Jesus was saying in this instance. One who makes peace will be a reflection of the character of God in this respect. There is no higher honor than this for the child of God.

"Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Mark 9:50

Salt never becomes "unsalty." When pyramids were opened salt was found. It was as salty as when it was placed in the pyramid thousands of years ago. Salt came from two sources in that time. Some came from salt mines in the south by the Red Sea. People also would dig up the dirt around the Dead Sea. When this dried, there were grains of salt embedded in the dirt. They would pick out the crystals of salt from the dirt. When all the

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

salt had been taken from the dirt it was spread on the road because it would ruin good soil if spread upon it.

Salt had three very obvious uses. It was used to cleanse food and other things. Second, it was used to add flavor to food. It was also used to preserve food. Each of these uses added to the quality of life of the people of the area.

Jesus urged them to have salt in themselves. He wanted them to add a quality to life around them; to do among people what salt does with food.

Notice that Jesus said, "have salt in yourself and be at peace with one another." There is a cause/effect relationship in this statement. One of the sources of peace among God's people is the benefit we provide for each other in terms of purifying, adding flavor to life or preserving.

To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace. " Luke 1:79

The elderly priest, Zecharias, had all his adult life been the object of ridicule and abuse because he and his wife, Elizabeth, were childless. Now, as he neared the retirement age of 50, his wife gave birth to a child whom the angel said would be "great in the sight of the Lord." The ecstatic, elderly priest broke forth into song as his voice was restored. He concluded his song with the words of this verse.

Zecharias described the ministry of the coming Messiah to bring salvation to His people.; He spoke of the ministry of Jesus, ":to guide our feet in the way of peace." Peace is more than the silencing of battle. It is a daily walk, a way of living, a direction of life that ushers His beloved from the paths of sin into the paths of righteousness.

"Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bond-servant depart In peace, according to Thy word; Luke 2:29

This, of course, is the ecstasy of Simeon after he had seen the infant Messiah. By the Holy Spirit, he had been assured that he would not die until he had seen the promised Messiah. The time had come and the exaltation of the privilege overwhelmed the aged saint. In this ecstasy, Simeon cried out in praise to God in the words of this verse. In the jubilation of this statement, the aged man of God gave us an insight into the nature of peace. He said, "...let thy bond servant depart in peace." The idea of peace, in this instance, contains an element of fulfillment. Simeon could not have spoken of departing in peace if he had not first seen the promised Messiah. Here, peace is that sense of completeness; that awareness of closure brought about because God had done what He said He would do; that ecstasy of privilege granted a humble soul to see personally, the one who would redeem Israel and save the people from their sins. God had demonstrated His compassion and faithfulness in the presence of this humble servant. Life was now complete. He was prepared to go on to his reward. That is peace.

*And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."
Luke 7:50*

This picture of peace is a bit like the previous one, but not exactly. The scene is set in the home of a Pharisee who invited Jesus to dine with him. The text is not clear why the Pharisee invited Jesus. Verse 39 indicates that the Pharisee had some doubts about the integrity of Jesus. We also know that the Pharisee insulted Jesus by not offering Him the washing

PEACEMAKERS

of feet and pouring oil on His head. The Pharisee violated his own code. They never associated with anyone they did not accept. They would not eat with anyone with whom they were not in complete harmony. This usually meant that Pharisees ate only with each other. These facts cause us to wonder if the Pharisee's motives were not what they might have been.

A woman who had lived a sinful life in that village came into the house. She bathed Jesus feet with her tears, wiped his feet with her hair and poured expensive perfume on His feet. The Pharisee was alarmed that Jesus would allow this. After chastising the Pharisee, Jesus told the woman that all her sins were forgiven. He then said "your faith has saved you; go in peace."

In this instance, peace is not the absence of war. It is, rather, that sense of completeness; that awareness of being in harmony with God despite past sins. It involves a sense of release. Such a woman would be totally ostracized in that culture. In Jesus Christ, if nowhere else, she was accepted and affirmed. Here was One who saw her for what she was, not for what she had been. The struggle to escape her past was ended; the goal of acceptance and forgiveness had been won, in Christ. That too is peace.

"And if a man of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him; but if not, it will return to you. Luke 10:6

The word "peace" is used in two ways in this verse. Jesus said, "If a man of peace is there." It is a way of saying, "if a man whose defining characteristic is peace is there." This suggests that peace is an observable quality of life. It is not one among many qualities, it is rather a quality that affects, modifies and colors every facet of a godly life.

The second part of the verse is different. Jesus said, "Your peace will rest upon him, but if not, it will return to you." This is a bit difficult for us. A greeting upon arrival or departure is a formality for us. It involves nothing more intentional than a courtesy. For them, especially for believers, a greeting was an intentional prayer. It expressed a sincere and strong desire that God would bless the recipient with peace. It represented intense desire.

In this instance, peace is an intense desire that God would bestow a blessing of harmony and fulfillment upon the person whose life is set apart to live at peace with others and with God.

"Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; Luke 12:51

This verse is a source of concern for many. Jesus is the speaker and it sounds to them as though His purpose in coming was of baser sort rather than redemptive. In fact, His redemptive purpose would itself create great division. This is because people would not accept the redemption He offered. The Pharisees are the most obvious example of this situation.

In this statement, however, Jesus has given us a glimpse into the nature of peace. Peace is the opposite of division. Put another way, peace is expressed in unity and harmony. Peace, however, is an active quality rather than a passive one. The greater the level of harmony and unity, the greater the level of peace that pervades the body of believers.

There are really two levels of peace in the life of the believer. First, there is a level of peace produced by the growing experience of harmony between the believer and God.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

There is a second level of peace that grows and increases between believers as their harmony and unity increases. This was the reason that Jesus sent the early Christians back to the upper room until they were of one accord. That was a beautiful expression of peace in the body of Christ.

"Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. Luke 14:32

In this paragraph, Jesus talked about counting the cost of discipleship. He used an illustration of two kings about to do battle. If a king sees he can win the battle, he will go to war. If it is clear he will be defeated, he will send a delegation to seek terms of peace. This is a principle as old as human conflict. In this verse, peace is the alternative to devastating conflict.

This term and its meaning have an application concerning spiritual growth. There are an abundance of Christian congregations where conflict between believers is faced. It is clear that pursuing the conflict will not resolve the differences. In spite of this, the conflict is engaged; the church is divided and no peace is realized.

Peace could be approached if the combatants were more interested in harmony than defeating each other. It must be admitted that on both sides they really believe that they are defending the faith. The problem grows out of the fact that they are unaware of their real purposes. The quality of peace is approached when kingdom values supercede personal desires and concerns. It is not to be found otherwise.

saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Luke 19:38

This verse and verse 42, which we will observe next, are part of the paragraph in which Luke described Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowd began to praise God using the words of Psalm 118:26. In this acclamation, the followers of Jesus give us insights into the nature of peace.

1. In the political world, the king is the one who arranges for the cessation of combat. In the spiritual kingdom, Jesus Christ, the King, is the one who brings peace to His people. Here we can also see that peace is two directional: Jesus brings us peace. At the same time, we as His people can create conditions among ourselves that work toward peace.
2. Note also that the disciples cried out, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." Other passages, such as Luke 2:14, speak of "Peace on earth." This suggests that this heavenly quality is to be found on earth among the people of God. Though the text does not say so, it would appear that the peace on earth is only a foretaste of that more beautiful and more complete peace we shall experience in glory.

Notice also that the quote from Psalms speaks of both "peace" and "glory." There may be many facets of truth here, but one is clear. The peace in heaven is as real and present as the glory of His presence.

saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. Luke 19:42

In the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as Jesus was descending the north side of the Mount of Olives, he stopped and wept over the city. It was here that He spoke the words of this

PEACEMAKERS

verse. It appears that he spoke of the destruction of the city that took place some 40 years later. He said, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace." There is information in these words about peace.

Peace does not just happen. It is caused. Jesus spoke of "the things which make for peace." It appears that there were things the people of Jerusalem, especially their religious leaders, could do that would bring peace. In view of the sordid history of the city, we have some suggestions of the "things" of which Jesus spoke. The religious leaders had turned the place of worship into a "den of thieves." They had killed the prophets God sent to remind them of their error. In some centuries, the people had become involved in the worship of idols. The kings had made alliances with pagan nations when God had told them not to do so. They violated the commandments. The worship of the temple had been so degraded that people like John the Baptist had left the city and gone off to the Dead Sea because they were convinced that the wrath of God would destroy the city. Though God had strictly forbidden it, the religious leaders lent money to widows knowing full well that they could not pay it back. They, then, violated another command and took these widows to court and made servants of them and their children. The religious leaders were arrogant and proud. They wanted to be noticed by people and given special attention more than they wanted to carefully serve God at the temple.

These are the things that violate peace. It is appropriate to think that if one would do the opposite of the things listed, these would be the things that work for peace of which Jesus spoke.

*"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.
John 14:27*

In this passage, Jesus had told His disciples, in a way that they finally understood, that He was going to die. The disciples were confused and apprehensive. Jesus took great care to comfort them and explain the situation to them. It is in this context that Jesus said the words of this verse.

In these comforting words, Jesus gave us information about peace:

1. Peace is "left" by Jesus Christ. The word "leave" comes from the Greek word "aphiemi" (ἀφίημι) and means "to send forth." Peace finds its origin and source in Jesus Christ.
2. Peace is a gift from Jesus Christ. "My peace I give to you." Peace can be two-sided:
 - a. There is a sense, as here, in which peace is the gift of Jesus Christ to the life of the believer.
 - b. There is another sense in which the believer at least creates the atmosphere for peace by his/her life of obedience to God.
3. The gift of peace, from Jesus Christ, comes in exceedingly generous measure – "not as the world gives."
4. One of the results of peace is that in the midst of distressing circumstances, our hearts can be free and untroubled.

*"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."
John 16:33*

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

In this passage, Jesus continued to comfort His frightened disciples after telling them that He would die on the cross. The comforting words yield more insights into the nature of peace.

Our peace is in Christ. It is not that He gives us peaceful, non-threatening circumstances. It is that despite our circumstances, calm or troubled, Christ is our peace.

Peace is the result of Christ's overcoming the world. The greatest expression of peace is not calm circumstance. It is that inner quality that defies distressing circumstances because Christ has already defeated the forces that cause our distress. Thus, peace is, to that extent, the product of our faith in Christ's victory over the forces of evil.

And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be with you." John 20:26

Following the resurrection, the disciples had great difficulty believing Jesus was alive, even though members of their group had seen Him and reported the experience to them. This caused great confusion for the 11. After eight days, Jesus came into the upper room where they were hiding away in fear of the authorities.

It is at this point that Jesus entered the room without opening the door. He said, "Peace be with you."

On one side, the pronouncement was their common greeting – "shalom." On the other hand, Jesus used this common greeting to speak peace to very troubled hearts.

Here, peace is the release from inner turmoil and ravaging fear. It is produced by the presence of Christ. Peace does not make us stronger. It rather breaks in upon our lives because of the presence and reality of the risen Christ in all His victory, power and glory.

"The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all." Acts 10:36

In this passage, Peter talked with Cornelius about the fact that God accepts the people of every nation, not just Jews. In this conversation, Peter spoke the words of this verse describing the message of the Gospel. He spoke of "preaching peace through Jesus Christ." In this instance, peace is the result of accepting the forgiveness of Christ, being adopted into God's family and ending the rebellion and enmity we sustained against the loving God. It is a cessation of hostilities between ourselves and God.

To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 1:7

Paul was fond of pronouncing this blessing upon the people of the churches to whom he wrote. Indeed, the blessing of "grace and peace" is part of the salutation of every epistle he wrote.

In this verse, Paul provides two pieces information about peace. Peace is bestowed upon us by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul deals with peace as a uniquely Christian quality of life.

But glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 2:10

PEACEMAKERS

In chapter two, Paul contrasted, for the Roman church, the consequences of doing evil and the consequences of doing good. Though peace is bestowed upon the believer by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, it is especially bestowed upon those who are daily involved in doing good on a continuous basis. Paul would define "good" as obedience to God's holy commands, especially as demonstrated in the life of Jesus.

And the way of peace have they not known. Romans 3:17

This verse is a quotation from Isaiah 59:8. Paul used this quotation to substantiate his claim that all flesh, Jew and Gentile, is under sin. Isaiah said, "The way of peace they have not known." In the series of quotations, 3:10-18, Paul identified the characteristics of a life of sin. He concluded this list by saying such people do not know the way of peace. It is fair to assume that Paul here implied that the way of peace involves the opposite of this list. Look carefully at the list:

KNOW NO PEACE	KNOW WAY OF PEACE
Do not seek God.	They seek God.
Do no good.	They do good.
Kill with words.	Use words for kindness.
Practice deceit.	Totally sincere
Poison with words.	Speak words which strengthen.
Cursing	Blessing
Bitterness	Rejoice
Murderers	Preserve people.
Create ruin.	Create harmony.
Produce misery.	Produce comfort.
No fear of God	They fear God.

Here is a place where we can discover direction in finding and increasing in the way of peace.

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 5:1

Paul's statement is clear. Those who are justified; those who stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus have peace with God. This termination of hostilities and institution of reconciliation is a part of our justification. It is, thereby, a uniquely Christian quality of life. Most of us know unbelievers who leave quiet lives that appear to be peaceful or at least free from struggle. Whatever that may be, it is not the peace of which Paul speaks.

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, Romans 8:6

In Romans 8:5-7, Paul contrasts the mind set on the flesh and the mind set on the Holy Spirit.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

MIND SET ON FLESH	MIND SET ON THE SPIRIT
Mind set on natural desires	Mind set on what Spirit desires
Mind is death	Controlled by spirit – Life and peace
Mind is hostile to God	Infer – not hostile to God
Does not submit to God's law	Joyfully submits to God's law
Unable to submit to God's law	
Cannot please God	Rejoices to please God

There are several pieces of information in these verses that focus on peace.

1. "The mind set on the spirit IS life and peace." It does not say this mind produces peace. It IS peace. Peace is inseparable from the mind determined to have only what the Holy Spirit desires. Peace is inseparable from the Spirit-led life. That is peace.
2. Peace, for the believer, is totally bound up in pleasing God and placing one's self at the pleasure of God who never changes.
3. Observe, Paul did NOT say the life controlled by the Spirit is peace. He said, " the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace." Peace is inseparable from life. By life, we do not simply mean breathing. It is that which finds meaning and purpose in serving and obeying God. That meaningful way may take us through storms, persecution and death, but it is peace.

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

Paul dealt with the problem of Christians judging other Christians. Part of the problem had to do with what a Christian can and cannot eat. Paul insisted this is not what the kingdom of God is all about. Paul asserted that the kingdom of God is about "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The way it is written, one might translate it, "The kingdom of God is...righteousness in the Holy Spirit, peace in the Holy Spirit and joy in the Holy Spirit." Each of these three qualities is inescapably tied to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Peace is one of the primary qualities to be found in the kingdom of God. One might fairly assert that if there is no peace, then one must look carefully to see if that individual is really a part of the kingdom of God.

Paul links three qualities to the kingdom of God – righteousness, peace and joy. These qualities are inseparably linked. These three qualities are equally a part of the life of the kingdom of God.

So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Romans 14:19

Paul continued with his instructions about Christians judging other believers. Two of Paul's statements give us information about peace. He said,

1. "Let us pursue the things which make for peace." Though peace is a gift of God, there are things we can pursue that bring His peace in our lives. Peace is an active quality, not a passive one. Peace will be a major focus in the lives of believers.
2. "Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." The two entities – peace and building one another up – are inseparable. If we have the

PEACEMAKERS

gift of God's peace, we will inevitably seek to do the things that build up the lives of other Christians. Building up the lives of other Christian people is an inevitable part of the life of peace.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Throughout his epistles, Paul occasionally inserts a beautiful benediction. This is one of those gifts. This benediction is insightful in terms of peace.

1. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace..."
 - a. It is as possible to be filled with peace as it is to be filled with joy.
 - b. Observe the linkage between hope, joy and peace. These qualities support and strengthen each other in the Christian faith.
 - c. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." The blessing of which Paul speaks is tied to faith in Christ. This is one more expression of the fact that "peace" is a uniquely Christian quality of life. Believing is the condition, the foundation upon which the God of hope fills His people with joy and peace. Belief is the atmosphere of peace.
2. "That you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
 - a. The word "that" suggests purpose or result. The purpose of God filling our lives with joy and peace is so that we may "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Our hope is inescapably linked to God filling us with joy and peace. It is an evidence of our peace.
 - b. All of this happens by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by our heroic efforts.

Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. Romans 15:33

This is another of the benedictions that Paul spread across his letters to the churches. In this brief sentence, Paul penned one of the most significant pieces of information about peace. It is a primary quality of the divine nature. One might translate these words, "The God whose nature is peace be with you all." Living a life of peace is the glorious privilege of being tucked away in the nature of God. In the life of peace, people will not see us, but the image of God in whom we live and move and have our being.

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Corinthians 1:3*

Previously we observed, in Romans 5:1, that "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In this verse, Paul adds significantly to that understanding. Grace and peace are the gift to our redeemed lives from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, in the course of this study we have discovered that each member of the Triune God participated in showering our lives with the gift of peace which is a gift of grace we do not, cannot deserve.

But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. Romans 7:15

Paul instructed the young believers in Corinth concerning unbelieving spouses. Faced with the dilemma that an unbelieving spouse may choose not to remain with a new believ-

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

er, Paul instructed that they should allow the unbeliever to leave. He then added, "God has called us to live in peace."

What is it to "live in peace"? In this instance, peace represents several things:

1. It is to feel no need to force an unhappy, unbelieving spouse to remain in an uncomfortable relationship against his/her will.
2. Peace is to feel no sense of personal failure when an unbelieving spouse feels compelled to end the marriage relationship with a new believer. There is an inner stress and turmoil, feeling of devastating failure that can accompany such an experience. Peace is to go through that experience without the sense of failure. There is a sense of loss, but there is also a sense of calm depending upon God for all of life, even successes and failures.
3. Peace is to live life to the full without being confrontational. Because we serve an all-powerful God of the impossible, there are occasions when we are tempted to force "good" things to happen. Peace is to be free from such felt need. It is the comfort of leaving the results to God.

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace... " I Corinthians 14:33

In this chapter, Paul dealt with the confusion and disorder in worship caused by many speaking in tongues at the same time and without interpretation, prophecies interrupting each other, etc. The net result was that the church was not strengthened by these elements of worship. Paul wrote to correct this drastic confusion. He drew a contrast. God is not the God of tumult, confusion. God is the God of peace. In this instruction, Paul threw light on the meaning of peace. Peace is the opposite of tumult, commotion and disorder. The word translated "disorder" is "akatastasia" (ἀκαταστασία) which means "to be unstable," "commotion," "confusion," "to be improperly planned." The opposite of disorderly worship is orderly worship. The opposite of commotion in worship is worship in that is untroubled and void of stress. The opposite of "tumult" in worship is worship that is carefully designed to be beneficial to the saints and informative to the unbeliever.

One of the elements of peace is that one understands exactly what is occurring. Peace prevails when the sequence of events presents no sudden surprises, confusions or meaningless misdirections. It is when worship achieves its divinely ordained purpose without distress or distraction. This is a description of peace.

Notice that Paul said, "God is a God of peace." Peace is the atmosphere in which Omnipotence spoke a universe into being. Peace is the atmosphere of character in which the Son sustains all creation. Peace is the pulse of character by which the Triune God inhabits the soul and spirit of the saint who seeks only God and shuns all evil. On the other hand, this picture of peace does not lend itself to leaden inactivity. Peace is, also, the dynamic calm Jesus expressed when He spoke the storm into silence.

*Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.
II Corinthians 13:11*

Paul came to the end of his second epistle to the Corinthian church. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only time he said "good-by" to one of the churches. It probably doesn't mean that he never planned to see them again. In chapter 12, Paul spoke of his readiness to visit them again. These verses, however, appear to be his final instructions to

PEACEMAKERS

this church. Paul gave them four admonitions. Because they are his final instructions, one may assume that these take a special priority in Paul's thinking. Also, the way these admonitions were written suggests that the four are interrelated. There is a synergism between the four; a mutual strengthening between them that makes them together far more than they would be separately. It is particularly notable that being of one mind is mentioned with living in peace. Indeed, the two are inseparable.

In this verse, Paul again spoke of God as "the God of love and peace." This suggests that peace is a vital ingredient in the character of God. To live a life of peace, then, is to live in such a way that we reflect His presence and character to those who do not know Him.

Paul also said that if they lived in peace, "the God of love and peace will be with you." Paul was not setting up an exclusive group with whom God would be uniquely present. He was, rather, identifying the fact that living in peace and in singleness of mind established a relationship of harmony whereby God would share intimately with them.

CONCLUSION

We have observed a great many details about the life of peace. Let us reflect on the things that we have observed.

1. Peace is a divine quality.
2. We are commanded to be at peace.
3. Matthew 5:9 - Making peace is one of the beatitudes.
4. Matthew 5:9 – Peace is a byproduct of life, not a goal to be achieved.
5. Matthew 5:9 – Peace is a source of joy.
6. Matthew 5:9 – It is possible for people to bring about peace.
7. Matthew 5:9 – Making peace identifies one as part of God's family.
8. Mark 9:50 – A source of peace among God's people is the benefit we provide each other in terms of purifying, making life more pleasant and preserving one another.
9. Luke 1:79 – Peace is a daily walk, a way of living life.
10. Luke 1:79 – Peace is a direction of life that ushers His beloved from paths of sin into the paths of righteousness.
11. Luke 2:29 – There is an element of fulfillment in peace; a sense of completeness, of closure, brought about by the faithfulness of God.
12. Luke 7:50 – Peace is the sense of completeness, the awareness of being in harmony with God. It involves a sense of release.
13. Luke 10:6 – Peace is an observable quality.
14. Luke 12:51 – Peace involves unity; the opposite of division. Peace is expressed in unity and harmony.
15. Luke 14:32 – Peace is approached when kingdom qualities supercede personal desires and concerns.
16. Luke 19:38 – Jesus is the source of our peace.
17. Luke 19:38 - Peace is two-directional – Jesus brings us peace, but we create conditions of peace among ourselves.
18. Luke 19:38 - Peace is a heavenly quality.
17. Luke 19:42 – Peace does not just happen; it is caused. Obedience is the key.
18. John 14:27 – Peace is a gift from Christ.
19. John 14:27--Christ's gift of peace comes in generous measure

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

20. John 16:33 – Our peace is in Christ.
21. John 16:33--Peace is the result of Christ's overcoming of the world.
22. John 16:33 - Peace is the product of our faith in Christ's victory over evil.
23. John 20:26 – Peace is release from common inner turmoil.
24. John 20:26 - Peace is produced by Christ.
25. John 20:26 - Peace is not our increased strength; it is, rather, the awareness of the power of Christ over His enemies which gives strength to our weakness.
26. Acts 10:26 – Peace is the result of being forgiven and accepted into God's family.
27. Acts 10:36 - Peace is the cessation of hostilities between God and our lives.
28. Romans 1:7 – Peace is bestowed upon us by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
29. Romans 2:10 – Peace is bestowed upon those who are daily involved in doing good. – Peace is bestowed upon those who are being obedient to the commands of God and the example of Jesus Christ.
30. Romans 3:17 – The way of peace is specific. It involves the following:
31. Romans 3:17 - Seeking God; doing good; expressing kindness; being totally sincere; showing concern to strengthen others; blessing others; rejoicing in God; preserving others; creating harmony; comforting others; fearing God. (Observe that throughout this statement the emphasis is on concern for other people within the body.)
32. Romans 5:1 – Peace is produced in justification.
- 34 Romans 8:6 – Peace is inseparable from the mind determined to have only what the Holy Spirit desires.
35. Romans 8:6 - Peace is totally bound up in pleasing God.
36. Romans 8:6 - Peace is inseparable from life – that which finds meaning and purpose in serving and pleasing God.
37. Romans 14:7 – Peace is a vital ingredient in the kingdom of God.
38. Romans 14:7 - Our peace is tied to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
39. Romans 14:7 - Peace is an active participant in the righteousness and joy that the Holy Spirit also applies to the life of the believer.
40. Romans 14:19 – Peace is a gift of God.
41. Romans 14:19 - There are things, already described, that we can pursue to bring peace to us.
42. Romans 14:19 - Peace and building one another up are inseparable.
43. Romans 15:13 – It is as possible to be filled with peace as it is to be filled with joy.
44. Romans 15:13 – Our joy and peace are in believing.
45. Romans 15:13 - Peace comes by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by our heroic efforts.
46. Romans 15:33 – Peace is a primary quality in the divine nature.
47. Romans 15:33 - Our peace is an expression of the divine nature.
48. I Corinthians 1:3 – Grace and peace are a gift of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
49. I Corinthians 1:3 - The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in giving peace to the children of God.
50. Romans 7:15 – Living in peace is to feel no need to force good things to happen. There is a contentment to leave the results to God.
51. Romans 7:15 - Peace is living life to the fullest without being confrontational in order to achieve your own goals.

PEACEMAKERS

52. I Corinthians 14:33 – Peace is the opposite of tumult, commotion and disorder.
53. I Corinthians 14:33 - Peace is the atmosphere in which Omnipotence spoke a universe into being.
54. I-Corinthians 14:33 - Peace is the atmosphere of character by which the Son of God sustains all creation.
55. I Corinthians 14:33 - Peace is the pulse of character by which the Triune God inhabits the soul and spirit of the saint who seeks only God.
56. I Corinthians 14:33--Peace is that dynamic calm Jesus expressed when He spoke the storm into silence.
57. II Corinthians 13:11 – Peace and single-mindedness are inseparable.
58. II Corinthians 13:11--To live a life of peace is to live in such a way as to reflect the presence and character of Jesus.
59. II Corinthians 13:11 - Living in peace results in a harmonious relationship with God through Christ.

One of the reasons peace is a difficult spiritual quality to comprehend is that people do not know where to start. If you read through the previous summary information again, you will observe that some pieces of information surface repeatedly.

- a. **Peace is a gift of God.** At the same time, it is possible for us to actively pursue this Christlike quality in our lives. We can create the conditions in which peace will thrive. That being the case, it is appropriate for us to ask God, seriously, that this gift be given to us. This would require, however, that we also carefully prepare our hearts so that that gift can be received.
- b. **Faith is a vital factor in the experience of peace.** Faith is not a decision, it is a gift of God. It is appropriate, therefore, to ask God to grant us faith to believe that peace will come in the turmoil of our lives.
- c. **Obedience surfaces repeatedly as a factor in the life of peace.** To ask God to grant us peace will probably not change much about the quality of our lives. If we busy ourselves, however, seeking to be increasingly obedient to the commands and teachings of Jesus, peace will be a byproduct of such a life of obedience.
- d. **Peace is a byproduct of Christian living, it is not a goal for life.** We will progress toward a life of peace by pursuing our relationship with Christ rather than pursuing a life of peace as such.
- e. **Peace is heavily intertwined with a life of oneness and harmony with others.** If we actively pursue a harmonious relationship with other believers and with God, we will have established a direction for peace in our lives.
- f. **Peace grows as kingdom qualities and concerns supercede personal desires.** We will move in the direction of peace if we increasingly resist the desire to focus upon our own desires. These will repeatedly get us into trouble. As we focus our attention and desires on kingdom qualities, peace will become increasingly present and obvious in our lives and examples.
- g. **Peace is not the product of trying harder.** We have all attempted to try harder to grow. The net result is always disaster. Trying harder will make us frustrated, not peaceful. We must focus on the fact that peace is a gift of God; it is the result of what God does in our lives; it is the result of living in harmony with others and obedience to God.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

- h. **Peace has a primary concern for others.** We can move in the direction of peace by dealing with our selfish tendencies. The more we focus on the needs of others rather than the desires of our own, the more we will move in the direction of peace.
- i. **Peace is a reflection of the person and character of Jesus Christ.** Therefore, it is appropriate to ask God to help us reflect His character and personality more clearly than ever before. As a result of this increasing Christlikeness in us peace will increase.

IN CONCLUSION

Spiritual growth, in all its many facets, has quietly slipped into the background of the thought and teaching within the church. It is not often the topic of conversation, preaching or teaching.

Throughout this study, we have repeatedly observed several features concerning spiritual growth:

- a. **Spiritual growth is a command** – Each of these qualities of spiritual growth is presented as an imperative. It is a command. To fail to do or to be these things is disobedience to the clear teaching of Scripture.
- b. **Spiritual growth is a process, not a single action** – In one quality after another, we have observed that the command is in the Present Indicative Active form – do this and keep on doing this. Spiritual growth is a way of living every moment of every day.
- c. **The qualities of spiritual growth are uniquely Christian** – They are gifts of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They are an outgrowth and expression of our faith.
- d. **The qualities of spiritual growth are interrelated** – In the New Testament, you find them working with each other. They become the foundation upon which other qualities are based. It is like trying to pick up a fish hook out of a box of hooks. You pick up one and discover that they are all hooked together.
- e. **The qualities of spiritual growth are never static** – These qualities may increase or decrease, but they never plateau. It is the divine plan that these qualities grow and continue to grow in us until that day when "we shall be like Him because we shall see Him just as He is." I John 3:2

If one reads the Scriptures carefully, it is easy to see that this sharing of the divine nature is a vital part of the relationship God always intended to share with the pinnacle of His creation. In Genesis He said,

"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Genesis 1:26

The word "image" is "tselem" (צֶלֶם). The original meaning of the word was "shade" or "shadow." It came to mean "resemblance." It resembles something, but it is not that thing. We are not God, but the more we grow in these spiritual qualities, the more we resemble Him and reflect His image before others.

In the Exodus, God didn't just tell Moses how to get back to the land of promise. Every moment, every day the pillar of cloud and fire abode with the people God chose as His bride. Even when Israel was to stay in one place for a period of time, the cloud was there.

In John's Gospel, Jesus said,

That is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. John 14:17

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

The Holy Spirit has taken up permanent residence in the heart of the redeemed. We have within us, the third person of the Trinity. Within us abides the teacher, the Helper Jesus promised to send to His people.

Again in John 14, Jesus said

"In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. John 14:20

This is awe-inspiring. He said that he is in the Father; that we are in Christ; Christ is in us. Jesus described a level of intimacy with God that defies human description.

In John 15, Jesus said,

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5

This is another intimate picture of the relationship we share with Christ. He is where we live. "Abide" means "pitch your tent," It is the place we call home. These verses also describe our source and purpose. What strength we have, we draw from Him as the branch draws its life and identity from the vine. Our purpose is to bear fruit. Fruit is the plant's attempt to reproduce itself. We are the fruit, God reproducing the qualities of His nature in human form so that others may know, more clearly, who God is.

Paul spoke of this intimate relationship, saying,

To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27

The "saints," those redeemed in every era, are the ones God chose to proclaim the mystery concealed until the church was sent to tell the whole world of the grace of God. The mystery is that Christ is in us. His inner presence is our hope of eternal glory. Our redemption was sealed in the cross. Our daily walk and hope of eternal life are sustained by His presence in us.

Our text, II Peter 1:4, seems to be the capstone of this intimate relationship. The opportunity has been presented to us to share in common with God the nature that identifies who He is. We can become partner with God in the character by which He identifies Himself. This is a progressive experience. Each day, as these qualities of spiritual growth increase in us, so does this partnership in the divine nature. What a blessing!

Our responses to this beautiful discovery will vary. For me, it is that hushed silence broken only by falling tears of profound joy that God would crave such an intimate relationship with me. Come, rejoice with me in this intimate relationship with God in Christ!