

# CHRISTIANITY AND THE LAW

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## INTRODUCTION

As J. A. Motyer of Trinity College in Dublin says, “From the very beginning in the Garden of Eden God’s Law lays at the center of His dealings with man... numerous trees were there for his enjoyment, and only a single tree was forbidden; yet in that single tree was enshrined the principle of law; obedience safeguarded the enjoyment of the life that was life indeed, and disobedience not only forfeited that life but replaced it by a death-bearing opposite” (Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Walter Elwell, 2001, p. 674). The rest of the Old Testament perpetuates the view that only by obedience to God’s Law can one prosper and live successfully in God’s world; the Law is given to direct human life (all other life is subhuman), thus Law has the function of liberating humans to live according to their true nature. The Old Testament asserts that the Law was given for our good; not to lessen & diminish life, but to enhance & fulfill life (cf. Deut 4:1; 5:33; 8:1). A life based upon the Law of the Lord is constantly under the blessing of God (cf. Ps 1:1-2), for by His Law the Lord has made His people secure from bondage (cf. Ex 20:2) — the way of obedience is the way of true liberty (cf. Ps 119:45). The problem with fallen man is that he is not able to obey the Law as God intended — “his heart is deceitful and desperately sick” (cf. Jer 17:9; Ecc 9:3; Rom 1:21) — he simply satisfies himself with a modest degree of outward compliance, and hopes that God will forgive him of his misgivings. Though he obviously doesn’t see himself as perfect, neither does he see himself as bad — the problem is he sees himself as reasonably good, but he only understands “relative goodness,” not “absolute goodness,” and therein is the root of the problem — relative human goodness is not acceptable to God... He demands absolute perfection. The reality is, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (cf. Rom 3:23; 3:9; Lk 18:9). So what is the resolution to this dilemma? Is there no way for us to resolve our sin problem? What is the answer? How can we possibly become people who are acceptable to God? Obviously we need to have “the problem of our sinfulness” resolved. What are we to do? Well, since the fall of Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden, God has had a plan for resolving it; a plan that will ultimately abolish sin in the universe and destroy the father of sin (*i.e.*, the serpent, the devil — cf. Gen 3:14-15; Mt 25:41; Jn 8:44; Rev 20:1-10), and come to this world in the person of Jesus Christ and atone for our sin (cf. Jn 3:16; 1 Pet 2:24), and then ask us to place our trust in Him as our Savior and Lord (cf. Jn 1:12; Rom 10:4-17; Gal 3:26; Eph 2:8-9).

Whereas the people of God in the Old Testament era looked forward to that day when God would fulfill His promise to establish a New Covenant with them (cf. Jer 31:31-34)... the people of God during New Testament times look back on that day when God established the New Covenant through the death and resurrection of His Son (cf. Mt 26:26-28;

Heb 8:6, 8; 9:15) — though God’s plan of salvation was a future reality in the Old Testament, today it is a historical reality that took place 2000 years ago in Jerusalem. The apostle Peter described it this way — “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, made careful search and inquiry about what God was telling them, seeking to know what **person** or **time** the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow... [he goes on to say] these were things into which even the **angels** of heaven desired to look” (1 Pet 1:10-12). Though many Old Testament prophets did not fully understand everything they were prophesying... they were told by God to write down what He was telling them, “because the fullness of His message was closed up and sealed until the end of time” (Dan 12:8-10); so when Daniel expressed his continued failure to understand the vision he was given, God told him it would not be completely clear until it occurred. Remember, the prophets foretold an even greater manifestation of grace than what they had known (cf. Is 45:20-25; 52:14-15; 55:1-7; 61:1-3; also Rom 9:24-33; 10:11, 13, 20; 15:9-21). The salvation of God is portrayed in the Book of Isaiah (read the following fifteen verses — Is 52:13-53:12); these verses contain incontrovertible evidence that Jesus is the fulfillment of messianic prophecy; this section of Scripture clearly refers to “the Messiah Jesus” as the New Testament attests (cf. Mt 8:17; Mk 15:28; Lk 22:37; Jn 12:38; Acts 8:28-35; Rom 10:16; 1 Pet 2:21-25); it is often alluded to without being quoted (cf. Mk 9:12; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 1:19; 1 Jn 3:5). The details stated in Isaiah cover the work of Christ in His substitutionary death, His burial, His resurrection, His saving of sinners, His intercession, and His kingdom. Beloved, take the time to prayerfully reflect upon those fifteen verses in Isaiah (cf. Is 52:13-53:12).

As has been the case from the very beginning, salvation results when man places his trust in God — “Abraham **believed** in the LORD, and He reckoned it to him as **righteousness**” (cf. Gen 15:6). Scripture clearly teaches that righteousness is only achieved by trusting in God (i.e., having faith in God), and has nothing to do with the works of man or obedience to the Law; remember, Abraham lived 500 years before Moses received the Law from God... so **Faith predates Law**. The apostle Paul quoted these words as an illustration of faith over and against works (cf. Rom 4:3, 9, 22; Gal 3:6; Jam 2:23); he stated it thus: “**No one** will be justified by the works of the Law” (Rom 3:20); “Man is justified by **faith** apart from works of the Law” (Rom 3:28); “The promise to Abraham was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13). God “reckoned” Abraham’s faith as righteousness (Gen 15:6) — the word “reckoned” is often translated “counted” or “imputed,” it is a banking term that means “to put to one’s account” (that word is used eleven times in Romans 4). So Abraham didn’t work for his salvation; he simply trusted God’s Word — it was Jesus Christ who ultimately did the work on the cross, and it was His righteousness that was placed on Abraham’s account. By the way, the word dikaïos in Greek is translated “justify” & “righteous” in English — to be justified before God is to have a “righteous standing” before God. Sinners are declared righteous because of the work of Christ on their behalf; so justification is something God does — no sinner can make himself righteous or justify himself... only God can do that; all we can do is place our faith in Him and believe in Him (cf. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11). “The wages of sin is **death**, but

*the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (cf. Gen 2:17; Deut 30:19-20; Rom 6:23; Eph 2:1-5). Remember, Abraham is the father of all believers, both Jews & Gentiles; the reality is, Abraham has a spiritual family (all true believers) as well as a physical family (nation of Israel); “*God made him a father of many nations*” (Gen 17:5). It is also important to note that “*God justifies the ungodly*” (Rom 4:5); the reality is, there are no godly people for Him to justify – “*there is none righteous, not even one*” (cf. Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Rom 3:10); we are all sinners who fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). God placed all of our sins on Christ’s account that He might put Christ’s righteousness on our account (1 Pet 2:24). *God justifies the ungodly (sinners) because they believe His gracious promise* (cf. Mt 9:12-13), not because they obey His Law. The Law was not given to save men, but to show them that they are lost and need deliverance (cf. Rom 4:15; Gal 3:19, 24) — “*All we like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (i.e., to fall on the Messiah Jesus at the cross)*” (Is 53:6). The good news of the gospel is “*the power of God unto salvation*” (Rom 1:16). Said the LORD to the prophet Hosea, “*I want faithful love more than I want animal sacrifices, and I want people to know Me more than I want burnt offerings*” (cf. Hos 6:6). Said Jesus in his high priestly prayer the night before He went to the cross: “*This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent*” (cf. Jn 17:3; Jer 24:7).

## THE PROBLEM WITH MAN

The main problem with all men is their continual desire to be autonomous creatures; i.e., their desire to run their own life and not be in subjection to anyone other than themselves. That was the problem with Adam, and it is still the problem today; even believers have a difficult time completely surrendering to the lordship of Christ (due to their sin nature). Many believers in the church of Galatia redefined the Christian life and made it a “works oriented life,” as if their compliance with the Law resulted in a level of righteousness before God (Gal 2:21). *While the law demands works, grace requires faith*, and those are two very different suppositions — works focuses on one’s own efforts, whereas faith focuses on the work of Christ. Faith is a difficult construct for many believers, because it is man’s nature to constantly focus on himself and his actions rather than focus on God and His actions. To believe that “our works” are somewhat meritorious before God, is to believe that “*a measure of good actually dwells in us*” (Rom 7:18); and that God is pleased when we embrace a certain lifestyle and obey certain precepts (be it circumcision, acting piously, disassociating from certain individuals, keeping the Sabbath, attending church, adhering to various ritualistic obligations, etc.); incidentally, that would be akin to believing that we are “transformed” (sanctified) by our own works. Listen carefully, we didn’t become children of God by anything we did (i.e., by our works)... and neither will we be “sanctified” (transformed) by anything we do (i.e., by our works — Gal 3:1-3). When “our behavior” is the supreme issue that governs our lives, our “focus in life” is completely misdirected — rather than focusing on Christ we are focusing on ourselves, but the Christian life is not about “our works,” it is about the “works of Christ” who is both “the author

*and perfecter of our faith*” (Heb 12:2); so the Christian life is not only about *what Christ did* to make us His children, but *what He continues to do* in our lives to bring about our sanctification. The word “**sanctified**” in Greek (*hagiasmos*) literally means “**to be separated unto God and be separated from all that is evil**” — thus it means to “**be holy**” (*hagios*); anything that is separated unto God and separated from that which is evil is holy (cf. Lev 11:44; Is 57:15; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Pet 1:16). Ultimately, the work of sanctification in our lives is the work of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2), not something of our own doing; it is God who makes us holy and transforms us into the image of Christ — think about it, how can we possibly make ourselves pure and holy? By performing some simplistic little works? Paul calls that nonsense (Gal 3:3). If God doesn’t make us holy, we will never become holy. The wonderful truth is, **God is doing a transforming work in us!** (cf. Phil 1:6; 2:13; 2 Cor 3:18). The **means** God uses to accomplish His transforming work in us is His Holy Spirit and His Holy Word; *i.e.*, the Word of truth (cf. Jn 17:17; 2 Cor 3:18) — remember, **God’s Word is living and active** (Heb 4:12); it is a living dynamic, not just a collection of forensic truths & divine precepts. **As we place our trust in God and cooperate with Him and strive to walk in righteousness (that’s our part), God by His Spirit effectuates a change in us** (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; 3:6; Rom 6:12-22; Eph 6:14; 1 Tim 6:11-14; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:16; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 Jn 3:6-10; Phil 2:12-13) — **where there is true born-again faith, there is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit disciplining us and moving us in a godly direction** (cf. Phil 2:12-13; Heb 12:4-11; Ps 25:8-10; 32:8-9; 33:18; 37:23-25). Just as it was **by His Word** that God spoke all things into existence (cf. Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29), and **by His Word** that we were born-again and became new creatures in Christ (cf. 1 Pet 1:3, 23; 2 Cor 5:17)... so it is **by His Word** that He is transforming us into the image of His Son (cf. Jn 17:17). It is here where most believers become somewhat confused.

*As fallen creatures, we have a tendency to separate God Himself from His Word, as if they are two distinct realities...* in so doing we make God a more distant reality and His Word just a collection of divine thoughts and spiritual truths. The reality is, **Scripture is God’s self-revelation to man** — not just a book about Him, but the very voice of God Himself. Not only is God “**holy**,” so also is His Word; not only is God “**living**,” so also is His Word; **the two realities are one, just as the Trinity is one**. Jesus referred to Himself as “**the truth**” (Jn 14:6), and to His Word as “**the truth**” (Jn 17:17), and to the Holy Spirit as “**the Spirit of truth**” (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13) — the reality is, there is only one truth, and truth does not reside outside of God Himself, as if truth is a separate construct unto itself — **Just as God is alive & holy, so is His Word alive & holy — again, they are one**. **So when you humbly study God’s Word, you are experiencing the very presence of God**. Now since God is Spirit, the physical Bible that we hold in our hands is *not holy* (the physical written Word of God is something that a publishing company made; some of its workers may not have even been believers), so we don’t treat our physical Bible as if the pages themselves are of a holy nature that need to be revered; **it is the invisible, intrinsic Word itself that is of God and is holy...** **keeping that in mind, we refer to Scripture as “the Holy Bible” because the content itself is indeed “holy.”** As the Bible proclaims, “**all of Scripture is God-breathed**” (cf. 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21)... it is the very Word of God Himself; not the words of men. The problem with man is that he insists on making God

and His Word two distinct realities; that Scripture contains some constructs about God, but that much of it is but the thoughts of men; thus many believers prefer a red-lettered edition of the Bible, because they believe the red-lettered words are of God (*i.e.*, of Jesus Himself), and that all of the other words are not quite as holy as the ones that Jesus spoke. The truth is, **Scripture is not just a book that contains some divine truths, it is the very breath of God in its entirety**; when we insist on separating God from His Word, we are actually separating God from who He is... thus making Him more mysterious to us than He should be; in so doing we are darkening the light of truth. When we study Scripture, we need to be open to seeing God in everything we read, and not simply imagine Him as being a distant reality behind the scene. When we humbly read the Word of God, it is the voice of God to our hearts; not just abstract thoughts. Regardless of what passage you may read, God wants you to experience “His presence” and commune with Him.

## GOD’S REVELATION TO MAN

So Scripture is God’s revelation of Himself to man – it reveals God Himself to us from every conceivable angle; it is not just a collection of abstract thoughts about God, it is the voice of God to the human heart. Though Scripture does not reveal the fullness of God to us (His infinite nature is beyond human comprehension), His Word reveals all God wants us to know about Himself as creatures made in His image. I am reminded of the famous words of the English Franciscan philosopher and scientist Roger Bacon (1214-1292) said, “There is one wisdom which is perfect, and that is contained in the Scriptures.” Likewise, the much quoted 2<sup>nd</sup> century theologian and outspoken critic of Gnosticism, Irenaeus said: “If we cannot find explanations of all things which require investigation in the Scriptures, let us not seek for a second god beyond the One who is.” With those thoughts in mind, don’t treat God’s Word as simply a collection of writings proffered by a few highly religious men who lived in antiquity. Scripture is not just a book that contains God’s Word – it is God’s Word – it is the very breath of God Himself to man (2 Tim 3:16); it is living and active (Heb 4:12). When you contemplate what Scripture says, you are contemplating the voice of the living God to your heart; it is like sitting in His presence with Him talking to you. Thus what is important for the believer is that he humble himself & diligently seek to understand exactly what it is that God is saying to him (cf. 2 Tim 2:15), and not simply conclude that “God’s Word doesn’t speak to my heart.”

When studying God’s Word it is important to first determine what God is saying, before determining what His message means – if one doesn’t accurately determine what God is saying, one will never fully grasp what God’s message means. Let me illustrate it with the words of Paul to the believers at Philippi – “I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). Do you know what Paul is saying in this passage, as opposed to what he is not saying? He is saying that God will perfect the work He began in those of us who have been born-again as a result of placing our trust in Christ... he is not saying that He might perfect

that work. Additionally, He is saying that God started a work in the believer's life, and that He is going to complete that work – the word translated “perfect” (*epiteleo*) literally means “to bring through to an end,” it is commonly translated “complete, accomplish, finish” (cf. 2 Cor 8:6, 11; 1 Pet 5:9; Rom 15:28). Before going any further, we need to first define what “that good work is” that Paul is referring to; it is “the divine work of regeneration,” i.e., the new birth that is effectuated in us by the Holy Spirit, whereby God makes us a new creation in Christ (cf. Jn 3:3-5; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:4-5; Col 2:13; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:3). Whereas regeneration is the “birth” by which this work of new creation is begun, sanctification is the “growth” by which that work is completed (cf. Jn 17:17-19; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18). The reality is, the regenerate person has forever ceased to be the person he or she was – the old life is over and a new life has begun; they are new creatures in Christ, buried with Him and raised from the dead with Him to a new life of righteousness (cf. Rom 6:3-11; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:9-11). You'll notice, Paul said God “will” perfect and complete the work He has begun; that verb in Greek is in the “indicative mood” (that is the mood of reality in Greek; the grammatical way in which one can state something as “being a fact,” i.e., “reality,” the English language doesn't possess that unique characteristic; it would have to express it with additional words). Thus Paul is saying that this is a certain reality in the lives of believers; now contrary to what one might be inclined to think, this will occur. Paul prefaced his comments by telling the Philippian believers that he was absolutely confident that God will finish the work He began in them — why was he confident? their participation in the work of ministry evidenced the fact that they were truly born-again, and that their faith was indeed genuine (cf. Phil 1:3-11; Lk 6:43-45; Mt 5:16; Jn 5:36; 13:35; Eph 2:10; Jam 2:17, 19). With the foregoing in mind, every believer can be absolutely certain that God is at work in them transforming them into the image of Christ (cf. Rom 8: 28-29; Phil 2:12-13); again, it is not something that God does instantaneously — our transformation (i.e., sanctification) will not be fully completed until we enter into the eternal state (heaven; cf. 1 Jn 3:2; Rom 8:18-25, 29; 2 Cor 3:18; 2 Pet 1:4). If there is something confusing or disturbing to you about a particular passage you are reading, take the time to wrestle with what it says, and then apply it to your life. Obviously, many passages in Scripture contain a lot of significant information (as does Phil 1:6); as believers we need to work at determining exactly what it means (cf. Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 1:10), and not simply insist on understanding everything with just a cursory reading. The truth is, these words of Paul to the Philippian believers are some of the most inspirational words in all of Scripture to the believing community; many believers have made Philippians 1:6 their favorite verse because of the incredible assurance that it gives to them as God's children. Learn to study Scripture with integrity, and not just casually read it. Keep in mind, “Scripture is God's Word to your heart!”

It should be noted, context is generally foundational to a proper interpretation of what Scripture is saying; without understanding the context, one can easily misinterpret the message — by dealing with the contextual setting, you will understand “why things are stated as they are.” So every aspect of Scripture needs to be studied in context — both the immediate context (i.e., the chapters that surround the passage you are reading), and the broader context (i.e., the entire book one is reading). The reality is this: if you are

studying a book that deals with events that occurred in the year 2,000 BC (the time of Abraham), or 1,400 BC (the time of Moses), or 1,000 BC (the time of David), or 600 BC (the time of Daniel), you need to have a little understanding of both the historical and cultural setting that existed then). In similar fashion, if I wrote a letter to someone that you happened to read... if you did not know the person to whom the letter was written, or why the letter was written, it is highly unlikely that you would understand much of what I wrote — the reality is, it could have been written to my wife, a relative, a friend, a person I had only met over the internet, or a friend of a friend I was simply trying to help who was really struggling. Now depending on the situation that existed between me and the individual to whom the letter was written, that information would be very important for you to understand why things were stated as they were. So determining “why” a passage says what it says is extremely important in understanding the message. Though some select passages don’t require a significant amount of contextual understanding, many passages demand a complete understanding of the context. Regarding the context of what Paul had said to the Philippians, as previously mentioned, he had become **convinced** of the genuineness of their faith because of their participation and dedication to living and proclaiming the truth about Jesus Christ, and helping Paul in his ministry (cf. Phil 1:3-4). Thus the truth of what Paul said can be applied to every born-again believer in Christ. Now once a person determines the contextual meaning of a passage, he then needs to affirm the truth of what God’s Word says (*i.e.*, believe it) and act upon it as it applies to him (*i.e.*, obey it). By way of application, the words of Paul in Philippians 1:6 should be a great encouragement to every believer, because their sanctification and their destiny are certain! As believers we need to fully embrace that truth as God’s voice to our soul, and reflect upon it often; and not just “hope it is true.” It is the same with the concept of heaven — is it too surreal a thought to you, or is it a dynamic reality in your heart? (cf. 2 Cor 5:1-8; Col 1:5; 3:1-4; 1 Pet 1:4; 2 Pet 3:10-13; 1 Jn 3:2-3). The reality is, you ultimately need to treat Scripture as God speaking to you through a contextual situation that may be very different from yours; when you come to understand God’s message to those individuals in the ancient world, you will then be able to determine its application to your life in our present day world.

It is also important for believers to understand that they are not insignificant creatures to God, who is very intolerant of them when they stumble in life — God is not some rigid deity who has very little patience with His children — He is a God of unconditional love who exercises extreme patience; unlike anything that we can imagine (cf. 2 Pet 3:9; Rom 2:4; 1 Tim 1:15-16; 1 Pet 3:20). As Scripture says, “love is patient and endures all things” (cf. 1 Cor 13:4, 7; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12-14; 1 Th 5:14; 2 Tim 2:24); grace is greater than all our sin (cf. Rom 5:20). God sent His Son to this world to die for us and atone for our sins and redeem us from the domain of darkness (Col 1:13), and He wants to speak to our hearts through His Word. God is fully mindful of our spiritual condition; He knows we are but dust, and that we are extremely weak creatures who stumble often — that defines all of us; none of us walk on water (cf. Ps 103:14; Heb 4:15; Jam 3:2; Ecc 7:20). Let me direct this message to you personally — God made you in His image and gave you a mind with which to contemplate Him. Use it!

Learn to **humbly mediate** on His Word (regardless of how unworthy you may think you are) that He might **speak to your heart** (read Ps 1:2; 4:4; 63:6; 77:6; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148). Remember, we are all fallen creatures; in spite of the fact that we are God's children, we are still fallen creatures with a truckload of foibles (Rom 7:18). You may need to prayerfully reflect upon the last few paragraphs several times in order to grasp the incredible reality of God's Word — you were not only created by it... you were born-again by it... you are being transformed by it... and you will ultimately be glorified by it! I can't overstress the importance of prayerfully contemplating and meditating upon divine truth. Remember, it is living and active, and is the voice of God to your heart! (cf. Heb 4:12). The more you contemplate God's Word, the more significant it will be to your heart and mind. When a believer humbles himself before the Lord and contemplates His Word, it warms his heart... it encourages his soul... it inspires him... it gives him confidence... it convicts his heart... and it gives him assurance. That is the essence of **FAITH** — only the voice of the living God to your soul can accomplish such things in your heart. Remember what Paul said: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom 10:17); simply wishing and praying that your faith would be greater than it is, isn't enough. By the way, being as God's Word is written, it's an eternal unchanging divine reality (cf. Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8); God isn't going to send us a revised version of it at some later point — as Jesus Himself said, "Make disciples of all people everywhere, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you... even until the end of the world" (Mt. 28:19-20). By the way, it has been over 1900 years since God spoke to the world; never before did He wait that long. Down through the ages He periodically spoke to man through a number of His servants and prophets... and then came "His final revelation" through the Lord Jesus and His apostles (cf. Mt 21:33-46; 23:37-39; 25:31-46). Jesus finished the work of God in our world (cf. Jn 17:1-4; 19:30; Heb 1:2; 1 Pet 1:5, 20-21; 2 Pet 3:3-9); there are no more words to be spoken. There will be no special dispensation given to man at some point in time in the future — only judgment awaits us (cf. Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1-5); this is God's eternal word to man... walk in it.

Beloved, prayerfully reflect upon these truths for an hour or so and see how significant they become to your heart. By the way, I'm not some mystic who is trying to get you to wander into the realm of the unknown, that you might have some ethereal experience. Though one may be inclined to embrace such thinking, that is not at all the experience of the believer; "we don't walk by sight, we walk by faith" (2 Cor 5:7). The reality is this: the reason believers struggle with their faith, is that they spend very little time studying and humbly reflecting upon God's Word. Consider what the book of Hebrews says — "By this time many of you ought to be teachers; instead you have need for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God" (Heb 5:12). By the way, faith is not just about "knowing" God's Word, it is about "believing" it! Though one must know something before he can believe it, believing is the game changer; and it only comes by giving serious prayerful consideration to divine truth (cf. Jam 1:21)... and that only happens to the humble heart that contemplates God's Word. Keep in mind, God's Word defines reality for us, and that is the "perspective" with which we must approach it. Scripture not only defines who God is, it defines who man is and why he is the way

he is... it (*i.e.*, God) tells us why things are the way they are... what is going to happen in the future to this world in which we live... and how He functions and operates in this fallen universe – such things are not just “opinions,” they are “reality.” The problem is, man thinks *his opinion* defines reality, but Scripture (God) calls such thinking absolute foolishness (cf. 1 Cor 1:18, 20; 2:14; 3:19). **James Montgomery Boice**, one of the world’s premiere preachers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century put it this way in his work, “Foundations of the Christian Faith” – “Without the Scriptures our imagined wisdom runs to foolishness. With the Scriptures and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are able to learn who God is, what He has done for us, and how we can respond to Him and live our lives in fellowship with Him” (p. 38). It goes without saying, “fallen man is a very proud beast, who isn’t going to cow tail it to anyone; not even God.” His fallen thinking is seriously deficient, yet his proud heart embraces it thoroughly; thus it is just such thinking that governs his life. Conversely, the premiere problem the believer has is that “his fallen fleshly thinking constantly seeks to control the discourse in his mind — which is completely at odds with divine thinking” (cf. Gal 5:17)... and therein is **the war** that believers must fight every waking moment until their lives on this planet are over (cf. 1 Tim 6:16; Heb 12:4-13; 1 Pet 5:6-10). Says Paul, “Brothers, I’m not close to having achieved perfection, but one thing I do, I forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead; I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (cf. Phil 3:13-14). That must be your goal as well; don’t let your stumbling cause you to stop fighting the fight! Though most believers insist on making the Christian life a pleasant little experience (regrettably, that teaching characterized the majority of churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century), that is not at all God’s plan for His children – “believers are to complete the sufferings of Christ in this world” (cf. Mt 16:24-25; Col 1:24; Phil 1:29; 1 Pet 2:21; 4:1-2; 4:12-13, 18; 5:6-11), “and put on the armor of God and stand firm against the devil” (cf. Eph 6:11). Because such thinking is a difficult construct for many believers, they must give themselves to studying what Scripture (God) teaches us, and not simply defer to humanistic thinking. One of the questions God is going to ask His children at the Judgment Seat of Christ (that’s the judgment to which every believer is going to be subjected; cf. 1 Cor 3:12-15; 2 Cor 5:10) is this: “Why did you treat My Word so lightly? Why did you disregard so much of it? Why didn’t you seek My face and prayerfully contemplate My Word?”

## THE BELIVER’S LIBERATION

Early in His ministry, Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath in Nazareth where He was raised... He stood up before the people and read these words from the book of the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me... He has appointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor... to heal the brokenhearted... to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind... and set free those who are oppressed” (cf. Is 61:1; Lk 4:18) – the words “liberty” & “sight” are both **emphatic** in Greek (*i.e.*, strongly emphasized); you may want to read the words of Jesus again with that in mind. By the way, these prophetic words by the prophet Isaiah were spoken 700 years earlier. The long and short of

it is, the Messiah's mission was to deal with the enormous problems that have afflicted mankind throughout history — bondage, suffering, poverty, sorrow, ignorance, blindness, and oppression — and deliver him from them. The reality is, the Lord Jesus came to this world to proclaim the dawning of a new era for the oppressed and the down-trodden, and present Himself as the answer to all the ills that torments man. The issue of "freedom" is a difficult one for most Christians, so let's take a look at it in more detail. A corollary of freedom is "liberation," and this concept is approached from a number of different perspectives in our world — the problem is, most of these perspectives are simply the product of fallen man, and have no merit at all with God. Many in the Christian world actually embrace a type of liberation that is not at all taught in Scripture — we see it principally in Roman Catholicism in Latin America... and Black Liberation Theology here in the US. Since "liberation theology" differs significantly from what Scripture teaches, it is a spiritual construct that does not coincide with divine truth.

Jesus said, "I am the **light** of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life"... "Unless you **believe** in Me you shall die in your sins"... "If you **abide** in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the **truth**, and the truth shall make you **free**.... and those whom the Lord sets free shall be **free indeed**" (cf. John 8:12, 24, 31, 32, 36). A disciple of Jesus is one who "follows Him," i.e., abides in His Word and continues in His teachings. In contrast to the followers of Christ, the Jewish people at the time of Christ lived in bondage to the Law & Sin — though the leaders of Judaism were very religious, their proud religiosity was not acceptable to God... their religiosity actually led them to kill the Messiah, though there was no guilt found in Him; cf. Mt 27:19, 23-26; Lk 23:41; Jn 18:38; 19:4, 6); so being religious & living by some strict rules has nothing to do with having a righteous standing before God — proud man-made religion is worthless in God's sight. Down through the ages, men have invented all kinds of religious ideals; many have even invented their own version of Christianity, but since it is not grounded in the truth of Scripture, it is not acceptable to God — thus He will say to them at the end of time, "Depart from Me, I never knew you" (Mt 7:21-23). A "works-oriented life" is completely unacceptable to God because there isn't an ounce of true goodness in it; though man is capable of relative goodness, he is not capable of absolute goodness (i.e., absolute holiness), and that's the requirement (cf. Lk 18:19; Rom 7:18); the best actions of men are all tainted with evil (i.e., pride, self-centeredness, and self-righteousness). Now just because one makes Jesus a part of his or her religious thinking, and adopts some of His teachings, doesn't make him or her a "follower of Christ" — we are not free to pick and choose what we want to believe, and somehow conclude that we are "followers of Christ." Having a "humble heart" is foundational to genuine faith — without humility, one's faith is completely bogus... why's that? because a proud heart has a "self-orientation," and such is completely sinful to God.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century we saw the development of something known as "liberation theology;" it was a movement in Latin America that attempted to unite theology and sociopolitical concerns; as if the political world needed to be an integral part of their theology. Though

the world in which we live can be a very troubling one, “we are not free to change the discourse of Scripture and make Christianity into something it is not.” Because many people in south America believed they were the victims of colonialism and economic exploitation, and since Jesus was for “the poor” in this world and hated these things (cf. Mt 11:5; 19:21; Lk 6:20; 14:13), they made their struggle for a new socialist society and being liberated from such evils the foundation of their faith; so they believed God was on their side and would deliver them from these things — thus the premiere focus of their faith was being liberated from the corrupt world in which they lived, rather than experiencing God’s forgiveness for the corruptness that existed in their own soul. The reality is this — liberation from the ugly tenants that characterize our world cannot become the premiere message of Christ to our fallen world. To make political ideals a part of our faith is to impose our own thinking (i.e., man’s) on what Scripture (i.e., God) clearly states. That doesn’t mean that Christians don’t care about the poor, the downtrodden, and those who are being exploited; the truth is mistreatment of the poor is a gross evil that should bother all of us... it is the ugliest characteristic of sinful man down through the ages. Jesus expressly had a heart for the poor. In the ancient world when He entered into human history, “hate” characterized much of the human family; so much so that many Christians were tortured and murdered for their faith in Christ, but that didn’t mean they made their political ideals the foundation of their faith; spirituality and politics are not interrelated. God’s goal for His children in this life is not to remove all of the negatives from their lives, and make it nothing but a bunch of positives; i.e., keep us healthy, keep our bank account full, and make our life a pleasant little utopia — that would be akin to liberation theology. Sadly, many Christians in our world believe in a kind of prosperity doctrine; i.e., a name it and claim it doctrine, where God gives one pretty much everything they ask for — should they not receive it, they believe they are simply not exercising enough faith; likewise, should they not experience healing from some condition that they are suffering from, they believe the problem is with their faith (not with God). Obviously there is a lot of heresy being propounded in the Christian world. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; only he who does the will of My Father... Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Mt 7:21-23); all sin is lawlessness and rebellion against God (1 Jn 3:4). The message of Jesus is this: “We must humbly comply with the teachings of God’s Word, and not change the discourse and make it say what we want it to say;” the truth is, “reality is what it is, not simply something we want it to be” (Jesus referred to that as “lawlessness”). Down through the centuries the teaching of men has distorted the teaching of Scripture. After the fall of Rome, the Christian world back then began to politicize Christianity; the church at Rome became the governing power that controlled the western world — it was then the Roman Empire became the “Holy Roman Empire;” but that was not at all of God. Rather than “love” being the chief characteristic of the church, “war” became its dominant characteristic — thus there were the Crusades and Inquisitions (clearly these things were not of God). As believers we are not free to

“add anything” to our faith in Christ; when we do, we are mixing “human ideals” with “divine ideals,” and those two ideals do not coalesce. No matter how virtuous one might think his beliefs and ideals are, they are not to be connected to God and made an integral part of the Christian faith.

The first definition of “humble” in the Oxford English Dictionary is “Having a low estimate of one’s importance, worthiness, or merits.” In the Greek language of the New Testament, the word “humble” refers to something that is low, or made low; thus it means to acknowledge that we are lower than God, and such is expressed by a state of voluntary submission to His will. So godly humility starts when we see things as they really are (not how we want them to be), and realize that God is the Creator of all things and the standard by which everything is measured and evaluated. Because humility is always measured in terms of submission to God’s will, the clearest indicator of true humility is a person’s obedience to God. The humble person lovingly and honestly obeys God, unlike the Pharisees who simply made a proud show of obeying God; they omitted important parts of the Law such as love, mercy and justice (cf. Mt 6:1-6, 16, 18; 23:5, 23; 2 Cor 5:12). In contrast to humility “pride” is almost always an attitude of self-sufficiency, independence, and self-righteousness; C. S. Lewis called it “the Great Sin.” Pride is basically at the heart of all sin (cf. Ps 10:4; Prv 8:13; 16:5). Nothing comes to us more naturally than pride; our instinct is to think first of ourselves... so it not surprising that humility is rare, because it does not come naturally. The biblical story of the Prodigal Son (cf. Lk 15:11-24) helps give definition to this matter of pride — the Prodigal struggled greatly with pride; his focus was strictly on himself and what he wanted... ultimately, his waywardness cost him everything owned... in his humiliation he actually fed upon the food that was being given to swine (which is very reminiscent of what Nebuchadnezzar was forced to do because of his pride — cf. Dan 4:30-33)... when the Prodigal Son humbly came to his senses, he genuinely acknowledged the fullness of his sin to his father — in so doing, he was fully restored to his father’s good will.

Jesus is the perfect model of humility — our attitude is to be the same as His (Phil 2:5)... “He humbled Himself and became obedient to death; even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). When we think of ourselves as lower than God, we will place ourselves in sub-mission to Him and obey Him. Remember, three times Jesus prayed to the Father the night before He went to the cross to “take the cup from Me” (because of the incredible pain He would have to endure); nevertheless He said, “Not My will, but Thine be done” (cf. Matt 26:39, 42, 44). From His example we learn that humility is putting the will of God before our own (Mt 6:10; 1 Jn 5:14). Jesus said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:29). I find it interesting that the Greco-Roman world in which Jesus and His followers lived extolled strong, self-willed people who pushed their way through life and came out on top; such is not much different today here in the Western world in which we live, in a sense, the proud are the most admired in our culture — how is that for an oxymoron? Though it is not like God’s will is always displeasing to the human heart... but when it is, we are to defer to the will

*of God*. That is the internal war we must fight in our soul — it is a fight between *our flesh* (the term Scripture uses to define the sinful inner core of man) and *the Spirit* (the Holy Spirit's presence in our life); these two entities are nearly always in constant opposition to each other (cf. Gal 5:17; Rom 6:12; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:1-2, 8-11) — though this battle doesn't go on every waking moment, it is a far more frequent experience than most believers think. I cover this subject in another study I did titled "*The Dynamics of Genuine Faith*;" again you can find it on my website: [www.thetransformedsoul.com](http://www.thetransformedsoul.com)

A corollary of liberation is the issue of "*deliverance*" — as believers, we all pray for deliverance from things... be it deliverance from physical infirmities, adversity, trials and tribulation, temptation, the guilt of sin, pain in the soul, frustration with life, loneliness, family matters, help in overcoming, relational problems, financial difficulties, sickness, unemployment, terminal illness, even the matter of unbelief and the seeming ineffectiveness of our faith; the reality is, *there's nothing we don't pray about*. It's by prayer that we commune with God and express our reverence and adoration for Him... that we bare our souls in contrite confession before Him... that we pour out our gratefulness and thanksgiving to Him... and offer our petitions and supplications to Him. Obviously "*faith*" is an integral part of prayer — it sees God for who He is, and humbly sees oneself for who he is, and ultimately *places oneself in willful submission to the will of God* (cf. Mt 6:10; 26:39; Acts 21:14; 1 Jn 5:14). Now aside from the fact that we bring our needs before God, does not mean that He will respond to our requests as we would necessarily like Him to — tribulation, suffering and temptation play significant roles in our lives (cf. Jn 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1 Cor 10:13; Jam 1:13-15; 3:2; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 4:12-13; 5:7-10). The reality is, God has a purpose for them; it is through them that God transforms our lives into the image of Christ (cf. Rom 5:3-5; 8:18-30; Jam 1:2-4; Deut 4:20; Is 48:10). Sadly, there are many in the Christian community who believe that people don't get what they ask for simply because they don't have enough faith... thus they make *their faith* the game changer; but that is not what Scripture teaches; as stated earlier, we are not a people of *great faith* (not one of us walks on water), we are a people of faith in a *great God* (cf. Mk 9:24; Rom 3:3; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 13:5; also cf. Mt 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). It should be remembered, Jesus often healed men of little or no faith (that's His prerogative; don't put God in box and limit Him to human thinking; God can do as He pleases — if it serves His higher purposes, there is nothing He can't do; remember the words of Jesus, "*God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*" — cf. Mt 5:45). With that in mind, "*unanswered prayer*" (i.e., not getting what we ask for) can produce a lot of consternation in our soul; after all, much of what we ask for coincides with divine truth — we ask that we would not have given in to temptation... that we would not experience turmoil in our soul when things go awry in life... that the trials of life would not overwhelm us and cause us to despair... that we would respond to some particular matter the way God would have us respond — yet our prayers frequently do not result in what we ask for. So this thing called "*prayer*" and this thing called "*faith*" isn't exactly what we are inclined to think it is. Due to the fact that we often make *ourselves* the center of our little world (that defines all of us; that is simply the way our inner core functions), life can be an extremely challenging predict-

ament for us. Think about it, when life doesn't go the way you want it to go, or the way you think it should go, or the way you pray that it will go... your little world is turned upside down rather than right-side up in your mind, leaving you in a quandary that can be very perplexing; by the way, that is not at all unusual; that characterized the lives of all the prophets.

## THE PROBLEM OF SIMPLIFYING TRUTH

*It is our insistence on **simplifying** the ways of God in our world that lays at the root of our problem.* I am no more a genius in this area than you are... frequently life doesn't work the way I think it should work or the way I want it to work. It is here where we must bend the knee and defer to the words of God to the prophet Isaiah — *“My thoughts are **not** your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isa 55:8-9). Yet here we are insisting that life make sense to us, and that it be a somewhat pleasant little experience; after all, are we not God's children whom He loves unconditionally? (cf. Mt 7:7-11). The inherent argument in our minds is this — *“love and suffering don't coincide — how can God say He loves us when He permits us to suffer terribly?”* It is when we insist on simplifying everything, including our faith, that we begin to question everything — that was precisely where the prophets of old ended up (read the books of Job, Jeremiah & Ecclesiastes). According to the word of the Lord, *God made Solomon **the wisest man** who ever lived or who ever will live* (read 1 Kg 3:3-14; especially verse 12) — why some believers argue with that truism is beyond me, but they do. Listen to Solomon's words: *“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: Fear God and keep His commandments; this applies to every person. God will ultimately bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil”* (cf. Ecc 12:13-14). Obviously there is a time to argue and complain to God about all that is going on in our lives, but there is also a time to shut it down and submit to Him and His will for our lives; it is here that the *“psalms of lament”* play an important role in the believer's faith (cf. Ps 142); God understands how difficult things can be in our lives, and how irreconcilable they can be in our minds... as such, He wants us to pour out our unedited reactions to life, and not coat them and try to make them more acceptable to Him (cf. Ps 32, 51)... He is well aware of all the angst in your soul, so tell God your doubt, your anger, your fear, and your deep sadness. Do you not want your children to be open and honest with you? or do you prefer that they hide their thoughts from you? Our God is not some narrow-minded deity who can't handle reality — *“He loved us in that while we were yet sinners, He died for us... how much more now does He loves us as His children?”* (cf. Rom 5:8-11; 8:31-37; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 13:5). The reality is, God wants you to be exceedingly truthful to Him about everything that is going in your life... even the anguish and the anger that you feel; why would you think otherwise? Only those who believe God is exceedingly rigidly and strict, would fear being open and honest with Him... but such is not our God.

Year's ago a friend of mine's little boy was killed in a terrible accident... his son was the joy of his life; he meant more to him than anything in the world... as a result of his son's death he became extremely distraught, and became angry with God for taking his son's life (cf. Ps 139:16; Ecc 11:5). Obviously God never answered "the 'why' question" that constantly occupied his mind; ultimately, darkness filled his soul for an extended period of time... apparently the pain in his soul simply seemed too much for him to bear. Many people thought he might actually commit suicide. Whether or not he reconciled everything with God before he died (about fifteen years later), I don't know — my thinking is, he probably did; because sometimes believers hold on to things until they reach the end of the road in life. I only knew this man for a few years; it wasn't until about ten years later that he passed away. Many of us learned some very poignant truths through the death of his son. Obviously there are times in our lives when God subjects us to some very difficult circumstances... some of us undergo far more painful ones than others; regrettably, there are some in the Christian community who actually measure other people's faith by the problems in their lives — *i.e.*, if their life is filled with negatives, they must be guilty of something before God... on the other hand, if their life is filled with positives, God must be pleased with them (read Psalms 73 & 142; Jer 15:15-18); such thinking shows how juvenile, warped and heretical the minds of men can be. It might also be helpful to remember that some believers are actually martyred for their faith in Christ, though the vast majority are not. By the way 45 million Christians have been martyred for their faith since the first century; statistics tells us that some 90,000 Christians are being martyred each year in our world today. Why do some of us get a easy road and others an extremely difficult one? Only God knows that. Many of God's choicest saints in Scripture suffered terribly... it appears that God subjects many of those who serve Him faithfully and diligently to some very painful trials, and to something known as "darkness in the soul" — *i.e.*, "a crisis of faith" whereby life's circumstances produce such an extreme level of consternation in the soul, that it causes one to question and doubt his or her preconceived beliefs. Ultimately a crisis of faith demands that one reconcile or reevaluate that particular tenet of faith, before he can continue believing in it or continue in the life path in question; thus he either reconciles the cause of doubt with the belief in question, or he drops that belief. When believers carefully think through their faith, it would be very naïve of them to think that their "theology of thought" is without problems; after all, the things we believe to be true about the Christian faith obviously stretch the human mind and heart — in reality, we only scratch the surface of our understanding of the Eternal, Transcendent One — GOD (cf. Is 55:8-9; Rom 11:33-36). The psalmist said, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes" (cf. Ps 119:71; also 119:67, 75; Heb 12:5-11).

In his book "Abandoned to God," Oswald Chambers states, "The mystics used to speak of 'the dark night of the soul' as a time of spiritual darkness and dryness, not the direct result of sins committed, but rather a deep conviction of sin itself that dwells in the heart and mind (cf. Rom 7:18). It is at just such a time that 'a person is being brought to the end of himself,' and made aware of the utter worthlessness of his own nature when he is stripped of all religious pretensions." During a dark night of the soul, God initiates a

purging, a cleansing, and a purifying of our souls from everything that is not of faith. It is at this time, *God crushes our self will, so that He can merge it with His own*. In other words, this is our own private Gethsemane. As Jesus cried in the garden, "*My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death... nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt*" (Mk 14:34-36). During this dark season of the soul, God teaches us to respond as Jesus did, "*Not my will, but Thine*" (Mt 26:39). So the dark night of the soul is simply the transition we make from depending upon ourselves and our own thinking to a total dependence upon Christ and His faithfulness. Thus through the dark night we enter into a new way of knowing God. The dark night of the soul is a phenomenon that describes a malady which the greatest of Christians have suffered from time to time. It was the malady that provoked **David** to soak his pillow with tears. It was the malady that earned for prophet **Jeremiah** the nickname, "*The Weeping Prophet*." And it was the malady that so afflicted **Martin Luther** that his melancholy threatened to destroy him. Nothing gets the believer's attention more than the dark night of the soul... the reality is, it must not be seen as just some ordinary depression, but *a depression that is linked to a crisis of faith*, a crisis that comes when one senses the absence of God or gives rise to a feeling of abandonment by Him — it was just such a condition that prompted Moses, Elijah, Job, Jeremiah, and Jonah to ask God to take their lives. Regarding darkness, Job said this: "*God reveals mysteries from the darkness, and brings the deep darkness into light*" (Job 12:22). Said Jeremiah, "*Why has my pain been perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Lord, will you indeed be to me like a deceptive stream with water that is unreliable?*" (Jer 15:18). He went on to say, "*LORD, Thou hast deceived me... Thou has overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me... it becomes like a burning fire in my heart... I cannot endure it... cursed be the day when I was born*" (cf. Jer 20:7, 9, 14). Again, I stress this because of the wayward thinking of those who possess a significant degree of "*self-piety*" — *they make light of difficulties in the soul*, as if those who experience them suffer from some spiritual mental neurosis... sadly, this was very common thinking in 20<sup>th</sup> century America. The truth is, those who make such deductions have a *very immature faith*; should you hold to such thinking, then you better throw the majority of the prophets under the bus also, because that is what they experienced.

Though this friend of mine may never have reconciled the death of his son with the Lord, does not mean that God excommunicated him from His family as if he had committed the unpardonable sin; God doesn't do that. Though we are redeemed creatures, we are not able to pass judgment on such matters; that is something that God alone does... yet many believers came down very hard on this man, and took the position that his faith must not have been genuine... the man that I knew stayed inside his house and rarely interacted with others — the grief he had experienced had simply overwhelmed him. It should be noted, none of us as God's children walk through life "*highly victorious*;" many believers seem to struggle all the way to the grave. The reality is, everything we go through in life isn't easy; sometimes it can be very disconcerting and painful — though like you I wish that was not the case, sometimes it is. Said the apostle Paul: "*For Thy sake we are being*

put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered; but in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:36-37). As believers we have to endure tribulation, distress and persecution; obviously some of these tests are very hard to bear; in spite of that fact, NOTHING can separate us from the love of Christ! Through Christ we are actually more than conquerors! (cf. 1 Pet 1:6-7; 4:1-3, 12; 5:10). The “key” to a transformed life is “keeping our eyes on Christ” (Heb 12:2); though all of us are inclined to place them on “ourselves and our painful circumstances,” we must fight the fight of faith to do otherwise — we must daily affirm God’s unconditional love for us, no matter how unworthy we may see ourselves, or how ugly our world may be to us. Many of us have traveled a very difficult road in life... some excruciatingly so; yet we are still hanging on to our faith — beloved, that in itself speaks volumes for your faith! God hears your angst! He’s not upset with you because of your troubled soul! Don’t make light of your fallenness — though you are a saved creature, you are still a fallen creature; and if there is anyone who knows how fallen you are, it is God. Consider the following — if God answered all of our prayers the way we wanted Him to answer them, our lives would not only be sinless, they would be little trouble-free, spiritual utopias! and we would be extremely happy creatures! Beloved, that’s what heaven is all about... that is not what life on earth is all about. The reality is, if you take certain verses out of context, you could arrive at a utopian theology of thought... but you would have to “ignore” what a lot of other passages say on the matter; such heretical thinking is the product of very shallow biblical understanding. As stated earlier, don’t make “your faith” the supreme issue in life, make “Christ” the supreme issue — none of us have enough faith to ooo & ah over or walk on water! Rather than addressing this subject further, let me encourage you to read a study I did on it titled, “The Dynamics of Genuine Faith,” again, you can find it on my website under the “Additional Studies Link” — [www.thetransformedsoul.com](http://www.thetransformedsoul.com)

As Christians, “we have been set free from the law of sin and death” (cf. Rom 8:2); i.e., sin and death no longer have jurisdiction over us. You’ll notice it is referred to as “a law,” the law of sin is this — “sin results in death” (Gen 2:16-17). Paul said, “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:23)... as believers in Christ we have been set free from the law of sin (death), and now have life in the Spirit; i.e., we have moved into a new sphere in life now that we are in Christ. The Law of sin and death is described in Romans chapter seven (vv. 7-25); conversely, the Law of the Spirit is described in Romans chapter eight — Paul contrasts these two precepts in chapters seven and eight. As believers in Christ, the Law no longer has jurisdiction over us; we are dead to the Law (Rom 7:4) and free from the Law (Rom 8:2). As Paul states, “There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1), because Jesus bore our condemnation on the cross for us (1 Pet 2:24). That doesn’t mean we don’t stumble and sin in life, but sin is no longer the practice of our lives (that is a present tense verb that defines the ongoing behavior of someone; in other words, sin is the mainstay of his life); as believers, we now fight against sin continuously — that’s the spiritual war that we as believers fight (Gal 5:17). The good news for us as believers is that we have been set free from the law of sin and death, and made alive in Christ (Eph 2:1-5) and transferred into His

kingdom (Col 1:13). By the way, the death being emphasized here is “spiritual death,” not “physical death,” all unbelievers are spiritually dead; conversely, all believers are spiritually alive in Christ (Eph 2:1-5). Paul put it this way, “Through Christ we have been freed of all things from which the Law of Moses could not free us” (Acts 13:39). The reality is this: God sent His Son into the world to save us and do what the Law could not do (due to our sinful flesh; cf. Rom 8:3). The essence of “faith” is believing what God says, and placing our trust in Christ and His atoning work on the cross — unless our sin problem is resolved, there is no way we would ever have “a right standing before God,” thank God He sent His Son to this world to resolve our sin problem. Though none of us as believers have a perfect faith, we are all growing in our faith to some degree; sadly, some believers are mixing a lot of their own thinking with the teachings of Scripture, thus causing them to believe some erroneous teachings that are deterring their growth and having a negative impact upon their faith.

Paul reminds us that growing in our faith takes place through the study of God’s Word (Rom 10:17); *i.e.*, through contemplating the truths of Scripture. Peter said, “Long for the pure milk of the Word that by it you may grow with respect to your salvation” (1 Pet 2:2); salvation and faith are correlatives of each other. Though we are not a people of “great faith” (faith is a difficult issue for us), we have faith in a “great God.” Can you imagine what it would be like to have such a dynamic faith that we could actually walk on water? Imagine it! We would be competing with each other as to which of us was really the greatest! And the entire world would be oooing and ahing over us! Beloved, we could no more handle that kind of notoriety and praise, than broad jump the Grand Canyon or swim from Los Angeles to Tokyo in 24 hours! (read 2 Cor 12:7-10). We would become so arrogant, the Lord would have to do to us what He permitted Satan to do to Job! Should you not be able to identify with this, either you are spiritually retarded, or the pride that exists in your soul is so monumental it has completely led you into the wilderness of unreality. Beloved, it ought to be very clear, we are men and women of “little faith” (cf. Mt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Jn 13:33; 1 Jn 3:18); yet our faith is in a “great God.” So faith is more about the object of our faith, than it is about the potency of our faith; we are not to boast in our faith... we are to boast in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14); Christ is not only the object of our faith, but the author and perfecter of it as well (Heb 12:2). Though we as believers are sometimes bound up in our sin and deeply troubled in our hearts, we only need to humbly turn to Christ and experience His unconditional love, forgiveness and peace; in spite of the fact that we don’t merit one ounce of it, God graciously grants it to us when we humble ourselves before Him; that’s what makes our salvation in Christ such an incredible reality. By the way, it is not just 99 percent His work; it is 100 percent His work! If you insist on making your part really significant, consider this: “What do you bring to the table other than your sin?” Beloved, even your faith is a gift from God.

Let me share a few more thoughts on this matter of “liberation” — as unbelievers we were enslaved to sin; *i.e.*, we were in bondage to ignorance, error, superstition, darkness, Satan, legalism, prejudices, self-centeredness, fear, pride, lusts and earthly pleasures...

and we were under the curse and penalty of sin (we were “dead” in our unrighteousness; Rom 6:23; Eph 2:1; Col 2:13). The word “sin” (*hamartia*) literally means “to miss the mark,” as unbelievers we simply didn’t measure up to God’s standard of “absolute holiness,” not one of us did, because we are fallen sinful creatures (cf. Rom 3:10-20). When **believers** place their trust in Christ, God delivers them (i.e., sets them free) from the curse and the penalty of sin through the cross (John 3:16; Gal 3:13; Eph 2:2; Col 1:13) — “and those whom the Lord sets free are free indeed” (Jn 8:36). The reality of the cross is this: Jesus liberates us from the tyranny of sin and its bondage. “By abiding in His Word (i.e., by believing it) we come to know the truth and are set free & delivered from the domain of darkness” (John 8:31-32; Col 1:13). True genuine “liberation” is only found in Jesus Christ; “there is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). If you want to study this matter of “faith” in more depth, let me encourage you to read a study I did on it: “The Dynamics of Genuine Faith.” You can find it on my website — [www.thetransformedsoul.com](http://www.thetransformedsoul.com) — under the “Additional Studies Link” at the top of the Homepage; click on the “Spiritual Life Studies” and scroll down until you find it. If you would like to make a **printable pdf version** of it, simply click on the “icon” in the upper right hand corner of the first page of the study. My prayer is that you will find it a great encouragement to your heart and faith... it was to mine; that’s why I wrote it.

## THE BELIEVER’S TRANSFORMATION

Let’s return to the issue of “the believer’s transformation” — though **God** is the one who transforms sinful man into the image of Christ (Rom 8:28), the **believer’s** part is to believe the truths of Scripture and practice walking in them; i.e., turn from immorality and love others (read 1 Th 4:3-12) — as we do, we will increasingly grow in our faith and more reflect the image of Christ because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Just because we as believers are to exercise faith by obeying, does not mean that we are the ultimate cause of either our salvation or our sanctification — **God is the cause... He simply asks us to trust Him and cooperate with Him**. Perhaps one could liken it to a poor baseball player being coached by one of the greatest players ever... after years of training and coaching, this young ballplayer starts demonstrating a fairly significant skill-set and starts reflecting much of what he has been taught; the truth is, without undergoing the training and discipline of his coach, he never would have amounted to a hill of beans. Keep in mind, as believers we are not the product of our own doing; we didn’t give ourselves the brains or the skill-set we possess; they are all gifts from God (cf. Jn 3:27; 1 Cor 4:7; Eph 2:8-9)... God is simply asking us to employ our God-given skill-set to His praise and glory. Paul put it this way: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth” (1 Cor 3:6; 15:10). In short, “we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (i.e., with great reverence & awe of God; cf. Prv 1:7; 9:10; Is 66:1-2), yet work with the realization that we work not alone, God is at work in us, both to will and do His good pleasure” (cf. Phil 2:12-13). To logically reflect upon the issue of growth (be it physical or spiritual), it should be pretty obvious as to WHO really effectuates that growth — **GOD DOES**. Though

we as men may argue to the contrary, it is God who **sustains** the entire universe and keeps it functioning as it does; “in Him **all things** consist” (Col 1:17); remember, He is the only eternal reality in the universe... He created everything... to somehow conclude that He is not superintending everything He made would be absolute foolishness, and make Him a distant God rather than the eternal reality He is. Yet fallen human thinking still claims that accidental happenstance is the cause of all things; that order sprang out of disorder... that life sprang out of inorganic dormant matter, and that the human mind is the premiere source of all wisdom and knowledge in our world; so fallen human thinking believes the uncontrolled evolutionary process is the ultimate cause of order, wisdom and life — that is the most irrational, unintelligent construct of thought anyone in the human family has ever believed; reflect upon the foregoing for a moment to see how innately stupid it really is. Quite frankly, it is astounding at how many people embrace the evolutionary system of thought, when in fact it runs completely contrary to the second law of thermodynamics (i.e., the law of entropy, which maintains that all things are in a state of decline and not making any advances whatsoever) — this is an unambiguous, unequivocal law that God let the scientific world discover in the 20<sup>th</sup> century — every physicist believes it, yet the evolutionist believes that 13.8 billion years ago the absolute dominion of this law (i.e., the second law of thermodynamics) was interrupted by an extreme explosion of energy in the universe (in spite of the fact that they have no explanation at all as to the cause of that explosion), that resulted in the incredible order that now underlies our universe — again, think about it: order sprang out of disorder, and life sprang out of inorganic matter — that is how the evolutionist views this thing called “the big bang theory.” That is simply how foolish human thinking becomes when it removes God from the equation (cf. Psalms 14 & 53); it will subscribe to absolute stupidity. Keep in mind, here was a lifeless universe in a permanent state of decline, somehow giving birth to the genius of life and to an immaculate order that transcends human understanding.

It's amazing the lengths to which fallen man will go to keep himself in the drivers seat of life (cf. Rom 1:18-32). Though such thinking is complete nonsense... that defines our world. The truth is, if God were to remove Himself from the created order, it would not only completely collapse, it would cease to exist! Everything exists because of God and for God, and is being sustained by God (cf. Rom 11:36; Col 1:16-17); there is no reality in all the universe that came into existence outside of God. Remember, God created everything out of nothing; He simply spoke everything into existence (cf. Gen 1:1-31; Ps 33:9; 148:5; Is 40:28; 42:5; 45:18; Mk 13:19; Rev 10:6; Heb 11:3); obviously, our little rinky-dink heads can't get its mind around such things — is it any wonder why human thinking embraces the concept of evolution? The created order isn't some self-operating order that fallen man thinks it is; it is an order that is being controlled and superintended by God (that is precisely why this universe in which we live possesses “order”). Yet here we have the insanity of man claiming otherwise — that reality (which is infinite in scope) is nothing but accidental happenstance. The truth is, God is not only the source of all things, He is the power that sustains all things. So don't think of God as just a little insignificant presence somewhere out there in distant space (another juvenile thought of fallen man); He

is the source of everything in all creation, including everything we possess (cf. Deut 8:18; Hos 2:8; Jn 3:27; 1 Cor 4:7; Ecc 7:13-14). He gave us our minds, our athleticism, our parents, our possessions, our bodies, our looks, and even so willed that we live in the culture in which we were raised (cf. Eph 1:11). The reality is, God had a **higher purpose** in making us the persons He made us, and giving us everything that He gave us. Keep in mind, you are God's property, and a steward of His — and one day you're going to have to “give an account” for all He entrusted to you and everything you did with the life He gave you (cf. 1 Cor 4:2; Rom 14:12; Mt 12:36; 16:27; Lk 12:16-21; 1 Pet 4:5). I state the foregoing “very firmly” because some of you are so stubborn “you refuse to bend the knee and acknowledge reality for what it is.” Regarding God's judgment of the believer before he enters into the eternal realm, read what Paul had to say about it in I Corinth 3:10-15. Though fallen creatures like to think they are the product of their own doing, and take the credit for everything in their life, including their genius, their physical appearance, and their accomplishments, God tells us “that is **not** the case!” It simply shows us how proud, stupid and stubborn sinful man really is. As Paul stated, “What do you have that you did not **receive**? And if you received it, why do you **boast** as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor 4:7). It might be helpful if you took the time to write down everything you possess (both seen & unseen, external & internal), and then verbally identify everything you possess as being God's property and given to you to accomplish His higher purposes; obviously He wants you to enjoy what He has given to you, but He also wants you to use it to His glory... in so doing you will look at everything in your life very differently. By the way, I have done this with several items in my life, and it has radically impacted my thinking; though it requires serious contemplation, it helps one see things as God sees them; failing to keep things in their proper perspective adversely affects your faith. Let me suggest that you do it with the five most important possessions you have, with your children, and your physical body — articulate it out loud and give careful consideration to what you're saying. Somehow you need to see everything as “being owned by God” rather than yourself. This isn't just silly human thinking, this is divine reality. Make a little sign that says “God's property” and affix it to some valuable thing He has entrusted to you... and put a little sign on the bedroom door of your son or daughter that says “God's child” — in so doing you will be continually reminded of God's goodness and your gratefulness to Him for His kindness to you. You might be shocked at its impact upon your thinking.

The reality is, God asks us as believers to **pursue our sanctification** (i.e., the change in our life that God so wills) earnestly and undeviatingly, with the understanding that our sanctification is not instantly achieved or something that is imputed to us; it is built up little by little as the result of our being obedient to the Word of God; i.e., God Himself (cf. Mt 11:29-30; Jn 13:14-17; Phil 2:5); He is our master. Remember, it is the Holy Spirit who makes all of our efforts efficacious (cf. Rom 8:12-15; Eph 3:16), and moves us in a godly direction and inspires our sanctification — He may use a sermon to motivate us, the words of a friend, a book we may be reading, or Scripture, as well as adversity, trials and tribulation; whatever it is, it is the work of God in our heart (cf. Rom 15:16; Eph 1:5, 11; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 Cor 6:11;

Heb 12:1-11; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 5:9-10; 2 Tim 4:7-8). To somehow understand “our part” as being the premiere part would be to misunderstand the process; without the ministry of the Holy Spirit to our heart, absolutely nothing would occur! Claiming to be the one who effectuates growth would be like taking the credit for making a tree grow when all you do is water it, in spite of the fact that you frequently abrogate that responsibility, thus causing the owner to step in and do it for you. The truth is, not many human beings even understand how a small microscopic mass of protoplasm and the nuclei operates and stimulates growth; yet even if they did understand it, they would not be able to directly effectuate the growth; by the way, “the sun and the atmospheric conditions of our planet” are also foundational to life on our planet — without these things life would not continue to exist on the earth. **Albert Einstein** expressed it thus: “the harmony of natural law reveals an intelligence of such superiority, that all the systematic thinking of men is but insignificant reflection.” The reality is, human beings cannot comprehend the intrinsic aspects of our physical universe. Why? because we have extremely small minds (cf. Job 38:1-4ff; 40:1-9; 42:1-6; Ecc 1:13-18; 11:4-5; 12:13-14). Though the average person may understand the depth of things to about one foot, and the wisest of us to a depth of three feet... reality is thousands of feet deep — to Einstein’s credit, he was well aware of the fact that human beings only scratch the surface of reality. The problem with proud man is that he thinks he has a reasonably good grasp of reality, when in fact he hardly understands it at all... as fallen creatures we grossly overestimate & underestimate things, which simply evidences how immature and fallen we are as creatures. Now by applying this construct to our salvation, that would be like placing greater emphasis on our faith (as weak as it is) rather than on Christ and the cross; i.e., on what we did more than on what Christ did. By the way, it wasn’t because of our marvelous wisdom that we came to believe in Christ; even that was “a gift from God” (cf. Eph 2:8-9; 1:4; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor 12:3; 1 Th 1:5). Let me illustrate it — if you were to go and view one of the most incredibly beautiful buildings in the world that was nearing completion, and you met a man who was installing some window-shades that had been chosen and purchased by the chief-architect, would you ooo and ah over “this laborer and his work?” or over the one who designed and superintended the entire project? To focus on someone who was simply doing some blue-collar work would be a little foolish — the truth is, he had nothing at all to do with the design. In like manner, we need to focus on the Master Designer of our lives rather than all of the subordinate stuff that seems to dominate our thinking and cause us to distort reality.

Here’s another significant point we need to address — obviously there is a big difference between what we know and what we do... it is one thing to know something, it is quite another to do what we know — as believers we all know we are to love others, but loving others can be very difficult when things aren’t going the way we want them to go; being kind, being patient, being others-oriented, bearing all things, and enduring all things isn’t always easy; sometimes it’s almost impossible (cf. Rom 7:14-25). James writes, “to him who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it — that is sin” (Jam 4:17). So this thing called “faith” is no walk in the park; the truth is, perfection is completely outside the realm of possibility for any of us. The reality is, faith must be built on a right understanding of

the truth, and a commitment to walk in the truth. Paul told Timothy, his young cohort in ministry, “to fight the good fight of faith” — genuine faith involves “spiritual warfare,” where the believer not only wrestles with the truth and his inner core (*i.e.*, his flesh), but obeys the truth. Our flesh constantly contends with the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, so obedience to the truth is oftentimes very difficult (it’s our old sin nature that makes it so). Though James says “knowing what to do and not doing it is sin,” he also says, “we all stumble in many ways because of our sinful inner core” (Jam 1:14; 3:2). It ought to be clear to everyone of us, our sin nature is a very strong presence in our lives, and is something with which we must continually contend (Gal 5:17); and therein is the battle. For one to conclude that his flesh doesn’t have a significant presence in his life, is to be completely fooled by the evil one; one would have to drastically lower the absolute holy standards of God to arrive at such a conclusion. The wonderful truth for us as believers is that God keeps on cleansing us of all our sins. Sadly, there are many in the Christian community who possess a significant degree of “self-piety” — *i.e.*, they act in such a way so as to convince others that they are something they are not (*i.e.*, righteous); this characterized several people I have known in my life. It is one thing to perform acts of righteousness, it is quite another to want others to believe that you possess a significant degree of righteousness — that’s a spiritual sickness grounded in a very proud heart.

It should be noted, sin obviously has a purpose in God’s economy for the believer — if God didn’t have a purpose for it, it would no longer exist in our lives; it would have been eradicated from us when we were born-again. Obviously, this thing called sin is a very humbling reality in our lives; how else would we cease being the proud creatures we are were it not for our sin? Remember, we are proud fallen creatures. Since sin is very humbling, it keeps us mindful of our inward condition, and our need of Christ. The reality is this — since Christ forgives us over and over and over again, we become more and more conscious of His unconditional love and ever mindful of the cross; that’s the reason why believers celebrate Communion (the Eucharist, the Lord’s Table). However, should the believer just focus on his sinfulness, it can be overwhelming and nearly destroy him... God’s intent is not that His children be consumed with their sinfulness. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, He does so that we might run into the arms of Jesus and experience His forgiveness and be renewed and restored to fellowship with Him. Yet many believers are so distraught by their sinfulness (for some reason they have a difficult time coming to a full understanding of their inner core; they think it should somehow become less offensive than it is), that they simply wallow in it and start thinking that God’s forgiveness and deliverance is now something that is questionable — when one insists on meriting forgiveness, he is traveling down a wrong road — the problem is that his faith is more “works-oriented” than “grace-oriented,” if you don’t understand the difference between those two constructs, you need to humbly study this matter of grace. Regarding God’s purpose for “sin” in His economy, let me encourage you to read a study I did on it titled, “Sin and Man’s Eternal Purpose” — that particular study was a life-changing one for me and many others; you can access it on my website: [www.thetransformedsoul.com](http://www.thetransformedsoul.com) Take a moment and reflect upon the following words to the early Jewish converts who were

being harshly treated by those in ancient Judaism: “Run with **endurance** the race that is set before you, fixing your eyes on ‘Jesus,’ the author and perfecter of your faith” (Heb 12:1-2); the words “endurance” & “Jesus” are both **emphatic** in Greek. The Christian life is a life of humility that focuses exclusively on Christ – He is not only our salvation, He is our life (cf. Gal 2:20; Col 3:4). Without immersing ourselves in God’s Word, human thinking will dominate our lives; don’t lose sight of the fact that “we are transformed by the renewing of our minds” (cf. Rom 12:2; Prv 23:7), and only the divine presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives can cause the Word of God to renew our minds and our thinking.

## THE TWO MAIN DYNAMICS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The two main dynamics of the Christian life that need to define the believer are “**faith**” and “**love**” — one cannot please God without faith (cf. Heb 11:6), and to the degree that one’s faith expresses itself in love, to that degree is one exercising genuine faith (cf. 1 Jn 4:7-8; Jam 2:17-20). Paul put it this way, “In Christ, nothing matters but **faith working through love**” (Gal 5:6); the emboldened words “through love” are **emphatic** in Greek — likewise wrote Paul: “LOVE is the fulfillment of the Law” (Rom 13:10), and “The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, LOVE your neighbor as you love yourself” (Gal 5:14)... said James, “If you are fulfilling the royal law of LOVE, you are doing well” (Jam 2:8)... conversely, John wrote, “If you have not love you do not know God, because God is LOVE” (1 Jn 4:8) — **LOVE IS SIMPLY FAITH AT WORK!** Aside from grace, if there is anything the believer must understand about the Christian life it is “**faith and love**,” these are the premiere elements of the Christian life. If these two dynamic realities do not characterize your life, humble yourself before the Lord and ask Him to forgive you of all your sins and become real in your heart and life, and give you the faith to be the person of love God wants you to be; that is the whole message of Christianity. That shouldn’t be surprising to anyone; remember “the greatest commandment” has always been that “we love God and love others” (cf. Mt 22:36-40; Deut 6:4-9; Lev 19:18) — when we have not love, we have nothing but a proud self-centered life; *i.e.*, we simply live for ourselves. Our part as God’s children is to take our eyes off of ourselves, and place them on Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2), constantly rejoicing in His unconditional love & grace. Should we insist on having a self-focus, we will become extremely exasperated with our faith, because it will have a self-orientation rather than a God-orientation. **Beloved, we are not under Law, but Grace**; *i.e.*, the love of God (Rom 6:14). Though both Law and Grace “demand obedience,” the perspective is radically different for the person who is under Law, as opposed to the person who is under Grace. The person under Law lives as though his compliance with the Law essentially determines his acceptability before God (*i.e.*, that his behavior is actually somewhat meritorious and righteous); on the other hand the person under Grace walks in obedience to God because of God’s unconditional love for him and his desire to please Him; we obey God out of gratitude, not because of fear. Those are two extremely different constructs — can you imagine earning your parent’s love and acceptance as a child; that if you fail to abide by all of their rules they will “excommunicate and banish

*you from their family”?* Well to live under such “fear” is completely contrary to the love God has for you (1 Jn 4:18-19). As Paul stated, “You have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons” (cf. Rom 8:15). I can almost hear someone saying, “I can understand God accepting me if there is just a modest degree of sin in my life... but there is too much sin in my life for me to be comfortable with my faith in His love” – let me say it one more time, “sin has a significant presence in all of our lives as believers; none of us are anywhere near perfect.”

As long as you are preoccupied with your sinfulness... God’s love for you will be of secondary importance in your mind – of this you can be sure, Satan will constantly remind you of your wayward soul (*i.e.*, indwelling sin); at some point on your journey of faith, you are going to have to stop making your sinful inner core (*i.e.*, your flesh) the premiere focus of your life, and stop identifying it as “the real you” – the “old you” is no longer the real you; the “new you” is now the real you. Said Paul, “In reference to your former manner of life, lay aside the old self, which is constantly being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit;” *i.e.*, it is getting worse and worse (your flesh was far less corrupt as a young child than it is today as an adult) – that’s what our flesh does; it simply gets worse & worse (to think one can actually make it better is sheer madness). Therefore Paul said, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness & holiness of the truth” (cf. Eph 4:2-24). Obviously, salvation involves “the mind” (cf. Mk 1:15; Jn 1:12; 6:29; 14:1; 20:30-31; Rom 10:9; 12:2; 2 Cor 10:5; Col 3:1-2, 10); when we became Christians, God gave us a completely new spiritual and moral capacity that a mind apart from Christ could never achieve (cf. 1 Cor 2:9-16). It is the new self with which we are to be occupied, not the old self – when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives at salvation everything becomes new (cf. 2 Cor 5:17) – we see things we never saw before, and understand things we never understood before... we now look at things through the eyes of faith, and it is this new perspective on life with which we are to be occupied. We are to have the mind of Christ (cf. Phil 2:2-8; also Rom 8:6-7; 12:2).

When the believer understands and believes God’s unconditional love for him, he will strive to please Him out of gratitude and start experiencing a transformed life, and become more conformed to His image (cf. Phil 3:13-14; Rom 8:28-31; 2 Tim 1:9; Col 1:29; Heb 12:4-13; 1 Jn 4:18-19). It should be clear, without a significant appreciation for God’s unconditional love, gratitude will not be a significant part of our faith – thus, we must see ourselves for who we truly are (sinful), and see God for who He truly is (one who loves us unconditionally in spite of our sinfulness)... if our sinfulness isn’t that big a deal to us (*i.e.*, we don’t see ourselves as being that sinful), then God’s unconditional love for us simply won’t be that significant to us. If you think you’re a lovely creature, then you’ll think you are somewhat deserving of God’s love. If you need convincing as to the depth of your sinfulness, then humbly study the matter and take it to the Lord, and tell Him exactly how you feel... and ask Him to give you eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind to understand; only God can give us the grace to see reality for what it really is, and God

only gives that grace to the humble of heart. Obviously growing in Christ and growing spiritually doesn't just happen because one wants it to happen and prays that it will happen; it requires these five things — Humility, Scripture, Prayer, Faith and Obedience (cf. Jam 1:21; 2:17-20; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18). Since that is the case, "can you not spend a good **thirty minutes** every day humbly & prayerfully contemplating God's Word?" Because some believers actually think that "God **honors** their little devotional time in the morning," and will bless them accordingly that day, "they feel really guilty" when they neglect that responsibility; as such, they think their lives are going to be filled with a lot of negatives that day. However, that kind of thinking is very "legalistic," and keeps one in bondage. As God's children we should have a strong desire to grow in our love for Christ and have fellowship with Him — which is radically different than somehow thinking that a little devotional time will suffice and get one through the day. Beloved, don't place yourself in such bondage, because it is the antithesis of what it means to walk with Christ in life; if you make your relationship with Christ a legal one rather than a loving one, you will make it something God never intended it to be. If you really don't **desire** to commune with God and hear His voice, your **fellowship** with Christ will be seriously deficient — should that be the case, come clean and pour your heart to the Lord, and draw near to Him, and He **will** draw near to you (Jam 4:8). Now when studying Scripture, first seek to understand it, and then affirm it to your own heart and apply it as God would have you do so; that's the essence of genuine faith. By the way, "taking notes" is oftentimes very helpful in building your faith and experiencing a transformed life... because when you can articulate things, you'll discover a deeper level of understanding, and find it much easier to apply. The key to "being a person who loves others" is to consciously look for ways to express love to others — love doesn't just happen, it requires intentionality. As you practice loving others in every possible way, it will soon become a more natural expression of the heart. Keep in mind, you are not obeying a law, you are responding to God's love. In order to see this as a dynamic reality in your life, prayerfully and intentionally show love to others at least five times every day; the result will astound you! As John said, "Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 Jn 3:18).

## REGARDING BIBLICAL FAITH

Now just as we became children of God by "faith" in the work of Christ on the cross (thus experiencing the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit; Titus 3:5), so we experience a transformed life by "faith" under the inspiration and work of the Holy Spirit. Paul put it this way when addressing the church at Galatia: "Having begun by the **Spirit**, are you now being perfected by the **flesh**?" (Gal 3:3); *i.e.*, having become a child of God by the Spirit of God, are you now going to perfect yourself by obeying the Law? True, genuine, efficacious faith is the distinguishing characteristic of the child of God; as Scripture repeatedly tells us, "the just shall live by **faith**" (cf. Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11). In his letter to the church at Philippi Paul said, "I am confident of this very thing, that **He** who began a good work in you **will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6) — it

is God who not only began the work in those of us who believe, it is God who will perfect and complete that work. The reality is, when God begins a work of salvation in a person, He finishes and perfects that work; “thus as believers we are eternally secure in Christ;” that’s a given (cf. Rom 8: 29-39; Eph 1:13-14; Heb 7:25). Since Christ fulfilled the Law for us, we don’t have to worry about fulfilling it (cf. Mt 5:17; Rom 8:3-4); after all, what more could one possibly add to the work of Christ? The notion that sinful, weak, fallen human beings (cf. Mt 26:41; Heb 4:15) could actually improve on the saving work of the Holy Spirit was absolutely ludicrous to Paul. God’s message to us is this: “We not only become children of God by **faith**, we grow in Christ by **faith**; i.e., we trust Christ not only for our salvation but also for our growth... with that in mind, **faith** is a monumental issue regarding our relationship with God; both our salvation and our sanctification are **faith** issues. So what is this thing called “**faith**”? “**Faith** is the **substance** of things hoped for, and the **conviction** of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Thus in a word, faith is an “unseen hope” that has no physical evidence (cf. Rom 8:24), and involves the most solid conviction possible — God assures our soul of definite realities; since it is not based upon empirical evidence, divine assurance is a gift of God to one’s soul (cf. Eph 2:8). When we **humble** ourselves before God, He gives us the **grace** to believe; thus James says, “in **humility** receive the word implanted which is able to save your souls” (Jam 1:21). So we are not only regenerated through the power of the Word (cf. 2 Cor 6:7; Col 1:5; 1 Th 2:13; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:23-25), we are transformed by the power of the Word. Remember, “we walk by **faith**, not by **sight**” (2 Cor 5:7); i.e., we don’t walk by some empirical evidence that exists in our lives (our circumstances aren’t the measuring stick for us; God’s Word is — that’s faith!). Obviously when our circumstances run contrary to our heart’s desire, “faith is not an easy didactic;” that’s why Paul urged Timothy “to **fight** the good fight of **faith** to which he was called” (1 Tim 6:12). Again, the life of faith involves **warfare** against the world, the flesh, and the devil (cf. Gal 5:17; Eph 6:11-12; Jam 4:7; 1 Jn 2:15-18); this battle is a “**fight of faith**” that involves wrestling with the truth of God’s Word, and giving oneself to that task. God has called us to a life of faith (believing the truths of God’s Word, and rejecting our fallen human thinking), and foundational to that life is humility of heart (seeing our inward selves for who we really are — fallen sinful creatures); as we grow in our faith we will become far more aware of the corruptness and the deceitfulness of our inner core (cf. Ecc 9:3; Jer 17:9; Mk 2:17; Rom 7:18; Gal 5:17; Eph 4:22). Contrary to the thinking of what many Christians believe and preach, we will **not** see our humanness in a better light later in life; our humanness (i.e., our flesh) is in “a constant state of being corrupted by the **deceitfulness** of its own desires” (cf. Eph 4:22; Heb 3:13; Jam 1:14 — also Gen 3:13; Jer 17:9; 37:9; 49:16; Ob 1:3; Gal 6:3, 7; Col 2:8; 1 Jn 1:8; 3:7-8). The reality is, when we take our eyes off of Christ we are easily deceived. God never redeemed our sinful flesh (cf. Rom 7:24; 8:23); neither did He remove it from us when we became His children; as such, “we are to die to it daily!” (cf. Mt 10:38; 16:24-25; Lk 14:25-35; Rom 6:11-23; 12:2; Gal 2:20; Eph 4:22-24; 5:15-21; Phil 3:17-21; Col 3:1-10; Heb 12:1-14).

Why the Christian world makes light of one’s sinfulness is beyond me; all they want to do is make the believer’s life a joyful little experience — though there is peace and joy when we walk in the light, there is no peace or joy when we walk in the darkness of our flesh.

**Joy is a by-product of experiencing God** — it is instilled in the soul by the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22); as the psalmist David said, “In Thy presence is fullness of joy” (cf. Ps 16:11; 21:6). Only God can make the heart joyful (cf. Jn 17:13; 15:11; 16:24; Lk 6:20-23; Rom 14:17). The reality is, joy depends on our disposition, not on our circumstances (cf. 1 Pet 1:6-8; Jam 1:2-4; Heb 12:11). What one believes in the moment, and why one believes it is the issue. It is here where God’s Word plays an extremely important part in our lives; the foundation of that which governs our lives is to be the Word of God. The question is, are you willing to humble yourself and cry out to the Lord and seek His face when your world isn’t super pleasant and you are struggling with fleshly thoughts and feelings? Are you willing to humbly draw near to God so that He might draw near to you and give you His peace? (Jam 4:8-10), or do you simply let the issue at hand dominate the discourse in your mind? As every mature believer attests, spiritual warfare is far and away the premiere issue with which we all struggle in life (bar none!)... and that fight is “a faith fight.” Never lose sight of the fact that the foundation of our faith is **Christ** and the absolute assurance that He is true to His Word — when that reality drifts from your mind in the midst of the fight, you will struggle terribly with your faith (obviously that is not uncommon for any believer; every believer struggles with the fight of faith). Again, we are not under the Law (whereby our actions control our focus), we are under Grace (wherein God’s love for us is our focus; thus the incredible conviction of faith is the channel whereby we receive God’s grace). Think of God as the supreme energy that governs the universe, and your faith as an electrical cable that gives you access to God’s divine energy — obviously if your faith is not plugged in to divine truth, your faith will prove deficient and not give you access to God’s divine current — “without a humble heart and true faith you cannot please God and experience His grace” (cf. Heb 11:6; Jam 4:6); if you are not plugged in to God’s divine current (i.e., believing Him), you won’t experience His grace. So “humility of faith” is foundational to experiencing God’s grace. Though sinful man can demonstrate a limited degree of external compliance (as the Pharisees did), he cannot achieve internal compliance (because his flesh is corrupt to the core; cf. Rom 7:18; Jer 17:9) — only the arrogant deny that reality. So either you learn to live with reality (i.e., divine truth) or you are really going to struggle. If there is one thing you must give prominence to as a believer, it is this: “Fix your eyes on Christ, the author and perfecter of your faith” (cf. Heb 12:2) — that is emphatically stated in Scripture... that Christ loves us “unconditionally” is the game changer. Though our feelings and our circumstances oftentimes control the discourse in our minds, we must continually fight against those things that distort the truth, and affirm God’s unconditional love for us.

Regarding the matter of “faith,” it involves having a right understanding of three things: 1) Who we are, 2) Who God is, and 3) What God would have us believe and do. By the way, if we get the first two constructs right, the last one won’t be nearly as difficult... if we misconstrue the first two, the last one will simply be a collection of cold, hard facts. Having a proper understanding of these three constructs is “the unseen substance of our faith” (Heb 11:1); remember, faith has nothing to do with what we “see and feel,” it is “the reality of what really is the case” i.e., what is really true, and truth is liberating (cf. Jn 8:31-

32); that which is not true keeps us downtrodden and in bondage. Regarding this matter of truth, carefully reflect upon the following verses: cf. Ps 25:5; 43:3; 51:6; 86:15; 117:2; 119:160; Prv 3:3; 23:23; Jn 1:14, 17; 4:24; 8:31-32; 14:6; 16:13; 17:17; Rom 1:18, 25; 1 Cor 13:6; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:15). It should be noted, only the proud reject the truth (cf. Rom 1:18-25; Jer 13:25); why is that? because they must place themselves in submission to God and His will for their lives (but that is the one thing they simply will not do — they simply insist on autonomy). Because many believers don't take the time to prayerfully contemplate the truths of Scripture (that seems to be the norm) some of you might skip over the verses I just listed... beloved, my prayer is that you won't do that, because there are no shortcuts in the Christian life; you must contemplate God's Word. If you are not really serious about your faith and reconciling the truth, you are going to struggle with it all the way to the grave... though that doesn't mean you are not a child of God, you won't experience much peace and joy in your life, and neither will your faith be very pleasing to God (cf. Heb 11:6); you will simply have an immature faith. The more stubborn you are, the more chastening you are going to experience (cf. Heb 12:5-11); God chastens His children because He loves them. As Peter said, "Long for the pure milk of the Word that by 'it' you may grow in respect to your salvation" (cf. 1 Pet 2:2; Rom 10:17; Col 3:16; Jer 15:16; ); by the way, the word "it" is **emphatic** in Greek; either you humbly devour the Word, or your faith will never become the dynamic reality in your life that God wants it to be. At some point in your walk with God, you need to start taking your faith very seriously (if you have not already done so); that's the road everyone of us must travel as His children — none of us get a special dispensation (*i.e.*, an easy road); if one existed, I would have discovered it a long time ago. ☺ When you prayerfully and humbly seek God through His Word, it'll have a significant impact upon your life... however, should you simply read it lightly, it will have very little effect upon your life (cf. Ps 1:1-2; 119:11; 119:105, 114, 133, 148, 160, 169; 130:5; Jn 8:31-32; Heb 4:12; Jam 1:21; 1 Pet 1:23; 2:2). Let me take a moment and list some constructs of thought that need to define your faith; though this is not an exhaustive list, it covers the bigger issues of life — you may want to study the various issues listed below, so that they will become more meaningful to you and more significant to your faith. I have tagged on a verse or two for each of the constructs listed to help get the ball rolling for you; I would encourage you to write your thoughts down on each of them—that will help you give voice to them, as well as clarify them in your mind. Don't be afraid to "ask questions" when reflecting upon a particular thought — that is exactly how the prophets and the apostles wrestled with divine truth, and that is exactly what I do.

- The foundation of faith is believing the truth about oneself and God (1 Pet 1:3; 2:24).
- Faith sees God for who He is; the sovereign God of all things (Is 14:24; 43:13; Eph 1:11).
- The wisdom and knowledge of God is not unreasonable (Jam 4:17).
- Faith believes God and trusts in the integrity of His Word (Prv 3:5-6; Jn 3:16).
- Without faith it is not possible to please God (Heb 11:6).
- Justification depends on a faith that leads to obedience (Rom 3:28; 5:1).
- True justification always results in the process of true sanctification (2 Cor 3:16-18).

- Living faith results in good works (Jam 2:17-20; 1 Jn 4:7-8).
- We are transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23).
- Faith puts no confidence in the flesh; instead it embraces divine truth (Phil 3:3).
- Faith involves repentance and the acknowledgement of one's sinfulness (Is 30:15).
- Faith believes in the trustworthiness of God; that He is a God of truth (Jn 14:6).
- The object of faith is Christ; that means knowing Him (Jn 1:1; 17:3; Rom 3:22; 5:1, 8).
- Genuine faith moves the heart (Rom 5:5; Eph 3:16-19; Heb 11:1; Jer 31:33).
- Faith trusts in God rather than oneself (Prv 3:5-6; 2 Cor 1:9).
- One grows in faith by humbly and prayerfully studying Scripture (1 Pet 2:2; Jam 1:21).
- As one grows in the grace and knowledge of God, his faith will grow (2 Pet 3:18).
- The economy under which we as believers are to live is "faith in Christ" (Gal 2:20).

Thus, the Christian life has nothing to do with "keeping the Law to earn God's favor" (we obtained God's favor by trusting in the work of Christ; we are now His children and nothing will ever change that — not even the ugly sins we commit — cf. Rom 8:1, 31). Life for the believer is about "fighting the fight of faith by walking in the Spirit (i.e., walking with Christ) through all the ups and downs of life" (cf. Gal 5:16; Col 2:6; Rom 6:4; 8:4; Eph 5:8; Col 1:10; 1 Jn 1:7). The truth is, there are a lot of ups and downs in life — there are temptations at every juncture in life, and there are trials and tribulations that constantly beset us and challenge our thinking; it is the presence of indwelling sin (i.e., our flesh, our sin nature) that makes the life of faith such a challenge and produces so much anxiety in the soul (Rom 7:18; Gal 5:17). The Christian life is not about experiencing some glorious little utopia here on earth... it is a spiritual war against your flesh, the world, and the devil. Now should you minimize this warfare, your perspective on the life of faith will not correspond with the life God has called you to; instead, you will make your wants and wishes the premiere issues of life (and find a hundred ways to justify that thinking). Remember, "Your sin nature (your flesh, your unredeemed humanness) sets its desires against the Spirit; it is in opposition to the Spirit, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Gal 5:17). When you became a child of God, you became a brand new creation (cf. Jn 3:3; 2 Cor 5:17), but God did not remove your sin nature from you; he left it in you and has asked you to die to it and no longer let it reign in your life (cf. Rom 6:12; Mt 16:24; Eph 4:22-24); again, that is the war we are called to fight. Study the following passages: Jn 16:33; Rom 7:18-25; 8:1, 18, 28; 1 Cor 10:12-13; 2 Cor 1:3-5; 10:3-5; Gal 2:20; 5:16-17; Eph 6:10-18; Phil 1:6; 2:12-13; 3:13-14; 4:6-8; Col 3:1-4; 1 Tim 1:5; 6:12; 2 Tim 2:15; Heb 4:15-16; Heb 10:23-25; 12:1-2, 5-11; Jam 1:14-15, 22; 4:8; 1 Pet 5:10; 1 Jn 2:15-17; Jude 1:18-21). Obviously I listed a number of passages there; take the time to prayerfully think through them, and write down your thoughts & questions — in so doing you will be "doing an inductive study" (i.e., you will be employing logic in your search to understand the ways of God; obviously as one grows in his faith, he will grow in his reasoning capacity & understanding. When one humbly reflects and meditates on God's Word, the Holy Spirit opens his heart to the truth (cf. Jn 14:16-17, 26; 16:13; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor 12:3; 1 Th 1:5; 1 Jn 2:20, 27). This is precisely the way the prophets of old and the apostles studied the Scriptures. God gave us minds with which to think; we can't abrogate that responsi-

bility as believers and expect to grow in our faith (that is not possible; cf. Rom 10:17; 1 Pet 2:2). Incidentally, “we are transformed by the renewing of our minds” (cf. Rom 12:2); should we fail to give careful attention to the Word, we are violating the command of God (cf. Deut 6:5-7; Ps 1:2; 25:4; 119:15; Phil 4:6-9; Col 3:16). To make an excuse for not putting forth a reasonable effort to grow in Christ, is a sad commentary on the control your flesh has over your life. All of us can spend thirty minutes a day prayerfully wrestling with the truths of Scripture; as is the case with pretty much anything in life, it takes about thirty days to develop a pattern of living for it to become more habitual. Remember, as a believer, you have a responsibility to grow in your faith, and live a fruitful life (cf. Jn 15:7-8; 1 Pet 2:2). To the degree divine reality (truth) and your thinking correspond, to that degree will you experience transformation in the inner man (cf. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Gal 5:17).

The economy under which God willed us to live is that we wrestle with and obey the truth, and that we ultimately reject what is not true. As stated earlier, this is not a simple little life to which we have been called – many in the heavenly realm in eternity past (including Satan) rejected the truth and fought against it; as such, one third of the angels were cast out of heaven for rejecting the truth (cf. Rev 12:4-5, 9, 13, 17; 20:10; Mt 25:41). In like manner, those who reject the truth here in the newly created order in which we live will receive the same judgment as those who rejected the truth in eternity past (cf. Rev 20:11-15; Mt 25:41). Beloved, please don’t make light of truth. Sadly, the majority of those in the Christian world “are really not followers of Christ” – as is the case with most religions, people identify with it because that’s the religion they were raised with or because of some of the advantages it provides for them; it gets God on their side (or so they think) – to them life is not about God and His will, instead it is about man and his will & what he wants; but that is not at all what Christianity teaches. The Christian faith is not a smorgasbord faith, where one picks and chooses what he wants to believe, and ignore what he doesn’t want to believe – man does not determine reality... so on the last day Jesus will say to them, “Depart from Me, I never knew you” (Mt 7:21-23; 25:41). The wonderful thing about being a true child of God is this – God has imputed the righteousness of His Son to us and guaranteed our eternal destiny; since it is absolutely certain, we don’t have to fear not measuring up (the fact is we can’t measure up because we don’t have the capacity to do so; hence Christ measured up for us; *i.e.*, fulfilled the law for us – cf. Mt 5:17; Rom 8:3-4). Therefore salvation is completely the work of Christ (Mk 10:27), and our destiny is as sure as the cross (cf. Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8; 8:29-30; Phil 1:6; Col 1:13-14; 1 Th 5:24; 2 Tim 1:12; 2:13; Titus 3:5; Heb 7:25; 12:1-2; 1 Pet 5:10; 1 Jn 5:4). Therefore we can fight the good fight of faith with confidence, even though we stumble over and over again, knowing that there is no condemnation awaiting those who are in Christ (cf. Rom 8:1; Heb 4:15-16; Jam 3:2; Ecc 7:20; Prv 24:16). One could describe God’s charge to us this way: “Your future is in the bank, it is absolutely sure... so go out and fight the war of faith... though you will stumble often on your journey, never let it deter you... always remembering I will never leave you or forsake you... after you have suffered for a little while, I will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. May My grace and peace sustain you through all the ups and downs of life” (cf. Heb 13:5; Mt 28:20; 1 Pet 5:10; 2 Pet 1:2).

As the apostle John said, “Those who walk in the light have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus cleanses them from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). All genuine Christians walk habitually in the light (truth), not in darkness (falsehood) — the result is, the Lord continually forgives them and cleanses them from their sin; the present tense verbs describe “continual action,” true born again Christians live in the light, not in the darkness (cf. 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:8; Col 1:12-13); though they stumble often in life because of indwelling sin (*i.e.*, the flesh, the old man within, their old sin nature), that doesn’t change who they now are in Christ. Just as immature children stumble, so also do God’s children; thus, God disciplines them (as all parents do), but He never abandons them (cf. Heb 12:4-11; 13:5). To expand upon what the apostle John said, the true Christian participates in the cleansing process by “confessing his sins to God;” *i.e.*, “by saying the same thing about them that God says;” in so doing he experiences God’s cleansing and forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9), and his fellowship with Christ is restored (1 Jn 1:3-7). It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin (cf. Jn 16:8, 13; 1 Th 1:5; Heb 11:1); we simply affirm the truth of that conviction. Without being in agreement with God as we walk through life, we won’t enjoy His peace, His intimacy, or His fellowship; the barrier of unconfessed sin will keep us at bay. The reality is this — whether or not our sin is an outward act or an inward thought, we must deal with it or God’s hand will weigh heavily upon us (cf. Ps 32:3-5; 38:2; Prv 28:13). As the psalmist David put it, “God desires truth in the innermost being” (cf. Ps 51:6; 15:1-2). So rather than letting the flesh run the show in our lives, we must deal with it quickly when it gets in the driver’s seat, and submit to the lordship of Christ. Obviously as believers we don’t achieve some remarkable level of perfection in this life; though we live in the kingdom of light, we are constantly dealing with the presence of indwelling sin (cf. Col 1:13; Jn 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:36). True, genuine faith is not simply a mental, theological position, it involves obedience as well; James put it this way, “faith without works is useless” (Jam 2:14-20). Let me illustrate true faith: If you were to say you didn’t believe in running red lights, yet you constantly ran them, your testimony would be without merit... if you said you believed in serving others, helping the poor, and tithing, yet those things didn’t define you, your testimony would be false — at some point your life must correspond with what you say you believe, because your life testifies to what you really believe. Though obedience isn’t a piece of cake for anyone, as believers in Christ we are to constantly hammer away at dealing rightly with all the issues of life — that is what true believers do (they never give up); the Holy Spirit just keeps pushing them. If everything in life was just left up to us, ultimately we would throw in the towel... but thankfully, “God is at work in us, both to will and do His good pleasure... and He will accomplish what concerns us” (cf. Phil 1:6; 2:13; 1 Th 5:24; Ps 138:8); so foundational to the Christian life is the grace of God (cf. Eph 2:7-9; Rom 3:24; 5:20; 6:14; 11:6; Jn 1:17; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 12:9; Gal 2:21; Eph 1:7; Titus 3:5-7; Jam 4:6; 1 Pet 1:13; 2 Pet 3:18). Obviously, we are not men and women of great faith... we are men and women of faith in a great God.

## IN CONCLUSION...

Three times in the New Testament we are told that “*the righteous shall live **by faith***” (cf. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38); these authors were quoting the words of the prophet Habakkuk (cf. Hab 2:4). So as believers we are not only “*justified by faith*,” we are to “*live by faith*” (cf. Rom 3:28; 5:1). *Faith* is the principle which motivates the whole life of the believer — “*without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Heb 11:6). Just as Abraham was “*reckoned righteous before God by faith*” (cf. Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3), so are we. With all of the foregoing in mind, let’s briefly summarize the issues of Law, Heart, Obedience, and Faith.

1. **Law** — The Law seems to be a somewhat confusing issue in the minds of most people; a typical view of the Law is that its purpose is to teach us *how to be good*, but that is not the emphasis in Scripture... the purpose of the Law is to teach us *what is good*. Obviously God is *GOD*... the Creator of all things, and the ultimate standard of all things... “*for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things*” (Rom 11:36); so God is the source, the sustainer, and the rightful end of everything that exists. God’s actions are perfect because His nature is perfect, and everything He does is done in accord with His nature. In short, God always does what is right, and as God’s creatures we are required to do what is right as well; as such, *He demands that we live according to His moral law*, which is revealed to us in the Bible. *God’s Law is the ultimate standard of righteousness* and the supreme norm for judging right & wrong; when we violate God’s Law, He deals with us accordingly. Since we are not autonomous creatures, so we are subject to the Law of God. The primary means by which *God reveals sin to be sin* is the *Law of God* that is contained in the Scriptures; *thus the primary purpose of the Law is to humble us and reveal our utter sinfulness, that we might turn to God and seek His forgiveness* — the Law came because of sin; were there no sin there would have been no need for the Law (Gal 3:19). The prophet Isaiah said, “*All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way*” (cf. Is 53:6); that has been the rule of life for the human family since the beginning (cf. Gen 6:5; Judges 17:6; 21:25). It is because man is a sinful creature (*i.e.*, one who refuses to submit to the ways of God), that God introduced His Law to man and administrated it (cf. Gal 3:19, 24). Scripture emphatically teaches that “*all people are sinful*” (cf. 1 Kg 8:46; Ps 143:2; Prv 20:9; Ecc 7:20; Is 53:6; Rom 3:9-23; 11:32) — As Paul put it, “Scripture has shut up (*i.e.*, confined) all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (cf. Gal 3:22; 3:18; Rom 11:32). Contrary to the thinking of the ancient Jewish world, the Law was not given so that one could *obtain righteousness*; it was given to *reveal one’s unrighteousness* (cf. Rom 3:20; 7:7; Gal 3:19). As Paul stated, “*By the deeds of the Law shall no man be justified*” — *i.e.*, no man will be declared righteous by God by obeying the Law (Rom 3:20). The argument should be clear — we are already *unrighteous sinners* who do not have the capacity to obey the Law (Rom 7:18; 8:3), so how can the unrighteous obtain righteousness through the Law? James reminds us that if a person stumbles in just one point, he is guilty of breaking the entire Law (Jam 2:10). *So righteousness is imputed to those who believe the promises of*

God — that has been the means by which men have been saved since the beginning of time (cf. Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jam 2:23); all the Law does is show man how incredibly sinful he is (cf. Rom 3:20). Said Paul, “I would not have known about coveting were it not for the Law” (Rom 7:7).

Christ did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill the Law (Mt 5:17); and He fulfilled it completely. Said the Lord Jesus, “Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law until all of it is accomplished” (Mt 5:18). Though no man truly understands everything about God’s Law (that has been attested to by theologians down through the centuries), what we do know is that it reveals the absolute perfection of God’s holiness (a level of holiness that transcends human thought); so no man can walk around claiming to understand the fullness of God — as stated earlier, that would be like putting the entire ocean into a little thimble; compared to God we are extremely small creatures. I’ve always liked the words of **Albert Einstein**: “The scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation... His religious feeling rakes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.” Those words in and of themselves are pretty profound; yet they only see things from a human perspective. Though Einstein was not a man of faith, one cannot help but admire his humility of thought. Ultimately, the reality is, as God’s children we are not under the Law but Grace (Rom 6:14); therefore we are not to subject ourselves to the Law (*i.e.*, the Mosaic Law)... furthermore, we are not under the Old Covenant but the New Covenant (for a more definitive understanding of the New Covenant and Old Testament Law, take the time to read & study Hebrews 8-10; these three chapters contrast the differences between the two). To provide a little contextual understanding to the Book of Hebrews, it’s important to remember that Christianity in its earliest years was completely Jewish — Gentiles didn’t become a significant part of the Christian community until the apostle Paul started his missionary journeys (which was about twenty years after the resurrection of Christ). So keep in mind, Jesus was a Jew, His disciples were Jews, and the first converts were Jews. Their first meetings happened in synagogues, and their first controversies concerned adherence to Jewish laws. The first critics of Christianity knew it as “a Jewish sect.” Now for the first Jewish believers, believing in Christ raised many questions — What about the Law of Moses? What about the temple and animal sacrifices? Did believing in Christ negate much of what they had grown up believing? Was it really enough to trust in Christ? Answers to these questions were needed right away for those who lived in the earliest years of Christianity. Jewish tolerance would soon give way to torture and executions — believing in Christ would be a life-or-death proposition, and the temptation for Jewish believers to go back to their old ways would be irresistible for many converts, unless they could know for sure they had made the right choice.

When the Lord Jesus affirmed the great commandment of the Old Testament regarding *“loving God and loving others”* (Mt 22:37-39; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18), He said, *“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets”* (Mt 22:40); hence Jesus was stating that the entire moral duty of man lay under these two categories. When Paul was on his first missionary journey in Galatia, he compared the advantage of Christ to that of the Law; he said, *“Through Christ everyone who believes is **justified** (i.e., declared innocent, acquitted; the death of Christ was the payment of our sin debt, so that we might be forgiven; on the other hand, one is **not freed** from his sins through the Law – cf. Rom 3:28; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 2:16; 3:11; Phil 3:9)... thus through Christ we are **set free** from the Law of Moses”* (Acts 13:38-39). That’s why the apostles reminded us time and again that *“we are saved by the **grace** of the Lord Jesus, not by trying to keep the **Law**”* (cf. Acts 15:11; Rom 3:24; 5:15; 6:14; Eph 2:8; Titus 3:7; 1 Pet 1:10-11; 5:10-12) – Paul emphatically said, *“By the works of the Law **no one** will be justified in God’s sight”* (Rom 3:20); the reality is, *“all men are under sin”* (cf. Rom 3:9ff), so if we are all sinners how can we possibly keep the Law? – that is akin to saying that evil people can do good, or that illiterate people can read, or that a one year old child can argue against the law of entropy (incidentally, an evil person is one who does not *trust* in God, not necessarily one who commits *acts* of overt evil). Furthermore, how can one fulfill the law if he has already broken the law? As stated earlier, James said, *“by breaking one law, one becomes guilty of breaking the entire Law”* (Jam 2:10).

Since the tyranny of *“works”* has always been a major problem in the religious world, *men simply lower the standards of the Law to make obedience to it more attainable*. The problem with *“faith”* in the minds of men, is that it is too ethereal to them; they don’t see how embracing constructs of thought in and of themselves can be that significant – they simply can’t get their minds around this thing called faith; since works is an easier construct of thought for them than faith, people are far more likely to embrace the idea of *works* rather than *faith*. The night before Jesus went to the cross He gave His disciples a brand new commandment – *“that they **love one another as fellow-members of the family of God**”* (Jn 13:34; 15:12). Paul defines loving one another as *“the law of Christ,”* where we are called to bear one another’s burdens as fellow-believers (Gal 6:2); he goes on to say, *“do not lose heart in doing good, for in due time you shall reap”* (Gal 6:9). Paul reminded believers that *“the whole Law is fulfilled in one word – **loving your neighbor as yourself**”* (cf. Gal 5:14; 6:2; Mt 22:40; Rom 13:8, 10; Mt 7:12). James refers to loving others as *“the royal law”* and *“the law of liberty”* (cf. Jam 2:8, 12). Since *“the love of God has been poured out in our **hearts** by the Holy Spirit”* (i.e., He gave us a heart of compassion), we can humbly fulfill God’s command to love others because of His indwelling presence in our lives (cf. Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22); Paul describes it as *“**faith working through love**”* (Gal 5:6) – i.e., *“love is the expression of true faith.”* The apostle John in the final years of his life lived on the Aegean island of Patmos... the Roman government used that island as a place of banishment for criminals – they were forced to work in the mines. Emperor Domitian banished the revelator St. John to Patmos in 95 AD (cf. Rev 1:9). Historians tell us that when John was old, people would

daily carry him into the sanctuary where Christians would gather, and in so doing he would simply say to the people, “Love one another.” Finally one person asked him why he always said that to them when he came into their presence; to which John replied, “If this alone be done, it is enough.” LOVE is the premiere construct that needs to define the life and faith of the believer (cf. Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14; 6:2; Mt 22:40; 1 Jn 4:7-8).

2. **Heart** — It is important to note that love is a “heart” issue, not an action devoid of wisdom and compassion. Throughout Scripture the heart is described as the seat of emotion, desire, knowledge, conscience and moral character. Since the heart stands for the inner being of man (i.e., the man himself), it is the fountain of all he does (Prov 4:4). The intrinsic aspect of man that defines him is his heart; thus the heart is the most important part of man... it is the quintessence of who he really is. The heart is used figuratively for the hidden things of one’s personal life — all one’s thoughts, desires, words and actions flow from deep within. So it is the heart that defines man; i.e., the real man (1 Pet 3:4). Scripture describes human depravity as in the “heart,” therefore sin is a principle that is rooted in man’s inward life (Mt 15:18-19). As man stubbornly goes his own way in life, his heart becomes harder and harder; and God alone is the answer to his hardened heart. The Bible regards the heart as the sphere of Divine influence (Rom 2:15; Acts 15:9) — the LORD prophesied to His people through Ezekiel, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh... and I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (cf. Ezek 36:26-27; Jer 31:33). When David fell and sinned against the Lord, he asked God to “create in him a clean heart” (Ps 51:10). The problem with man is, “his heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; man cannot even understand it” (Jer 17:9); nevertheless, it can be cleansed & renewed (Ps 51:10; Ezek 36:26). The LORD told Samuel, “God does not see as man sees; man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). It’s the “heart” that defines man, not his perceived behavior. So the heart is not only the seat of one’s moral and spiritual life, it is the seat of grief (Jn 14:1); joy (Jn 16:22), affections (Lk 24:32), conscience (1 Jn 3:20), thoughts (Heb 4:12), understanding (Mt 13:15), reasoning (Mk 2:6; Lk 24:38), the will (Rom 6:17; Col 3:15), obedience (Eph 6:6), and faith (Mk 11:23; Rom 10:10). Incidentally, the word “heart” appears more than 800 times in Scripture; take a moment and reflect upon the twenty selected verses I have listed below —

- God saves those who are upright in heart — Ps 7:10
- The fool says in his heart there is no God — Ps 14:1
- My heart trusts in the Lord, and I am helped; therefore my heart exalts — Ps 28:7
- Create in me a clean heart — Ps 51:10
- A broken and contrite heart, Thou wilt not despise — Ps 51:17
- The righteous are not shaken; their heart steadfastly trusts in the Lord — Ps 112:7
- How blessed are those who seek the Lord with all their heart — Ps 119:2

- Thy word I have treasured in my heart that I may not sin against Thee – Ps 119:11
- God, search me and know my heart; lead me in the everlasting way – Ps 139:23-24
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart... and He will direct your path – Prv 3:5-6
- As you forgive others from heart, so will God forgive you – Mt 18:35
- Because of the hardness of men's hearts, God permitted divorce – Mt 19:8
- Love the Lord your God with all your heart – Mt 22:37
- As Lydia listened to Paul, the Lord opened her heart to respond – Acts 16:14
- Because of a stubborn unrepentant heart, one experiences God's wrath – Rom 2:5
- With the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness – Rom 10:10
- Do the will of God from the heart – Eph 6:6
- Beloved, put on a heart of compassion – Col 3:12
- Draw near to God with a sincere heart with full assurance of faith – Heb 10:22
- Love one another from the heart – 1 Pet 1:22

In view of modern trends in psychology, it is instructive to note this emphasis on the heart in early Hebrew and Christian literature. The prophets of old saw clearly that it is in the heart of man wherein moral and spiritual battles must be fought and won... thus the psalmist David prayed, “Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults; also keep me from committing presumptuous sin; let them not rule over me... Let the words of my mouth & the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer” (Ps 19:12-14). The perfection demanded by the Law led David to **consider his own imperfection**: he was made aware of both hidden faults as well as deliberate impetuous sins, so he asked God to deliver him from both. When we consider our fallenness and the imperfection of our inner being, it becomes quite clear to us that it is a painful weighty issue. When the cumbersome nature of anxiety weighs heavily upon us, it can cause us to despair and cause depression in the soul; it is at this point where we must pour our heart and emotions out to the Lord if we are to experience His peace – only God can administer genuine peace to the soul of man (cf. Phil 4:6-7; Gal 5:22; Heb 12:11). Obviously pouring one's heart out to the Lord requires humility and sharing the depths of one's anguish; it is not simply a matter of just scratching the surface of the problem, and then expecting God to give you peace that overwhelms the soul – ruminating over the depth of our anguish means dealing with the fullness of our pain, and crying out to the Lord with humility of heart. God wants us to look at the fullness of our inner being, and not just scratch the surface; our sinful inner core is not just a minor issue – it is so significant, it took the death of Christ to resolve... and He asks us to deal with it our entire life and see it for what it really is (cf. Ecc 9:3; Jer 17:9; Mt 16:24-25; Rom 6:12-23; Gal 5:17). In spite of the depth of one's despair, God replaces it with peace; He not only quiets the soul, He fills it with peace. All of us as believers experiences some level of anxiety in life; some far more than others. Anxiety is an emotion characterized by uneasiness, dread, concern, tension, restlessness & worry... and often accompanies depression. The anxious individual often anticipates misfortune, danger, or doom... so anxiety is the underlying cause

of many psychological problems. Though there is a healthy side to anxiety (it can increase efficiency and one's concerns; cf. 2 Cor 11:28; Phil 2:20), when anxiety takes on the form of fretting and worrying, it is not healthy (cf. Phil 4:6; 1 Pet 5:7). The learned responses that we have accumulated in life over the years (some go all the way back to our childhood), are often aroused by the stress we are undergoing in our life today. According to the Neurosurgeon **Wilder Penfield**, "repressed emotions are frequently experienced in current situations" (*The Mystery of the Mind*; Princeton University Press, 1975); thus we are not only reacting to the current stresses, but also to the repressed emotions of our childhood — which explains the reason why we often overreact the way we do to current situations. Just because we are believers does not mean we have an exceedingly healthy inner core — our inner core is the product of all our life experiences. Scripture says there's nothing good in the interior of our being (Rom 3:12; 7:18; Lk 18:19), and of this we can be sure — it is going to express itself in our life (Jam 3:2; Ecc 7:20).

Essentially "anxiety is a strong feeling;" sometimes it can be very strong. The word anxiety refers to the perception of one's state as either being pleasant or unpleasant; thus there are two categories by which feelings may be classified: "good" & "bad." As **Dr. Jay Adams** says in his book, "*The Christian Counselor's Manual*" — "the problem comes when people reduce their feelings to thoughts and beliefs." Many counselees say "they feel inferior" (or stupid, or inadequate); but that deduction is grounded in a judgment they have made regarding their own behavior. The reality is, one cannot "feel inferior" because inferiority is not an emotion; inferiority is a judgment based upon some deductions. The question one needs to answer is this — "What reasons do you have for concluding that you are inferior or inadequate?" One might also say, "I don't feel saved" or "I don't feel loved" — those are common reactions by many in the Christian world, but the conviction that one is truly saved or loved is not an emotion; assurance is not a feeling. Though our relationship with Christ affects the emotions, it is not in itself a feeling. Distinguishing between the emotion and the conviction that triggers it is often fundamental to discovering the solution to one's problem. Regarding our salvation, assurance first depends upon the promises of God in His Word, and then upon our dependence on Christ and the evidences of salvation in our life. So feeling is not the basis of our salvation, but the fruit of our salvation — it arises out of assurance and enhances it, but assurance itself has a more objective foundation. The Christian life is not a life based upon "how one feels;" it is based upon "what one believes" — Scripture repeatedly tells us that, "the righteous live by faith" (Rom 1:17), "not by what is seen" (Rom 8:24-25; 2 Cor 5:7). When we let our feelings dictate reality to us, we will only love others when we feel like it... or be kind when we feel like it... or go to work when we feel like it... or cut the grass when we feel like it... or go to church when we feel like it... or abstain from fleshly desires when we feel like it — should we let our feelings run our lives, we will find ourselves in an extremely deep psychological quagmire that will ultimately destroy us. It should be clear, the reason we sin is because "we feel like it;" i.e., we capitulate to our feelings. The reality is, the more mature we are in our faith, the more we will

*live above our feelings and see things for what they really are — the mature believer learns to live responsibly in spite of his feelings; yet frequently his feelings do get the better of him — obviously the passions of our inner core can be very strong at times* (Rom 7:18; Jam 2:3). By the way, the more we *discipline* ourselves in life (cf. 1 Cor 9:27; Phil 3:13-14; Heb 6:1), the more we will reflect the presence of Christ. Regarding “*discipline*,” read the following passages: cf. Ps 50:16-17; Prv 12:1; 15:32; 23:12; Col 2:5; 1 Tim 4:7. With the foregoing in mind, as believers we must be committed to doing the following five things: obey God (Rom 6:16)... pray earnestly (Eph 6:18)... study the Word diligently and believe what it teaches (Rom 10:17; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17)... guard our thought life (Phil 4:8)... and be confident in the fact that God is at work in us transforming us into the image of Christ (Phil 2:13-14; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

3. **Obedience** — Since the very beginning the Lord has instructed men as to what they were to do; failing to do that would bring punishment. God commanded Adam and Eve “*to be fruitful and multiply... to fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over every living thing*” (Gen 1:28); thus God gave man the authority to exercise dominion over all the earth. He told them, “*they could eat of any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good & evil; that if they eat of that tree they would die*” (Gen 2:16-17). So “**obeying God**” has always defined the economy of God for man. Time and time again God instructed man as to what he needed to do, yet time and time again man failed to do what God told him to do. Pharaoh responded to God’s servant Moses with these words: “*Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice?*” (Ex 5:2). Not long after, the LORD said to His people in the Sinai wilderness, “*If you will obey Me... you shall be My possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine*” (Ex 19:5). “*If you do not obey Me... I will punish you for your sins... and destroy your pride*” (Lev 26:14-19). “*If you diligently obey Me, I will bless you... if you do not obey Me, I will send many curses upon you*” (cf. Deut 28:1ff & 28:15ff). “*If you will obey the Lord with all your heart, I will prosper you*” (Deut 30:2, 9). *Throughout Scripture we constantly see God blessing those who obey Him* (cf. Gen 26:12-13; Deut 28:1ff; 1 Chron 4:10; Mt 5:3-10; 11:6; 16:17; Lk 11:28; 12:37; Jn 13:17; Acts 3:26; Gal 3:8-9; Eph 1:3). The reality is, all legalistic religions obey their gods in order to gain their favor and avoid being punished; incidentally, that’s the essence of every religion except Christianity — either they are earning God’s favor or disfavor. The true believer in Christ doesn’t obey God to earn something or get something from Him; he obeys God out of gratitude for His unconditional love for him. So we are not saved *by good works*, we are saved *for good works*; i.e., loving others (cf. Eph 2:10; 1 Jn 3:16-19; 4:7-11, 19).

When King Saul *disobeyed* the command of God (he had actually *redefined* what God had said, and did what seemed best in his own eyes), he made a show of repentance with an elaborate burnt offering when the prophet Samuel confronted him about his disobedience. As a slam on his arrogant action, Samuel said to him, “*To obey is better than sacrifice and burnt offerings*” (1 Sam 15:21); thus emphasizing that *sincerity and obedience were the prerequisites for worship that pleases God; man doesn’t have the*

option of changing the standard. The reality is, only an **obedient disposition** of the mind is truly good – when such a disposition is lacking, so also is moral value. Thus said Peter, “God has given the Holy Spirit to those who **obey Him**” (i.e., to those who believe on His Son; Acts 5:32). We are not free to change the rules of life simply because they don’t mesh with our thinking (remember, we have fallen minds). Sadly, many in the Christian world insist on redefining what Scripture says, to make it correspond with their own paradigm of thought; if something seems unreasonable to them, they will choose not to believe it... thus they will develop their own theology of thought. Essentially that defines the path liberal theologians have traveled in our world; they reject the supernatural and the claim that Scripture is the infallible, inspired word of God (they claim it is nothing but the product of men). Because there are certain ugly realities in the world (death, murder, sickness, disease, floods, hurricanes, war, earthquakes, etc.), they feel such things are irreconcilable to a God of love; thus they refuse to believe in a God who would allow such things – as such, they define God on their own terms, and arrogantly reject anything that does not coincide with their thinking, passions, or autonomy (not at all mindful of the fact that they are grossly fallen creatures with very deficient minds). Obviously when one embraces such a position, he foolishly makes fallen human thinking the ultimate measuring stick of what true reality is; in spite of the fact that his brain is incredibly small and deficient; remember, man’s IQ is 150 at best, and is not even capable of discovering the vast majority of things that are under the sun (cf. Ecc 1:14; 7:13-14; 11:5; 12:13-14); yet he insists on judging reality at the highest level (both moral and spiritual) with his tiny little brain. The problem is, he has a very proud heart; one that will submit to nothing or anyone other than himself. From the beginning of time sinful man has always questioned the integrity of divine truth; i.e., what God says. The apostle Paul described it this way: “You are a slave of the one you **obey**; either of **sin** (i.e., that which doesn’t correspond with the expressed thinking of God), or of **obedience** (i.e., what God says)” (Rom 6:16). The question is, what is the source (the foundation) of your thinking? Without humility of thought one will not embrace divine thinking... remember God only convicts the humble heart of divine truth; thus to the proud heart, “it is foolishness” (cf. 1 Cor 1:18; 2:14; 3:18-19; Rom 1:21-22).

4. **Faith** — Faith is the foundation of “obedience,” without it one cannot rightfully obey, because true obedience is a corollary of faith (i.e., it must be inspired by faith, and be the outgrowth of faith). Remember, faith is the substance of divine thought; not the substance of human thought. Regrettably, faith is often mistaken for a blind belief in something that is unreasonable... to call the Christian faith a “blind faith” is an outrage to God, because it is the wisdom of God administered to man’s heart by His Spirit. Thus true faith is the by-product of divinely inspired wisdom and empirical evidence (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-24; 2:6-10; 2 Pet 1:16). Christianity does not rest upon myths and fables, but on the testimony of those who saw with their eyes and heard with their ears (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3; Jn 1:14; Jn 20:24-29). The truth of the gospel is based on historical events. The book of Hebrews defines faith this way: “Faith is the **substance** of things hoped for,

*the conviction of things not seen*” (Heb 11:1). Obviously there is a substantive reason for the hope that is in us who believe. The fullness of biblical theology is centered on the notion of divine revelation and the receptive response of man — God speaks His word, and man hears it and is required to obey it. In the Torah, the theme of responsive obedience is underscored (cf. Ex 19:5, 8; 24:7; Deut 28:1; 30:11-14). The concept of faith in Scripture conveys the thought of a movement of trust going out to and laying hold of the object of its confidence; thus it is an attitude of the heart that involves a self-renouncing, trustful reliance upon God (cf. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38) — self-renouncing is very clear to the believer; humility of thought cannot deny it because it is so convincing to the heart. So the nature of faith means to live by the truth God conveys to the heart by the Holy Spirit — be it through the spoken or written Word (cf. Acts 16:14; Rom 10:17). The Bible views faith’s convictions as certainties because they rest upon the testimony of a God who does not lie (cf. Titus 1:2; 1 Jn 5:9-12), and equates them with knowledge (cf. 1 Jn 3:2; 5:18-20).

Abraham was blessed because he heard and obeyed God’s voice; i.e., believed what God said (Gen 22:18). Disobedience is being unattentive to the voice of God — “having ears, but not hearing” (cf. Ps 115:6; Jer 3:13; Is 6:9-10). According to Scripture, believing and obeying God is “faith;” without faith one cannot please God (Heb 11:6). The New Testament brings out this Old Testament construct when Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (cf. Mt 11:15; 13:9, 15-16; Mk 4:9, 23; 8:18; Lk 14:35). Then there is this exhortation of Christ, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say?” (cf. Lk 6:46-49; Mt 7:21-27). Another proclamation by Jesus is this: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (cf. Lk 11:28; Jn 10:16, 27; 15:5, 10). **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, the 20<sup>th</sup> century German pastor and ecumenist who was outspoken against Hitler, in his famous work “The Cost of Discipleship” commented on the previous verse saying, “It is only to this obedience that the promise of fellowship with Jesus is given.” As Jesus’ brother stated, “faith without works (obedience) is useless / dead” (Jam 2:17, 20). Claiming to believe something without demonstrating it is nothing but a sham (cf. 1 Jn 3:7-10; 17-18; 4:7-8). By the way, the heart is a correlative of faith — the heart is the interior of our being that believes, and faith is the expressed position of the heart (i.e., what a person truly believes). If a person really believes something, it will be evidenced by the way in which he lives (Mt 7:15-23; Jn 13:35). That truism reminds me of the words of **Tertullian** (ca. 160-220), the African moralist, apologist & theologian, who was known as “The Father of Latin Theology” — being reared in cultured paganism in Carthage, he knew well the hatred and brutality that the pagan world had for one another... pagan philosophy was filled with errors and was at odds with Christianity. In his earliest writings Tertullian defended Christian beliefs & practices that pagans often misunderstood; one of the pagan quotes about Christians that he mentions in his writings was this, “See how they love one another (for they themselves hate one another), and how they are ready to die for each other (for they themselves are readier to kill each other” — *Apologeticum*, chp 39, p. 7). It’s hard to imagine the incredible hatred that existed in the first to the third centuries. One of the most profound

comments made regarding the early Christians came from the lips of a man named Aristides, who was sent by Emperor Hadrian around 135 AD to spy out those strange creatures known as “Christians,” having seen them in action Aristides reported back to the Emperor, “Behold! How they love one another.” True born-again Christians reflect the love of Christ in their world in some measure; *i.e.*, they evidence it by the way in which they live, because God by His Spirit is doing a work in and through them (cf. Phil 2:13; 1 Jn 4:7-8). The Christian apologist Justin Martyr (100-165)... and the Christian scholar Clement of Alexandria (155-220)... and Cyprian (ca. 200-258), the Bishop of Carthage, all made very similar statements. The greatest of the Latin fathers was Augustine (354-430) — his voluminous writings massively influence almost every sphere of Western thought down through the ages; both the Reformers and Catholics claim his patronage; in his writings Augustine frequently quoted Tertullian.

Let me bring this study to a close with an Old Testament quote — the LORD said to His people Israel through the prophet Isaiah: “You honor Me with your lips, but your heart is far from Me; your reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote” (Is 29:13). Jesus said the same thing regarding the Pharisees in the gospel of Matthew (Mt 15:8). Sin and Satan have so blinded fallen human beings (cf. Eph 4:18; 2 Cor 4:4) that they cannot see and comprehend the realities of divine truth (cf. Jn 3:3; 1 Cor 2:14), or come to “a self-renouncing trust in Christ” (Jn 6:44, 65) — as previously mentioned, it is only the “humble heart” that the Holy Spirit enlightens and does a work of grace in his life (cf. 1 Th 1:5; 1 Cor 12:3; Titus 3:5; Heb 10:15-16; Jam 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5).

*Beloved, humbly fight the good fight of faith!*