

 **MPI PUBLISHING**



IN HIM

I AM WHO GOD SAID I AM AND I CAN DO WHAT GOD SAID I CAN DO!

JOE WYROSTEK



IN HIM: I am Who God Said I am and I Can Do What God Said I Can Do!

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I dedicate this book to every disciple that I've had the honor of sharing the message of Christ-centered identity with and seeing them live the abundant life. Here's to Christ in you, the hope of glory!

INTRODUCTION

Colossians 1:27 (NKJV), “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

There is no greater promise than that of Christ actually dwelling within the born again believer. This is the purpose for which you and I were made: to be unified with God, glorified in His presence, and united with Christ forever (Romans 8:28-30). The fulfillment of this promise is not relegated until the afterlife when you go to heaven but happens at the moment of your spiritual re-birth- here and now (John 3:3). The Apostle Peter taught that, as a child of God, you presently partake of the divine nature (1 Peter 1:4). Therefore, you should never look at yourself the same again.

This book was written to help you gain a God-centered sense of identity. This is contrary to the world’s message that identity is basically self-derived- a self-centered identity. In other words, the self-centered movement teaches that our value and purpose come from within us and can only be decided by us. This, however, proves to be a vain attempt at true fulfillment, because the more we look within the more problems we find, and the more we believe in ourselves, the more we let ourselves down. At the same time, some people allow others to assign them their identity. This world-centered identity is often shaped by our family, friends, or false religion; as well as the culture at large. This, too, leads to frustration as we quickly find that broken people can’t fix other broken people. Corrie ten Boom once said, as it relates to these flimsy foundations for identity, “If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you’ll be at rest.”

The only firm foundation for identity is found in Jesus, to see His reflection in you, and begin to live the God-kind of life, a life that is not based on what you think about yourself, or what other mere

creatures say about you. Paul said that if you are in Christ, you are God's masterpiece, created for good works- an entirely new creation! (Ephesians 2:10 & 2 Corinthians 5:17) Consequently, there is nothing lacking in you; you are as much like God as Jesus is (1 John 4:17). Do not be shocked by such statements; these are foundational biblical truths that pertain to your identity as a Christian. Sadly, many in the Christian faith have been taught the opposite, with clichés like, "It's okay to not be okay," and "God makes you beautifully broken." To put it bluntly, these are lies and nonsense!

Jesus' atoning work on the cross renders you an alien to this world, belonging to a different Adam (the "Second Adam") and thus you come from a different spiritual lineage and race, "The God-Race." (1 Peter 2:9-10) As a child of God, you are as different from the children of this world as light is to darkness. You should never settle for less. Why play in a puddle of worldly filth, when God is inviting you to swim in the ocean of His divine grace?

The Apostle John goes so far as to imply that all the wonderful truths stated above are merely preliminary to a far greater reality that awaits us when he says, "we shall be like [Christ], for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2) Some have wrongly taken this to mean that we will become gods to rule over our own worlds. But such claims are blasphemous. For God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah, "Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior." (Isaiah 43:10a-11) That being said, short of us actually becoming "gods," I believe everything else is a possibility for us in our eternal state. We will indeed be kings and priests in the Kingdom of Christ (Revelation 1:6).

Once again, this is only made possible because of the redeeming work of Christ. For without His meritorious nature being imputed and given to us we would be the most pitiful and wretched of all creatures. As a human race, we had been given much- even more than the angels- and lost much due to our wicked pride and arrogance. Let us not become boastful in anything other than marvelous grace of God. Let us all say like Paul, "but by the grace of God I am what I am" and without Him, "I am the chief of all sinners." (1 Corinthians 15:10 & 1 Timothy 1:15)

I pray that this book encourages you to boast in Christ and walk worthy of all that He has given you. Consider the great price that was paid for us to be like Jesus and bring glory to the Father. We do not work to gain our new identity in Christ, nor do we work to keep it, but

we work to bring God glory because He has already given us the privilege to be made like Christ. Paul said that Jesus was the first of many brothers and sisters- “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” (Romans 8:29)

Now, being in the sinless One, you were made sinless to live sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21). You can “do perfect” because in Christ you “be perfect.” You don’t have to “do, do, do” in order to “be, be, be.” For unless Christ first makes you to “be like Him,” all your “do, do, do” amounts to a bunch of “doo-doo.”

My prayer is that you and I will all be presented as perfect in Christ on Judgment Day because we were already made perfect in Christ here on earth. Paul expressed this same heart when wrote in Colossians 1:28-29 (NKJV), “28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. 29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”

**PART I:
I AM WHO GOD
SAID I AM**

LESSON ONE

I Am a Newly Created Child of God

I am Brand New

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” Let us examine this verse further and see if it rightly applies to you. First, “Are you an anyone?” Second, “Have you come into Christ by faith?” If you answered positively to these questions, then the promises declared in this verse apply to you. First, you are God’s new creation; second, you are no longer the old person you were before Christ; third, Jesus’ new life is yours right now!

Please stop reading and take some time to repeat 2 Corinthians 5:17 out loud until you can say it from memory. Then determine to believe it and live like you believe it every day of your life. Imagine how radically different Christians’ lives would be if they believed their past was in the past and everything about them was brand new at the time of salvation. It would be like heaven on earth!

Conversely, to this point, you may have believed that this “new creation” was a “work in progress.” You may have been taught that God was working on you over the course of your lifetime, and that day by day you were becoming newer as the old things passed away slowly. It would then follow that you were helping God change you by learning to do more good work, as if He was taking the next 80 years to remodel your house and needed your help. But that is not what the Bible teaches. The Scriptures are clear that you were made brand new the moment you came into Christ. Just as a person becomes wet the moment they are immersed into water; you became new the moment you came into Christ.

In keeping with the example about water, some might ask, “What if all of me is not in Christ and I am just dipping my toes in Him?” They are basically asking if a person can be partially in Christ and partially out of Christ at the same time. The simple answer is, “No!” You are either all in or all out. There is no such thing as being partially saved or partially born again. You are either in Christ or you

are not, there is no in-between. No one can serve two Masters (Matthew 6:24). Jesus was precise when He said to Nicodemus that when anyone believes in Him, they are instantaneously born again, just like in natural birth (which happens in a moment).

John 3:5-8, “5 Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’”

Is a child born over the course of days, weeks or months? Certainly not. Though a mother may be in labor for long periods of time, the actual birth of a child happens very fast. Jesus didn’t say you would be formed in the womb of the Spirit for your lifetime and then be born again at death, but rather that spiritual re-birth happens at the moment you believe. Furthermore, does the same Holy Spirit who formed the universe in an instant need years to make your spirit new? Does He not possess both the power and desire to make us new instantly? Our spiritual re-birth took place at the same speed the Holy Spirit created light.

For this reason, both Peter and John wrote to their disciples assuming that the new birth had already taken place for them. They did not teach them to wait for this new life to develop over time or that it would be received upon death. For the apostles, the new birth was a present reality that they based their entire message of Christian living on.

1 Peter 1:14-16, 23, “14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” “23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

1 John 3:9-10, “9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. 10 This is how

we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.”

Notice that neither Peter or John's exhortations would be valid unless their readers had already been born again. For example, from Peter's epistle: how could his disciples live as obedient children of God, unless they were in fact already born again children of God? Likewise, where would John's disciples get the ability to discontinue sin if they were not yet born again by God's seed and had the work of Satan destroyed in their lives? The truth of the matter is clear: being born again into a new creation is the starting point of Christianity. All of our spiritual maturity and good works as Christians derive from this foundation and, thus, make Christ-like living, not only possible for us, but the expected standard.

I was Saved All at Once, Not Little by Little

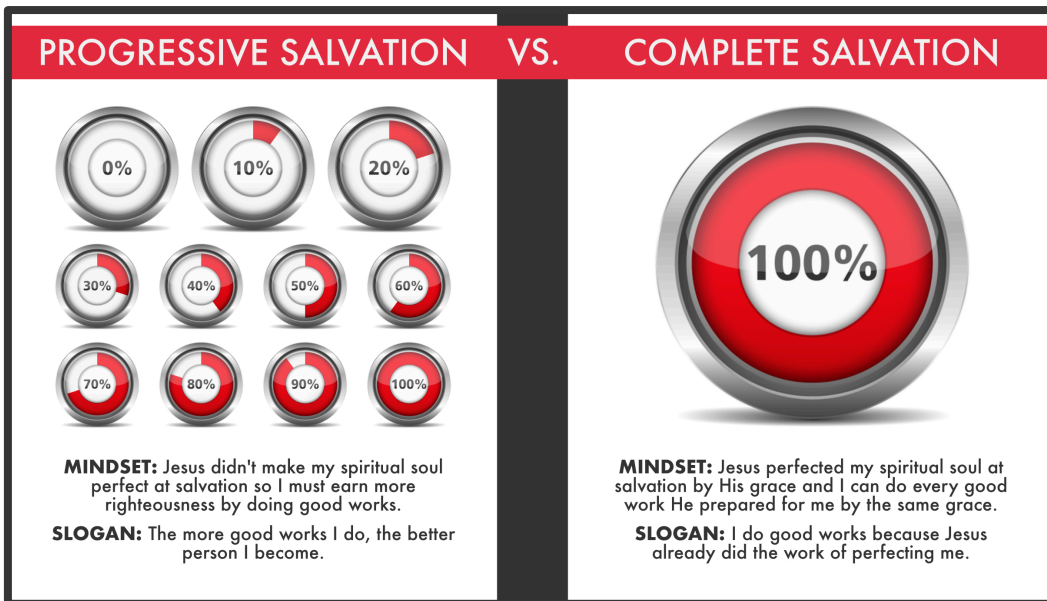
Oftentimes, well-meaning Christians talk about how God is working on them day by day. This may be true experientially as we learn God's Word and mature in character, however, it is not true ontologically, with regard to our salvation and spiritual nature. Our maturity might be a process, but our identity is instantaneous. Being saved and becoming God's masterpiece is not a lifelong journey- a destination that lies far ahead- but according to Paul, it was accomplished the moment we believed.

Ephesians 2:8-10, “8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Is there anything in this passage that would suggest that our being saved, created anew is a slow, gradual process? Absolutely not! Paul taught that we were (past tense) saved by the free gift of God obtained through faith and that we are presently His handiwork. Now, only on this basis, can we do the good works God has prepared for us to do.

With that in mind, ask yourself this question; “Have I been saved by grace through faith?” If you have, then you are God’s handiwork created to do good works. You are not becoming God’s handiwork over the course of a lifetime- you were created as God’s handiwork the moment you were saved. Think about it. Does a child have to learn to walk and talk to be born? Or, is a child first born, then they learn to walk and talk? Likewise, does a person become a Christian by doing good works? Or, are they first made a Christian by God’s grace?

Consider the following illustration as you set your heart on believing that your salvation is complete:



“Progressive salvation,” as seen in the chart above, is a man-centered mindset that looks at salvation as something dependent on our good works. “Complete salvation” is a God-centered mindset that sees salvation as dependent on God’s free grace. Having understood the stark difference in these two views, you must determine to know what you believe about salvation and why. Because what you believe about your salvation will impact how you live out your salvation.

Both John and Paul wrote that God wants us to know we are His children the moment we receive Jesus. We are not waiting at the orphanage for the Father to pick us up and bring us home to heaven. Rather, it was at the moment we accepted Jesus that heaven came to live in us.

John 1:10-13, “10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

Romans 8:15-17, “15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs —heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Therefore, if you have received Jesus, you have the right to be God’s child. It is fully God’s choice to adopt those who willingly choose Christ. And He not only forgives them, but He completely changes them. God could have chosen to make us pickles when we repented of our sins, but instead He chose to make us His children. To conclude this lesson, take some time to read and study the chart below. Look at each of the Scriptures and consider all the wonderful truths connected with being made a child of God.

1. I am God's child, born again	1 Pet. 1:23	41. I am not afraid	Heb. 13:6	81. I am free from condemnation	Rom. 8:1
2. I have Jesus' atoning sacrifice	1 Jn. 2:1-2	42. I am redeemed from the curse	Gal. 3:13	82. I am the righteousness of God	2 Cor. 5:21
3. I am purified, cleansed from all sin	1 Jn. 1:7-9	43. I am strong in the Lord	Eph. 6:10	83. I am firmly rooted	Col. 2:7
4. I am born again into a new life	Jn. 3:3	44. I am holy and without blame before Him	Eph. 1:4	84. I have joy	Gal. 5:22
5. I am born of God	1 Jn. 5:1	45. I am blessed	Deut. 28:1-14	85. I have peace beyond understanding	Phil. 4:6-7
6. I have eternal life	Jn. 6:44	46. I am a saint	Rom. 1:7	86. I think in new ways	Phil. 4:8-9
7. I am accepted in Christ	Eph. 1:6	47. I am qualified to share His inheritance	Col. 1:12	87. I am a disciple of Christ	Jn. 13:34-35
8. I am set free	Jn. 8:31	48. I am the head not the tail	Deut. 28:13	88. I am built on the foundation	Eph. 2:20
9. I received God's character	1 Jn. 4:17	49. I am above only and not beneath	Deut. 28:13	89. I am a partaker of His divine nature	2 Pet. 1:4
10. I live in God's love	1 Jn. 4:16	50. I am victorious	Rev. 21:7	90. I am God's workmanship	Eph. 2:10
11. I have no fear of punishment	1 Jn. 4:18	51. I am dead to sin	Rom. 6:2,11	91. I am being changed into His image	Phil. 1:6
12. I have no darkness	1 Jn. 1:5	52. I am elect	Col. 3:12	92. I am one with Christ	Jn. 17:21-23
13. I have a sound mind	2 Tim. 1:7	53. I am loved with an everlasting love	Jer. 31:3	93. I have all my needs met in Christ	Phil. 4:19
14. I love like Jesus	1 Cor. 13:4-8	54. I am established to the end	1 Cor. 1:8	94. I have the mind of Christ	1 Cor. 2:16
15. I have the fruit of the Spirit	Gal. 5:22-23	55. I am circumcised by Christ	Col. 2:11	95. I have the gifts of the Spirit	1 Cor. 12-13
16. I am called of God	2 Tim. 1:9	56. I am crucified with Christ	Gal. 2:20	96. I have guaranteed inheritance	Eph. 1:14
17. I am called of God by my name	Is. 43:1, 49:1	57. I am alive with Christ	Eph. 2:5	97. I have abundant life	Jn. 10:10
18. I am engraved in the palms of God	Is. 49:16	58. I am raised up in Christ	Eph. 2:8	98. I have overcome the world	1 Jn. 5:4-8
19. I am precious to God, Honored by Him	Is. 43:4	59. I am his faithful follower	Eph. 5:1	99. I have power to control my thoughts	2 Cor. 10:5
20. I am created by God in the womb	Ps. 139:13-16	60. I am the light of the world	Matt. 5:14	100. I have access to the Father	Eph. 2:18
21. I am formed and set apart by God	Jer. 1:6	61. I am the salt of the earth	Matt. 8:13	101. I have received the power of the Spirit	Mk. 16:17
22. I am called in God by righteousness	Is. 42:6	62. I am called of God	2 Tim. 1:9	102. I can do all things through Christ	Phil. 4:13
23. I am created for His glory	Is. 43:7	63. I am brought near by the blood of Christ	Eph. 2:13	103. I shall do greater works than Jesus	Jn. 14:12
24. I am forgiven	Eph. 1:7	64. I am more than a conqueror	Rom. 8:37	104. I walk in Christ Jesus	Col. 2:6
25. I am delivered from darkness	Col. 1:13	65. I am in Christ Jesus by God's doing	1 Cor. 1:30	105. I possess the Greater One	1 Jn. 4:4
26. I am a new creature	2 Cor. 5:17	66. I am an ambassador for Christ	2 Cor. 5:20	106. I press towards the goal	Phil. 3:14
27. I have God's unfailing love	Ps. 32:10	67. I am beloved and chosen by God	1 Thes. 1:4	107. I forget the past, and go forward	Phil. 3:12-13
28. I am loved	1 Jn. 4:10	68. I am the first fruits among his creation	Jas. 1:18	108. I have received the power	Phil. 3:10
29. I have a purpose for living	Jer. 29:11	69. I am born of God, Satan can't touch me	1 Jn. 5:18	109. I live by the law of the Holy Spirit	Rom. 8:2
30. I am never forsaken	Ps. 27:10	70. I am a king and a priest unto God	Rev. 1:6	110. I know God's voice	Jn. 10:14
31. I am comforted	Is. 66:13	71. I am chosen	1 Pet. 2:9	111. I show forth His praise	1 Pet. 2:9
32. I have a father	Ps. 68:5	72. I am perfect	Heb. 10:14	112. I always triumph in Christ	2 Cor. 2:14
33. I am not an orphan	Jn. 14:18	73. I am a joint heir with Christ	Rom. 8:17	113. I have the fullness of God in Christ	Col. 2:9-10
34. I am adopted by God	Eph. 1:5	74. I am reconciled to God	2 Cor. 5:18	114. I have Christ in me, the hope of glory	Col. 1:27
35. I am filled with the Holy Spirit in unity	Jn. 17:21	75. I am forgiven and healed	Ps. 103:3	115. I am a witness for Christ	Acts 1:8
36. I have the Holy Spirit to teach me	Jn. 2:27	76. I am healed by the wounds of Jesus	1 Pet. 2:24	116. I am unconditionally loved	Rom. 5:5
37. I am the temple of the Holy Spirit	1 Cor. 6:19	77. I am in the world as He is in heaven	1 Jn. 4:17	117. I am the apple of my father's eye	Ps. 17:8
38. I am washed, sanctified and justified	1 Cor. 6:11	78. I am a fellow citizen with saints	Eph. 2:19	118. I am being made holy	Heb. 10:4
39. I am an overcomer	Rom. 8:9-11	79. I am sealed with the Spirit	Eph. 1:13	119. I am an image bearer	Gen. 1:27
40. I am transformed	Rom. 12:2	80. I am complete in Christ	Col. 2:10	120. I am to rule in heaven with Christ	Rev. 22:5

Lesson One Review

1. Recite 2 Corinthians 5:17 from memory.
2. Describe what it means to be a new creation in Christ.
3. Can someone be partially in Christ and partially outside of Christ at the same time? Describe why or why not, using Jesus' teaching in John 3 about spiritual birth.
4. What core belief did Peter and John use as their foundation to encourage their disciples to live godly lives?
5. How does Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:8-10 contradict the idea that our salvation is a slow, gradual process?
6. What are some differences between the mindsets of progressive salvation and complete salvation? Which one is correct?
7. What is your choice in regard to becoming a child of God? What is God's choice?

8. List three benefits of being God's child. Use Scripture from the 120-point chart.

Faith Confession from Lesson One

I am God's child. I was born again by the Holy Spirit when I believed in Christ. I am a new creation, my past is gone, and I am completely saved. I was created in Christ Jesus to be God's handiwork to do good works.

Journal Ideas

Consider the following starter sentences:

- "Today's lesson changed the way I think about..."
- "I want to learn more about..."
- "God showed me that as His child I am..."
- "I pray that I will..."
- "I pray others would know..."

LESSON TWO

I Am Saved from Sin

Sin is No Longer My Master

Jesus made it clear that no person can serve two masters. He taught that they would love the one and hate the other or serve the one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24). With this axiom in mind, how can any Christian claim Jesus as their only Master, yet still live in sin? To live in sin is to live in defiance to Jesus' lordship. Paul explains this incompatibility in Romans 6:11-14:

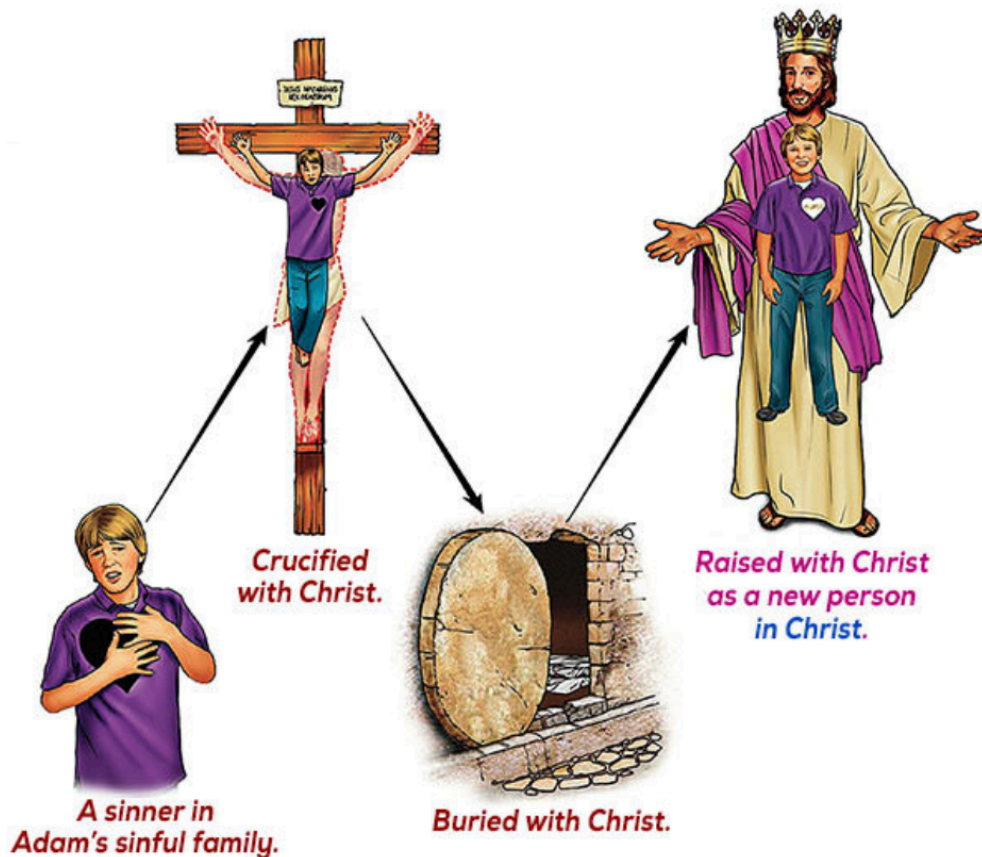
11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. 14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Notice that Paul ends the passage by using the term "master" in regard to sin. Our personal sin is the real slave master we must be on guard against. Some think that Satan is the most dangerous foe to the Christian, but sin was even his undoing. It was the sin of pride that turned Lucifer from a beautiful angel to an evil, fallen creature (Ezekiel 28:13-19).

Thankfully, as Paul teaches, once we come into Christ, we are set free from the mastery of sin. Chronologically speaking, the moment we are born again, we change masters even as our spiritual position changes. Before salvation, we were alienated from Christ, but upon salvation, we come into Christ. As a result, we are no longer slaves to sin, but now are slaves to Christ. Paul goes on to describe this transition in Romans 6:15-18:

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey —whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Praise God! Because of who Jesus is, and what He has done on the cross, we are dead to sin and alive to righteousness! Below is a great illustration to help make this point clear.



It is true that we were all born sinners- spiritually dead, separate from God, helplessly mastered by our sin, and held under Satan's sway (Ephesians 2:1-3). However, when we were born again, our

nature changed from sinful to righteous, and so did our master. When we submitted ourselves to Jesus as our Master, our old sinful nature was crucified with Him. Now our new life comes from the resurrection power of Christ. From that point on, as His disciples, we have been given a new life under a new Master. Therefore, we are not to live in habitual sin as we did before. Our new habit and default mode of living is to be righteous just like Him. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Think of it like this: to the degree you were once unrighteous apart from Christ, is to the degree you are now righteous in Christ. In other words, we were sinners without Jesus, but now we are saints with Jesus!

In 1 John 3:9-10, we learn that the life ruled by sin is the observable difference between the children of the devil and the children of God.

9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. 10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

Notice that John did not say a Christian cannot sin, or that if they did sin, they are no longer a Christian. Rather, John was showing that children of God do not *continue in sin* as a habit, whereas, the children of the devil do. That is why John wrote previously in the same epistle:

1 John 1:8-2:6, “8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father— Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 3 We know that we have come to know him if we

keep his commands. 4 Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”

When we take into account Jesus’ teaching about lordship, Paul’s insight into spiritual slavery, and John’s exhortation to cease from continual sin, the harmonious message of Scripture is clear: we are free *from* the control of sin, and free *to* obey God and live righteously!

I am Not My Fleshly Temptation

Whenever this kind of teaching is brought up, it is often asked, “If I am free from sin, why do I still face temptation?” This is a sensible question for followers of Jesus to ask. We want to deal honestly with the fact that some of our inner desires run contrary to the desires of our new Master and who He made us to be. It can feel as if there are two different persons, like “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” grappling within us. The answer to this troubling question has to do with our physical nature- that is, our flesh.

When God created Adam in the Garden, he was made both of the earth (body) and of spirit (soul). Moses wrote in Genesis 2:7, “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being [or “living soul”].” As Adam’s descendents, it follows that we, too, have physical bodies as well as spiritual souls, given to us by God’s breath. Though you have a fleshly body, you are not your body, you are a spiritual soul that lives in your body. That is why even when your body dies, you will still exist. Think about your body as your “earth suit.” It was designed to give your spiritual soul a place to dwell while on earth.

So, as a Christian, does our temptation come from our body or spiritual soul? The answer is found in 1 Peter 2:11, “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.” According to Peter, sinful desires do not come *from* the soul; but rather, they come from the flesh and war *against* the soul. Therefore, the born again soul is not fighting against itself; it is the sinful flesh fighting against the spiritual soul.

Specifically, the carnal brain with its sense driven passion has an animal like instinct for sinful things. Paul said in Philippians 3:19 about those who live by the flesh, “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”

Paul described the source of temptation, as well as how to conquer it, when he wrote to the Galatians, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24) Notice it is the flesh that has “passions and desires” contrary to God’s will, and that those passions and desires are declared to have been “crucified” along with our flesh. Similarly, James tells us where temptation comes from and what it can lead to when acted upon, “14 Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (James 1:14-15) Our temptation comes from our “own evil desires” that abide in our flesh. These desires, according to James, have a powerful, magnetizing force that can “drag us away” toward sin and death.

Remember, being born again has to do with our spiritual soul being renewed by the Holy Spirit. This spiritual new birth does not immediately transform our earthly bodies. The earthly body, what the Bible calls “flesh,” continues to be with us until we die, or Jesus comes back and transforms it. Either way, the flesh we now have will not inherit the Kingdom of God. It must either die or be transformed at Jesus’ second coming. And as for those who have already died and are in heaven, they will get their new body at the second coming as well.

While we live in the flesh, we are commanded to fight temptation, and count the flesh as crucified. For this reason, Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:13, ESV) Similarly, that is why Paul wrote the following passage, which describes the conflicting natures of the flesh and the Spirit, and commands Christians to always choose to follow the Spirit (which guides our spirits):

Galatians 5:16-24, “16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to

do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

As we conclude this lesson, consider the following illustration to help you understand that though your flesh may tempt you, you are not your flesh. You are a born again child of God that lives in a body to glorify Jesus!

**THOSE LED BY THE SPIRIT
HAVE CRUCIFIED THE FLESH!**

THE SPIRIT
The spiritual soul (mind, will, & emotions) reborn and created in righteousness and holiness by the Holy Spirit.

THE FLESH
The physical body influenced by the brain and the five senses (touch, taste, see, hear, & smell).

**HOLY SPIRIT
NEW YOU**

Galatians 5:24-25, “24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

Lesson Two Review

1. According to Jesus, how many masters can a person have?
2. According to Romans 6:18, what master has the Christian been set free from and what master do they now serve?
3. What happened to the Christian's sinful nature ("flesh") when Jesus was crucified?
4. Why do Christians still experience temptation?
5. What kind of things did Paul say the flesh desired, according to Galatians 5:19-21?
6. How are you to pray when you face temptation?
7. What did John command a Christian to do in 1 John 1:9 if they should sin?
8. Describe what is meant by the phrase, "the flesh fights the spirit."

Faith Confession from Lesson Two

As a born again child of God, I am free from the mastery of sin because my soul is new and my old flesh is crucified with Christ. If I do sin, I will be quick to confess it and turn from it so that I will not continue in it. Jesus is my new Master, and I will keep in step with the Holy Spirit, empowered to live holy and righteously, bearing good fruit for God.

Journal Ideas

Consider the following starter sentences:

- "Now that sin is no longer my master, I will..."

- “Since I am crucified with Christ, I am dead to...”
- “My temptations do not define me, because...”
- “I pray that I will...”
- “I pray others would know...”

LESSON THREE

I Am Entirely Sanctified

I am Washed, Sanctified, and Justified

Sanctification, which means to be “made holy” and “set apart” for God’s purposes, has sometimes been thought of as a process- and a slow, gradual one at that. This is a popular sentiment, even among many preachers and theologians, but it is not what the Bible teaches. Read how Paul saw our sanctification, as well as our cleansing and justification, as something that occurred in the past in tandem when we were first saved.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11, “9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Biblically speaking, can a Christian say that some of their past sins remain unwashed? Certainly not! And suppose someone else claimed that they were not entirely justified when they were saved. Would they be right according to Scripture? God forbid! Yet, why is it that so many Christians believe that they have not yet been made entirely holy, and, thus, need more “sanctification”? I often hear Christians say such foolish things as, “Nobody is perfect,” “Some days I’m a sinner, some days I’m a saint,” and “Nobody is like Jesus.” These statements came from the devil to keep Christians from experiencing the abundant life of God! (John 10:10)

Surprisingly, in an attempt to justify this foolish mindset, they will claim that Paul spoke this way when he called himself “the worst of sinners.” However, they fail to take into account the context where

that phrase is found. Take a moment to read Paul's statement within the body of his thought.

1 Timothy 1:15-16, "15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners —of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life."

Was Paul claiming that, presently, he was in fact the worst of all sinners? Was he worse than Nero, a witch, a rapist, a slave owner, a pedophile, or an apostate? If so, how could he be considered trustworthy as a leader in the church? A thief would be more credible than him! Later in the same letter Paul commanded that Timothy appoint elders in the church who were "above reproach" and in Titus, he said the elders must be "blameless." (1 Timothy 3:1 & Titus 1:7) How could Paul require that church leaders be flawless in their character if he was the most flawed person alive? It's ridiculous to think Paul would have done such a thing.

Obviously, Paul wasn't referring to himself in the present time, but rather to his past life. He was simply speaking in the present tense to demonstrate how God made him an example of His grace. It would be as if I were to say in my sermon, "If God could save a wretch like me, he can save anyone!" I certainly don't consider myself a wretch now, but I would speak as such to demonstrate for my listeners how lost I was before Christ. And I certainly believe that I would presently be just as bad off had Jesus not changed me.

Remember, Jesus taught that when a sinner is born again by the Holy Spirit, they become a new person. A new birth always leads to a new life and nature (John 3:3-8). That is why Paul wrote those powerful words in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Paul wouldn't go on to contradict himself a few years later in 2 Timothy. He understood that, at the moment of salvation, we are ontologically changed- that is, in our very nature. Therefore, we ought not to use Paul's words out of context to justify our lack of belief that we have been changed. Rather, we should believe what Paul said in context- that God saves the worst of sinners- in harmony with what he taught elsewhere- that God makes sinners holy.

It is no wonder that Paul so often addressed his fellow Christians as “saints!” He frequently used this glowing language when he would write to the churches. For example, in his greeting to the Corinthians he wrote, “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...” (1 Corinthians 1:2, KJV) The word “saint” is translated from the Greek word, *hagios*, which means “holy ones.” In calling them saints, Paul declared the Corinthians to be holy and set apart to God. Conversely, he never once called them sinners or wretches. Interestingly, the Bible used the term, “saint,” to describe believers even more than the term “Christian.” In point to fact, if you are a Christ-follower (i.e., “a Christian”), you are a saint- a holy and sanctified person. I like to say it like this: “We were born sinners in Adam, but we were born again saints in Christ.”

Not only does Paul call Christians saints, he goes much further to describe our lofty position with God. Think about it. Can you be more righteous than the “righteousness of God?” And can you be any closer to God than if you are “in Christ?” Paul uses this exalted language to describe our status as saints when he wrote, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) According to Paul, those who are now in Christ are as righteous as Jesus is and are as close to God the Father as the Son of God is.

To the extent we were sinful in our old, Adamic nature, we are now righteous in our new, Christ-like nature. Though it is true we still live in a sinful body (i.e., “the flesh”), it is also true that our spiritual soul lives with Christ in heavenly realms by the Holy Spirit who indwells us. We have established before that there is no way to be only partially born again. Similarly, there is no way for us to be only partially sanctified. We were entirely sanctified in our spiritual souls the moment we were born again. You don’t need more sanctification; you just need to live out the sanctification you’ve already been given in Christ!

I am Perfect like My Heavenly Father

Without a doubt, Jesus was a masterful teacher and communicator. But even so, many people manage to misinterpret even some of His

simplest sayings. A great example would be when He said in Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Some teach that Jesus was really trying to say, “Love like your heavenly Father loves.” They conclude this because Jesus commanded His disciples to love their enemies in the prior verses (Matthew 5:43-47). And in a complimentary passage in Luke 6:36 Jesus said, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” However, if that is what Jesus meant, why didn’t He just say that, and Matthew record it? Words have meaning and every Word of the Scripture is God-inspired and is important.

Furthermore, when we see similar concepts in the gospels (ex., “be perfect” and “be merciful” like our Father), we shouldn’t try to smash them altogether like clay to say the exact same thing. We should do the opposite and allow each passage to add depth to the other and bring forth a multi-dimensional point. Just like surround sound uses multiple speakers to produce a full sound of an environment, so it is with the gospels. Thus, we as the reader should ask ourselves, “Why did Jesus say in Matthew 5:48 to ‘be perfect’ instead ‘be loving’ or ‘be merciful’?” The answer is simple; Jesus was teaching that before one can love perfectly or be perfectly merciful, they must first be made perfect. Otherwise, how can a person *do* perfect, unless they first, *be* perfect. Perfection cannot come for imperfection.

Others use the Greek to say that Jesus taught we are to be “complete and lacking nothing,” just as our heavenly Father is complete and lacks nothing. Though it is true that the Greek word, *teleios*, can at times be translated “complete,” how does “complete” fit into this context? Also, how is God completed when He acts upon the earth- isn’t He already complete? And how do we become complete by our good works, aren’t they just filthy rags before God? I thought Jesus made us complete at salvation. As a result, something is missing from this interpretation- mainly, the context.

The simplest explanation is often the best, and I believe that is true for understanding Matthew 5:48. What is the simplest explanation of Jesus’ words? In its context, Jesus was teaching His disciples to love and pray for their enemies, and in doing so, they would show themselves to be “children of [their] Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:45) Children are to imitate and mirror the character of their fathers (Ephesians 5:1). So when He goes on to say in verse 48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your Father in heaven is perfect,” He means, “imitate and

mirror your Father in heaven in His moral perfection.” We know this is *moral* perfection, once again, because it is in the context of how we love and treat others, which are moral actions- we are to be perfect in this, just as God is perfect.

Jesus taught here and elsewhere that moral perfection is accomplished by love (Matthew 22:37-40). Though there may be some truth in the other interpretations we discussed, they cannot truly provide the same impact and clarity that Jesus intended, and cannot be seen in the plain reading of the text. Yet, now that we understand that this was Jesus’ point- to be morally perfect in love- how can we begin to be perfect like our heavenly Father? Is perfection something we strive and inch our way towards by our good works, or is it obtained by grace, the same way we receive salvation?

Thankfully, there is much light shed on this throughout the entire Bible. It conveys that we must first be *made* perfect *by* love in order that we may *act* perfect *in* love. Consider how in 1 John 2:5, the King James Version rightly translates *teleios* as “perfect” in regard to God’s love for us: “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God *perfected [teleios]*: hereby know we that we are in him.” John taught us that we are perfected by love to live in perfect love. We are first changed perfectly by God’s love and, therefore, we can both love perfectly and live perfectly.

Second, John notes that once God perfects His love in us, we then can have our love perfected by living in His perfect love. He wrote, “Herein is our love made *perfect [teleioō]*, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.” (1 John 4:17, KJV) Correspondingly, Jesus’ command in Matthew 5:48 is only possible inasmuch as the Father perfects His love in us in order that we may perfect our love in Him. I call this the “Cycle of God’s Perfect Love.” The same way God has perfected us in love, we are to live in perfect love toward Him and share it with others. Our highest duty in life is to love God and others perfectly. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40:

37 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

But do we love God first or does He first love us? God loves us first according to 1 John 4:19, “We love because he first loved us.” God spoke about this perfection of love through the prophet Ezekiel, when He promised that His people would be able to perfectly follow all His laws because He would give them new hearts (the place where love abides).

Ezekiel 36:25-27, “25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

God promised to cleanse us from all our impurities, give us a new heart, and place His Spirit within us to guide us to keep His laws. We know that this was realized under the New Covenant, made possible by Jesus’ work on the cross. We can see this taught by the author of Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:19-22, “19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

As a result, if Ezekiel’s prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ, as the author of Hebrews claimed, and all our impurities are cleansed, how much sin remains in the believer’s life? None. And if we are given a new heart at the moment of salvation, how much of the old heart is left? None. With this we can say the command to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect has been completed for us at the cross. All we have to do now is believe it, receive it, and live it. We were made perfect to live perfect in love!

I am Sanctified and Perfected in Jesus

Consider what was written in Hebrews 10:14 (KJV), “For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” Notice that the word “perfected” is in the past tense. Perfection is not something Christians strive toward or are waiting until heaven to receive. Rather, our spiritual souls have already been perfected upon our new birth. Let’s be clear that we were born again- not born again, and again, and again. It was one and done. In the same way, we were completely sanctified in our nature when we first believed and don’t need to seek further completeness.

Let’s look again at Hebrews in regard to how and when spiritual perfection came to God’s people, both on earth and in heaven. First, look again at Hebrews 10:14 (KJV), “For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” This means that all saints, whether in heaven or on earth, have been perfected by the one offering of Jesus on the cross. This correlates to what we read in the next passage concerning the saints who lived before Christ, that they, too, have been perfected in the same way and at the same time by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Later, in Hebrews 10:39-40, the author wrote concerning the Old Testament saints, “39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, 40 since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” Prior to the cross, the souls of the saints who passed rested in Sheol, namely in Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22-24). Hebrews teaches us that they had to wait to be perfected because an adequate sacrifice had not yet been provided for them. Once Jesus offered His blood, however, those in Abraham’s Bosom, along with the first believers living at that time, were made perfect together. Henceforth, those who get saved after the event of the cross receive the same spiritual birth and perfection as the first saints did. In other words, no one has to wait until after they die to be perfected. Perfection and sanctification came with Jesus’ perfect sacrifice. Everyone in the New Covenant who believes in Jesus is spiritually perfected and sanctified.

Lastly, the author wrote in Hebrews 12:22-23, “22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are

written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” This passage teaches that the saints who comprise the universal church, both in heaven and on earth, are “spirits of the righteous made perfect.” No one can belong to the church (whether they are in heaven or on earth) unless they are a righteous spirit made perfect and are sanctified in Christ.

Think of it this way- in order to belong to the church of Jesus Christ, you must be a righteous spirit made perfect. The only way to be made perfect is by believing in the gospel. The process of going from imperfect to perfect is called sanctification. Therefore, it is necessary for God to perfect His people’s spirits on earth before they come to heaven. Only when they are perfected can they belong to His church and be with Him forever. When a saint dies there is no extra step of purification called “purgatory,” nor does the act of leaving your body make your spirit perfect. Spiritual perfection comes at the moment of spiritual birth, through sanctification, and remains for eternity. Death is not your savior, Jesus is!

When you remove the false belief of progressive salvation and progressive sanctification, the supposed need for more good works disappears with it. Now you can rest in the finished work of Christ, which empowers us to do the good works He prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Consider the following verses about resting in Christ’s finished work and be encouraged by Paul’s prayer to let God sanctify you “through and through!”

Matthew 11:28-30, “28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Hebrews 4:9-10, “9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, “23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”

Lesson Three Review

1. What does sanctification mean and when does it occur?
2. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, what other two things happened simultaneously when we were sanctified?
3. Is it possible to be perfect like our Father in heaven is perfect?
4. What does the following phrase mean, “God perfects us in love so that we can live in perfect love?”
5. How does God go about perfecting imperfect people, according to Ezekiel 36:25-27?
6. What did the author of Hebrews say perfected Christians for all time?
7. Does a Christian need more sanctification either in this life or after death in order to be perfect? See Hebrews 11:40.
8. What did Paul pray in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 that all Christians should experience while alive?

Faith Confession from Lesson Three

As a born again child of God I am fully sanctified. There is no leftover sin in my spiritual soul. I was made perfect like my heavenly Father is perfect, to love both Him and others perfectly.

Journal Ideas

Consider the following starter sentences:

- “I believe I was washed and sanctified from...”
- “Since believing that I am perfected in love, I want to...”

- “Jesus’ finished work allows me to rest from...”
- “I pray that I will...”
- “I pray others would know...”

PART II:
I CAN DO WHAT
GOD SAID I CAN
DO

LESSON FOUR

I Can Love God with All My Heart

I Love God with Everything I Am

As we now contemplate the prospect of having a wholehearted love for God, take a moment to read Jesus' answer to the all-important question: Which is the greatest commandment? Then, consider His answer and its implications. Finally, ask yourself, "Is it truly possible to love God with all our hearts, or will we always somehow come short of it?"

Matthew 22:34-38, "34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment."

So, do you think it is possible to keep God's greatest command? Some think it impossible to love God with all of one's heart because we are just too sinful. They quote verses that seem to support this notion, such as Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" And Genesis 6:5, "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." To be sure, such texts accurately diagnose the heart of fallen, sinful man, but that is not true of the new man who is in Christ. They seem to forget the beautiful promise of a new heart available to all under the New Covenant. Read again what Ezekiel wrote on this subject many years before Christ.

Ezekiel 36:25-27, "25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a

new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Notice that Ezekiel called the old heart, a “heart of stone,” but the new heart, a “heart of flesh.” The heart of stone is cold, dead, hard, and unresponsive to God’s love, and, thus, incapable of truly ever loving God. The heart of flesh, however, has been made alive, and is softened to where it can receive and reciprocate God’s love. We receive this new heart when we receive new birth (John 3:3-8). If that had not been the case, Jesus’ “greatest command” would be an impossible feat.

Think about it- if God cannot entirely remove the old heart of stone and give us a brand new, perfectly clean heart, then our sin is more powerful than the Holy Spirit. God forbid! Praise God that Paul gave us the truth on this matter, mainly, that Ezekiel’s promise of inward renewal and cleansing has been fully realized for us “through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

Titus 3:3-8, “3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. 8 This is a trustworthy saying.”

All Christians were washed at rebirth and renewed (made new) by the Holy Spirit. We were cleansed and given a new heart even as we were justified by Jesus’ grace. And God was not stingy in bestowing these blessings either, but He “poured [them] out” “generously” on us. Indeed, Paul confirmed the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s promise.

Likewise, in Galatians 5:19-26, Paul described how the Spirit guides us to follow God’s laws, and not give way to the sinful flesh. Further, the Spirit causes us to bear abundant fruit for God, chiefly

love. Therefore, those who don't believe we can love God perfectly are in denial of the power of the Holy Spirit and of the clear testimony of Scripture.

We have nothing holding us back from keeping the greatest commandment. Though, once having a stone cold heart, we could rightly say it was impossible. But now, having a living, beating heart of flesh, we are empowered and impelled to love God with everything we have. All our heart, soul, mind, and strength should be fully saturated with the love of God! And what follows after is that when we love God perfectly, we will obey God perfectly.

For clarification- the heart, soul, and mind are all just different descriptions of the inner spiritual person. The inner person is who you truly are on the inside- mainly, your mind, will, and emotions. Throughout the book, I have been calling this the "spiritual soul." As a result, the words "heart," "soul" and "mind" are used interchangeably in the Bible to refer to the "inner person." And lastly, your "strength" is the physical aspect of your nature that allows you to do all of your day-to-day tasks- such as, eating, working, playing, etc. The bottom line is, *God wants us to love Him with everything we are and with everything we do!*

I Love God Because He First Loved Me

John, who is known as the "Apostle of Love," wrote in his first epistle that God is love and when we live in love, we live in God. He then went so far as to say that when we truly understand God's love for us, all fear of punishment is removed, and we can see how perfect God has made us as His children. Enjoy reading this passage and allow it to impress God's love in your heart.

1 John 4:13-19, "13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love.

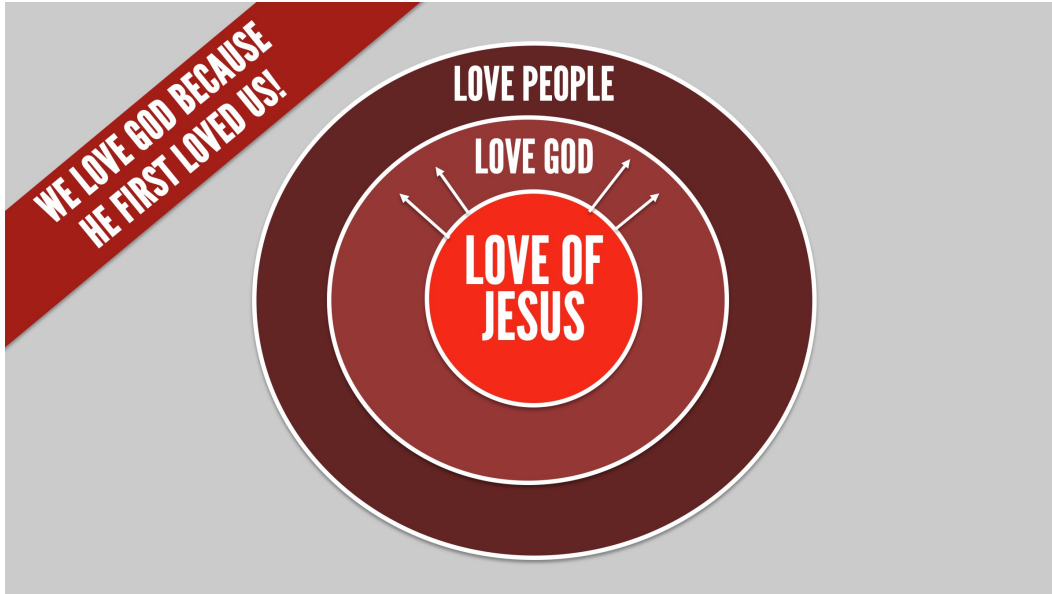
Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

19 We love because he first loved us.”

With this text in mind, consider how beautifully John reminds us of the Trinity. First, he speaks of the Spirit, the Father, and the Son all working together in the life of the disciple, filling us with perfect love. Second, reflect on how John’s teaching about the Spirit corresponds to the Spirit’s work as seen in Ezekiel 36:25-27. The Spirit’s indwelling us makes the love of the Father and the Son real in our lives. Third, at the end of this passage, John reminds us that it was God who first loved us, and we now love Him. It is like when I give my children money to buy me a birthday gift. The money was mine to begin with and will be given back to me in the form of a present. However, the true joy in giving them my money is seeing them give it back from their heart, with their own unique expression of love.

When it comes to us loving God with everything, it is not our capacity to love that counts, it is the very love that God has already given us- an immeasurably deep well to draw from! Therefore, whenever someone says they cannot love God with their whole heart because of sin, they imply that God doesn’t have enough love to fill their heart and has left them dry. This would be like my children saying they don’t have enough money to buy me a gift, after I have given them the money to do so. Truly, the problem would not be with their resources, but with their willingness to participate in the cycle of giving.

All of God’s children are privileged to participate in the circle of love. As the illustration below shows, when we have God’s love in the center of our hearts, He enables us to love Him and others with perfect love. First, God pours His love into our hearts as we experience His unparalleled affection and faithfulness (Romans 5:5). Then, love works its way out as we begin to express it toward God and others, loving in action and in truth (1 John 3:16-17). With that said, there is certainly nothing in our nature that can prevent us from loving perfectly, because the very God of love lives in us.



I Have an Undying First Love for God

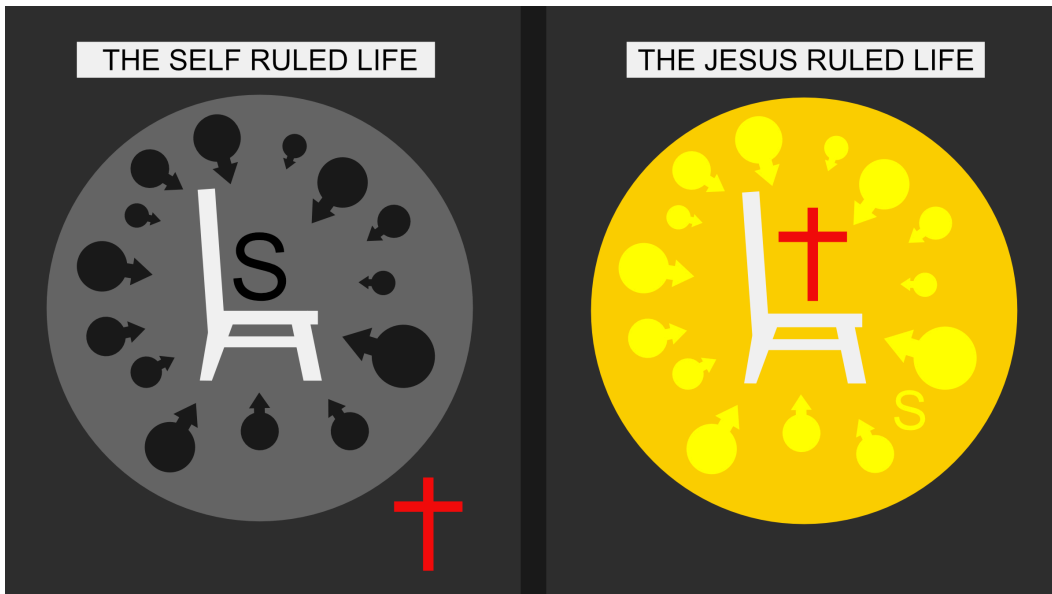
One of the profoundest conclusions to a book of the Bible is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, when he wrote these parting words to the precious flock of God in Ephesus, "23 Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love." (Ephesians 6:23-24) Once again, as with John, Paul indicates that God is the source of love and that He initiates the circle of love. Further, he notes that God's love comes to us with peace and faith; "peace... and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." What more could we ever ask for? Yet, Paul goes one step further and mentions "grace" in regard to those who love Jesus with an "undying love." It is God's unending grace that allows us to love Him with an undying love.

Sadly, only within a few years of this writing, the people of Ephesus had lost their first love and allowed their hearts to grow cold. Read what Jesus said about the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:4-5, "4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

The Bible does not say specifically how the Ephesians came to forsake their first love and earn such a stern rebuke. However, 1 John does clue us in to another love that competes with our love for the Father. According to John, every person living is in one of two circles; they are either in God's circle of love or that of the world. (By "the world," he means the fleshly, sinful world, under the power of the evil one.)

1 John 2:15-17, "15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever."

Though God's love will never run out, we can move out of it. Take for example, the Mississippi River- it never stops moving, but you can move in and out of it. God gives each of us free will and the power of self-determination. We are the final arbiters of our hearts. Consider the popular illustration concerning who sits on the throne of your heart, Jesus or Self.



"The Self Ruled Life" is one of idolatry, lust, emptiness, lovelessness, and darkness. "The Jesus Ruled Life" is full of glory, life, power, light, and love. Take a moment to consider all the things

that God has given you to serve Him with. These blessings are like planets revolving around the Son (sun). However, if we do not keep Jesus at the center of our lives and allow His love to empower and motivate all we do, we will wither up and die because we put our “self” (“S”) on the throne of heart, instead of putting our self (along with everything else in our lives) at the feet of Jesus.

As God’s children, we are to daily choose to stay in His circle of love and allow Him to bear good fruit in our lives. We are to resist the temptation to let even the good things in life, things like family, ministry and work, corrupt our love for God. Decide today and every day to let God’s love flow from within you, and back to Him and everyone around you!

Lesson Four Review

1. What did Jesus say was the greatest commandment?
2. Is it possible to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?
3. How does God make it possible for people to love Him with everything according to Ezekiel 36:25-27?
4. What is meant by the phrase, “God’s circle of love,” and how does it apply to obeying the greatest commandment?
5. What did Paul encourage the Ephesians to do that Jesus said they stopped doing?
6. Can Christians choose to reject God’s love? If so, what other choice in regard to love do they have, according to 1 John 2:15-17?
7. Describe what it means to live a “Jesus Ruled Life” and how it applies to obeying the greatest commandment.

Faith Confession from Lesson Four

As a born again child of God, I choose to participate in God's perfect circle of love. I love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I am perfected in love and abide in the perfect love of the Father.

Journal Ideas

Consider the following starter sentences:

- “Now believing that I am in God's perfect circle of love, I want to love God in the following ways...”
- “I will never let my love for Jesus grow cold because I will always...”
- “Jesus rules my life because...”
- “I pray that I will...”
- “I pray others would know...”

LESSON FIVE

I Can Love Others as Myself

I Love My Neighbor as Myself

Now that you are in God's circle of love, you have what it takes to love your neighbor as yourself. In fact, God's love in you empowers you to even love your enemies. When Jesus issued the greatest commandment, it came attached to the second greatest commandment. These two commandments should be viewed as a package and can only be kept by those to whom God has given a new heart.

Matthew 22:37-40, "37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

In Luke's parallel account, we read that an expert in the Jewish law tried to justify himself by asking, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) To which Jesus answered by giving the famous Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). The premise of the story is simple: when a man (presumably a Jewish man) was robbed and beaten along the road, no one came to help him except a Samaritan (a person from the region of Samaria). The lesson of the story is best understood in light of the 1st century Jewish cultural context, which helps us understand the significance of those who passed by and the one who stopped to help. For the expert in the law wanted to narrow down his criteria of a "neighbor" so that he could justify not loving people outside of his preferred group.

Jesus said two kinds of religious Jews passed by, a priest and a Levite, both of whom did nothing to help the wounded man. However, a Samaritan, considered culturally inferior by the Jews, was the one to stop and help. The Samaritan not only offered help, but also went out of his way to meet the man's long-term needs. Many Jews in the time

of Jesus despised Samaritans because their ancestors had intermarried with the pagan Assyrians long before, rendering them “half breeds.”

To drive home the countercultural message in this parable, let’s draw a comparison to a more familiar cultural backdrop. Picture living during the Jim Crow era in the U.S., addressing a group of white southerners. Telling a similar story, you make the white preacher and deacon respectively appear selfish and aloof, while presenting the African American as the compassionate hero. As you might imagine, this would be utterly scandalous to such an audience. And, as we think back to Jesus, if the person who was robbed in His story was in fact a Jew, it makes the point that much stronger. A Samaritan was willing to help his racist enemy, whereas the Jewish religious leaders were unwilling to help their own. The Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that our neighbor is anyone that we can help- regardless of cultural background, gender, religious affiliation and the like.

Though it is true that we may not be able to help everyone, it is true that we can help someone. Our willingness to help others should not be conditional upon culture, skin color or social status. Likewise, our love should be given equally to those who are good and bad alike. Recall our study of Matthew 5:43-48, where Jesus taught us to be perfect like our heavenly Father. This instruction comes in this exact context of loving even our enemies.

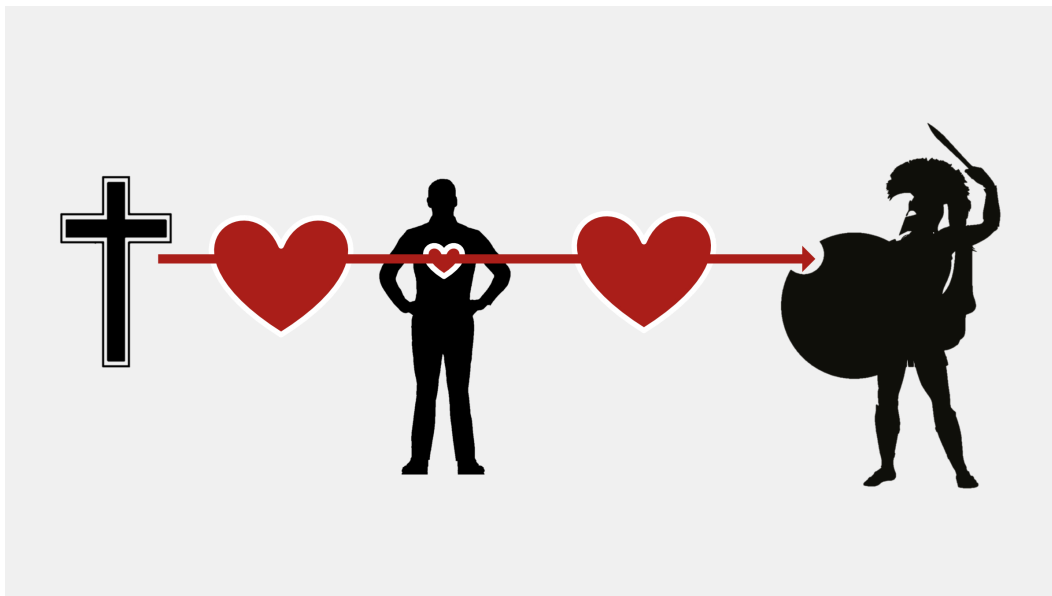
43 You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

When we consider how much Jesus has loved us, even while we were His enemies (Romans 5:10), how can we not be inspired to love others in the same way? Even those who dislike us or harm us are far more loveable in light of God’s infinite mercy to us. It is helpful to note that loving our enemies does not justify their evil or remove its consequences (or that we may need to be separated from them for

safety's sake). Loving our enemies means that despite their evil, we still want God's best for them. Furthermore, Jesus was clear that if we do not show our love in forgiving others of their sins against us, our own sins will not be forgiven.

Matthew 6:14-15, "14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Remember what we learned about loving God with all your heart; it is the same with loving your neighbor. You can only love other people perfectly on the basis of receiving a new heart from God that has been filled with His love (Ezekiel 36:26-27 & Romans 5:5-8). The love you are giving others is God's love. Hate, abuse, and rejection from others are not strong enough to stop God's love! We simply must let God's love flow through us like a river and it will fill every part of our heart with genuine compassion and mercy for other human beings. It is because of Jesus that we can love our enemies and help others in need, even when it requires great sacrifice and patience. Decide to be a conduit of God's love to everyone around you as the picture below illustrates. Since God loved you when you were His enemy, you should never hinder your enemies from knowing God's love through you.



I Love Others Like Jesus Loves Me

Loving people as yourself doesn't mean you become a doormat or that you affirm everyone's bad choices in life. We are called to love people as we love ourselves. Well, how is that supposed to look? Jesus taught His love for us would be the new standard for how we are to love others (John 13:34). Think about some of the ways that Jesus loves you:

1. Jesus loves you just the way you are, but too much to let you stay that way (John 4:16-17).
2. Jesus loves you by telling you when you are wrong (Luke 13:5).
3. Jesus loves you by correcting your bad behavior (Matthew 16:23).
4. Jesus loves you by hating certain actions and attitudes you may have that are sinful (Proverbs 8:13).

Likewise, you are to love yourself in the following ways:

1. Love yourself even when you're in a bad place, but do not allow yourself to remain there (2 Corinthians 13:5).
2. Love yourself by recognizing when you are wrong (Romans 13:13).
3. Love yourself by correcting your bad behavior (Ephesians 4:29).
4. Love yourself by hating certain actions and attitudes you may have that go against God's Word (Romans 12:9).

Lastly, you are to love your neighbor as yourself in the following ways:

1. Love others wherever they're at in life, but too much to let them stay in bad places (Ezekiel 3:16-21).
2. Love others by telling them when they are wrong (Proverbs 27:5).

3. Love others by correcting their bad behavior (2 Timothy 4:1-5).
4. Love others by hating certain actions and attitudes they may have that are sinful and destructive (Jude 1:22-23).

Love is not just an emotion; love is a person- God. And from God's nature comes the true definition of love for others. Often times, what non-Christians call "love" is actually hate, and what they call "hate" is really love. For example, it would be hateful not to warn someone that his or her house was on fire. Likewise, it would be hateful not to warn people about the fiery judgment of hell. If someone was in such grave danger, but you only offered false security and affirmation, you'd be rightly judged as a terrible person.

Sadly, we are living in times when people have God's love backwards. Most sinners want us to "lovingly" affirm their sin and accept all behaviors as righteous. However, God said in Isaiah 5:20, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." We would be just as evil as the world is if we went along with its backwards morality. God has called us to truly love people as we love ourselves. Knowing the truth of God's Word, we wish to escape the judgment of hell that it warns about. And if we have so much as an ounce of goodwill toward others, we would want to help them avoid that horrible fate also (2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

Consequently, we should preach the gospel just like Jesus did. Call to mind that Jesus spoke more about hell than any other biblical figure. He did this, not out of vanity or fear mongering, but because He knew more than anyone how dreadful hell truly is. The judgment of hell, by an infinitely wide margin, is the worst thing that could ever happen to anyone.

On one hand, God has given all people a choice, so we cannot coerce others to change and believe as we do. We need to be patient with them as God was patient with us. On the other hand, we must not let their apathy for God diminish our passion for presenting them with the truth of the gospel. Jude said it best in Jude 1:22-23, "22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."

I pray that, as you help others in their times of need, you will also love them enough to preach God's Word to them. May your heart

be unified with the heart of God who wants all people to repent and know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. As we end this lesson be encouraged by 1 Timothy 2:1-6 to know how to pray for all people to be saved and blessed by God.

1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

Lesson Five Review

1. What did Jesus say was the second greatest commandment?
2. Is it possible to love others as yourself?
3. How does God make it possible for us to love others as ourselves according to Ezekiel 36:25-27?
4. What did the Good Samaritan do that the other people in the parable didn't do?
5. Why was the ethnic background of the Samaritan so important to the man's question about who was his neighbor?
6. List some ways that Jesus loves you and explain how they apply to you loving your neighbor as yourself.
7. If people call our love "hate," should we stop loving them like how Jesus loves us? Explain your answer from the example of Jesus.

Faith Confession from Lesson Five

As a born again child of God, I love my neighbor as myself. I choose to be a Good Samaritan to everyone wherever I go- even to my enemies. I will love people just like how Jesus loves me and how I love myself.

Journal Ideas

Consider the following starter sentences:

- “Since believing that I can love people as myself, I want to...”
- “I pray that my enemies will...”
- “I will love others as I love myself by...”
- “I pray that I will...”
- “I pray others would know...”

LESSON SIX

I Can Obey All of God's Commands

I Love God's Commands

Behind each of God's commandments is a glimpse into His heart and character. God commands us not to lie because He is not a liar. God commands us not to steal because He is not a thief. God commands us not to commit adultery because He is not a cheater. All of God's commandments reveal to us His holy and loving nature.

Though the Bible calls God a "Jealous God" in Exodus 34:14, it does not mean "jealous" in the way we are not to be. The Hebrew word, *qanâ*, is only ever used in reference to God, and does not mean covetous or jealous in the sinful sense. The best way to understand God's jealousy would be to imagine the longing of a husband for his wife's affection if she neglected him or gave her attention to another lover. Similarly, the Bible gives examples of God ending human life (as with the Flood), but this does not make God a murderer. When God judges His creation, it stems from His justice. Just as with human courts, it is considered just to administer capital punishment to the worst offenders. And all humanity deserves death because of sin. The sins we have personally committed, and the sins imputed to us in Adam all warrant death and damnation (Genesis 2:15-17 & Romans 6:23). Finally, God, being the Creator and Giver of life, alone has the right to take life.

With this in mind, God has a specific reason for each and every one of His commandments- this includes those found in the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament. In today's society, we tend to dismiss the Law of Moses as "politically incorrect" or just plain silly. King David, on the other hand, loved the Law so much that he wrote a poem about it. Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem that begins every stanza with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, each new stanza expressing David's great fondness of God's commands, decrees and statutes. Below are some of the verses that express his passion for God's Law:

v. 14, "I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches."

v. 40, "How I long for your precepts! In your righteousness preserve my life."

vs. 44-48, "44 I will always obey your law, for ever and ever. 45 I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts. 46 I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame, 47 for I delight in your commands because I love them. 48 I reach out for your commands, which I love, that I may meditate on your decrees."

v. 52, "I remember, Lord, your ancient laws, and I find comfort in them."

v. 54, "Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge."

v. 62, "At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws."

v. 72, "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold."

vs. 92-93, "92 If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. 93 I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life."

vs. 97-100, "97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. 98 Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. 99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. 100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts."

vs. 111-113, "111 Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. 112 My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end. 113 I hate double-minded people, but I love your law."

v. 120, “My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.”

v. 129, “Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them.”

vs. 135-136, “135 Make your face shine on your servant and teach me your decrees. 136 Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.”

v. 148, “My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.”

v. 164, “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.”

vs. 171-172, “171 May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees. 172 May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous.”

If that is how much David loved the laws of the Old Covenant, how much more should we love the laws of the New Covenant, which is a greater covenant built on greater promises? (Hebrews 7:22)

Obedying Jesus’ teachings was never meant to be a burden, but rather an expression of our love for Him. Below are a few key verses in John’s Gospel that reveal Jesus’ heart for us, that obedience would spring out of love and result in our joy.

John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commands.”

John 14:21, “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

John 14:23-24, “23 Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24 Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.’”

John 15:9-14, “9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command.”

As we can see, from the Old to the New Testament, those who love God are to love His commands. Choose today to love all of God’s commands and obey them with a joyful heart. If you do not know where to start, check out this summary list of Jesus’ commands as found in the book of Matthew:

1. Repent of your sin (Matthew 4:17)
2. Follow Jesus (Matthew 4:18)
3. Be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20)
4. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:38)
5. Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:38)
6. Be poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3)
7. Be mournful over sin (Matthew 5:4)
8. Be meek (Matthew 5:5)
9. Be hungry for righteousness (Matthew 5:6)
10. Be merciful (Matthew 5:7)
11. Be a peacemaker (Matthew 5:8)
12. Be joyful in persecution (Matthew 5:9)
13. Be the salt of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14)
14. Don’t murder or sin in anger (Matthew 5:21-26)
15. Don’t commit adultery or lust (Matthew 5:27-30)
16. Don’t get an unbiblical divorce (Matthew 5:31-32)
17. Don’t make oaths (Matthew 5:33-37)
18. Don’t seek revenge (Matthew 5:38)
19. Be kind to everyone, including your enemies (Matthew 5:39-42)
20. Be generous (Matthew 6:3-4)

21. Be a person of prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)
22. Be forgiving (Matthew 6:14-15)
23. Don't fast to gain attention (Matthew 6:16-18)
24. Store up treasures in heaven by using your wealth to benefit others (Matthew 6:19-24)
25. Don't worry about the things of life, but seek God's Kingdom first (Matthew 6:33)
26. Don't judge others by a different standard than the Bible (Matthew 7:1)
27. Remove the plank out of your eye so you can help get the speck out of your friend's eye (Matthew 7:3-6)
28. Be persistent in your seeking after God (Matthew 7:7-8)
29. Do unto others as you would want done unto you (Matthew 7:12)
30. Enter through God's narrow gate and stay on His narrow path (Matthew 7:13-14)
31. Avoid false prophets and teachers (Matthew 7:15-20)
32. Don't be a hypocrite (Matthew 7:21-23)
33. Build your life on Jesus' teachings (Matthew 7:24-27)
34. Be ready for Christ's return (Matthew 24)
35. Be a good steward of God's gifts in your life (Matthew 25)
36. Take communion in remembrance of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 26:26-29)
37. Be a disciple of Jesus that makes new disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)

Obviously, more commands and teachings from Jesus can be found in Mark, Luke, and John as well. Further, Paul and the other Apostles expound on Jesus' commands throughout the epistles. Romans 12-14, 1 Corinthians 5-8, Galatians 5:13-26, Ephesians 4:17-6:20, 1 Peter 2-5, and 2 Peter 1-2 are some great sections to read. Just know that wherever you find God's New Covenant commands, you will find God's strength to obey them!

I Love the Spirit's Guidance

Even though you, as the reader, are not specifically addressed in the Bible, the teachings of the Bible nevertheless apply to you

specifically. The same is true for every situation and predicament you face in life. Even though the Bible doesn't specifically mention what kind of career path you should take, it does contain moral judgments and principles to help you discern between what is right and wrong in that situation.

Consider the following questions of Christian conduct that Scripture does not provide a clear, comprehensive answer to: Can a Christian listen to non-Christian music? Can Christians dance the salsa or do the Electric Slide with their friends? How long should Christians date before getting married? Is dating before marriage even a viable option? What is the right age to marry and have children? How long should a church service be? And, how should Christian ministers perform funerals and weddings?

Many Christians in the past have tried to answer these questions with man-made laws and traditions; however, God gives us a much better way- the way of the Spirit. The way of the Spirit is to be humble and open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in all the areas of life that the Bible doesn't address specifically. In Galatians 5:19-26, Paul outlines the "acts of the flesh" in contrast with the "fruit of the Spirit," giving us a clear sense of right versus wrong. But notice how he ends the section with a command to "keep in step" with the Holy Spirit.

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Keeping in step with the Spirit doesn't mean that every Christian gets to pick and choose the commands they will obey or not.

Rather, when we follow the Spirit, He will fill in the gaps of our understanding, helping us apply biblical principles to the specific situations we face in our daily lives. In a sense, the Bible provides broad parameters for the disciple to live within, and then the Holy Spirit guides them in what is right. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:23 (KJV), “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” Certainly, Paul is not writing that all things, including sins, are “lawful” for him (that would be a contradiction in terms to everything he wrote). He meant, rather, that all things outside the realm of sin are lawful, things like dating and dancing, which we listed in the questions above. Thus, lawful things need to be filtered by the Holy Spirit to each individual to ensure they are “beneficial.”

At this point, some well-intentioned Christians may want to resolve the supposed issue of having “grey areas” in Christianity by stretching the application of certain passages to cover said areas. But God did not intend for the stipulations of the New Covenant to be meticulously codified like it was in the Old Covenant. The cults, who do not have the Holy Spirit, try to do this very thing. Wherever there is a lack of clarity on a moral question, their false prophets make up a law for all to follow. This is why Mormonism forbids drinking caffeine, among other things. If that were God’s intention, there would be laws in the New Testament, similar to the 613 laws of the Old Covenant.

The fact that there are moral grey areas in Scripture is proof that God wants His people to be Spirit led. It is for this purpose that the Father sends the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer. This partnership between the Spirit and the Christian is described in Ezekiel 36:27, “And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” The Holy Spirit desires to teach us both how to keep God’s law and to know His perfect will for our lives (Romans 12:1-2).

Consider the following application of Psalm 101:3 for an example on how not to use the Bible for the grey areas of life. David wrote in Psalm 101:3, “I will not look with approval on anything that is vile.” Some use this verse to teach that Christians should never watch television. However, if that were the law, then all TV, including the nightly news and Andy Griffith, would be just as sinful as pornography. But we ought to know there is a difference between good and evil when it comes to media. In other words, we cannot take

a general principle about not looking on evil and approving it, and now apply it to everything in life, with no regard to the context or to each person's own conviction and conscience.

A better way to apply Psalm 101:3 would be to say, "I will not watch and approve of anything on television that is vile." Notice the emphasis is on the act of approving, as well as on what is considered "vile." This interpretation complements well what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:30, "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." As a result, we should conclude in this matter, "I will not watch anything that causes me to sin." If we avoid taking Scripture out of context, we can allow God's Word to set our boundaries, and then personally follow the Spirit's leading to obey the specific things He wants us to do or not do.

Paul also wrote in Romans 14:23, "everything that does not come from faith is sin." Which means, whatever we do (even something morally neutral), if not done in faith (with the conviction that it is God's will), is sin for us. Likewise, James taught in James 4:17, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." Furthermore, the author of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 5:14, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." So instead of trying to make a Christian law code that needs constant updating- we are to be trained by the Holy Spirit to distinguish between good and evil. The Spirit was sent to guide us into all truth and empower us to live a life that is pleasing to God!

We shouldn't endeavor to do this alone, but in community, under the care of trusted elders and deacons in the local church (Hebrews 13:7,17). Under the Spirit's leadership, our fellowship with other disciples will be like iron sharpening iron, as we all mature and get better at discerning God's perfect and pleasing will for our lives (Proverbs 27:17).

Lesson Six Review

1. What do God's commands reveal to us?
2. Why is God said to be jealous and judgmental?

3. Describe some of the things David said about God's Law.
4. What did Jesus say about His commands?
5. List some of Jesus' commands in Matthew that stand out to you.
6. Why is it important to be led by the Holy Spirit?
7. Can Christians choose which commands to obey?
8. Describe why it is important to following the Holy Spirit's guidance in a church community.

Faith Confession from Lesson Six

As a born again child of God I love all of God's commands and consider them to be the foundation of my life. I joyfully follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in all that I do so that I may please God in every area of my life.

Journal Ideas

Consider the following starter sentences:

- "Since falling in love with God's commands, I..."
- "I sense the Holy Spirit is leading me to..."
- "I like sharing with others Jesus' command to..."
- "I pray that I will..."
- "I pray others would know..."

CONCLUSION

Ephesians 4:1, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

My earnest prayer is that, having read this book, you will never see yourself the same again. That you would know that you are no longer the “old self,” but a “new self” in Christ, “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:23-24) As you embark on a new life of Christ-centered identity, never forget that your spiritual transformation came to you by grace, and, thus, will always be kept by grace. Remember there is a difference between “receiving” your calling and “living worthy” of your calling. You had no other option but to “receive” a calling to be Christ-like because it was something you could never earn. And it is from that place of receiving that you will always be empowered to live worthy of what you have been given.

Think of the journey ahead of you as if you were given the International Space Station as a gift. Imagine you now possess the world’s most expensive facility, worth approximately 150 billion dollars. Would you now spend the rest of your life working to earn the gift, like you were paying it off? Remember- it’s already paid for and has already been freely given. So, would you not rather be so grateful for the gift that you resolve to steward it wisely to accomplish the purpose for which it was made? Since you do not need to pay it off, the best response would be to enjoy it and use it to benefit humanity.

In the same way, don’t try to spend the rest of your Christian life on earth “earning” the gift of Christ-likeness. Instead, joyfully receive your new Christ-like nature and use it for the glory of God and to bless His Church. Jesus said you are the light of the world and the salt of the earth- never settle for anything less than being a world changer, history maker, and roof breaker (Matthew 5:13-16).

Remain in a place of rest where you are too blessed to be stressed. Reject the notion of being beautifully broken because the truth is, you are beautifully healed. And stay far away from stinking thinking- be so heavenly minded that you change the earth for good!

Christ died so that He could multiply Himself in people like you across the globe. Therefore, be inspired to live on fire for Jesus all the days of your life!

In closing, consider the story of the twelve Jewish spies sent to explore the Promised Land. Ten of the spies said, “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” But Caleb, along with Joshua, said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” (Numbers 13:30,32) What was the difference? It wasn’t what they saw- they were looking at the exact same things: giants, a strong army, and a fertile land. The difference was how they saw God in themselves. See yourself in Christ and go conquer the world for Jesus!

APPENDIX

I thought it best to include my responses to popular passages that are often brought up to object to Christian perfection and entire sanctification. Since they did not fit well into the flow of the book, I added this appendix for them, enjoy!

1 // Philippians 3:8-16 (KJV), “8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. 16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”

Comment: This lengthy passage is at the conclusion of Paul’s major thought, which he began in Philippians 1:4-6. There he prayed with confidence in God completing His work in their lives. It was in the same vein he commanded them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling in Philippians 2:12-13. In other words, we are to not stop doing the work of God. And according to Jesus, what is the work of God that merits salvation? It is summarized in John 6:29, “Jesus

answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’” It was worth noting that Paul makes a very similar point in Romans 10:9-10- it is when you “believe in your heart” that you are saved.

Thus, in Philippians 3, Paul wanted to make clear that even he had not been completed and perfected in regard to God’s entire salvation plan. However, what he was lacking and still pursuing had nothing to do with his spiritual soul, but rather with his body. In other words, Paul had not yet attained the perfection of his body (nor has anyone still to this day except Christ). That is why he desired to share in the sufferings of Christ (death) that he might be closer to receiving his new body in Christ’s second coming (resurrection).

Follow his train of thought starting in verse 10, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” Notice that what he had not attained yet was the perfection of his body. Yet, at the same time, he wrote in verse 15, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule.” Therefore, there was a perfection he had not yet attained (the resurrection of the body) and a perfection he had already attained (a perfect spiritual soul). Consider the breakdown below for further clarity:

1. In Philippians 1:4-6 Paul declared that he was confident God would complete His good work in their lives.
2. In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul commanded the saints to continue to work out their salvation so God would fulfill His good purpose in them.
3. In Philippians 3:8-16 Paul let the saints know that he had not attained the final stage of his salvation; that is, a resurrected body (physical perfection). Yet he reminded them that they should live up to that which they had already attained (spiritual perfection).

It is easy to see how Paul’s phrasing might confuse some in this letter but let us remember that Paul is never going to contradict himself in

Philippians, or in any of his other letters. The “already and not yet” was a common theme in Paul’s writings. There were things he taught that Christians have “already” and there were other things they do “not yet” have. With regard to salvation, we “already” have a new spirit, but have “not yet” received our new bodies. Shockingly, Paul had to combat false teachers that claimed they did. That was actually a subject Paul addressed in 2 Timothy 2:17-18 (emphasis mine);

17 Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have departed from the truth. *They say that the resurrection has already taken place*, and they destroy the faith of some.

Hymenaeus and Philetus taught that Jesus had already secretly returned and had given them their resurrected bodies and, thus, they were super-apostles with special authority and wisdom. He had to warn of their false teaching because it was destroying people’s faith in the real second coming of Jesus. So let’s put this in perspective: the problem Paul faced was not people thinking they hadn’t been spiritual perfected, but rather that they had been physically perfected as well! That is why he takes the time to explain what God has done already, and what God will do in the future. Therefore, let us not fall into either of the two ditches: one ditch is believing we are not perfect in our spiritual soul because we live in a sinful body; the other ditch is believing that because our spiritual soul has been perfected our body has been perfected too.

2 // Romans 7:21-24, “21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”

Comments: As with Paul’s thought in Philippians, most people do not allow the entire book or immediate context of Romans speak to give clarity to this passage. Nothing Paul described in Romans 7:7-24 has to do with being a born again Christian, but rather he is describing his life as self-righteous, unregenerate Jew. The reason he used present verbs is because he is re-telling his past with the knowledge he

now has in the present. This is called an “autobiographical reconstruction.”¹ We do this whenever we tell a story and say things like, “I believed his lies because I am gullible.” Certainly, the person in the present isn’t gullible anymore because they now know what the person said was untrue. But when they tell the story they speak in the present tense, “I am gullible.”

That is exactly what Paul is doing both here and in 1 Timothy 1:16-17, “But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” How could Paul literally be the worst of sinners in chapter one and at the same time in chapter three of the same book command Timothy to appoint elders that are “above reproach... temperate, self-controlled, respectable, etc.?” If Paul wasn’t using the literary technique of autobiographical reconstruction in both Romans 7 and 1 Timothy 1, then Paul is a terrible hypocrite and shouldn’t be a leader in the church because he is wretched, the worst of sinners, a slave to sin, and unable to control his actions.

Thankfully, there is a much better way to understand Paul in Romans 7:21-24, just keep reading into chapter 8 to see the full context and point Paul is making:

Romans 7:24-8:4,9-11, “24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

“9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong

to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”

In the wider context, Paul’s point is that prior to being born again, it is impossible to live for Jesus because we are still “in the flesh.” The flesh is too powerful of a slave master for the soul to break free from, even if we know the commands of God and the good we ought to do. The only way to actually obey God’s commands and be delivered from the slave master of our flesh, what Paul calls, “the body of death,” is to be born again and set free by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit-led life is one in which the spiritual soul is perfected, free from bondage to the sinful flesh, to love and serve God. Though we still live in the body it is no longer our slave master, Jesus is. We live free from the flesh by offering our body as a living sacrifice and setting our mind on the Spirit so we can be renewed in our thinking every day. To this end, Jesus called us as His disciples to deny ourselves and take up our cross that we may follow Him (Mark 8:34). Also, this is why Paul summarized his point again in Romans 12:1-2.

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Therefore, you have no excuse to live in the realm of the flesh, but have all the power and resources to live every moment in the Spirit. God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will is not just a hope to discover when you get to heaven, but the reality in which you are supposed to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ on earth.

¹ For more on this perspective being Paul's autobiographical reconstruction read, *A Study of Romans 7:14-25 as Paul's (Auto)biographical Reconstruction*, by Chan Tsz-on at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48535863.pdf> (accessed 2 September 2019).