

# Christianity 201

*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: - 1 Peter 2:2*

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## Introduction

Many college classes introduce a subject to students by offering a class often called “101“. For example biology 101, history 101, etc. The use of the distinctive “201“ in the title here attempts to suggest to the reader the next step in Christianity.

Many people see Christianity as the fulfillment of some criteria to obtain a place in heaven. If a Christian is not satisfied with what might be called Christianity 101, this book may be helpful to consider how the Christian life can impact our daily lives.

The purpose of this book is to encourage the reader to undertake a program of what might be called Christian development. We will consider how deeper Christianity is not just for “religious nuts” but is actually considered from the bible to be the “normal” Christian life.

*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. - Hebrews 5:12-13*

Not only is there progress available to become more like Jesus, it is expected.

*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: - Ephesians 4:13-15*

This book has four main sections;

1. The leaven of the Pharisees - This section examines all the ways smug self-righteousness can cripple our walk with the Lord. We are all vulnerable to this and care must be taken or we will lock ourselves in a prison more secure than Alcatraz.
2. The deceitfulness of riches. This section examines how not just prosperity, but even just the desires for material goods in general can come to be an alternative object of trust, crippling our faith and retarding any chance of growth in our Christian life,
3. Walking by the Spirit. This section focuses on the path through life the Christian is called to walk and the enabling and guiding influence of the Holy Spirit to help us.
4. Dying to self. This section examines the difficulties we encounter attempting to reduce the influence of our old sinful nature.

This book is not intended to be anything other than a call to Christians to take the next step in their Christian life. All too often Christians think that deeper Christianity is about abstract theological concepts that are disconnected from real life. It is hoped that by reading this book the reader will appreciate how relevant Christianity is to daily life.

## The Leaven of the Pharisees

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. - Matthew 23:27*

A timely warning for Christians. The Pharisees were held accountable for allowing themselves to come to the point of self-deception and blindness that resulted in their acting hypocritically. Rather than considering the Pharisees from a perspective of condescension, we should consider how easily we can and do fall into the same trap.

### Chapter 1 - Being "right" is not the same as following truth.

One of the things exhorted in the bible is Christian unity. Sadly one of the most noticeable characteristics of Christians over the centuries is a tendency to attack and even kill each other. While denominations no longer launch armies against each other, there is often scathing denunciation or mocking derision held for any who adopt a doctrinal "flag" other than one's own.

This is not a recent phenomena;

*For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? - 1 Corinthians 1:11-13*

Today we might find those who claim Christ to say, "I am of Luther", "I am of Calvin", or "I am of KJV only". A common thread through these is a prideful arrogance, a feeling of having "gotten it right", and even a mocking of others. This lack of humility is the same condition to be found with the Pharisees.

Part of the problem is attempting to run Christianity as an organized system as opposed to just simple relations between people. Two people have more of a chance to work out problems between each other. Organizational systems usually define themselves in opposition to other systems such that there is little chance to resolve differences as remaining steadfast is seen as the only way to defend the organization from attack.

An individual may seek to learn and change his views as he grows in understanding. An organization cannot allow change as it would be seen as an acknowledgment of error.

Here we see the problem with organizations. They have to claim to be “right”. Christianity was intended to be dynamic with each Christian growing and maturing. Organizational systems tend to be static requiring compliance and adherence to doctrinal declarations they have deemed not only to be “right” but by definition also “complete”.

In a way, the organizational system approach to Christianity serves as a model for what goes wrong in a Christians life when he begins to follow the path of the Pharisees. There is an established template of what is “right”. This then leads us to focus on works and accomplishment. We then see ourselves as having appropriated “rightness” and begin to be prideful for our faithful accomplishments.

The Christian life was never intended to be agreement with a particular creed or set of doctrinal statements. Christianity is so much more.

*Christ in you, the hope of glory: - Colossians 1:27b*

The Christian has new and eternal life, the life of Christ. We have God living in us and desirous to work in us to turn from our old selfish and destructive nature and allow his work in us to make us a new creation inclined to righteousness. Our transformation is to be much more than “doing good” or “being right”. In fact, it is when we think of ourselves, this way, we actually elevate our flesh (pride) and make ourselves useless for God to work in us.

One way to reflect on this problem is to consider how we deal with error. A Christian being led by the Spirit of God is going to be actively seeking how to be more like Jesus. He is going to make mistakes, but be open to instruction and correction, in fact he will be seeking it out. In contrast the Christian attached to an organizational system may become rather inert. He may have his desire to follow the Lord channeled into rituals or rule observance so that his actions can be measured and verified to be in compliance. This is what happened to the Pharisees. They were no longer living by faith as Abraham did. Rather they saw in the law which was supposed to expose their sinfulness and humble need for a Savior a way to prove their own righteousness. When the promised Messiah (Jesus) finally did arrive, they not only could not recognize him, but they saw him as a threat and felt the need to kill him.

*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:20*

This book is an attempt to expand on how this Pharisaical “leaven” can come to infest and cripple a Christian. The Christian may have never had any intention other than to serve his Lord. Yet, in spite of every good intention, come to see self-righteousness as a substitute for the righteousness of Christ. We are all subject to these influences. It is not so much a matter of resisting sin, as it is being aware of how our inattention can allow us to drift, our fear can cause us to seek comfort, and how our vanity can approve that which cripples our faith. Like a ship’s captain that has lost his ability to see his compass, the Christian who becomes so diverted is likely to end up at a destination he did not expect.

## Chapter 2 - When “leaven” (hypocrisy) is not intentional it is self-deceptive.

*Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. - Luke 12:1b*

Jesus gave his disciples this warning in the context of being enticed by the Pharisees to say something by which they could accuse him. The word “hypocrisy” was used at the time to refer to stage actors who would present a performance that was by definition other than who they actually were.

Today we mostly use the word “hypocrite” to refer to someone like an actor who presents an image inconsistent with reality. Often we think of a scoundrel or manipulator trying to gain some advantage through misrepresentation. With this emphasis on intentionality, it is easy to overlook the more common and damaging aspect of hypocrisy that of self-deception. Like an actor that “gets lost in his part”, a Christian can come to a point where what he does, thinks, and says is different than reality. He can sound very sincere because he believes it himself.

In the warning Jesus gives the disciples he uses the word “leaven”. The slow, pervasive, and inflating aspect of yeast (leaven) would indicate the Jesus was warning less about intentional hypocrisy than about how one can be brought to this state unawares.

We have an example of one way this can overtake a Christian with the example of Peter and Barnabas.

*But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? - Galatians 2:11-14*

Here we have a record of being “carried away” with dissimulation (hypokrisis - elsewhere translated hypocrisy). Here the motive is fear and the sort of “herd mentality” common with peer pressure.

There was an episode of the Twilight Zone where a man found a mirror that had been painted over. When he scraped off some of the paint, he discovered that it was a portal to another world. After scraping off all the paint, he went through only to learn that he could not find his way back. Truth is a little like that. When we deviate, even slightly, we begin to lose our ability to find our way back. Hypocrisy (intentional or otherwise) is a disconnection from truth. It can have lasting consequences.

If we can see from the example of Peter and Barnabas what a slight drop in vigilance can allow, how much more should we seek to recognize when this happens to us.

In the example of Peter and Barnabas we have them on the path of truth and serving Jesus who is truth. Their acquiescence to the preferences of the visitors (the Jews of the circumcision) might have seemed to them only a courteous accommodation. They may have even felt that they might be able to “win over” these people through their accommodation. They probably correctly anticipated that if they failed to provide such accommodation, the visitors would “pitch a fit”. It is understandable that they would want to avoid such a confrontation seeking “peaceableness” instead.

This is what makes the “leaven” of hypocrisy so tricky. It can start so small that we never notice its encroaching growth. We can even consider what we are doing as righteous or godly.

If we examine Peter and Barnabas we might be able to determine at what point they started to diverge from truth. It seems they thought they had to act a certain way to achieve a certain result.

Embedded in this are several elements

1. Shift from trust in God to trust in self.
2. Implying that simple faith in Jesus is insufficient.
3. Imputing to those of the circumcision an authority not deserved.
4. Subverting their previous testimony to the gentiles.

It is often when we start to think that we need to control or direct things, even with good intentions, that we step into the flesh and risk disconnecting ourselves from God. When we see things in terms of what we can or should do, slowly we begin to see ourselves as the one who decides what is right. Jesus is a better example of how to avoid the elevation of self that can arise.

*Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. - John 5:19*

Often the path to play-acting hypocrisy begins with consideration of the appearance of things. We find that we modify what we do and say (even what we believe) to achieve a particular effect only to find that we have become diverted from truth.

### Chapter 3 - Master of Our Own Domain

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. - Proverbs 3:5-6*

Mankind was created to depend on God. It is when we stray from this relationship that bad things start to happen. This vulnerability has been a primary target for Satan. He makes effective use of getting us to consider making our own assessments and taking our own actions;

*Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. - Genesis 3:1-5*

Satan assured Eve that her taking independent action from God would not have a penalty but actually be beneficial. This was not true. God knew this would happen and had planned from before creation to have Jesus pay the price for sin that some might be redeemed. While the salvation available by faith in Jesus can rescue us from hell, the Christian also has a means to repair the damage our daily sin causes to our relationship with God. God has provided a way for us to restore our relationship with him when we stray;

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9*

The Greek word homologos (meaning the same words) is translated as the word “confess”. This implies that when we can say the same things about what we have done and said that God would say, we can have a restored relationship with God. This “confession” requires both humility and truth. The problem with the pervasive growth of the “leaven” (hypocrisy) demonstrated by the Pharisees is that one becomes distant from both truth and humility having substituted something else for them and being convinced that what is held is the real thing.

If we consider some biblical examples of this sort of substitution, we can begin to get a better picture of how this process can grow to be a debilitating cancer.

*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. - Matthew 15:9*

*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. - 1 Corinthians 1:17*

*He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. - Mark 7:6*

Here we can see a divergence from God. What is less obvious is the motive force that leads to this state. It could be summed up as human will apart from God (selfishness). This is often seen in the behavior of children who insist on having something or doing something they desire in opposition to parental instruction. It has been said regarding children, “They want what they want when they want it”.

*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. - 1 Samuel 15:23*

At first glance the comparison of witchcraft and rebellion might seem like apples and oranges. However, at their core both activities are about getting what you want. Human history could be considered an accumulation of evidence for the pain and suffering caused by our attempting to get what we want.

There is a bumper sticker that declares “He who dies with the most toys wins”. While there are many iconic ways to emblemize the selfishness of the world apart from God, this serves well to also connect it with a sort of infantile component.

The opposite of selfishness is love.

*Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

God himself is the example to us of this self-sacrificial love;

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. - John 3:16*

*Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. - Philippians 2:5-8*

We have an example of ultimate selfishness in the rebellion of Satan;

*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. - Isaiah 14:12-14*

While we may not have the grandiose ambitions of Satan, we can still in our own small way begin to follow a path away from God that makes us just as blind as the Pharisees became.

*Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. - Matthew 23:26*



We see with the example of Eve how easily we can be seduced away from God to use our own ideas as the basis for making decisions. With the example of Peter and Barnabas, we find that we do not even need temptations from Satan as there is that within us that can divert us from faithfulness to God into seeing our own plans as if not virtuous, then at least acceptable.

There was a popular book written after WWII titled, "God is my Co-pilot". While well intentioned and seeking to be a testimony of faith, the implied subordinate position of God in the relationship testifies to much of the trouble Christians have had in modern times.

*And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. - Matthew 26:39*

As with all things, Jesus is an example for us to see that even when faced with great difficulty, setting aside what we would prefer is essential in our relationship with God.

Much of modern life (education, corporate employment, and even social activities, are constructed such that God seems irrelevant or even an obstacle. This can make it difficult for a Christian because when God is not given his proper place, we often fill that void with our own ambitions, plans, and desires. This can be dangerous enough for the Christian, but there is also a danger that he can be attracted to a flavor of Christianity that feeds his self-preoccupation.

We may have plans and ambitions, but we need to remember that it is God who should be directing us and not the other way around.

*And who of you by worrying and being anxious can add one unit of measure (cubit) to his stature or to the span of his life? - Matthew 6:27 (AMP)*

*But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? - Luke 12:20*

Those whose path through life has little room for God find that that in which they have trusted will fail them.

*Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish: - Job 8:11-13*

How much more the one who distorts his view of God so much that while he thinks he honors God, his trust is really in himself.

*Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. - Matthew 6:2*

## Chapter 4 - The Natural Man

*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. - 1 Corinthians 2:14*

While people who are not Christian cannot receive the Spirit of God, there is a condition for Christians called “walking according to the flesh” that mimics this condition.

*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. - 1 Corinthians 3:1*

Here Paul calls those in Corinth first “brothers” (implying they are Christian). Then he calls them “carnal” (meaning according to the flesh). There is the implication that some Christians are carnal and others spiritual.

*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. - Galatians 6:1*

When Paul cautions the Galatians, he shows us something interesting. It would seem that a path that leads to a loss of spirituality can be found in failing to remain “meek” (gentle, humble). This is a major element in the growth of the leaven of hypocrisy.

The natural man is what we inherit from Adam. It is only when we receive Christ and are born again do we receive the Holy Spirit.

*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. - 1 Corinthians 15:22*

Even then, we have the ability to frustrate the work the Holy Spirit would desire to accomplish in us.

*Quench not the Spirit. - 1 Thessalonians 5:19*

The entire letter to the Galatians was written because they had allowed themselves to be influenced by Jews that had convinced them that to be really complete, they needed to follow the law that was given to Israel. They represent the starting point of a path that ends up with the Pharisees. For this reason it can be beneficial to examine what they were doing and what instruction Paul gave them regarding the danger of their actions.

*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? - Galatians 3:1-3*

Paul contrasts the life Christians are called to live (that of the Spirit) with that which we all too often follow (that of the flesh). This dual nature of Christians can cause some confusion. On the one hand, we often think that we have nothing to do with our old nature;

*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. - Romans 6:6*

*Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; - Colossians 3:9*

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. - 2 Corinthians 5:17*

In the letter to the Romans Paul contrasts his struggle with the flesh in chapter seven with the victorious Christian life in chapter eight. It is interesting that his struggle with the flesh is summed up in the transition to chapter eight;

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? - Romans 7:24*

Here the solution to the problem of the flesh is given not as a “what” or a “how” but as “who”.

A big problem for Christians is thinking that since the old nature was “put to death” that it no longer can exert an influence. This can lead the Christian to act as if he has nothing about which to be concerned. He may even come to think he is almost sinless. This is fertile ground for pride which can erode “meekness” and make one vulnerable to the leaven of hypocrisy.

Chapter eight of Romans is more a description of what is possible for the person who trusts in Jesus. It is not a guarantee that the difficulty of dealing with the flesh has been dealt with.

*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. - Romans 8:13*

Here the verb tense information in the Greek is often missing in translation. The word “mortify” (put to death literally or figuratively) would better have the word “habitually” added to convey the fuller meaning from the Greek. We get the idea not so much that the problems with the flesh have been done away with, but rather that we now have the possibility that they need not overwhelm us as the by power of the Holy Spirit they can be choked out. The idea is that the more freedom and cooperation we give the Holy Spirit, the less power the flesh will have over us.

This contrast is also stressed particularly in Galatians chapter five. Remember the Galatians were starting to slip into the type of hypocrisy that had consumed the Pharisees. Paul details the need for the ascendancy of the Spirit to resist the attraction of the flesh.

*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. - Galatians 5:16-17*

## Chapter 5 - All the World is a Stage

Satan cannot be everywhere at once. As a result, he has to influence the world to adopt collective systems that will give him increasingly greater control. We are told that Satan sets the course of the world (insofar as he is allowed by God);

*Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: - Ephesians 2:2*

One of the ways Satan has set the course of this world is to place an emphasis on theater. The introduction of classroom education was clever in several ways. One of them was that the model of the teacher/class became a performer/audience model. We find that even churches often follow this model. Together with TV and movies, the imprint of the various roles with which our children are presented often makes more of an impression on them than the little time they have with their parents. Perhaps more insidious than being shaped to fit a particular slot in the world system machinery, is the further “shaping” such influence can have on even thoughts and behaviors.

Our minds can be shaped to see ourselves as an almost fabricated persona complete with a script to follow.

*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: - Proverbs 23:a*

We get the word hypocrisy from the Greek “hupokrisis” meaning acting or to speak from under a mask (a common theatrical method in ancient Greece). Our modern society makes this problem so much worse than it was in the past. Technology has produced media capable of almost constant bombardment.

The purpose of this bombardment is to influence the nature of people away from the image and influence of their parents to make them compliant components in the systems Satan needs them to fill. These forces of compliance manifest in driving us to act out roles as they are designed to resonate with our own internal fleshly inclinations towards Pharisee-like hypocrisy.

We are channeled to take our place in the world. If we are charming enough we can be popular, if we are clever or shrewd enough, we can acquire wealth. Even for the unexceptional, we can come to the expectation that our performance of our role will result in a “successful” life.

One of the most basic things children learn is what they have to do to get what they want. For example, a baby quickly learns to cry in order to get fed. As the child grows, he will attempt exploring the utility of lying and stealing to get what he wants. If parents provide negative consequences, the child may learn to minimize these attempts. However, the question of what do we have to do to get what we want is still hard-wired into us (the selfishness of the flesh).

The theatrical role oriented perspective with which we are bombarded everyday carries with it the assumption of implicit cause and effect dynamics from which we come to have expectations of what has to be done to get what results. For example, the hard driving ambitious college student may come to adopt the role of the up and coming young lawyer who will get a big paycheck, a fast car, and have a successful urban life. That these roles are distortions of reality becomes more apparent when the person (no longer young) after working 90 hours a week as an associate at a law firm for 20 years finally realizes that he will not gain the partnership that he thought would give him the “good” life.

When the media based theatrical imprint is intentionally diminished in a more natural home environment. The increased influence of family can work to help in the character development of a child as he learns that he needs to restrict his selfishness so that he can learn love (selflessness) and have more successful relationships.

In modern society, the advancement of social development (through the classroom, playground, TV, and the Internet) at the expense of familial development reduces the more natural development of impediments to selfishness. As a result, in addition to the expansion of things like consumerism, children grow to see relationships less in terms of affection, accommodation, and love and more in terms of utilitarian mechanical pragmatism (how people can be used).

As humans, we still retain the need for approval, affirmation, and understanding. However, now when the family is less a source of this than the peer group, the process of “socialization” touted by educators tends to create an individual deficit that could be called social dependency. A child formed to have limited function outside a role provided for him may develop in such a way as to experience anxiety when even just considering acting independently.

The movie Zieleg was a fictional portrayal of a man who had a chameleon like ability to blend in with whatever group he was with. Today many children grow up with such a need for social approval that they assume roles which conform their behavior, values, and even thinking to accommodate conformity to the group.

Considering that we are immersed in a world where we see the future in terms of what roles we can fill, our friends in terms of adapting to their expectations, and our desires in terms of what we have to do to get what we want, it should come as no surprise that we are more vulnerable to the difficulties that can come from assuming a role than previous generations.

The Christian may also find a selection of stereotypes available in the religious realm. There is the faithful church goer, the zealous contender, the lofty lecturer, the long suffering server, the financial benefactor, or the autocratic administrator. There are also many other possibilities. The nature of an organizational system often aids in reducing activities to roles.

Systems with predefined functions often have predefined roles. When Christians adopt roles to serve the organizational purposes of a system, we often begin to see ourselves as a sort of mechanical extension of the system. We can lose joy and begin a sort of Christian “drudgery”. However, the problem of hypocrisy emerges when we begin to see ourselves as Christian “successes”.

*But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned: from which things some having swerved have turned aside unto vain talking; desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm. - 1 Timothy 1:5-7*

The example of the ambitious young lawyer that was tricked into a life of virtual economic slavery because he selected a role that was not as advertised is still better off than the Christian who ends up acting some parody of real Christianity and having to stand in front of Jesus one day filled with shame for his negligence.

There are Satanic as well as fleshly forces working to draw and keep us in the artificial reality of play acting roles. As Christians we need to be aware of these forces and endeavor to follow truth so that we are not diverted into the worship of self.

Modern society provides the prosperity needed for the mind to wander into delusional realms that were seldom explored when life was historically more difficult. Today many people have no trouble imagining that they are of the opposite sex, identify as animals, or even think they are dragons. The world of play-acting in imaginary realms can seem attractive, but like a Frank Lloyd Wright house, it is not conducive to real life.

## Chapter 6 - Sincerity

“It’s not a lie if you believe it” - George Kastanza giving advice to his friend Jerry Sienfeld on how to beat a lie detector.

The origin of the word “sincere” is from the practice of Roman pottery manufacturers to put a piece of wax to fill the void in a defective piece of pottery and pass it off as if it were good. The word “sincere” comes from the phrase “without wax”.

There are two ways to sell a piece of pottery with wax. The first is to be such a good actor that you can exude honesty and sincerity. The second is to convince yourself that there really is no wax. You can exude sincerity because you have come to think that you are speaking the truth.

Self-deception is rather common, and it shows how distant we have become from him who is truth. We can see from the bible that this separation from truth is harmful;

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. - 1 John 1:8*

In the very next verse John tells us that we can restore our relationship with God by “confessing” (saying the same words) about our sin that God does. However, this is something that cannot be done without truth and humility (which is the result of really understanding truth).

Here we have the crux of the problem. Our self-deceptions lead us to be distant from truth and truth is what we need to be restored. A ratchet is a mechanical device that holds something (frequently a rope or cable) in tension. It allows the rope to be tightened, but cannot be undone. In a way this is a picture of the leaven that had so permeated the Pharisees. They were only able to “ratchet” further and further from the truth. They were essentially prisoners of their own self-deceptions and immune to any correction.

Some key indicators of this condition are;

1. Pride (which cannot exist where truth is appreciated).

*And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. - Matthew 6:5*

2. Smugness (which grows in contempt for others).

*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: - Luke 18:9*

3. A sense of accomplishment (the feeling that one has achieved completion).

*Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. - Luke 18:10-11*

Sincerity, like earnestness, is more indicative of magnitude than accuracy. Without truth, it can carry us far away from reality. What can make this more difficult is when we confuse truth with “being right”. At first glance one might think they were the same thing. However, “being right” has more to do with conformance to some standard. For example, the Pharisees thought they had kept the law. In a similar way today Christians can come to think they have achieved some level of performance through keeping a set of rules, mastery some difficult teaching or doctrine, belonging to the correct denomination, or even just thinking they have done well.

A Christian may have indeed avoided the “really bad” sins, done some good works, found a better understanding of a doctrine, or some other achievement. However, it is just this focus on what and how works are done that was misleading Peter and Barnabas.

A person who comes to view what he does as “right”, virtuous, or praiseworthy is seldom open to even considering he is in error. Sincerity is a passionate emotion. However, like other feelings it can be deceptive.

*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. - Isaiah 64:6*

We do not want to mistake sincerity for truth.

*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. - Matthew 7:21-23*

Coming to sincerely believe they had kept the law was a big problem for the Pharisees. When confronted with something like the law that was given to Israel, a person faced three choices. He could admit that he was a failure and throw himself on the mercy of God (this was what was supposed to happen). He could make a token acknowledgment of the law, but for most purposes live a life that ignored it (this is what most people did). The last possibility was to convince himself that he had achieved keeping the law. Jesus spoke to this idea by expanding on the law.

*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. - Matthew 5:21-22*

Self-deception is key to being able to convince yourself that you have kept the law, fulfilled all requirements, or have not sinned. We can say to ourselves that we are good people, good people would not be angry, therefore I have never been angry with my brother.

## Chapter 7 - Cognitive Dissonance

“It is a happy faculty of the mind to slough that which conscience refuses to assimilate.”  
— William Faulkner

A relatively famous psychology experiment was conducted once where students were divided into two groups. Both did a tedious job. One group was paid \$10/hr. and the other group was paid \$1/hr. Then individuals from each group were recorded describing their work to others. The first group reported the job was dull and boring, but it paid \$10/hr. The second group was recorded touting the challenges of the work. The conclusion was that the human mind finds it difficult to maintain inconsistencies (i.e. boring work for low pay). As a result, reality is distorted to remove the anxieties caused by inconsistencies.

The students who were paid \$1/hr. had convinced themselves to see some merit in what they were doing so that they wouldn't be stuck having to wonder why they were wasting their time for \$1/hr.

The ease with which we can twist reality (truth) for our own comfort underlies the warning about the leaven of the Pharisees. Peter and Barnabas were in danger of following a path where they would first excuse what they had done and then come to justify it.



The mind is not only taken captive through the comfort of altered reality. Consider the influence of riches (that the bible also calls “deceitful”).

*And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! - Mark10:17-23*

Here we have an example of how a young man came to be convinced he had kept the law. Jesus rather than confronting his limited understanding of the breadth of the law (Matthew 5:28) instead confronts the true object of his faith (his riches).

The young man had come to a point where his mental process had become disconnected from reality. It would have been impossible to convince him that he had become captive to unreal thinking (i.e. it was his riches that sustained him instead of God). He had apparent confirmation of his “rightness” by his wealth and achievement in keeping the law. We find that prosperity can be a curse and occasional difficulties a gift from God that keeps us from traveling too far down the road of self-deception.

*Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. - Romans 12:16*

We live in an age of unprecedented prosperity. Even people on welfare have more comfort than most kings and emperors throughout history. We have hot and cold running water, indoor plumbing, air conditioning, central heating, and 24 hour entertainment. The comforts of prosperity were a snare for the rich young ruler of Jesus’s day, just as they are for us.

The patriotic zeal and fever for war in the run up to WWI was intense. However, many combat veterans returned from the trenches after an almost constant barrage of artillery fire with a different view of the nobility of war. Painful reality has a way of purging ones delusions.

Prosperity can create alternatives to reality that allow comfort to be the determining factor of what is real over truth. The popular phrase from the 60s “If it feels good, do it” reflects a little of the measurement criteria used for determining the best course of action when circumstances are not difficult. A man with a prosperous career as an attorney spent three years using cocaine and following this principal until he was homeless and destitute. Reality became his teacher that perhaps it was time to select a new philosophy of life.

The distortion we can have in our thinking caused by the comforts of prosperity are illustrative of the distortion we can have that results from our seeking to avoid the discomfort of truth. Just as a drug addict will do or say almost anything to chase after the feelings he desires, those who seek the comforts of the mind will alter their thinking to accommodate thoughts that are inconsistent with reality.

It would never cross the minds of the Pharisees that they were pompous showboats sadly trying to gain admiration from others to fuel their delusional sense of superiority. Like leeches they were feeding off the reactions they could manipulate in others.

*Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. - Matthew 6:16*

Here we have a closer parallel to the world of acting. Someone can become almost addicted to an audience reaction as if it verifies the high opinion that one came to have of himself. In classical cognitive dissonance, beliefs are altered to be consistent with behaviors to reduce discomfort. In actual practice everything (beliefs and behaviors) are malleable because what matters most are the feelings one gets from thinking one is superior, successful, accomplished, or simply better.

People can become addicted to the sensations they create in their own minds. Jesus called this sort of seductive call to abandon reality “leaven”. It can start small and grow without notice.

## Chapter 8 - Legend in Our Own Mind

Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real. - Thomas Merton

When King David was young, he was on the lamb. King Saul was trying to kill him. Many of the most beautiful psalms were written from the heart of a young fugitive whose survival was only in the hands of the God in whom he trusted.

*And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. - Acts 13:22*

However, after years of being king, David had become so narrow in his focus that he had a woman’s husband killed so that he could have her for himself. This was not done in shameful secrecy, but from a perspective having no thought of wrongness. God finally had to send Nathan to penetrate David’s blindness.

*And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. - 2 Samuel 12:7-9*

This is another example of how complacency over time can lead us incrementally from a fearful and heartfelt dependence upon the Lord to a point of pride and blindness where we can even murder and think nothing of it. This same process of prideful ossification can be seen with the Scribes (often associated with the Pharisees).

*Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation. - Luke 20:46-47*

Here these people would even profit in some way with real estate transactions that exploited the vulnerability of widows. We also find the Pharisees cheating by trickery in their business dealings.

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! - Matthew 23:15-16*

Few people are rescued from such a state of blindness. With David we have an example of pride brought low. David was finally able to see truth and reality but at great cost.

*To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. - Psalm 51:1-3*

Consider again the coupling in first John of the blindness of pride contrasted against the restorative acknowledgment of truth;

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:8-9*

Since God is truth, it is essential for Satan to construct his social systems such that he can advocate pride as a tactic to insure we remain separated from God. Regardless whether it is called, positive affirmation, self-esteem, confidence, worth, respect, satisfaction, assurance, regard, or

even narcissism, we (like a drug addict) are so easily lead away from the discomfort of truth to the more pleasant world of delusion.

The play acting (hypocrisy) of the Pharisees came as a result of “leaven” working its slow way through them facilitated by pride, complacency, and sufficiency.

We can see the blindness created by this deviation from truth.

*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. - Proverbs 16:18*

One of the tactics Satan has been advancing is using the concept of relativism to erase the influence of absolute. Only three things are called truth, the bible, God, and Jesus. It is the absolute that gives us reality. When we lose our connection to or appreciation for truth, we divert from God and his word into a world where we can begin to see ourselves in greatly inflated terms.

*And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. - Luke 16:15*

The Christian needs to reject the comfortable path and be actively seeking truth. Even though truth can be uncomfortable, it is essential to eternal life.

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: - Matthew 7:13*

## Chapter 9 - Fat and happy

What I fear is complacency. When things always become better, people tend to want more for less work. - Lee Kuan Yew

Because of sin, God changed creation to be difficult;

*And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. - Genesis 3:17-19*

In addition, God brings us difficulties;

*And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. - Hebrews 12:5-6*

It is fairly easy for Satan to set the course of this world according to the principles of fast, cheap, and easy. The appeal is strong.

*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. - Proverbs 14:12*

In addition to the deceitfulness of riches, other worldly comforts can work to remove any desire to follow truth;

*But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. - Luke 16:25*

*But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appavelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. - Luke 7:25*

*And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. - Luke 12:19*

The problem of our getting comfortable and letting complacency make us inert from the path the Lord would have us walk was recognized by Moses;

*And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. - Deuteronomy 6:10-12*

Complacency is not necessarily limited to physical comforts. One can also arrive at a belief system that provides assurances of completion which remove any incentive to continue a spiritual path. For example if a person thinks of themselves as “elect”, even though they may not be tempted to go on a spree of sinful indulgence, they may not see much need of growing in faith, drawing nearer the Lord, or pursuing Christ-likeness.

If a Christian is inclined towards legalistic systems, he may feel that having achieved success in rule observance, there is little left to do in his Christian walk. Many denominations assure their members that their baptism, church membership, or sacrament observance fulfills all Christian requirements so that they can get on with their real lives. Sadly, many church systems even operate to quench questioning or any spark of initiative in a church member to divert them away from an ardent seeking after the Lord into a program, event, or class.

Complacency is not only a failure to progress in the Christian life, it is fertile ground for the development of the blindness that can result in the play-acting of hypocrisy. The person who has an arrested spiritual development may feel that there is no need to progress because he has achieved all that is required. This perspective tends to foster smugness and then even contempt

for others. A Christian can act as though he has finished the race because he has lost sight of the finish line (Christ-likeness).

*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, - Hebrews 12:1*

*For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. - James 1:23-24*

It is so easy to slip into a life that takes God for granted and allows us to pursue our own plans and interests. It would be cruel for God to give us salvation and leave us here in this sinful world unless there was work of his here he wanted us to do. Our neglect of God's purposes is a pretty poor response to his gift of eternal life.

*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; - Hebrews 2:3*

Sadly, churches have had much responsibility in creating passive Christians. The structure of running Christianity as a system requires Christians to be functional components. In addition, the promulgation of salvation criteria promotes the idea that Christianity is limited to just getting to heaven. Once Christianity can be reduced in one's mind to criteria that can be accomplished, all sorts of options open up to pursue our own interests. This is most obviously demonstrated by the fact that most claiming the name of Christ only set aside an hour a week to concern themselves with him.

## Chapter 10 - Everything is Going According to Plan

*A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. - Proverbs 16:9*

When man lived closer to nature, vicissitudes of weather made clear to him his need of his God. Urban life opens many other possibilities that have a less clear connection to God.

*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. - James 4:13-15*

A Christian can come to the point where he thinks little of God and focuses mostly on his own plans and how to achieve them. He may come think of schooling, employment, social position, or savings as the key elements to secure his future. He may become so woven into the fabric of the world system that there is little distinctive about him that would testify to his faith.

*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. - James 4:4*

We can think we are being prudent, in planning our future and making provision for ourselves and family. However, it is very easy to erode faith in God by placing faith in our own cleverness, skills, or resources.

*for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. - Romans 14:23b*

*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. - Matthew 6:33*

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. - Proverbs 3:5*

Our focus on our own plans (even if well meaning) can work to exclude our Lord from our thoughts such that by default, we elevate ourselves and start a process of leavening. We end up constructing a mental edifice that does not honor our God but ourselves.

*A Song of degrees for Solomon. Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. - Pslam 127:1*

*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. - 1 Corinthians 3:11-15*

## Chapter 11 - Measuring Hypocrisy

“Humility is the proper estimate of oneself.” - Charles Spurgeon

*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. - Romans 12:3*

We may not have come as far as the Pharisees in contamination with the leaven of hypocrisy so that we steal widows homes from them, but we all have drifted from our Savior, the truth, and faithfulness at different times and to different degrees. It can be helpful then to consider what indicators there might be to warn us if we are starting to become inflated with the leaven of hypocrisy.

One measure of our Christian faith and assurance of salvation is our “love of the brethren”.

*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. - John 13:35*

If we have contempt, mock, or are smug in regard to our brothers in Christ, it may indicate we are not even Christian. However it can also indicate that we have come under the influence of pride and have been led to a point of “play-acting” superiority.

Another measure of our spiritual condition can be the interest or lack of it in God’s word.

*And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? - Luke 24:32*

*This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. - Psalm 119:50*

As we drift further from our Lord, his words become less clear and even irrelevant to that with which we are preoccupied. We can give perfunctory acknowledgment to the worth of his words, but they seem to find little purchase in our hearts. Christians in particular can be quite zealous for a particular bible translation. They can even memorize many verses. However, our great external concern may hide the fact the God’s word has little effect on our lives or in our hearts.

*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. - Matthew 15:8*

We all too often measure the external such as works and accomplishments. We can even over-value the declaration of belief. It is really what is in the heart at the core of our being that is the true measure of our spiritual condition.

*O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. - Matthew 12:34*

To measure the condition of the heart one has to weigh the volume and character of words. Do we too often speak of ourselves, our desires, our accomplishments, or do we speak of the wonders of the Lord and the many blessings he has bestowed. Do our words mirror an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness or do we complain and mock.

*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: - Proverbs 23:7a*

We tend to measure things by detecting whether it is present or not. Like a broken bone, one either has it or one does not. It is often easy to dismiss something like hypocrisy since we see it as an intentional act and dismiss it because we do not see ourselves as culpable.

We often fail to see hypocrisy (in the Greek sense of play acting) as something that happens to us as opposed to something we do. When we give consideration to the process of what might be called “leavening” we see the danger that Jesus was warning of, that of being slowly diverted from him into a world where self reigns supreme as evidenced by the delusional condition of the Pharisees.



Churches can encourage a sort of “dormant” Christianity where having been assured of a heavenly destination, one just waits out the clock. The bible gives a different picture of the Christian life. There are many verbs used that imply an activity level that is seldom reached.

Seeking - *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. - Matthew 6:33*

Crying out - *So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. - Proverbs 2:2-5*

Surrendering - *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. - Romans 12:1-2*

Following - *And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. - Luke 9:23*

There is an expectation of activity in the life of a Christian that is often unfulfilled. Sometimes this is because of bad teaching. Sometimes it is the result of distracted attention. It can also be a result of a person not even being a Christian. However, it can also be a result of “leaven” that has started to grow in a life like barnacles on the hull of a ship. As time progresses less and less headway is made until things slow to a stop. Unfortunately, this condition of Christian paralysis can be masked by a flurry of business with committees, programs, events, and even classes.

## Chapter 12 - Doctrinal Contributions

“You can believe in whatsoever you like, but the truth remains the truth, no matter how sweet the lie may taste.” - Michael Bassey Johnson

*Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. - Matthew 16:12*

Doctrine (teachings) can carry a powerful influence. They are often presented with authority and can even press in on one if made with clever speech or compelling power. Like a powerful tidal current it can draw some into its conformity. This was what happened to Peter and Barnabas. They found it difficult to resist the social power of those carrying the doctrines of the Pharisees.

There are those who tout their intellectual accomplishments plumbing the depths of arcane writings to summon the power of bluster to bully others into compliance with their doctrines. While many on this path of elevating their own reason stop at the smug sense of superiority of the Pharisees, historically many completely left Christianity on the progressive path of Renaissance humanism, enlightenment, down to the liberalism of today.

*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, - Romans 1:22*

Doctrine (teachings) can come from a humble heart seeking to point the way to a closer walk with God or they can come from one whose credentials and accomplishments testify to the approval of men. We know that there will be false teachers.

*For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. - Acts 20:29*

The Christian is well advised to avoid being taken in by often loudly and forcefully presented claims (doctrines) that may be misleading. The Bereans give us a good example of how to consider the seeming avalanche of doctrinal claims.

*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. - Acts 17:11*

One of the hallmark characteristics of unhealthy doctrine is its presentation as something that has to be accepted. Truth is the only thing that can withstand scrutiny. The Christian has the advantage of the Spirit of truth.

*Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. - John 14:17*

Here again Christianity administered as an organizational system runs into problems. A system will maintain a doctrinal “package” that is essentially inviolate. Some churches have a package that is closer to truth than others. While the question of how accurate a particular “package” is remains, there is a larger problem.

*Whereas the object and purpose of our instruction and charge is love, which springs from a pure heart and a good (clear) conscience and sincere (unfeigned) faith. - 1 Timothy 1:5 AMP*

Much of Christianity has lost the understanding that teaching (doctrine) is supposed to accomplish changes in the lives of its members. This relational engagement all too often has been replaced with lectures reiterating doctrinal dictums that seem abstract and have little traction in the actual life of a believer.

This may be that like the teacher who blames the student for failing, the church often blames its members for failing to figure out how to apply the word to their own lives. In all fairness, some church leaders have a sincere desire to aid their members in spiritual growth or recovery from fleshly entanglements, but are unable to because of the constraints of the system they administer.

Other church leaders attempt to focus on rule following as a means of spiritual growth and castigate their members for failing to overcome their sin. It can be helpful to consider the nature of church leadership.

*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: - Hebrews 17a (KJV)*

Obey = peitho = persuade, convince  
them that have the rule = hegeomai = a chosen leader  
submit = hupeiko = cessation of resistance

Alternatively = Stop resisting and allow yourselves to be persuaded by those you have chosen to follow.

God favors those who seek truth.

*RUN TO and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and take notice! Seek in her broad squares to see if you can find a man [as Abraham sought in Sodom], one who does justice, who seeks truth, sincerity, and faithfulness; and I will pardon [Jerusalem--for one uncompromisingly righteous person]. - Jeremiah 5:1 (AMP)*

“Seeking” is an interesting word. It implies both initiative and evaluation. There is also an implication of progression such that false starts, wrong turns, and blind alleys can be expected along a path of seeking. Unfortunately this process is not very compatible with systems that seek to control and regulate.

Most of Christianity is presented in various franchise brands (denominations). There is a requirement to take an entire “package” of doctrine and settle in. This does not leave much room for seeking. The Christian is expected to grow to maturity, yet often encounters systems that claim completion just as the Pharisees thought they had everything nailed down.

*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: - Ephesians 4:15*

*But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. - Matthew 23:13*

One way to avoid entanglement with the doctrine of the Pharisees is to recognize that if you think you have arrived, you haven't.

*Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. - Philippians 3:12*

Doctrines put forth that assert one has arrived at Christian completion create a religion of superficiality which is often manifest by worldliness, foolish talk, self-deception, and ignoring the needs of others.

*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. - James 1:26-27*

## Chapter 13 - The Unknown

Has the trade of interpreting the Lord's matters gone out, discouraged by the time-worn fact that nobody succeeds at it? No, it still flourishes; there was never a century nor a country that was short of experts who knew the Deity's mind and were willing to reveal it. - Mark Twain

*Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. - 1 Peter 1:12*

The word “theology” (the study of God) sounds a little ambitious and possibly irreverent insofar as it implies a subject that can be mastered. There are things the angels do not know. How much more likely that we will not understand some things or even lack the ability to understand even if we were told.

A child does not understand the dangers from which his parents protect him. He does not understand where the food, clothing, and shelter come from. He is often selfish, demanding, and ungrateful. He can even strut around with an imperious attitude of complete understanding. We have a similar relationship with our heavenly father.

*But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 19:14*

Seminaries (the main centers where theologians are manufactured) have an incentive to produce those who will be ardent in the advocacy of their doctrines. Truth seems less important than confident assurance of correctness. This often entails providing certainty where realistically uncertainty would be more accurate. For example, the declaration that those punished in hell will be punished forever relies on the assignment of “eternal” to the Greek word *aion*. Considering that we do not know if eternity is the end of time or time unending, it seems a little bold to declare that which is beyond our understanding. We can know that those who are not saved will be judged by their works and there will be punishment. If this punishment lasts for an “age” (the usual definition for *aion*) or true eternity is not clearly discernable.

There is a pragmatic advantage of declaring hell as “eternal fire”. Fear can motivate people in the direction you wish to herd them. However, truth is not honored when we exceed that which can be known from God’s word. We begin to insert our own reasoning and conclusions instead of resting by faith in our heavenly father’s goodness and justice.

Acknowledging that which we do not know leaves room for humility. It also leaves room for faith. We can treasure that which God has chosen to reveal to us and trust in him for that which is not clear.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. - Isaiah 55:8-9*

There is a danger in declaring things beyond which we can know.

*Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, - Colossians 2:18*

There is no end to the number of people willing to tell us what to do. However, we have the responsibility to evaluate what is said in terms of truth. It can be easy to surrender to what someone tells us. However, we are still responsible.

*But what I do, I will continue to do, [for I am determined to maintain this independence] in order to cut off the claim of those who would like [to find an occasion and incentive] to claim that in their boasted [mission] they work on the same terms that we do. For such men are false apostles [spurious, counterfeits], deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles (special messengers) of Christ (the Messiah). - 2 Corinthians 11:12-13 (Amp)*

*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. - 1 Timothy 1-3*

There are all sorts of reasons we can come to incorporate false teachings in our belief system. We might buy into some strange doctrine because we are too lazy to seek the truth for ourselves. We may be bullied into going along with something. We can be born into an inherited tradition. We can find a particular practice appealing for reasons of vanity, security, fear, or comfort. However, we are going to have to stand in front of Jesus one day at it will be embarrassing to have to say that we were not satisfied to live by faith, but added to his word to satisfy our own desires.

*Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.- Lamentations 3:40*

Others may mislead us for good intentions or bad. However, it is incumbent on us to discern that which is true and which is not.

*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. - Matthew 15:9*

*Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. - John 7:16-18*

Jesus speaks to a method of discernment based on doing the will of God. We can see where nearness to God, brings discernment.

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: - John 10:27*

## Chapter 13 - Legalism

*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. - John 16:2*

The leaven of the Pharisees is often more than just the blindness of smug self-satisfaction in rule following. It can lead to active contempt.

*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: - Luke 18:9*

There are Christians who may have come out of bad experiences to develop a defensive sort of “bunker” mentality where they cling to a particular doctrine, creed, or denomination and scorn those who they see as “wrong”. They often fail to recognize how far this “leaven” has taken them from the Lord they claim to serve.

Some Christians (particularly those with seminary experience) come to a sort of perspective of intellectual pride. They look sometimes with disdain on other Christians who have not achieved their insights and understanding.

A few Christians become accelerated down this path because of taking up leadership or advocacy of a particular issue. By putting the spotlight on one particular theme, you always risk pushing it to an extreme. For example, a study of election can become Calvinism, questions of translation can become KJV only, reaction against the modern assault on the traditional family can become patriarchy. Those who may have started with well intentioned advocacy can end up fostering smug superiority that sadly often ends in failures of the flesh.

Some Christians see a kindred spirit in a leader taking a stand against one thing or another. This tends to build a conclave of the disgruntled. It is not healthy for leaders or followers. The Christian is supposed to focus on and emulate Christ. Becoming indignant about one thing or another fuels self-righteousness and accelerates the growth of leaven.

*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:2*

When we take our eyes off of Jesus, we are likely to forget how far short we fall and begin to think of what we have accomplished. We can begin to measure ourselves by our accomplishments and at the same time impoverish ourselves in matters more important.

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. - Matthew 23:23*

## **Chapter 15 - Justification**

*And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. - Genesis 3:12*

We all tend to excuse and justify our actions. It is almost a reflex action. When called to give an account or to explain something we have done, we can be very creative in finding reasons that sound plausible. We prefer to avoid saying, “I was angry” or “I was selfish”. We prefer to say, “They made me angry” or “I was only getting what I deserved”.

The leaven of the Pharisees is just this sort of self-deception. What we often fail to appreciate is just how dangerous this is. Our innovation can lead us to construct very clever deceptions by which we hope to deflect criticism. However, as we come to believe them ourselves, we distort and corrupt our own thought processes. We should again carefully consider the warning given by John;

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. - 1 John 1:8*

We can temporarily avoid the discomfort of criticism and wounded pride. However, the abandonment of truth carries with it a far greater price. Without a habit of honestly acknowledging our sins and faults, we create a false self in whom our increasing satisfaction often expresses itself in pride and smugness.

We become actors playing a character we have fabricated and come to believe is our true self. These rationalizations are the glue that keep us prisoner under the mask we have constructed. If Hitler could justify killing six million Jews, there is little humans are not capable of justifying.

The Pharisees would cheat each other in business and steal houses from widows. This shows there is no limit to the destruction we can cause ourselves in failing to honor truth.

*Buy the truth, and sell it not; - Proverbs 23:23a*

One can “sell” truth by exchanging it for something else. One can “sell” truth in exchange for the comfort and even pleasure self-deception brings. Consider the qualities that flourish in the absence of truth like pride, smugness, ingratitude, disregard for others, and even greed, lust, and hatred.

The reflex to protect our comfort at the cost of our souls is one that needs to be replaced with a reflex that is quick to acknowledge fault and speak truth.

## Chapter 16 - Summary

God has given you one face, and you make yourself another. – William Shakespeare

Hypocrisy is not so much something we do, it is what happens to us when we “fall asleep at the wheel” of our Christian life.

One of our biggest problems is that we think of Jesus, the bible, church, and all things religious as something we have allocated for an hour or two once a week. Thinking that Christianity is something that is simply done and then only briefly and infrequently allows our lives to be directed according to other forces. When we think we have satisfied religious requirements we risk the same thinking that infested the Pharisees.

The word “leaven” was also used of the Herodians and Sadducees. One can see the faith of the Sadducees as based on their position and birth. The faith of the Herodians seems to have been based on their political and economic connections. While the Pharisees deluded themselves into thinking they were religiously superior by their own merit, the others had faith just as strong. Unfortunately none had faith in God.

We come to play-acting (hypocrisy) by becoming distant from God. The solution is to come closer;

*But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.- James 4:6-10*

James gives us a process that begins and ends with humility. Humility begins when we understand who we are and what we bring to the table.

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. - Romans 7:18*

Humility continues when we begin to glimpse how great God is;

*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; - Psalm 8:3*

Humility grows as this understanding expands to be present in all of our activities and not just the church ones. For example, a man in casual conversation with some friends when tempted to share his excitement at getting a new boat refrains because he remembers that a friend just lost his job and he wants to not cause his friend anguish. It is when humility grows that we are better able to fulfill biblical admonitions;



*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. - Philippians 2:4*

Humility is the first step in the subordination of the flesh (self). It progresses as control of things and even people are transferred to the Lord even to the point of our own life.

*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. - Revelation 12:11*

Satan has gone to great lengths to create a society where even the idea God seems laughably primitive. Those who seek to draw nearer their Savior face a difficult time. Faith is made to look irresponsible. Humility is seen as weakness, unless it is the false humility used to manipulate others. Chastity is ridiculed. Having children is seen as not only unwise, but even harmful. The traditional family is seen as toxic.

If we are to heed the warning of Jesus to beware the leaven of the Pharisees, we need to be vigilant of all the snares Satan has prepared to subvert us, the weakness of our own flesh, our own lack of maturity in Christ, and a “Christian” life marginalized to an hour or two once a week. There are many forces that combine to lead us to think we have completed the Christian life and have satisfied all the Christian requirements.

Have we matured to the “full measure of Christ”?

*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: - Ephesians 4:13*

Are we friends with the world?

*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. - 1 John 2:16*

Have we ignored the imitation of Christ?

*And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. - Luke 14:27*

Is our life too comfortable?

*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. - 2 Timothy 3:12*

Is Christ the center of our life?

*And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.- 2 Corinthians 5:15*

The leaven of the Pharisees grew until they were only acting religious. They did not even know they had ended so far from God. Trapped by the combination of their own self focus and convinced they were godly, there was little chance of escape from such a dark prison.

The only hope we have of avoiding a similar fate is to cling to our Savior in gratitude and humility. We need to cry out for wisdom. We need to seek truth and walk by the power of the Spirit of truth. We need to reject entanglement with the world. We need to grow in love (selflessness). We need to see our brothers in Christ with less criticism and more compassion. Mockery and smugness should be far from us. Most of all fervent prayer is needed to both focus ourselves on our Savior as well as turn our attention from those things which divert us.

We get a picture of a life in constant dependence upon our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; - 2 Corinthians 10:3-5*

This requires vigilance in preventing the leaven of the Pharisees from gaining traction with us. Since it is almost impossible to remedy once it gains purchase, prevention is about the only way to be free from its corruptive contamination.

Prevention depends on detecting the presence of “leaven”. Just like a smoke detector identifies the first indication of combustion, we need to construct a mechanism for detecting the early indicators that we are going in the wrong direction. One of the best ways to do this is establishing a process of self-examination.

*So whoever cleanses himself [from what is ignoble and unclean, who separates himself from contact with contaminating and corrupting influences] will [then himself] be a vessel set apart and useful for honorable and noble purposes, consecrated and profitable to the Master, fit and ready for any good work. - 2 Timothy 2:21 (AMP)*

*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. - Romans 12:3*

*But let a man examine himself, - 1 Corinthians 11:28a*

Walking in truth is a requirement to see ourselves in truth. This means we need to be honest about all of our sins, motives, desires, acts, and thoughts. When we are honest, we clearly see how petty, vain, ambitious, vengeful, greedy, and generally sinful we really are. It is this clarity of vision that keeps us from the “leaven” that our natural man so eagerly seeks to use to insulate himself from the discomfort of truth.

No one likes to live with discomfort. It is like a man who places his hand on the hot burner of a stove. He may choose to instantly give himself a shot of anesthetic to numb the pain, or he may choose to remove his hand so that healing can begin. The pain caused by seeing ourselves in truth can be intense. However, rather than starting to alter our perception of truth to provide ourselves a comfortable delusion (which is how we come to be hypocrites), we need to apply an appreciation for the love of God and the sacrifice of Jesus that cleanses us from all our sins.

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. - Romans 5:8*

Seeing ourselves in truth brings a painful realization of how far we are from what God desires for us. Rather than trying to soothe our discomfort by thinking that we really aren't so bad, we need to find solace in the all pervading love of God through Christ for us.

*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. - Ephesians 2:4-7*

The Pharisees demonstrated the opposite of humility.

*Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. - Romans 2:17-20*

Humility is a sort of gate through which God is able to pour out grace.

*But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. - James 4:6*

It is also from the point of humility that gratitude flows.

*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. - Psalm 100:4*

Satan has conspired for centuries to craft a world hostile to all things godly. If he cannot prevent people from becoming Christian, he desires to divert them into inactivity or even to subvert them to advance his plans. To resist this we need to arise from our slumber and seek truth.

*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. - Psalm 51:6*

Like David, we need to awake from an inert and dormant faith that we might be of use to him who has given us eternal life.

*Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. - Psalm 51:9-10*

# The Deceitfulness of Riches

*He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. - Matthew 13:22*

## Chapter 1 - The Essential Nature of Trust

*Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! - Mark 10:24b*

It is difficult to go through life and trust in no one or nothing. We trust that our employer will pay us. We trust that we will not be murdered in our sleep, We trust the bridge we drive over will not collapse. We can even trust that a friend won't pull a chair out from under us as we sit down as a joke. We come into this life in complete dependence and vulnerability. Sometimes we have parents who nurture, love, and care for us which can make trusting easy. Sometimes we have parents that make trusting difficult. We can grow to be too confident and trusting of the world around us or not trusting enough.

As we grow and come to hear of Jesus and his love for us, we may come to trust in him.

*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; - Hebrews 6:19*

In contrast, those who do not have this trust (faith) are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of circumstance. People can come to trust in governments, employers, friends, wealth, or even social position only to find that things change and trust has been betrayed.

The most significant change we face is when this life ends. Many people live life as if it would go on forever. Adolescents are often described as living as if they thought they were immortal. Those who see nothing beyond this life and who do not trust in God are left trying to obtain what they can from the world and its systems.

*That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: - Ephesians 2:12*

More than just the assurance of eternal life in heaven, the Christian's present life can benefit from a foundation for trust that is solid and reliable. Having this "solid rock" in which to trust allows the Christian to avoid the many deceptions in the world and especially those associated with riches and their pursuit.

*The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. - Psalm 18:2*

Sadly, many Christians live lives of crippled trust. They are unable to fully let go of the faith they have in what the world can provide, particularly money. This creates a sort of perpetual anxiety.

*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. - James 1:8*

The Christian with crippled faith is unable to put his full trust in God. This is usually because the world seems so able to provide what he desires.

*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. - 1 John 2:16*

It is difficult for someone to try to “straddle the fence” with a foot in the realm of God and a foot in the realm of the world. Either he will exist on the fringe of the world with God at the center, or on the fringe of God with the world at the center.

*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. - James 4:4*

This dichotomy can be seen with money as it so much represents the lifeblood of the world.

*No servant is able to serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stand by and be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (riches, or anything in which you trust and on which you rely). - Luke 16:13 AMP*

One can be anxious or fearful and seek security from the things of the world. One can also be predatory or greedy and seek opportunity from the things of the world. We can see in other worldly dynamics patterns that parallel and are entwined with the influence of money. For example, one’s friends and associates can be seen as a way to achieve security or advantage. A person can seek to build relationships with others with a view towards gain just as readily as they might seek money.

*Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. - Luke 16:3-4*

*Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour. - Proverbs 19:4*

While the manipulation of social networks for advantage has a long historical record, at a more basic level throughout history advantage has often been sought through the use of force. Today this option is mostly employed by governments and criminals.

*But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. - Luke 11:22*

*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. - Psalm 20:7*

We can often see in the use of force, the seeking of relationships, and the general use of wealth a reflection of the powerful motives of both fear and greed. These forces of the flesh are what drive most of the activity of the world. Since these forces arise from the flesh and seek to serve self, they often bring one into conflict with others. This creates uncertainty which undermines hope and trust.

*He who is of a greedy spirit stirs up strife, but he who puts his trust in the Lord shall be enriched and blessed. - Proverbs 28:25 AMP*

Throughout the ages, the main thing people trusted in was wealth. People are not very reliable and the use of force seldom achieves its objectives without creating other problems or lasts long. Money, property, or other resources can seem to offer a more certain future. However, even riches may not be as certain as one might hope.

*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; - 1 Timothy 6:17*

We can see here two of the problems with riches. First they corrupt our thinking so that we begin to see ourselves in inflated terms (highminded). Secondly, even riches are ultimately “uncertain”. Regardless of whether we are driven by fear or greed, our trust in wealth leads first to the pursuit of it, and even if successful, the toxic effect of it in our lives.

*Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. - Proverbs 30:8-9*

Paul writes that the purpose of the law given to Israel was not to show how they could keep it, but to show how they could not. It was to be a constant reminder of their need to depend on God. In a similar way, the curse of hard work given to Adam and Eve was to motivate them to recognize how much they needed God. Instead, we use riches to convince ourselves we have no need of anything or anyone. One of the many deceitful aspects of riches is how we come to be so short sighted and we have such confidence in the short term that we become blind to the eternal.

*And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? - Luke 12:18-20*

In the example of the prodigal son we see someone whose view and value of the things of life has been reduced to money. Consider how the father felt when his son asked for the money he felt he deserved so that he could chart his own course in the world. Only a parent who has raised a child can imagine the pain and hurt such selfish ingratitude causes. It is similar to the pain we cause God when we act the same way towards him.



*And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. - Luke 15:12*

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child! - Shakespeare

What can make riches so deceitful is that they can seem so necessary. Consider the example of the widow who lost her son. In a world where, without the support of that son, she would face the rest of her life as a beggar.

*Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: . - Luke 7:12a*

We can also come to see our prosperity as so vital to life and that upon which we depend, that we fight hard to prevent any loss. We may find that we will stoop to any act, surrender any values, or even hurt others to insure that the wealth we see as essential is not threatened or diminished. The intensity with which we can come to cling to riches is reflected a little in contrast to what Jesus willingly set aside.

*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: - Philippians 2:6*

Here the word “robbery” does not capture the fuller meaning from the Greek, “goods obtained through theft and held with an intensity greater than that with which the original owner held them”. Here the picture is that Jesus held greater riches than that of the whole world, but was not so enthralled by them that he was reluctant to set them aside.

The person who clings to his riches shows his greater trust in them or even himself and a proportionally lesser trust in God. In contrast, there are people who come to a point of considering suicide. They have often found attachment to life and the things of this world to be ultimately insufficiently worthy of trust. While suicide is often driven by pain, despondency, and disconnection, it does illustrate some of the superficial and insubstantial qualities of the world and their inability to ultimately provide fulfillment.

*And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: - Acts 14:15*

The vanities of the world to which the rich cling and the suicidal find inadequate are deceitful in that they are often taken to be the sum of all existence. In contrast we are called to turn from the illusions of the world to the reality of God, the eternal life he offers in Jesus, and the path of wisdom and truth.

*He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. - John 12:25*

Old age and failing health are often the only way we have of being motivated to consider that this world may not hold everything we need. Not only is this world passing away, but so are we.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. - Jim Elliot

The deceptiveness of riches is really a reflection of how we come to deceive ourselves. We place more value on the things which can provide ease, comfort, and pleasure, than we do on things of eternal value. Wealth both in prospect and in substance blinds us to the reality of a fallen world lost in sin and in desperate need of a Savior.

## Chapter 2 - Who is rich?

*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. - Matthew 6:21*

In Western society today the average welfare recipient lives a life of greater prosperity than most emperors and kings in history. Air conditioning and central heating, hot and cold running water, indoor plumbing, 24 hour entertainment, and health care more effective than leeches or blood letting.

It is difficult to talk about riches because most people think it is a subject that only applies to others. There are people with millions of dollars that think the word rich does not apply to them. In a way, the subject of “riches” has two hurdles to overcome. The first is that it applies to all of us and the second is that it is an internal condition rather than an external circumstance. It can be instructive to consider what happened to an entire nation that was deceived by riches.

Moses gave a warning to the nation of Israel when they were about to move into the land of Canaan. They were to inherit houses that did not need to be built, land that did not need to be cleared, vineyards, that did not need to be planted, and wells that did not need to be dug. Having been through forty years of hardship, they found it difficult to consider that their most difficult challenge lay before them, that of prosperity.

*And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. - Deuteronomy 6:10-12*

Here an entire population would be faced with sudden relative prosperity and ease (especially considering the privations of the previous 40 years in the wilderness). What happened to the nation of Israel can be instructive for us. First they got conned because they trusted in their own understanding even though God had given them several ways to know his will.

*And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation swore unto them. - Joshua 9:14-15*

Even after this blunder, they did not seek the counsel of the Lord, but wanted to use their own plans to “solve” the problem.

*And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them. And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us? Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God. - Joshua 9:21-23*

Slavery can look very attractive to the one who benefits from the labor of others. In a way, the labor of others can be seen as a type of riches. However, it is deceitful because apparent initial ease inclines us to not consider the long term corruptive effects.

*And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves. - Judges 3:5-7*

One way to measure “riches” can be obesity. In most of history obesity was limited to the wealthy as those who were poor had little time or resources to allocate to gluttony. The obesity epidemic of today is indicative of the relative widespread distribution of “riches”. Like the nation of Israel, we have used prosperity to indulge ourselves, forget to seek of the Lord, lean on our own understanding, and become seduced by false gods.

Further hindering our ability to see ourselves as vulnerable to the deceitfulness of riches is our being bombarded by political demagogues who incite hatred of “the rich” (meaning some other people). We can come to reflexively think that “rich” only applies to others. In all fairness many rich people acquired their wealth by less than noble means. However, listening to these almost constant exhortations can create in us discontent and even hatred and division besides blinding us to understanding that the dangers to the “rich” also include us.

To get a better idea of how the word “rich” might apply to us we should consider a group of people considered the opposite of “rich” in the bible.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:3*

At first glance the “blessedness” of being “poor in spirit” might seem elusive. The word used for “poor” is ptochos which means absolute poverty. The sound the word makes in Greek is the sound of someone spitting (it may have been customary in ancient Greece to spit on beggars). It implied someone who had absolutely nothing and no hope of ever having anything. It came to mean someone whose trust in the Lord was not in any way obstructed by pride, possessions, or possibilities.

*The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends. - Proverbs 14:20*

In contrast, those who might be considered “rich” would be anyone who had anything. If we cannot see ourselves as having “riches” we are unlikely to get any benefit from warnings regarding how these riches can harm us.

*To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. - Jeremiah 6:10*

For an example of how riches can cause harm when people are deceived, we can consider the post WWII generation. Almost en-mass they populated suburbia and raised their children with every possible indulgence and material prosperity that well meaning parents could provide. This produced a crop of self-indulgence manifest in the drug and sex revolutions as well as almost unprecedented self-righteousness and ingratitude.

The damage caused by prosperity at the societal level is plain to see. What is less clear is at the individual level,

*He who has an evil and covetous eye hastens to be rich and knows not that want will come upon him. - Proverbs 28:22*

Here we see that just the desire for wealth can result in a loss of discernment or blindness such that a man can become vulnerable to disadvantageous circumstances.

*He who is of a greedy spirit stirs up strife, but he who puts his trust in the Lord shall be enriched and blessed. - Proverbs 28:25*

Here we have described a consequence of greed, strife (or contention). It might be expected that one who eagerly seeks that which others also grasp after will find that he is entangled in disputes.

*He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; But he that hateth bribes shall live. - Proverbs 15:27*

Here is an intriguing statement that greed can cause trouble within a household. One might surmise that an elevated interest in gain might be accompanied by a proportional deemphasis on the importance of familial relationships. If people within a family feel that they are valued less than the things the family owns, they might become resentful.

*And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not. - 2 Peter 2:3*

Greed can lead people to deceive with words and use others as if they were disposable commodities. There are many other negative effects that cause riches to be deceitful. What is important is that we are aware that these influences can damage a life regardless of if the person has one million dollars, or just one.

*The righteousness of the upright [their rectitude in every area and relation] shall deliver them, but the treacherous shall be taken in their own iniquity and greedy desire. - Proverbs 11:6 AMP*

## Chapter 3 - The Roman Emperors, a study of the corruption of wealth.

In the book "An Outline of History" we are implored to be kind in our consideration of the Roman emperors by being asked to think how we would turn out if every desire we had from infancy was instantly fulfilled.

The Roman empire could be considered a centuries lasting Ponzi scheme. At the core a small group of people fed off the wealth brought in by expanding conquest. While marginal democratic ideals were favored early in the empire, the institution of emperors defined most of the rule of Rome. Depending on how they were counted, there were approximately 83 emperors. Of these 26 died of natural causes, 8 died in battle, 6 committed suicide, and 43 were murdered or executed. Being emperor could be considered hazardous to your health.

Rome could expand and prosper as long as there were wealthy neighbors to plunder. When the limits of geography, population, and wealth were reached, Rome faced two destructive forces. The first was similar to the starvation a parasite faces when the host dies. The second was the exposure of the intrinsic weakness of the Roman system, when that to which one has become addicted disappears, there is no "plan B". At a more basic level, when there was no more money to pay or provide for the soldiers, they were open to invasion.

The sale of captured lands, slaves, goods, and positions created an income stream that appeared to many to be unending. This highlights one aspect of the deceitfulness of riches, that of being narcotic (one requires increasing amounts and frequency).

"Just a little bit more." - John d. Rockefeller, in response to the question, "How much money is enough money?"

*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. - 1 Timothy 6:9*

Here just the desire to be rich results in lusts that entangle and carry one down a path of destruction and ruin. Even if one is successful in obtaining riches. there is a real physical danger in having that which others also lust after. The ostentatious display of wealth has led to more than one murder in history.

However, the additional dangers of having or even just seeking wealth are often not fully appreciated. The perversion, debauchery, and excesses for which the Roman emperors are so famous are not found among the poor as frequently or to such an extent. This is not necessarily because the poor are more noble, but more because poverty imposes limits and even a sort of discipline.

We have an example from the Tower of Babel where God limited the scope of use to which we could put our collective imagination.

*And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. - Genesis 11:6-7*

One can also see in the original curse that God was not so much punishing us with hard work, but setting limits so that our fallen nature would not have much chance to indulge itself.

*And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. - Genesis 3:17-19*

Modern life has largely achieved freedom from the limits God instituted for man. We have often used this freedom in the same way Roman emperors used theirs. Philosophers have long pondered the essential nature of man, is he essentially good or bad. One way to measure this is to see what people do when they are freed from restrictions and provided with surplus resources. The “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” of the 1960s seems to parallel the lives of the Roman emperors.

We might consider that the Roman emperors were not a uniquely flawed group of humans, but representative of that which is within all of us.

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? - Jeremiah 17:9*

To consider the natural orientation of the human heart, we should consider what the bible describes as works of the flesh.

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. - Galatians 5:19-21*

The current idea that man is basically good could only be plausibly presented in a Christian society such as Western Civilization. In Asia, the Mid East, or Africa such a foolish idea would not long be entertained.

*As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: - Romans 3:10*

It is easy to see in the Roman emperors a decadence and debauchery unique to themselves. However, we must overcome the tendency to see ourselves in such a favorable light that we deceive ourselves into thinking that we are not like them. Paul writes that the law was given to the nation of Israel to help them see that they could never keep it and were in need of a Redeemer.

Sadly many, like the Pharisees, thought they had kept all the law and thus had made themselves righteous. In a similar way, we are inclined to see ourselves as immune to the corruptions and deceit of riches, because we often come to think that we are not rich.

*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. - 1 Corinthians 6:9-11*

While most of us do not have armies at our command like Roman emperors, we do have access to even greater comforts than they enjoyed. Consequently we begin to experience the same delusional thinking, descents into perversion, and perpetual dissatisfaction.

The “deception” comes from thinking we are pursuing that which eases, frees, indulges, and satisfies. Only to discover that we have unleashed that within us that devours, enslaves, corrupts, destroys, and is never satisfied.

It is not so much the amount of damage we do to others. It is not even the amount of riches that we have. What matters more is the internal damage that changes us. The Roman emperors represent an extreme example. What is less discernable is the effect of the lies we come to tell ourselves to justify the harm we do others. It is a tragedy if one becomes deaf or loses his eyesight. However, the loss of the ability to discern truth, be sensitive to others, or trust in a Savior who died for us is so much greater a tragedy we should all weep when we see the effect of the deceitfulness of riches.

*Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. - James 5:1-5*

One does not need to be an emperor, banker, industrialist, or even business owner to be vulnerable to the deception of riches. One does not have to be a farmer who exploits agricultural workers. One can cheat on taxes or food stamps as well. Regardless of how much a person possesses, it is the power of selfishness that fuels the deceitfulness of riches.

The poison of selfishness destroys the world. - Catherine of Siena

## Chapter 4 - Can the Rich be Saved? - Industrial Camel Processing

*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. - Matthew 19:23-26*

Two thousand years after Jesus spoke these words we actually have technology that theoretically could liquefy a camel and push the resultant material through a small opening such as the eye of a needle. It would be very difficult, expensive, and time consuming, however, it is still illustrative of an almost impossible task.

From our perspective it is impossible for someone given over to riches (whether those riches have actually been obtained or not) to become free of the grip with which such lust can hold one.

It has been said that there are more people receptive to hearing about Jesus in prisons and hospitals than in country clubs. Riches and the desire for riches come to be seen as an alternative god. They seem to offer provision, protection, and security even to the point where just the idea of God is seen as laughably anachronistic, a sort of an embarrassing legacy of a heritage considered primitive and superstitious,

*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: - 1 Corinthians 1:26-28*

Riches are deceitful because they lead us to first consider God less important than what riches could provide. We can then come to forget about God. We can even come to intentionally reject any consideration of God. The illustration of a camel going through the eye of a needle attempts to picture how unlikely it is that any of the people who have come to be so distant from their creator to ever consider their need for a Savior. Yet God is still all powerful and can bring anyone to himself.

*The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: - Daniel 4:33-34*

Here in the dealing God had with Nebuchadnezzar, we see an example of how “with God all things are possible”. It is also an illustration of how intense a divine intervention needs to be to penetrate the delusion of self-sufficiency we can create for ourselves.



## Chapter 5 - Is it Possible That We Are Actually Rich?

While we usually think about “those” rich people and how difficult it is for “them” to respond to the life that Jesus calls them to, we need to remember that the biblical admonitions regarding riches apply to anyone who elevates their possessions and even desires over God.

We might not be guilty of active hostility towards God. We might not be so smug and arrogant as to think we have no need of God. However, we may find that we are too busy to spend much time in his word, seeking out and knowing brothers and sisters in Christ to see if they have any needs to which we can minister, or seeking out older and wiser Christians from whom we can learn to grow more fully into the image of Christ.

*And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. - Luke 11:7*

If we are reluctant to be inconvenienced when asked, how much more unlikely that we would actively seek out those who might need our ministry. The rich young ruler was reluctant to surrender his wealth. Are not we similarly reluctant to surrender our time to minister to others or expend the effort to seek out those from whom we might learn and grow. The riches of Nebuchadnezzar are obvious. However can we equal his sense of self-sufficiency with what we possess.

We can hoard our time and effort as stingily as the worst miser grasps his gold. God can use drastic measures to call back those who have become so woven into the fabric of the world that they have become almost useless for the work the Lord would have for them. Getting laid off, losing a house to foreclosure, being unjustly accused, or having health problems are all ways God can use to turn us away from that to which we cling.

*And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. - Hebrews 12:5*

Self-assessment and reflection are good ways to avoid any corrective methods the Lord might employ to gain our attention as well as determine if we have followed riches away from God. If we include how we use our time as well as our attention, we may come to find that we have “riches” of which we had little awareness.

*Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. - 2 Corinthians 13:5a AMP*

We need to pay attention to our Christian life particularly in regard to where we fall short. Rather than reflexively disregarding consideration that warnings and admonitions about riches can apply to us as well as the “rich”, we should seek of the Lord to bring to our mind that which needs correction.

*For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. - 1 Corinthians 11:31*

## Chapter 6 - All that Glitters is not Gold.

*And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. - Luke 12:15*

Jesus gave this warning to a man who was concerned for his inheritance. The warning exposes another aspect of the deceitfulness of riches. Contrasting the number of things that one possesses with one's own life. Here one can see that a desire for things can lead a person to lose sight of the value of his own life.

In touching on the subject of value, Jesus describes the ultimate accounting;

*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? - Mark 8:36*

While possessions have the ability to assuage anxieties and provide comforts, in the end they all pass away. True riches would be that which one can carry with them into eternity.

*And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. - 1 John 2:17*

The word "drugs" is generally taken to mean those families of chemicals that can be used to produce a specific effect in people. In medical practice, this is usually some therapeutic effect. However, in the larger world, the sensations of pleasure or just mind numbing tranquility have such a value that almost any price will be paid for even the brief short term effect they produce.

*Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. - Proverbs 23:29*

The consequences of alcohol are well known. Yet people still pursue it. How much more will people entangle themselves in the pursuit of riches, when the negative consequences are far less discernable. If we consider again Paul's words to Timothy;

*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. - 1 Timothy 6:10*

The apparent mixed metaphor of falling into a snare and drowning may be better understood as a sequence of events. Beginning with a desire, temptations are encountered which entangle like a snare. This is compounded by lusts which lead to destruction and perdition so complete as to be seen as being covered such as with burial or drowning. This process has two components "temptations" and "lusts" that accelerate one down a path whose end is "destruction". It could be seen as similar to one who falls into quicksand.

It is interesting that it is not just greed or the desire to be rich that drives this destructive process. The “many lusts” that are spawned from this essentially compound the destructive forces that can take someone almost as a captive to his destruction. Frequently the desire for power, fame, and prominence work in parallel with greed.

It is interesting that these corruptive dynamics do not require wealth, just the desire for it. It can be seen in anyone. For example, from someone who might participate in a pyramid scheme, buy a lottery ticket, make a hostile takeover of a corporation, or rob a liquor store.

An example of a destructive “lust” that might seem disconnected from greed could be the destructive characteristics of a narcissist (the desire to control others, have everyone “respect” him, or acknowledge his “superiority”). The emergence of additional lusts can confuse the identification of the original triggering lust for riches.

*The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the willful contrariness and crookedness of the treacherous shall destroy them. - Proverbs 11:3*

The Christian has the opportunity to avail himself of resources such as wisdom, discernment, knowledge of truth, and the very Spirit of God to guide his path. Those given over to the desires of the flesh are like a blind man on a precipice.

It is not just riches (things that glitter) that can seduce a Christian on a destructive path. He can be flattered, drawn into pride so that he thinks he is doing “God’s work”, or convinced (like the Pharisees) that he has achieved righteousness through his own accomplishments.

For the Christian, the key to not being seduced by various lusts is the ability to see truth. The key to being able to see truth is humility.

*And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. - Luke 18:13*

Humility allows God to fill us with grace.

*But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. - James 4:6*

Freedom (including freedom from destructive lusts) comes from truth.

*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. - John 8:31-32*

When we can look at ourselves and the world through the filter of truth, things that glitter” (even gold) become less attractive as we can understand the real cost of such things. We do not need a bigger car, and fancy house, or the best schools. Rather we need the love of Christ to wash away our sins and to trust in his provision.

## Chapter 7 - Who's the Boss?

People with surplus wealth begin to spend it on things they think they will enjoy. However, it slowly becomes apparent that the time and money they spend protecting, repairing, maintaining, and even using these assets almost makes them servants of that which they ostensibly own.

Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one. --Benjamin Franklin

One particular aspect of the deceitfulness of riches is that while one thinks he is gaining, he is really losing. Sometimes the wealthy hire someone to manage their affairs so that they can be free of the entanglements that riches often bring. However, it is not uncommon for those who have gained stewardship of others resources to begin to find ways to divert some into their own pockets.

Fretting over the threat of money loss, the demands of asset management, and even the worries about those who have been entrusted with your wealth can create even greater anxiety than one had before he was well off.

*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. - Philippians 4:6*

Riches and possessions are uncertain. Trust in them will ultimately fail. Trust in God who is unchanging, eternal, and merciful relieves us from unnecessary worry and anxiety. The anxieties associated with riches reflect their ultimate source, ourselves. The Hollywood starlet may think her looks will never fail. The rock star may feel that his inspiration will never cease, the executive may feel that his talents will always be recognized, the office sycophant may think his loyalty will always be rewarded, the welfare recipient may think his dole will constantly increase.

No matter what it is in which we trust, if it is other than God, it is ultimately only a reflection of ourselves and ultimately unreliable. At some level we often know this and can come to work like slaves to sustain that which we have acquired. All of this effort and anxiety to serve that which is not worthy of our trust is truly sad.

*for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. - Romans 14:23b*

*Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. - John 8:34*

An aspect of the deceitfulness of riches is misplaced faith. One might consider that we are ultimately brought to the state of "servant" by having failed to place our trust in God.

*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. - John 8:31-32*

## Chapter 8 - Fair weather friends

Too many people spend money they earned..to buy things they don't want..to impress people that they don't like. --Will Rogers

Drugs are not the only source of pleasurable sensations. Adulation, flattery, and being sought after can be equally enjoyable and even equally addictive. Having things others want attracts all sorts of attention.

*A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet. - Proverbs 29:5*

*They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. - Psalm 12:2*

Another aspect of the deceitfulness of riches is that one can be fooled by covetousness disguised as friendship. Most of the world systems are constructed of false friendships, insincere alliances, and people making use of other people.

*I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD. - Psalm 31:6*

The world is run by a network of flatterers all seeking to gain advantage for themselves. Like bullies, they are obsequious to those in power or with money, but brutal to those who are in their way or not of use to them. We are made vulnerable to the effects of flattery in proportion to our distance from truth.

Flattery is a counterfeit money which, but for vanity, would have no circulation. --François de la Rochefoucauld

He that loves to be flattered is worthy of the flatterer. --William Shakespeare

Riches can lay before us as an open invitation to get what we want, enlist the labor of others, exert control over circumstances, or shape the future. This aspect of deception strongly competes with faith as trust in God can seem abstract and distant when what seems so obvious and concrete a foundation for trust is right before us. However, it is when we distance ourselves from God that we become even more vulnerable to deception.

*Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way. - Psalm 119:37*

Modern life has produced a weakened family structure and replaced much of it with a stronger social structure. However, it is a sort of unhealthy social dependence where we come to make determinations often based on the opinions of those around us. We are raised in an environment that weakens independent thought and evaluation. Thus we are even more vulnerable to the words of flatterers.

*Do not be so deceived and misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character. - 1 Corinthians 15:33 Amp*

## Chapter 9 - Gaining a Competitive Edge

*Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. - Mark 12:40*

Another deceitful element of riches is the extent to which rationalization and justification can be employed to excuse almost any act including the exploitation of the weak and vulnerable such as widows.

*WOE TO those [judges] who issue unrighteous decrees, and to the magistrates who keep causing unjust and oppressive decisions to be recorded, To turn aside the needy from justice and to make plunder of the rightful claims of the poor of My people, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! And what will you do in the day of visitation [of God's wrath], and in the desolation which shall come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you deposit [for safekeeping] your wealth and with whom leave your glory? - Isaiah 10:1-3 Amp*

Most people can look at a situation and see if there is a potential for gain. Those who give little consideration as to who might be harmed are similar to those who give little consideration to risk. The persistence and temporary success of “pyramid schemes” testify to the willingness of people to be drawn into risk by their assessment that others could be similarly exploited.

The potential for gain blinds the greedy to both risk to themselves and harm to others. Even Christians can come to see disadvantage to others as their own fault for not being “competitive”. This is more common among those who have embraced the political philosophy of Libertarianism. The attraction of this view is that it seems to justify the idea that one is entitled to whatever one can get and that those who fall short in this Darwinian arena deserve their fate because they were not clever enough, strong enough, or ruthless enough to contend for what was there for the taking. The main problem with this philosophy is that it is difficult to limit it so that it does not extend to justify the actions of thieves and murderers.

The problem with this sort of deception is that seldom will those held captive by it ever even consider that they do not see clearly.

*And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth. - John 9:40-41*

While the greedy seek after riches, those who have obtained them, even in small measure, often come to have a distorted view of themselves and drift increasingly further from truth.

*The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out. - Proverbs 28:11*

*But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? - 1 John 3:17*

## Chapter 10 - False gods

*Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: - Colossians 3:5*

The tenth commandment has a list of things we are not to covet (lust after). One could add that the seventh and eighth commandments (adultery and stealing) also include coveting. In Colossians coveting is equated to idolatry (commandments one and two). One can make a case that at least half of the ten commandments relate to wrongful desires of the heart.

While most people think of some stone statue or primitive tribal ritual as idolatry. What is often less appreciated is how often we in the modern world practice idolatry and do not even recognize it as such. For example, many consider getting a good education and securing a favorable position in life to be responsible. However, if one considers the fear of failing in school or losing one's job, one may begin to measure the degree to which we see these activities as that in which we trust over the trust we have in our Savior.

One measure of the deceitfulness of riches can be the more sure offer of security we see in them as opposed to what we perceive God can offer.

*And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. - Luke 12:29-30*

What God offers often seems to be ephemeral and insubstantial especially when contrasted with what appears to be the concrete, immediate, and tangible results that can be achieved with riches.

In a similar way to that of some ancient people who placed their children in a fire to obtain from the god Molech a favorable harvest, we can see in abortion and birth control, public education, and cable TV opportunities to both reduce the burden of children and obtain a more comfortable life for ourselves. We may think ourselves distant and even superior to the primitive people of the nation of Israel, yet we should ask ourselves if we have not also gone after strange gods?

*But mingled themselves with the nations, And learned their works, And served their idols, Which became a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto demons, And shed innocent blood, Even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, Whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with blood. - Psalm 106:35-38*

We may not think of the everyday activities in which we participate, our way of thinking, or the actions we take as being particularly idolatrous. However, we need to consider all that we say, do, and think that is apart from God.

*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. - Galatians 5:14*

To understand biblical love, the type of love that Jesus showed for us when he died for our sins, we should consider the biblical definition of love;

*Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

Essentially love consists of selflessness. God is love and calls us to show love. This is very alien to the course of the world. To the extent we seek after self, we draw ourselves further away from God. It is self that is at the heart of covetousness and greed. But beyond that, it is reflective of a lack of trust in God and a heightened trust in self.

*But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. - Matthew 6:33*

Equating covetousness with idolatry gets to the core of why riches are deceitful. Love serves God by setting aside self. Covetousness reflects a hunger to feed self. Love is giving and being full, covetousness is consuming and never being satisfied. All life is from God, especially eternal life. Riches, like idolatry, deceive us that we are independent from God and free from any restriction.

*The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. - Isaiah 44:13-17*

Trusting in a carved piece of wood to save us is as foolish as trusting in a savings account, one's social position, government support, or even health. They can all vanish in a moment and none last into eternity. Like the carpenter, we make "gods" of all the various things we think will save us. We are better advised to give up all our deceptions and trust in false "gods".

*But Jehovah is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting King: at his wrath the earth trembleth, and the nations are not able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens.- Jeremiah 10:10-11*



## Chapter 11 - Riches, the Thirst That is Never Satisfied

*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. - Ecclesiastes 5:10*

An object in possession seldom retains the same charm that it had in pursuit. –Pliny the Younger

You say, 'If I had a little more, I should be very satisfied.' You make a mistake. If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled. --Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The word “habituation” is used to describe how someone gets used to something. Money can be seen as similar to drugs, getting some usually makes you want more. While riches can deceive us even before we ever get any, actually getting some can start a process of reinforcement that locks our thinking into patterns of acquisition that make consideration of other things increasingly less likely.

*Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied. - Proverbs 27:20*

We have a continual appetite for food because our body depletes the nutrients we consume and additional quantities are required. If we derive a pleasurable sensation from the consumption of food, it is possible to over-eat because we have combined both a nutritional need and a desire to experience a pleasurable sensation. In a similar way, we work to obtain the money we need to sustain our existence (food, rent, clothing, etc.). However, we can also derive a pleasurable sensation from buying things or having beyond necessity. Like over-eating, we may not be able to determine where we cross over to an unhealthy pursuit of “riches”.

It is when appetites for pleasurable sensations are indulged that narcotic effects are first noticed. A person can ride a roller coaster and experience all sorts of sensations. However, if one rides the roller coaster a second time, the experience is diminished and the expectation of sensation is partially unfulfilled contributing to what can be a growing “hunger”.

*Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. - Proverbs 23:20-21*

When a person forms in his mind that he needs what riches can provide, his hunger becomes a funnel excluding temperance or balance. God is forgotten, others are ignored, and all that is left is a consuming “self”. Even in the unlikely event riches are actually obtained, the consuming hunger is never satiated and only grows ever larger.

*But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. - 1 Timothy 5:6*

## Chapter 12 - "Choking the word"

*He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. - Matthew 13:22*

In the specific example of the deceitfulness of riches Jesus describes one effect as "choking the word". This point deserves special attention. Life consists of more than avoiding doing wrong. The Christian draws his life from God's word.

*And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. - Luke 4:4*

Jesus is also called the "word of God".

*And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. - Revelation 19:11-13*

We have the ability to make to the word of God ineffective.

*Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. - Mark 7:13*

God would have us grow in faith and dependence upon him. Those who seek after riches neglect trust in God and grow in trust of self and the belief that riches will sustain them. It is when we cripple our faith in God, that we lose the effectiveness of his word in our lives.

There is a life to which we as Christians are called, Christ-likeness. This is growing to maturity in truth and love. We can only follow this path by humility and faithful dependence on God guiding us. When we abandon this path to serve the flesh and the world, we cut ourselves off from access to wisdom, truth, discernment, and grace. The path of self grows increasingly darker as we become distant from Jesus.

*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. - John 14:6*

One might think of the world as a minefield. There are all sorts of hazards and dangers we can encounter. Those pursuing riches find they are not able to avoid these dangers and are even drawn to them. Whereas the Christian who has escaped to deceptions of riches is able to draw from the word of God illumination to negotiate past the hazards of the world.

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. - Psalm 119:105*

## Chapter 13 - Two Masters

There are certain activities that dovetail or are synergistic. For example when a person goes to the grocery store, he may pick up eggs as well as milk. These two objectives combine in efficiency. However, there are other activities that not only do not mesh, but are in active opposition to each other.

*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. - Matthew 6:24*

It is interesting to note that even though many consider the pursuit of “mammon” (wealth) to be liberating, the bible still calls it “serving”. It is not just that these pursuits are in different directions, they shape the traveler in different ways. The person seeking after God is called to surrender self and even his very life.

*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. - Matthew 10:37-39*

The person seeking after wealth is not on a path to surrender, but to acquire. It is our “taking in” that inflates self and diverts us away from truth and God.

*If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above. - Job 31:28*

The world has a particular idea of what constitutes “success”. God offers a completely different one.

*Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. - Luke 6:22-23*

*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. - 2 Timothy 3:12*

*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. - John 15:19*

*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. - 1 John 2:16*

## Chapter 14 - Resource management

Some come to possess wealth without seeking it such as with inheritance or windfall. For the Christian a question arises as to how the resources that constitute wealth are to be administered. There will be no end to those who would suggest ways and reasons to distribute wealth. Some going so far as to advocate communism.

*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; - Acts 2:44*

However, the example of the early church in Jerusalem is not so much an example of the preferred method of church organization as it is an example of surviving persecution. We know from the example of the blind man's parents that there was fear of being expelled from the synagogue. This most likely also entailed social and economic ostracization. As the pooled money was exhausted, the church survived through contributions from other churches.

We understand that there is a principle of being responsible to provide support for one's own family.

*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. - 1 Timothy 5:8*

We also know that wealth administration can involve investment.

*Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. - Matthew 25:27*

There are requirements for charity.

*Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. - Romans 12:13*

There is also a principle to invest in the world after this one.

*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. - 1 Timothy 6:17-19*

Sometimes adversity for some Christians is an opportunity for others to minister to them and in so doing obtain heavenly reward. God's grace provides the sufficiency for our ministry.

*But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: - 2 Corinthians 9:6-8*

## Chapter 15 - Ambition Beyond Money

“Riches” can refer to things other than money. Those who seek fame, power, position, or influence also are subject to the deceitful influences of their ambitions. Similar to how romance might metastasize into stalking, self-seeking ambition can wreck a life even if greed per se is not a major component.

*But for those who are self-seeking and self-willed and disobedient to the Truth but responsive to wickedness, there will be indignation and wrath. - Romans 2:8 AMP*

Those who turn away from God make themselves into a sort of mini gods and seek to honor each other rather than God.

*How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? - John 5:44*

One of the reasons we have the Old Testament recorded for us is that we can be presented with a rather lengthy history illustrating what happens when people turn away from God.

*And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. - 1 Corinthians 10:4-14*

The bible equates covetousness (including greed) with idolatry. It can be difficult for a Christian to recognize to what extent his ambitions have carried him from his Savior.

*Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. - John 12:42-43*

The Christian is well advised to follow the advice given to Timothy and renounce those inclinations we have that elevate self and carry us far from God.

*Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. - 2 Timothy 2:22*

## Chapter 16 — Bad company

*But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. - 1 Corinthians 5:11*

With families so diminished and fractured at this point in history, the influence of neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances is greatly enhanced over times past. The Christian needs to be aware of just how different the unsaved are and how infectious their patterns of behavior and thinking can be.

*But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: - 2 Peter 2:10-14*

There is a modern mask of civility that is a cultural legacy of when Western Civilization was more Christian. As more and more people in Western countries repudiate Christ, this mask fades away. What is exposed is a more accurate reflection of the nature of man without Christ.

*For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: - 1 Peter 4:3*

When there was more simulation of Christian virtue as cultural conduct, it was easier to be taken in by those who were not really Christian. Now that pretense and even accommodation is ending, Christians have a more clear choice to make.

*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. - Romans 12:2*

*For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. - Galatians 1:10*

*My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. - Proverbs 1:10*

*The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe. - Proverbs 29:25*

## Chapter 17 True Riches

*If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, how will ye commit to your trust the true riches? - Luke 16:11*

While we are on earth we can accumulate all sorts of things even amounting to “riches”. However, none of these things will be of any value once we leave this earth.

*For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. - 1 Timothy 6:7*

If we are going to get serious about our Christian life, we should understand that there are rewards for faithful service much greater than the rewards for worldly pursuits.

*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 3:14*

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. - Matthew 6:19-21*

Consider what we can know about the life after this one.

*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. - 1 Corinthians 3:11-14*

*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. - 2 Timothy 4:8*

Worldly riches are acquired by ambition, cleverness, and even ruthlessness. Heavenly riches are acquired by just the opposite, giving of oneself, dependence on God, and faithfulness. It is God who equips and provides for us. He has works for us to do and for which he gives us rewards.

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. - Ephesians 2:10*

We have no need of worldly recognition as we serve him who knows everything.

*That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. - Matthew 6:4*

## Chapter 18 Summary

When considering how riches are deceitful, we can observe the following;

1. We become short sighted.
2. We can think that only riches are necessary for survival.
3. We can think that riches define all of existence.
4. Our faith in God is ultimately transferred to ourselves.
5. We become vulnerable to various temptations.
6. We bring forth various additional lusts.
7. We are brought to ruin by debased character.
8. We become targets of thieves.
9. We become targets of false friends.
10. We become entangled with the world.
11. We become slaves of what we own.
12. We become disconnected from wisdom, discernment, and truth.
13. We see ourselves more highly than we ought.
14. Desire is let loose like drug addiction.
15. The elevation of self increases isolation.
16. Comforts drive out thoughts of God.
17. Stirring up contention and strife.
18. Poor family relations.
19. Acclimation to wealth reduces the ability to survive adversity.
20. Just wanting to be rich causes other destructive lusts to arise as well.
21. We can come to think that we should control others.
22. We can come to a perspective of entitlement to justify any action.

*For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. - Matthew 13:15*

In the parable of the sower (where the deceitfulness of riches is mentioned) Jesus describes why he taught the lesson first as a parable before explaining it to his disciples. He explains that it is because the people had allowed their heart, ears, and eyes (essentially their entire being) to become disconnected from any interest in God.

The idea is of an incremental process over time of a willful disinterest in God that is recognized by God and as a consequence, any explanation that might produce understanding is withheld. In a way, people are kept in a prison of ignorance until such time as they turn their hearts and minds back towards God.

*And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. - Isaiah 59:20*



The idea of “turning” from transgression is captured again later when John the Baptist calls those in the nation of Israel to “repent” (change their minds and turn again to the legacy they have of the knowledge of God and the covenant of promise so that it would be manifest in their actions).

*Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. - Luke 3:7-8*

As Christians we can take from this example an understanding that complacency that leads us to drift into a sort of sleep-walking worldliness results not only in our distance from our Savior, but in the accumulation (“waxed gross”) of layers of insensitivity to any illumination of the deceptions that can entangle us.

We might say that we have been baptized or are members of a church only to discover that it sounds very much like those Jews who claimed favored status by being “children of Abraham”.

Riches are deceitful, but so are pride, fame, prominence, greed, fear, envy, or anything that rises in our life to divert us from humble and faithful dependence on our Savior.

# Walking by the Spirit

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. - Galatians 5:25*

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## Chapter 1 - Human Anatomy

Knowing how we are made can help us understand how we should live - Anonymous

*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. - 1 Thessalonians 5:23*

If we want to know how to walk in the Spirit, we should first consider the three main components of human existence, the body, soul, and spirit. The body is something we are very familiar with. We are born with it and haul it around with us until we die. Often it deteriorates significantly before actual physical death.

The soul is something a little more difficult to understand as it is not observable such as when we see the body in a mirror.

The Hebrew term for “soul” is nephesh and it is found more than 780 times in the Old Testament. It is not always translated into English word “soul.” The KJV uses 28 different words to translate the word. Nephesh, therefore, signifies different things, depending upon the context of the verse.

Similarly, in the Greek New Testament, the original word for “soul” is psuche, found 103 times. Our modern word “psychology” derives from this Greek term. “Soul” may signify merely an individual person, his life, or the mental and emotional facilities that can exist apart from the physical body.

*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. - Hebrews 4:12*

Here we have a indication of the difficulty in separating an understanding of soul from spirit. Both the words soul and spirit refer to parts of human existence that are immaterial. It can be confusing especially when contrasting the material with the immaterial to see the distinction.

It can be helpful to consider the soul as where the mind, emotions, desires, and affections reside.

*Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor? - Job 30:25*

*(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) - 2 Peter 2:8*

*And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation. - Psalm 35:9*

If we consider just the body and soul, we can see material and immaterial components. It is when we try to differentiate the spirit, that it becomes more difficult.

## Chapter 2 - A Working Hypothesis

It may be helpful to construct a working model of our constituent parts to use in considering how we as Christians are to respond to and walk by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If we think of Adam and Even as being created with a bodies, souls, and spirits, we can see that Satan appealed to the desire of the soul and first tempted Eve to sin and subsequently Adam chose to sin. They had been warned by God that on the day they sinned, they would “die”. One can see a picture of everyone born physically since then as having a “dead” or ineffective spirit.

*Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) - Ephesians 2:5*

We can think of being “born again” or receiving eternal life by the spirit of Christ in us as the moment when we cross from death to life.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. - John 5:24*

*But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. - Romans 8:9*

*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? - John 3:7-10*

It is interesting to note that it was expected that as a teacher Nicodemus should have understood that it was needful for a “birth” to restore that which could then receive eternal life.

Those who have not been “born again” are unable to have eternal life and come into judgment. After having been judged according their works they suffer for their sins and ultimately suffer the “second death”.

*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. - Matthew 10:28*

*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. - Revelation 20:6*

It is helpful to view our spirit as something which was dead or inactive and by virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit has been made alive.

*You have been regenerated (born again), not from a mortal origin (seed, sperm), but from one that is immortal by the ever living and lasting Word of God. - 1 Peter 1:23*

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. - 2 Corinthians 5:17*

This new creation (the Christian with a regenerated spirit) is configured with a body that interacts with the physical world and a spirit which interacts with God. In between these two is his soul where choices are made that influence whether the body has a more worldly or spiritual orientation.

People without this spiritual regeneration (those who are not Christian) are compelled by the influences of the old sinful nature (called the “flesh”). These are those that Satan can organize to accomplish his goals.

*And that they may come to their senses [and] escape out of the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him, - 2 Timothy 2:26a AMP*

*Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: - Ephesians 2:2*

Many of those who declare their hostility towards God and reject him thinking themselves free, come evermore under the control of Satan who despises them and desires to use them as pawns to advance his own plans. These sad people (dead in their sins) having no hope of eternal life have no way (unless God in his mercy should intervene) to recognize much less accept the truth.

*How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. - Jude 1:18-19*

*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. - 1 Corinthians 2:14*

*But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. - Matthew 15:18-20*

Sometimes the word “heart” is used to refer to the actual physical heart (cardia). However, often it is used to refer to what might be considered an appendage to the soul. It can be thought of as a repository for those things we hold as integral to our life. It can sort of work as an “automatic pilot” from which we are inclined to act in one way or another.

*Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: - 2 Peter 2:14*

Here we see that the heart can though “exercise” become filled with that which inclines actions and even thoughts. In this case towards evil.

In contrast to the “automatic pilot” influence on our lives that our heart exercises through the soul, there is the “manual control” that is our mind. Here we evaluate, consider, reflect, and conclude. It can be easier and more comfortable to go through life sort of on “cruise control” being directed by what we have allowed in our heart. However, the Christian is called to a life of intentional control by which the heart can be purged of its old inclinations and sort of reprogrammed with that which can be drawn from the Spirit.

*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. - Romans 12:2*

While we can visualize the mind and heart as part of the soul, it is less clear to see how our old nature operates.

*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. - Romans 6:1*

It seems that there are material elements to this nature (“body of sin”, the flesh) as well as immaterial elements (what was put to death at salvation). It seems as if our new birth resulting in salvation in some way disables the compulsive aspect of our old nature. As a result, we are freed from the power of sin, but not the influence. While some verses emphasize that we are free from the compelling nature of sin, the Christian desiring to walk by the power of the Holy Spirit has to understand that there is still within us something that opposes this effort.

*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. - Galatians 5:17*

When we Christians face our own inclination to sin, it can help to understand that there is some physical component in our body as well as an immaterial component in our soul that resists the intention of our mind to follow Christ.

*WHAT LEADS to strife (discord and feuds) and how do conflicts (quarrels and fightings) originate among you? Do they not arise from your sensual desires that are ever warring in your bodily members? - James 4:1 AMP*

It can be frustrating, especially for new Christians, to read about the peace, love, and joy that the Christian life should offer and yet somehow feel cheated because it isn’t experienced. The reason for this is that often there is much we need to learn, understand, practice, and change.

*My little children, for whom I am again suffering birth pangs until Christ is completely and permanently formed (molded) within you, - Galatians 4:19 AMP*

## Chapter 3 - Perfect Harmony

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. - Matthew 22:37*

God would have us live a holy life. The commandment to “love” God is more than a suggestion that we make a brief expression of affection. Love in the biblical sense is selflessness. One might think of it as the complete surrender of any self-interest.

*Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

Resisting this command to love God is every inclination of our old nature to serve self. Paul describes clearly the frustration of dealing with this inclination;

*For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise. But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. - Romans 7:18-20*

Paul also tells us the solution;

*Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? - Romans 7:24*

Here we see that the solution to our sinful nature is no so much a “how” or a “what”, but a “who”. The solution is a new nature that comes through the regeneration of our spirit by the work of the Holy Spirit as a result of our faith in Jesus.

*And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: - Ephesians 4:11-13*

Here we see the plan of our salvation and regeneration, that we mature to the “fullness of Christ”.

*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. - James 3:17-18*

There is a process of Christian growth and maturity that we are supposed to follow as we mature in Christ. Similar to planting a crop, the Christian is to grow to produce a harvest accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. - Galatians 5:22-23*

## Chapter 4 - Falling Short

*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? - 1 Corinthians 3:1-3*

It can be confusing for Christians to read about the love, peace, unity, and harmony to which we are called and resolve it with the strife, arguments, and worldliness so observable in most of actual Christian practice.

Being “carnal” means “of the flesh” or the old nature. When a person becomes a Christian, he gets a new nature, but that does not mean the old one disappears. The re-emergence of the influence of the old nature can be seen in the letter Paul wrote the Galatians.

*Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? - Galatians 3:3*

The Galatians had accepted the instruction of “experts” from Jerusalem who were telling them they needed to add Jewish practices such as circumcision to their Christian walk. It is instructive to consider what happened in Galatia because it is so representative of how we can come to be diverted into walking in the flesh.

The Galatians were not seeking to do evil. They were probably not even aware that what they were doing was wrong. They probably had a sincere desire to be faithful to do what was right. They let themselves be deceived by those claiming the authority to tell them what was right.

We live in a society that de-emphasizes personal responsibility to such a degree that even criminals often think that their crimes were not their fault. Given such a social environment, it can be even more difficult to consider that the Galatians are taken to task and held accountable for their individual failure in discernment and vigilance to remain faithful.

It is interesting to note that church members are not held blameless because they were misled by their “leadership”. Here is an important difference between modern church practice and that of the New Testament times, the idea that church membership requires unquestioning acceptance of prepackaged dogma and compliant observance of established practices has more in common with the Pharisees than the early church.

Almost all failure to walk by the Spirit can be traced back to getting diverted into some variation of walking in the flesh. At first glance the failure of the Galatians may be seen as choosing the wrong doctrine (an emphasis on works). However, at a deeper level the failure was a surrender of their individual responsibility to seek, evaluate and find truth.

Underlying and leading to the act of being misled into walking by the flesh instead of the Spirit was a sort of spiritual laziness that made the Galatians vulnerable to false teachings. One of the quickest ways to drift from the path of walking by the Spirit is to switch to a sort of “automatic pilot” type of Christian life. In contrast a Christian life of active seeking and evaluating provides protection from deception.



*And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. - Acts 17:10-11*

In contrast to the Galatians who could be misled, the Christians in Berea were actively seeking and evaluating truth. The process of Christian growth that the Holy Spirit would have us undertake, requires our active participation.

*Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. - Hebrews 5:11-14*

Here we have a description of a condition more familiarly known as a “lapse”. The example of Hebrews is one of losing spiritual ground through a failure to “exercise”. The resulting growth of “dullness” is a regression such that they are described as having to start over in their Christian life.

The failure of the Hebrews is one of neglecting salvation as a result of finding others things of more interest, value, and attraction. We can learn important lessons from the Hebrews and Galatians as the same things that happened to them can happen to us and for the same reasons.

*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; - Hebrews 2:1-3*

All too often we let “slip” away the riches in Christ for the comforts of the flesh. It is understandable, but not necessary as God has provided the means to overcome the flesh.

*Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. - Mark 14:38*

## Chapter 5 - Biblical walking

*Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. - Exodus 16:4*

Even though God had promised Abraham he would make a nation out of his descendants, the nation of Israel was still on probation. God became so angry with the nation of Israel, he was tempted to exterminate them and create a new nation from Moses.

*Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. - Exodus 32:10*

If one considers “walking” as how one conducts one’s life, we can see that God desired that Israel would adapt themselves to the law that they had agreed to follow when the covenant was established and the ten commandments received. Israel would be negligent if they failed to do this. However, they would be rebellious if they adopted an entirely different “walk”.

*And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them. - Leviticus 20:23*

Unfortunately Israel refused to follow the “walk” they had agreed to and it was only after the nation had been taken captive to Babylon for 70 years that they finally gave up the practice (walk) of idolatry.

*Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. - Isaiah 42:24*

Here we see a differentiation between walking in the ways of the Lord and obeying his laws. This seems to be lost on the later Pharisees as they made a religion of rule following that ironically carried them away from faithfulness to God.

What may not be fully appreciated is that obedience and law keeping are like the tip of the iceberg. They are an effect of something deeper. The Pharisees mistakenly considered rule following to be the entirety of what God desired.

*But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. - Matthew 9:13*

Jesus instructed the Pharisees that they were mistaken to focus on just the superficial. He pointed to deeper truths that were essential to please God.

*For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. - Hosea 6:6*

Hosea speaks in the context of the failures of Ephraim and Judah (the divided nation of Israel) and the frustration of God with their rebellion. If one looks only at external actions, one can miss the inclination of the heart from which actions arise. For example, the actions of the Pharisees appeared to be righteous.

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. - Matthew 23:27-28*

Perhaps the most iconic of the laws that was given to the nation of Israel was circumcision. It becomes almost emblematic for identification with the law. It was key to how the Galatians were being turned away from walking by the Spirit to walking by the flesh. However, the more important issue of faith is used to show its centrality over even the observance of a key element of law.

*And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. - Romans 4:12*

Here we have the core of our “walk”, faith. The conduct of our lives is only an echo or reflection of that in which we trust. If we trust in our flesh, our actions will show a pursuit of pride, lust, or other selfish inclination. If we trust in God, our actions should reflect the degree of that trust (strength of that faith). Too many Christians follow the example of the Pharisees and attempt to do “good” using the power of their own strength (the flesh). As Christians we cannot “do good” but only allow God to work good through us. This is facilitated by the work of the Holy Spirit.

*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. - Philippians 2:13*

Our walk should not reflect our accomplishments, but our trusting in God to work in and through us. When we trust in the flesh, we do not have the ability to see any alternatives. We distance ourselves from God and quench his Spirit. As we draw nearer to our Savior, we begin to see with clarity, the path he would have us walk.

*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. - John 8:12*

For example, the person who follows Christ may abstain from alcohol, not so much because it is “evil” or can cause much pain for others, but more because the light of Jesus illuminates a path where the sensations alcohol can produce hold no attraction.

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; - Ephesians 5:18-19*

Too often we allow the inclination of the flesh to direct our walk. We sort of operate on automatic pilot. We are not to sleep walk though life but “seek the Lord while he may be found”.

## Chapter 6 - Waking up

*Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. - Ephesians 5:14*

The first step in walking by the Spirit is to recognize that we need to. There are many life experiences that can serve to jolt us out of complacency such as the death of a loved one, loss of employment or reputation, health problems, divorce, or some other calamity. What these sometimes violent upheavals can do is shake our view of life and the world to its core. At these times a person can be more open to changes in the orientation and habit of the heart.

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. - Psalm 51:17*

Sometimes God will use an intense calling, as he did with David, to shake us out of a faith grown cold. However, it would be more to our advantage if we were to rouse ourselves from the spiritual lethargy to which we are all too often inclined.

*His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. - Isaiah 56:10*

We all tend to drift into the comfort of the familiar. This is in part due to our desire for ease and comfort. It is also a result of the favorable distortion of truth through which we often see ourselves.

*The plans of the heart belong to man; All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; - Proverbs 16:1a-2a*

Truth is key to walking by the spirit. Humility is the key to receiving truth. Yet before it all, we have to have a spark that drives and motivates us. It is when this spark dies out and becomes inert that we drift into complacency and disinterest in the things of the Spirit.

*And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. - Romans 13:11*

One way to ignite a spark or awakening is to call to mind what Jesus has done for us .

*Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; - 2 Peter 1:13*

*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. - 2 Corinthians 5:21*

Gratitude can be a component of stirring a spark of motivation. However, a dynamic that is solely reactive soon runs out of steam. What is needed is an ongoing and growing force that brings us out of our slumber.

Much of our life is spent in the pursuit of that which we value. We endure the labors of each day to obtain that which we need to sustain us. When we remember Christ and what he did for us, we can see value, but it is a sort of value in the rear view mirror. It can feed gratitude, but perceived distance diminishes even that.

It is the perception of present and future value that can more strongly draw us closer to our Savior. Many people would be willing to pay almost any price for a diet pill that actually reduced hunger. The reason that they would be so willing is that they see great and immediate value.

It is when we can recognize in Christ a present value that we can begin to awaken the motivation to leave the comfort of the flesh and start to walk according to the Spirit.

*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. - Philippians 4:13*

Here we have an example of something that would have great value. “Strength” is something that we can all benefit from. While obviously not describing physical Sampson-like strength, we should also consider that the “all things” is not anything we might choose, but rather anything within the will of God. Part of the process of awakening is to recognize true value, verify this value through use, and come to rely on it as we draw nearer our Lord.

This exposes a critical limiting factor in getting a spark to be motivated to seek after the Lord. To be able to see value in the Lord, we have to be able to value the same things he does. For example, the Galatians were beginning to value something that the Lord does not.

*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. - Galatians 5:4*

The real value we can see in Christ lies not so much in his granting our wishes, but in helping us repudiate the flesh and the world so that we can become useful for him in the work God has for us. We will not be able to truly value Christ until we can reject the false value of the flesh and desire the real value of surrender to God and the sublimation of self.

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. - 1 John 2:15*

We really start to awaken when our value for the things of the Lord becomes a growing passion. We can see with the example of David how that passion can become a foundation for a deeper walk with the Lord.

*Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily. - Psalm 86:3*

## Chapter 7 - Becoming active

Satan has many traps to keep Christians inert and ineffective. However, even when a Christian actually seeks to draw near the Lord, there are also traps to divert and entangle a Christian into activities that are just as useless for the Lord.

*Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. - Mark 7:13*

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. - 1 John 1:8*

Two common diversions are the legalism of rule following and libertine indulgences. Both are of the flesh and sadly both are very common. It can be helpful to consider the biblical model for drawing nearer the Lord;

*Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.- James 4:5-10*

While some might be tempted to turn this into a step by step procedure, it can be more helpful to see it as a process. One thing to note is that it is bracketed by humility. There are two parts to this process, things we do and things God does. God provides his grace which flows more freely into us through humility. This would be the first condition we need to begin to draw nearer to God.

Extending from humility would be submission to God. In a way, this authenticates humility. There is a type of false humility that when faced with submission to God evaporates. Submission can be thought of using the examples of a servant awaiting his masters orders or a soldier awaiting orders from his commander. We often fall short at this point because we may consider an occasional acknowledgment of God's supremacy as being the same as "submission".

The ability to resist the devil is closely related to our submission. A parallel illustration of this resistance can be seen using the example of spiritual armor.

*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; - Ephesians 6:11-18*

The warfare we encounter is not so much combat with individual evil entities, but more with the forces and influences these entities have woven into the fabric of society and the world. Consider how much of our modern world is permeated with entertainment, our relationships filled with superficial banter, and our schedules filled with time consuming activities. It is almost as if the modern world has been specifically designed to draw us away from our Creator.

*Come close to God and He will come close to you. [Recognize that you are] sinners, get your soiled hands clean; [realize that you have been disloyal] wavering individuals with divided interests, and purify your hearts [of your spiritual adultery]. [As you draw near to God] be deeply penitent and grieve, even weep [over your disloyalty]. Let your laughter be turned to grief and your mirth to dejection and heartfelt shame [for your sins]. - James 4:8-9 AMP*

*And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. - 2 Corinthians 5:15*

So much of human existence is based on what we can accomplish. It can seem strange that we are not called to confront, rebuke, or defeat the devil, but simply resist. This is because we have to rely on God to accomplish our protection. In the list of spiritual armor there is only one weapon that is offensive and that is the word of God. We have an example of how Jesus used this weapon;

*And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. - Luke 4:8*

Some people think that getting active in the Christian life is about rule keeping, social justice, fighting Satan, or some other task. In reality the Christian life is about the diminishment of self and faithful dependence upon God.

*He must increase, but I must decrease. - John 3:30*

Christian “success” is not accomplishment, but surrender, submission, and patient endurance.

*SO, SINCE Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with [intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God], So that he can no longer spend the rest of his natural life living by [his] human appetites and desires, but [he lives] for what God wills. - 1 Peter 4:1-2 AMP*

The beginning of the active Christian life requires us to thirst for truth. As we grow in truth, we can see the world for what it is and being repulsed by it, cling more strongly to our Savior. Truth also illuminates who we really are and who God really is. This can only result in growing humility.

## Chapter 8 - The Starvation Diet

*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. - Romans 8:13*

Hindering our Christian walk is our inclination toward what is called the flesh, old man, or sin nature. The process of “mortification” (putting to death) is a continual one (present tense active). What is indicated here is not so much a death by action, but rather by inaction. If we do not feed the flesh, it will starve.

*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. - Romans 13:14*

People who have gone to Alcoholics Anonymous or even have tried dieting know how hard it is to fight against what the body desires. However, Christians do not have to solely rely on their own strength (ironically also the flesh) to try to muster the ability to purge out the old desires. The idea of “not” providing for the flesh is coupled with “putting on” the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: - Colossians 3:9-10*

*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. - Ephesians 4:22-24*

*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. - Galatians 3:27*

The references to “putting on” and “putting off” use a sort of clothing illustration that pictures that with which we surround ourselves, move within, and carry with us. The clothing analogy can only go so far. Also pictured is a renewal in knowledge and in the spirit of our mind. This appertains towards internal processes.

*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. - Romans 12:2*

Here we see a transformation accomplished by the renewing of our mind. It is contrasted with being conformed to this world. We can think of conformance as imprinting or being molded. The world, which has been designed to resonate with the flesh, exerts a powerful force to draw us into its systems. However, Christians have the opportunity to be “transformed” by having our minds reconfigured from a worldly orientation to a heavenly one.

*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: - Philippians 2:5*

*For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. - 1 Corinthians 2:16*



For us to “let” the mind of Christ be in us, we have to make room. We have to be aware of our carnal and fleshly inclinations and make no provision for them. It is not so much a matter of our mastering them as it is a matter of our losing interest in them.

There has to be a sort of mental rearrangement. More than a brief acknowledgment that Jesus is good and we should be like him only to just go on with our normal engagement with the world and the routine of our daily lives, we need to change what we value and we seek. Unless this changes, we will keep “feeding” the flesh and unable to walk by the Spirit. Dormancy favors the flesh.

Solomon captures some of the passion with which we are to apply ourselves to a life lived for God;

*My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: - Proverbs 2:1-11*

Here we can see an example of how a motivation and directed action towards the things of God would automatically start a process of starving or allowing to die those more base inclinations of the flesh. In addition, we can observe that we are able to increasingly receive the things of God.

The “if / then” statements describe not only a promise, but a description of a process whereby we are able to draw nearer our Lord.

It is not by strength that we are able to restrain the flesh, rather it is by the power of disinterest. It is intended that the Christian would be so grateful for salvation and so eager to receive all that God has to give that this passionate reaction would almost automatically start the starvation and death of the flesh by neglect and disinterest.

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. - Matthew 5:6*

The Christian life is not so much about not sinning. It is not even so much about doing good. It is about letting God work through us for not only our own good, but the good of others. One can picture this cooperative state brought about inside of us as we learn to let go of those things that serve self and embrace that which demonstrates the love of God.

## Chapter 9 - Maintaining Humility

One of the surest ways to fall short in our Christian walk is to allow the self to regain ascendance. The way to keep this in check is to constantly be maintaining a grip on humility. This is done with a ruthless view of truth as applied to ourselves.

Many people embrace truth as long as it exposes only the shortcomings of others. The Christian is called to a level of honesty that the self finds repulsive.

*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. - Romans 12:3*

The flesh finds pride a much more comfortable sensation than humility and as a result will seek to advance pride at every opportunity. While truth can make us humble, the discomfort of seeing ourselves as we really are can be mitigated not by pride, but by gratitude for Him who loved us even in our state of wretchedness so much that he laid his life down for us.

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. - Romans 5:8*

Here the discomfort of truth is not resolved with the comfort of delusion (pride), but with further truth that connects us directly to our Savior through gratitude for his mercy and love.

The reason humility needs to be constantly exercised is that we have a tendency to forget the truth about ourselves.

*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. - James 1:22-24*

Here we also see the importance of the Christian life lived in action. It helps to sustain our perspective of truth. When we put Christianity into practice, we are acknowledging it as the thing we value most. This alignment brings us more into alignment with God and thus able to receive constant truth from him that does not fade. In a way we can see this proximity to God as the means whereby we can be constantly “renewed”.

*Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. - Psalm 55:22*

*For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. - 2 Corinthians 4:16*

It is through humility that more grace can flow to us from God. By maintaining humility we keep this critical door open.

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; - Titus 2:11-12*

## **Chapter 10 - Quenching the Spirit**

*Quench not the Spirit. - 1 Thessalonians 5:19*

Most are familiar with the image of a blacksmith taking a piece of hot iron and plunging it into a bucket of water. The loud hiss testifies to the heat being taken out of the piece by the water as it is turned into steam. We have the ability to similarly deflate the power of the Holy Spirit. We can be unaware of this cessation of the work of the Spirit with the example of Sampson.

*And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him. - Judges 16:20*

To better understand what is lost when we quench the Spirit, we should examine what we can know of his work.

*Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified. - John 7:37-39*

Here we have a picture of the Spirit indwelling a person such that an abundant and continual flow of “living water” will be found. We also find that the Spirit provides comfort and truth.

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. - John 14:16-17*

We can also see that the Spirit works to guide us in truth;

*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. - John 16:13*

We also have communicated to us assurance of our salvation.

*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: - Romans 8:16*

We also have help from the Spirit who works for us way beyond what we can even understand.

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. - Romans 8:26*

We stand to lose a great deal (comfort, assurance, being guided in truth, and intercession) when we “quench” the work of the Spirit. Since the risk is so high, we should consider how it is that we accomplish this self-injury.

*And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. - Ephesians 4:30*

Here we can see that the Holy Spirit can feel “grief” that we can cause. Presumably this emotional reaction is a result of hopes and expectations frustrated by poor choices we make. We all too often take a mechanical view of God and fail to appreciate his emotional range.

*The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. - Psalm 145:8*

We can see some of this hurt and regret with Jesus;

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! - Luke 13:34*

We can see with the example of Jesus in his consideration of the people of Jerusalem the lament for lost opportunity. This may be similar to the “grief” felt by the Holy Spirit of the opportunities we have and yet squander.

God can be provoked to anger and wrath.

*Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions. Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. - Psalm 106:37-40*

God is yet merciful when he sees that we turn from that which is deserving of punishment.

*And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. - Jonah 3:10*

God has desires for us that we should be blessed with all he has to give us. When we respond to the inclinations of the flesh, we start to follow a path away from God. His Spirit is grieved and his work in us is reduced. Like throwing a bucket of water on a fire, what we could have been and what we could have done is either postponed or abandoned.

*For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. - 2 Peter 1:8*

## Chapter 11 - Learning how to Walk

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. - Galatians 5:25*

Most parents observe their children learning how to walk around the age of one. Driven by the motive to reach a destination, the physical skills are exercised and the experience accumulated for the child to learn how to get where he wants.

Most of us become so accustomed to going where we want that it is reflexive. A person that wants an education goes to school. The person that wants money gets a job. The person that wants companionship gets married. The things we have to do to get us from point A to point B define our “walk”. Without the Lord our motives for going through life follow the desires of the flesh.

*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, - Ephesians 4:17*

The motives and purposes of the unregenerate mind influenced by the flesh is called “vanity” or emptiness. A different “walk” requires something else in mind than vanity. This is where the “renewal” of the mind comes into play.

*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. - Romans 6:4*

The newness of life and the renewal of our mind create new destinations for our walk. For example, walking in the flesh often places an emphasis on ends or objectives. The renewed mind begins to see how something is done (means) also as important as where one is going (ends). The fleshly mind might not see any reason to restrain acting on lusts and desires. The renewed mind may take in a broader understanding of consequence and a greater sensitivity to harm caused to others.

*SO, SINCE Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with [intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God], So that he can no longer spend the rest of his natural life living by [his] human appetites and desires, but [he lives] for what God wills. - 1 Peter 4:1-2  
AMP*

Like a child whose initial stumbling gains him the experience upon which bolder steps are taken, the Christian who attempts to walk by the Spirit may find he also stumbles. However, each attempt builds a foundation from which more steady progress can be made.

There was a dating reality TV show where a young man said that he wanted to refrain from fornication and keep himself pure for marriage. The other contestants could not contain their contempt and mockery of him because in their mind the act of denying whatever pleasure one could experience was the height of foolishness. This is an example of how completely alien the mind of a Christian is from those in the flesh.

We should consider the example of casual fornication that the world seems to consider as having value. The mind of the flesh is not able to see value beyond immediate sensations. Having a renewed mind can perceive the value of chastity because it is the foundation from which real true intimacy grows between a husband and wife giving a marriage the strength to survive a lifetime. Being able to see the value of this helps the Christian walking by the Spirit to consider casual fornication not only as valueless, but as destructive to the life he would have for himself.

God has provided all sorts of assistance to one who would walk by the Spirit.

*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. - James 1:5*

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. - Psalm 119:105*

*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. - Psalm 119:9*

We see that God is the source of wisdom. We can also see that immersion in God's word cleanses and guides us. It is recommended that one's first attempts to walk by the Spirit begin with continuing prayer for wisdom and a hunger to know God through his word.

An additional prerequisite to walking by the Spirit is clarifying one's faith. Many of us think that believing in Jesus is a simple matter of acknowledging he once existed.

*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. - James 2:19*

Faith might better be considered as trusting more than believing.

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. - Proverbs 3:5-6*

The Lord provides guidance in the path we walk. Like an infant that holds on to his parent's finger as he takes his first steps, our Christian walk needs to be taken with just such trusting dependence on our heavenly father.

*Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. - Psalm 143:8*

Unlike a child, we never reach a point where we are independent from the reliance on our father for our walk. A "step" in our spiritual walk is pretty much anything we think to do or say. Our words and actions should be selected for how well they serve the purposes of God as opposed to how well they serve selfish interests.

*Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. - Romans 6:13*

God shows us what steps to take through a process of resonance. The closer we come to him, the more certain we are of what he desires for us. We can come closer through knowledge we gain through his word, fervent prayer, humility, and crying out for wisdom.

*And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? - Luke 24:32*

## Chapter 12 - Taking a Wrong Turn

*And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. - Revelation 2:3-4*

The letter to the Galatians was written to an entire group that was taking a “wrong turn”. Here the Ephesians also had started to become inert. We can see in the life of King David an early passionate love of the Lord only to see later in life he became so distant from the Lord that he had a man killed so he could have his wife.

When he was young David was on the run trying to save his life because King Saul wanted him dead. That intensity of experience is reflected in many of his Psalms. However, after he was king and lived long in comfort, he lost his passion. As the voice of the Lord became more distant, he acted more and more in accordance with his own fleshly thinking. He, his family, and his country paid for such dereliction.

*For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. - Psalm 73:27*

We first begin to get off track when we no longer see or acknowledge God in our routine daily thoughts. Slowly the busyness of our routine masks the reality of God’s presence, provision, and protection. We create a vacuum that begins to be filled with fleshly concerns and desires.

*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. - Galatians 5:13-16*

Someone who becomes seduced by the desire for riches or inflated with a sense of self-sufficiency can be taken so far off track, there is little hope of returning. Since we all are vulnerable to being deflected from the path the Spirit would have us walk, maintaining a humble heart is critical to detecting when we have deviated.

*And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. - Luke 21:34*

If we examine ourselves in truth, we can begin to see where we fall short and how we might recover.

*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. - Psalm 119:59*

A man might walk past a rope and see it as clutter or an inconvenience. In a different circumstance, for example when he was downing, he might see the same rope in a much more favorable light. The things we value determine the direction in which we walk.

*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. - Matthew 6:21*

Since the industrial revolution modern life has become increasingly hectic. A day can become so filled with “necessary” activities that less and less attention is given to eternal matters. We seldom come to a point where specifically we decide our best interest lies in a walk away from God. Our diversion is usually subtle and almost indiscernible

*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. - Galatians 5:9*

## Chapter 13 - Getting Back on Track

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. - Colossians 3:16*

Much of the advice for getting back on the path the Spirit would have us walk is the same as how we would avoid getting off track in the first place. If negligence is our first mistake, diligence would be a sound remedy as well as preventative precaution.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. - Proverbs 4:23*

Peter uses the word “diligence” to begin the description of an additive process for building a solid Christian life.

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. - 2 Peter 1:5-9*

If we have let our diligence slip it may be because our flesh is reasserting itself. There really is no “neutral” gear in the Christian life. We are either growing closer to our Lord or further away. Getting back on track is a little easier than an initial attempt to walk by the Spirit. Once we have had a “taste” of the joy, love, and peace to be found in a closer walk with the Lord, it can be used to motivate us to renew our seeking after the Lord.



The problem with the flesh is that God fades from our perception. We see usually only our own effort and activity and thoughts of God can become so distant as to be non-existent.

*A Song of degrees for Solomon. Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. - Psalm 127:1*

Getting back on track or even starting to walk by the Spirit initially requires a renewed mind continuously filling a heart with that which is valuable and emptying it of that which is not.

*Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: - Proverbs 3:3*

Our heart is a repository of what we value and carries within it the momentum of our life. The flesh often reasserts itself through our heart.

*O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. - Matthew 12:34*

The mind can be employed as a gatekeeper of the heart. If foolish, shameful, or even hurtful things come out of our heart, a renewed mind can identify them and tag them for abandonment.

*Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed. - Psalm 119:80*

The mind can also be employed in an active sense to direct the heart to be filled with that which is of value.

*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. - Philippians 4:8*

In addition to the internal things we can do to get back on track, the value of godly friends should not be overlooked. In Alcoholics Anonymous a new member is paired with an older member who acts as their sponsor. AA understands the difficulty of attempting a new walk in life and the difficulty to keeping to that path. The Christian first attempting to walk by the Spirit or return to that walk can likewise benefit from an older wiser Christian who clearly shows the love and light of Jesus in their life.

*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. - Galatians 6:2*

*A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. - Psalm 17:17*

*Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. - Proverbs 27:17*

*And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. - Romans 15:14*

*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. - Ephesians 4:32*

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. - Colossians 3:16*

*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. - 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

*But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. - Hebrews 3:13*

*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. - Hebrews 10:24-25*

*No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. - 1 John 4:12*

## Chapter 12 - Walking as the former owner of our life

As corporations buy up and take over businesses, it is not uncommon to find a former business owner kept on as an employee of the corporation to run his former business. It can be difficult for the new employee to adjust to his subordinate position. His freedom to do whatever he wanted has been replaced with the constraints of someone else.

The Christian life can seem similarly restrictive especially when seen from a legalistic perspective (no smoking, dancing, playing cards, or drinking). However, the Christian who surrenders his life to be led by the Holy Spirit often finds that the financial and health expenses of smoking to be unrewarding, the frantic and loud environment of clubs to be un-inviting, the financial vicissitudes of gambling to be risky, and the need for the stupor inducing effects of alcohol to be no longer felt.

*Strip yourselves of your former nature [put off and discard your old unrenewed self] which characterized your previous manner of life and becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion; - Ephesians 4:22 AMP*

Walking by the Spirit is an eye-opening transformation. As we begin to receive and understand truth, we begin to see how shabby our former lives were. We can see how the inclinations of the flesh actually harm us and the brief pleasurable sensations that are sought not only do not build anything lasting, they often create a more painful future.

*And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? - Luke 24:30-32*

In addition to the new understanding we have of the undesirability of life in the flesh, we also begin to feel the pull of the desirability of a closer walk with God.

*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 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, - Philippians 3:7-8*

When we were distant from God, even if we weren't given over to a flood of dissipation, we sought to secure our lives, family, property, and future as best we could. The example of Abraham and Isaac is a good one to illustrate the walk of faith in God contrasted with a walk serving ourselves.

*And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. ... And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. - Genesis 22:2 & 5*

Here we can see that Abraham had confidence that both he and his son would return. This testifies to a faith that places all confidence in the Lord to set the course of our lives. We may not understand why or how things are working out. However, we need not be anxious.

*And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. - 2 Thessalonians 3:5*

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. - Romans 8:28*

We are not in the best position to decide the destination or even course of our lives.

*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. - Proverbs 16:25*

Our lives become much better when we relinquish control to him who died for us and loves us.

*A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. - Psalm 23:1-3*

The closer we walk with the Lord by his Spirit, the more we come to understand and appreciate his guiding hand. We need to let go of the fears and desires that drove us through life so that we can rest in the peace that trusting in God produces.

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. - Matthew 11:28-30*

The subject of free will has been debated for centuries. However, it boils down to a choice between the flesh and the Spirit. God has given us a free choice. However, we can see that our choices almost always tend toward selfishness and harm us in the long run. It is this destructive inclination of the flesh that gives the appearance of free will. In reality we are its slaves;

*Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? - Romans 6:16*

It is when we come to faith in Jesus and receive freedom from the compulsive nature of the flesh, that we begin to have actual free will.

*Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. - 2 Corinthians 3:17*

However, it is all too often that we use this freedom to drift back to the flesh and become inert in our Christian life.

*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. - Galatians 5:13*

Walking by the Spirit entails an almost constant mental assessment of our thoughts words and deeds. We need to employ our minds to identify our motives in the cold light of truth. Our sinful nature wants to reassert itself and retake control of our life. Our old nature seldom presents itself in open rebellion, often it employs subtle and incremental influence. Like the former business owner who comes to start making decisions as if he were back in charge, we can find we have neglected our seeking after the Lord and have begun to chart our own course.

*A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. - Proverbs 16:9*

*In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. - Proverbs 3:6*

## Chapter 13 - Summary

*That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. - Romans 8:4*

The subject of walking by the Spirit of God is one that is difficult because it encompasses more than a simple single action. It is even difficult to describe as a process. However, one might consider the developmental stages of the walk of a Christian and begin to see a pattern that describes how one might follow the path set out for us by the Holy Spirit.

The first step would be to become a born again Christian.

*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. - John 3:5*

The next step would be to escape the clutches of those who would direct us into paths that quench the Spirit. Both environments of legalism and liberalism cater to the flesh and can halt our spiritual journey.

*Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. - Mark 7:7*

*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. - Galatians 4:9-10*

*Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? - Colossians 2:20-22*

We also need to extract ourselves from those “Christian” associations which are inclined towards the flesh.

*But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? - 1 Corinthians 5:12*

*But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. - Titus 3:9*

Once a Christian has avoided or extricated himself from the many corruptive and deadening traps he can encounter, the next step is to search for those from whom the spiritual path can be learned (presumably from those older wiser Christians who show such maturity in their lives).

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. - Colossians 3:1*

*The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. - Titus 2:4*

*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. - Hebrews 5:12*

There is the expectation for Christian growth and maturity such that one is able to teach others. However the Christian life and walking by the Spirit is not information or a technique that is learned. Rather it is a reflection of ones entire life. For this reason fellowship with other believers who are also active, seeking, and growing in Christ is essential.

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; - Ephesians 4:1-4*

Walking by the Spirit might be summarized as;

1. Trusting in Jesus for salvation.
2. Avoiding pigeonholed or dead-end Christianity.
3. Actively seeking the deeper things of the Lord.
4. Finding an older wiser Christian who can teach.
5. Starving the flesh.
6. Feeding on the things of the Spirit.
7. Growing into the image of Christ.

In addition to the weakness of our own sinful nature in the flesh, modern man also faces the difficulties of having a societal (worldly) imprint from his youngest days. We all have an imprint on our character that cripples us by the media and institutional driven consumerism pervasive throughout our society.

Modern life is also hectic in ways that could not be appreciated by those who lived before the industrial revolution. This frantic pace often keeps us from turning to spiritual matters. In addition, the increasing level of collectivism weaves to even closer association with those who not only live in the flesh, but are hostile to those who would seek after Christ.

*Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals. - 1 Corinthians 15:33*

*Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God. - James 4:4*

The importance of true Christian fellowship is critical to be able to walk by the Spirit. However, it is very hard to even find anyone who has the time or interest for any kind of relationship, much less someone who has escaped the spiritual traps Satan has built into the world and is being led by the Spirit to maturity themselves.

*Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. - Matthew 5:14*

*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. - John 3:19*

Satan sets the course for this world (for now). He has crippled families both in breadth and depth and used his educational and media systems to inculcate generations of increasingly compliant people to be cogs in his social machinery. He uses people to form the collectives he needs to leverage his influence over the world. He has instituted superficial collegiality rather than deeper personal relationships to provide a substitute social “glue” to connect people to function in the artificial environment he has created.

Considering our own internal fleshly inclinations, the consumptive orientation of the modern world and its pace, and the influence of the people around us who are rapidly becoming hostile to Christianity, it is difficult to see how we can resist such powerful influences. One trick to use is fasting. Our hunger reflex is like an automatic timer calling us to eat. We can use this facility as a reminder to pray. It is like programming our body (ironically the flesh) to remind us to pray regardless of our circumstance or location.

The Christian who seeks to walk after the Spirit faces opposition from an intense social current similar to the power of an ocean tide to sweep away anything attempting to resist its influence. Walking in the Spirit begins with truth and humility. As truth floods into our lives, it can be depressing to see how sad the world really is once it is stripped of its facade.

*And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. - Ecclesiastes 1:13-15*

If we were to remain focused on the evil in the world, we would become vulnerable to pride, thinking ourselves immune or superior.

*Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. - 1 Corinthians 6:10-11*

Being able to see the truth about ourselves is the key to humility. However, if we were to only stop at this point we would be doubly depressed understanding the scope of the evil both in the world and ourselves.

O soul, are you weary and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?  
There's light for a look at the Savior,  
And life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.

The remedy is to recognize that there is hope. Jesus offered his life to redeem us. We have assurance that no matter how bad the circumstances, the Lord will not abandon us.

*When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up. - Psalm 27:10*

*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. - Matthew 28:20*



# Dying to Self

*And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. - 2 Corinthians 5:15*

## Chapter 1 - Isn't the Word "Death" too Extreme?

*And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. - Luke 9:23*

There are some in Christian circles that consider the requirement to "take up his cross" to be a euphemism for being willing to be inconvenienced. The cross was symbolic of death. Not just death, but intentional death. Since this was to be done "daily", we can see that something other than physical death is implied. However, it is still a "death" that is meant.

*for if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live. - Romans 8:13*

*Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience: wherein ye also once walked, when ye lived in these things; but now do ye also put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him: - Colossians 3:5-10*

We can see a picture of bad things that are inside of us that we have in common with everyone else in the world. However, because of the newness of life we have as a result in trusting in Jesus, we have the opportunity to replace those old qualities with new ones called the "new man". This replacement has two parts, "putting away" (or putting to death) and "putting on" (walking by the Spirit).

*Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. - Romans 6:11*

Dying to self is not a complete death of a person. We already see that physical death is not a part of this process. Since we are admonished to "reckon ourselves to be dead to sin", there is something we are to do in relation to something that is in us.

Some more modern Christian practices embrace a view that "Jesus loves us just the way we are". This sounds very appealing, however, it is not true.

*For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. - Romans 7:18*

That which is within us is not something that needs to be corrected. It is not something that needs instruction. What we have inside of us is so harmful to us and repugnant to God that it needs to be put to death. This is similar to the removal of a malignant cancer.

## Chapter 2 - The Sin Nature

*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. - 1 Thessalonians 5:23*

Man was created in the image of God and God gave him the breath of life. The Christian has received new life from God re-constituting him to the condition in which man was originally created, having body soul and spirit.

The body can be thought of as the means we have of interacting with the physical environment. The soul can be thought of as the means we have to interact with each other. The spirit can be thought of as the means we have to interact with God. Satan approached Eve at the level of her soul.

*Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which Jehovah God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? - Genesis 3:1*

This one incident is interesting because so much flows from it. While there are many other aspects to consider, our main focus is on how an appeal to the soul can result in a decision to either call on God for help (which would have produced a much different result) or use our own judgment. Adam was warned that he would “die” the day he in effect turned from God.

*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. - Genesis 2:17*

We can see at that moment Adam lost his connection with God. If we consider that the spirit component of man became dead, we can begin to see that what was left was condemned to exist in a state of seeking after self.

*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God amongst the trees of the garden. - Genesis 3:7-8*

We are all biologically connected to Adam and Eve. It is through this connection that we inherit what is called the sin nature, the flesh, or the “old man”

*And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. - 1 Corinthians 15:45-47*

*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.- 1 Corinthians 15:22*

Paul wrote about his own struggles with the flesh in Romans chapter seven.

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. - Romans 7:24-25*

Prior to salvation we all were captive to the sinful impulses of the flesh. After salvation these impulses are still present, but we have the opportunity to overcome them.

*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. - Romans 6:6*

However, not all Christians make progress overcoming the fleshly (carnal) nature.

*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? - 1 Corinthians 3:1-3*

Some even mistakenly attempt to regulate their inclination to sin with prohibitions and ironically, fleshly efforts.

*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. - Galatians 4:9-10*

*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? - Galatians 3:1-3*

*If then you have died with Christ to material ways of looking at things and have escaped from the world's crude and elemental notions and teachings of externalism, why do you live as if you still belong to the world? [Why do you submit to rules and regulations?--such as] Do not handle [this], Do not taste [that], Do not even touch [them], Referring to things all of which perish with being used. To do this is to follow human precepts and doctrines. Such [practices] have indeed the outward appearance [that popularly passes] for wisdom, in promoting self-imposed rigor of devotion and delight in self-humiliation and severity of discipline of the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh (the lower nature). [Instead, they do not honor God but serve only to indulge the flesh.] - Colossians 2:20-23 AMP*

Our sinful nature, the flesh, or the old man is essentially that within us that seeks after the world and selfishness. While the new life we receive in Jesus when we get saved frees us from the compelling influence, we still struggle with the legacy of its lusts and desires. It is not conquered by strength, but by indifference. As we grow to be more led by the Spirit, the influence of the flesh fades away as it starves to death.

*For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. - Galatians 6:8*

### Chapter 3 - Parenthood - The First Lessons of Selflessness

*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; - Proverbs 22:15a*

Some hold to a romantic view of the innocence of children. This view seems to be supported by the complete weakness and dependence of newborns. However, even before a child can walk or talk, the selfishness of the heart is made manifest by tantrums and demands beyond the necessary such as food, warmth, and cleaning.

The harshness of the natural (fallen) world places restrictions on the opportunities we have to give expression to our natural selfishness. However, it is often only when we are confronted with the needs of our own children that we begin to face having to relinquish some of our own selfish desires.

*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. - 1 Timothy 5:8*

Making “provision” for children goes beyond food, clothing, and shelter. The time and effort to form character is also a requirement.

*Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. - Proverbs 19:18*

*A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.- Proverbs 15:5*

One of the first indicators of a culture turning to selfishness is a decrease in the number of children. Usually a significant decrease is first observed through the use of barrier type contraception. As a society increases in selfishness children can be actually killed in a number of ways such as surgically aborted, aborted through oral contraceptives, aborted as a method of sex selection, burned alive in a sacrifice to an idol in the hope of obtaining a good harvest, abandoned to die on the streets, or even when they are older, sent off to die in foolish wars.

One might consider in horror the extent privation can drive parents to;

*The hands of merciful women have boiled their own children, They have been for food to them, In the destruction of the daughter of my people. - Lamentations 4:10*

However, less discernable, but possibly more contemptible is the modern disinterest in children and their fate motivated solely by convenience, ease, and a desire for comfort. If one were to consider what steps could be taken to attempt to “die to self” (reduce selfishness), first on the list might be to stop killing our children.

In the natural world the burden and expense of children are a sort of training program to force us to abandon our selfish inclinations. Our desire to avoid these strictures reflect a selfish childish heart that, in a sense, does not want to grow up itself.

*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. - ! Corinthians 13:11*

## Chapter 4 - The national influence of selfishness

Japan is an interesting study. They had already collectivized under the Shogunate when Western military forces impressed upon them their need to adopt the Western practices of industrialization, militarization, and colonialism. As a nation they followed a path of national selfishness first attacking Russia in 1905 and the US in 1941.

Having been defeated by the US, Japan plunged wholeheartedly in adopting Western culture (essentially capitalism and consumerism). Japan experienced unprecedented prosperity. They are now a dying culture. The collective result of individual selfishness is national suicide most obviously seen in a lack of children.

It is this unrestrained selfishness that is also killing Europe and the US although the death of these is somewhat masked by the importation of replacement cultures. What can seem obvious with nations can be less noticeable with individuals. Selfishness is consumptive. There is nothing built for the future. It is like suicide by cannibalism.

## Chapter 5 - The Pastor - A one man band

In considering modern church practice, the analogy to the description of a football game comes to mind: 50,000 people who desperately need exercise watching 22 people desperately needing rest.

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: - Ephesians 4:11-12*

How Christian practice came to be an institutionalized organizational system administered by a professional class could be a confluence of bad intentions such as leaders seeking greater control as well as laity adverse to any requirement to put forth effort. It was supposed to be regular Christians doing the “work of the ministry”

A Christian may find that his sincere desire to grow in Christ, minister to others, and die to self frustrated by his encounter of actual opposition from his own church, pastor, and other church members. Organizational church structure has a momentum and inertia that does not welcome change or deviation.

*Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. - Mark 7:7*

A pastor that sees his church as a machine and that it is his responsibility to keep the machine running smoothly may see any request outside of the functions that the machine has been programmed for as a threat. While the Christian may expect his pastor to enthusiastically support his desire to walk more by the Spirit, he may be surprised if he encounters disinterest or even hostility.

*But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. - Revelation 2:6*

The word “Nicolaitan” has not been identified as a particular group in history. However, it is likely that the word is a compound in the Greek meaning power over the people. Pastors today face a real difficulty to their faith as well as the faith of their members. Organizational systems tend to push the leader into the flesh to keep up with all the system demands as well as de-emphasize others who might be able to share the load. When a church does not seek or cannot recognize wisdom within their membership, it is an indication that they rely too much on their pastor.

*I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? - 1 Corinthians 6:5*

The church member seeking help to subordinate the inclinations of the flesh and die to self may find that the pastor is so encumbered with his system duties that he can be of little help. The other members of the church may just refer a person to the pastor.

## Chapter 6 - The Frankenstein of our Flesh

The fictional character Frankenstein was a creature made of the parts of dead bodies and given a re-animated life via the power of lightening. The Christian faces a somewhat similar internal monster each time new life is given to the flesh.

*But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. - Galatians 5:15-17*

There are choices we make that place us in situations where self is elevated rather than diminished. We might take a job that pays well thinking we will be able to provide a good life for our family. However, we may come to see that we are required to spend increasingly more time away from our family. We may even find that ambitions for fame or money are stirred and we become even more entangled with that which attracts our flesh.

We all too often think that selfishness only applies to big things like greed and ambition. We are not likely to see that something as seemingly insignificant as our desire to share about the purchase of a new car with a friend at church may lead us to overlook an elderly woman in need of a sympathetic ear.

*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. - Phillipians 2:3-4*

A farmer looks after the welfare of his livestock, a military officer insures his men are provided for, and mother makes sure her children are clothed and fed. There are many demands on us to forgo our own interests and seek after the interests of others. However, we tend to default back to thinking and acting to satisfy ourselves. As the farmer, the officer, and the mother begin to place more emphasis on their immediate desires and preferences, their responsibilities begin to slip.

*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. - Isaiah 49:15*

The resurrection of the influence of the flesh begins with just a glance. As we consider something that appeals to us our attention begins to become attached to that which we have observed.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a forward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. - Proverbs 4:23-26*

Dying to self requires a reiterative process of turning away from that which beckons us with fleshly appeals of comfort, ease, lust, pride, stimulation, and even delusions. It can be sad and discouraging when we consider how often our old nature attempts to reassert itself and how often we allow it to gain a foothold.

*As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly. - Proverbs 26:11*

We know that in spite of our failures, that we can depend upon the Lord to help us to grow in strength to resist the desires of our sinful hearts.

*But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. - 2 Thessalonians 3:3*



The Christian life, including the aspects of dying to self and walking by the spirit, is progressive. We know that we will have false starts, make mistakes, and require correction. However, our ultimate objective is Christ-likeness.

*My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, - Galatians 4:19*

## Chapter 7 - Resonance with the world

A tuning fork is sometimes used to adjust a musical device such as a piano. The physical characteristics of the device are such that when a sound wave of a precise frequency is made by the musical instrument, the fork begins to vibrate being able to receive the maximum amount of sound energy because it has been so constructed as to respond to a specific musical note and no others.

We know that Satan sets the course of the world.

*Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: - Ephesians 2:2*

He has constructed it to achieve his objectives. We may assume that it involves collectivizing the entire world in a hierarchical system to leverage his influence (since he cannot be everywhere at once). We can understand some of his plans;

*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. - 2 Corinthians 2:11*

*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. - Isaiah 14:12-14*

We are also told that Christians should not be part of this evolving world system.

*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. - James 4:4*

*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. - John 15:19*

Our ability to surrender our selfishness is greatly hindered by the design of the world which resonates with our flesh like the Sirens calling Ulysses to his doom.

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. - 1 John 2:15-17*

The replacement of family life with social life has led modern man to be so integrated into the lives of others in employment, education, and even recreational situations that we can cringe in fear lest we trigger a negative reaction from someone. We frequently find ourselves in social situations where we are expected to resonate with the world and not with Christ.

*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? - 2 Corinthians 6:14*

A Christian can find he begins to excuse or justify what he does at work so as to not risk losing employment. A Christian can be pressured to remain silent for fear of getting people angry at him.

The process of worldly indoctrination can be seen in the acceptance of divorce, immorality, and even perversion that would have been unthinkable to even mention a few decades ago. Promiscuity was once considered shameful and virginity virtuous. Today they are reversed as chastity is mocked and even ridiculed.

*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! - Isaiah 5:20*

The bible uses the word “woe” 98 times and it is never good. Educational systems are more geared for compliance forming than learning. Media serves to imprint values reinforced with the assumption that social momentum validates it (popularity = truth). It is so easy to accept that if everyone else thinks something, then we should accept it also. The flesh is drawn to that which is easy.

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. - Matthew 7:13-14*

The flesh recoils from a difficult walk of life counter to the general flow. The flesh also is disinclined towards the effort to seek out and evaluate truth. Dying to self and selfishness requires a disengagement from the course of the world and charting an active and independent course. The world has been designed to make things fast, cheap, and easy, all the things that appeal to our flesh.

The pull the world exerts on our flesh can be countered by giving active effort to those things that appeal to the Spirit.

*My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: - Proverbs 2:1-11*

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. - Colossians 3:1-2*

Since we can become so blind to the worldly and fleshly condition of our lives, it is essential to ask God to show us what needs to change so that we can follow him and die to self.

*Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. - Psalm 19:12*

## Chapter 8 - Aversion therapy

Paul received a commission from God that involved bringing the light of Jesus to the Gentiles.

*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Acts 26:18*

There is a clarity that comes when one embraces truth. It can be seen with the Jews who came to realize that they contributed to putting to death their Messiah 50 days earlier.

*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? - Acts 2:26-37*

The Christian who is awakening and having his eyes opened to truth frequently begins to see the way he lives his life as falling short of what he would like. Even worse, he recognizes his repeated failures to live the life he now sees as desirable.

*For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. - Romans 7:14-15*

There is a type of therapy where an electric shock is given to a person when he wants a cigarette such that he comes to associate the desire for a cigarette with a painful experience. This is called negative reinforcement or aversion therapy. While this can be somewhat useful in training animals, the Christian should be encouraged to avoid this sort of correction for himself. For example, the Christian who berates himself for each failure may think he can summon enough will power to be more successful in the future. He does not understand that dying to self and selfishness is not accomplished by self-mastery.

There are some useful elements that can be extracted from failure analysis. Like the alcoholic who learns to avoid situations that might trigger indulgence, we can identify some of our individual vulnerabilities and minimize the frequency and degree of failure. While we can learn to minimize some of the worst aspects of our selfish nature, we are not going to be able to escape it on our own.

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. - Romans 7:18*

For a person to make changes in his life, he first needs to see that something is wrong, desire to correct it, and then learn how to. The Christian who begins to recognize the destructive nature of selfishness and even come to see that self on its own is harmful may begin to have a desire for change. It is when that desire reaches the level of taking action, that the Christian may find he is uncertain of what to do.

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? - Romans 7:24*

## Chapter 9 - Love - The Opposite of Selfishness

*Love has long patience, is kind; love is not emulous of others ; love is not insolent and rash, is not puffed up, does not behave in an unseemly manner, does not seek what is its own, is not quickly provoked, does not impute evil, does not rejoice at iniquity but rejoices with the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

The modern world has significantly distorted the word “love”. For example, teenagers are almost continually bombarded with messages picturing love as something that is fallen into or out of. They come to consider that the emotional sensations they experience of lust, desire, anticipation, and expectation are what is meant by “love”. This confusion often results in poor marriage decisions.

Real love is an act of will. A new mother who gets out of bed in the middle of the night to feed her newborn is illustrative of this self-sacrificial love. We can also see a demonstration of this love in the example of the Good Samaritan that was cited in answer to the question of how one would love his neighbor as himself..

*But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. - Luke 10:37*

The goal of Christian maturity is love.

*Whereas the object and purpose of our instruction and charge is love, which springs from a pure heart and a good (clear) conscience and sincere (unfeigned) faith. - 1 Timothy 1:5*

The process of dying to self is a process of replacing selfishness with the self-sacrificial character of love.

*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: - 1 Peter 1:22*

It is interesting to note that there is a process of “soul purification” accomplished by “obeying” truth resulting in “unfeigned love” of the brethren. This sheds light on how we are able to “die to self”. We might imagine our soul attached to the flesh and pulled to follow after the world. As we submit and comply with truth, our soul becomes less attached to the flesh and more attached to the spirit to be directed by the Holy Spirit. As selfishness has less and less claim on our heart, we are able to consider others and act in service to them demonstrating love.

## Chapter 10 - The Cold Light of Truth

*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. - John 3:19*

Selfishness seldom welcomes truth. It might tolerate truth regarding the failings of others, but draws the line regarding self. How we react to truth tells us a lot about what is in our heart. The flesh is driven by feelings. Truth exposes our failings and often results in bad feelings.

The truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable. - James A. Garfield

The movie *The Matrix* centered around a character who awakens to discover that what he thought was his “real” life was an artificial one and that he was actually just a slumbering component in a large organic network. In a way this can be seen as descriptive of the comfortable image of our life our flesh gives us to keep us from facing the discomfort of truth.

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. - 1 John 1:8*

The Christian should understand how intensely our flesh fights against truth. What is called “back-sliding” is simply the strength of our old nature wanting to make us feel good.

*But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. - 2 Peter 1:9*

*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: - Revelation 3:17*

For many the first steps towards truth is to begin to see who God is and how great he is.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. - Proverbs 9:10*

Often the next thing to be illuminated by truth is our own wretchedness.

*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. - Job 42:5-6*

Our souls are purified by using our will to choose truth. This usually comes about as we change that which we value. As comfort, prestige, riches, and ease become less valuable to us than wisdom, truth, and nearness to the Lord, we find that the problems incumbent with a life lived for self begin to diminish.

*Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. - Proverbs 23:23*

## Chapter 11 - The Process of Christian Maturity

*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: - Ephesians 4:14-15*

We have seen that the process of dying to self and selfishness starts with the perception of the truth of who God is and in contrast, who we are.

*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: - Matthew 3:11*

*The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. - Matthew 8:8*

We can see that the only honest reaction to truth is humility. It is at this point where God is able to work in us with his grace.

*But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. - James 4:6*

The grace of God is often only thought of as the initial saving faith we have to first trust in Jesus. We need to consider how critical this continuing grace is to live the Christian life.

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; - Titus 2:11-12*

As we are guided by the Holy Spirit and surrender ourselves to his work in us, we should begin to see some of the change that happens as the flesh is no longer fed. One way to measure the degree to which we have achieved selflessness is to measure the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. - Galatians 5:22-23*

The work of the Spirit in us is hindered by the free reign we give to our flesh;

*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would - Galatians 5:16-17*

Dying to self is hindered by that of the flesh to which we hold. It can be helpful to inventory those things to which we cling that hinder (or quench) the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Christian maturity can sometimes parallel physical maturity. Those who are young often have enthusiasm and ambition that propel them into various learning experiences. As the years pass stability becomes a more prominent feature. With age a gradual disconnection from striving and contention precedes the culmination of a life. Sometimes the surrender of self only occurs when it becomes obvious that self cannot continue.

A life lived in selfless love concludes with earthly emptiness, but heavenly rewards.

## Chapter 12 - How important is life

*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? - Matthew 16:26*

It is difficult to think of a single possession valued more highly than life. People will fight, even kill, or impoverish themselves to preserve it. However, Christians are shown that we should not be overly concerned with it.

*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. - Matthew 16:25*

The life Christians find in Jesus is eternal life. This is life that cannot be lost.

*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. - Romans 6:23*

One of the main tactics of Satan is to deceive us into thinking we should try to control things that we really cannot control. He has suggested we attempt to control the climate, government, and other people. With such ambitious undertaking, it is understandable to see that some come to think they can control even their life. We should not forget much less attempt to usurp the authority of God.

*The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. - 1 Samuel 2:6*

Our flesh recognizes that death is the end of sensation and seeks actively to avoid it. The Christian knows that this life is transient and that a far better one awaits.

*If, however, it is to be life in the flesh and I am to live on here, that means fruitful service for me; so I can say nothing as to my personal preference [I cannot choose], But I am hard pressed between the two. My yearning desire is to depart (to be free of this world, to set forth) and be with Christ, for that is far, far better; But to remain in my body is more needful and essential for your sake. - Philippians 1:22-24 AMP*

If the only thing that mattered to God was our salvation, then as soon as a person became a Christian he would die. It would be cruel to leave a redeemed person in a sinful world. The reason Christians continue in this physical life is to minister to others in the work of the Lord.

*And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. - Revelation 12:10-11*

The Christian who can consider his own death with the same wistful detachment Paul did in his letter to the Philippians has achieved a major step towards dying to self.



## Chapter 13 - How important is family

*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. - Luke 14:26-27*

Jesus is not advocating hatred of family members. There are two factors to add clarity to the verses in Luke. The first element is context. There is a banquet where a guy makes what was probably a common toast.

*And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. - Luke 14:15*

To this Jesus responds with a story about people making excuses when invited to a great feast. The man giving the feast was angry that those invited begged off. He then told his servants to compel the blind, maimed, and poor to come to the feast instead.

The purpose of this story was to illustrate to the guy who made the toast that the casual assumption that any Israelite would automatically be in the kingdom of God, was mistaken. The second element that adds clarity is translation. Here a word for word translation misses a little of what the sentence would have meant to a Greek hearer.

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters in the event that they become hindrances to his supreme love for me, yes, moreover also his own life in the same manner, he is not able to be my disciple. And whoever is not taking up and carrying his own cross and coming after me, is not able to be my disciple. - Luke 14:26-27 Wuest*

Families are important. God created them. Satan has put a lot of effort over centuries in crippling them. They can be a source of much affection. However, they can also be a source of hindrance.

*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. - Luke 12:51-53*

An illustration of the hindrance a family can be seen in the example of a child who is a young adult and visits home and tells the parents he became a Christian. If the parents or other siblings are not Christian, they might act to pressure the young person to be quiet, or even change their view.

Essentially Jesus is saying that not everyone who thinks they are going to waltz into the kingdom of God is going to. In fact some will face opposition even from their own family which they will have to overcome by placing greater value on Jesus. Jesus even adds that one's own life can be a hindrance if it is valued as more important than Jesus.

## Chapter 14 - Fire sale - All things must go

*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, - Philippians 3:8*

Dying to self requires the detachment from everything in this life. It is not a rejection or severing, but a change in perspective. Consider the rich young ruler who could not imagine the loss of his riches.

*Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. - Luke 18:22-23*

A rich person does not have to surrender everything he has, but he has to be willing to. God may lead a person with abundant resources to use them in his work. God may ask us to surrender what we consider most valuable.

*And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. - Genesis 22:2*

Abraham gives us an example of someone willing to sacrifice everything to the Lord. However, his faith was such that he expected that his son would be returned to him.

*And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. - Genesis 22:5*

Job is an interesting example. He had his wealth, family and even health taken from him. We might see in him a sterling example of having died to self. However, like dross in a refining process, a little pride finally comes to the surface.

*My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. After my words they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them. - Job 29:20-21*

It is only towards the end when Job has let go of everything, that one might consider he had died to self.

*THEN JOB said to the Lord, I know that You can do all things, and that no thought or purpose of Yours can be restrained or thwarted. [You said to me] Who is this that darkens and obscures counsel [by words] without knowledge? Therefore [I now see] I have [rashly] uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. - Job 42:1-3  
AMP*

## Chapter 15 - Hunger and Thirst

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. - Matthew 5:6*

The flesh drives us with a hunger for sensation. The Spirit fills us with a hunger for righteousness. If we were to consider "righteousness", we might think in terms of good works such as writing a check to a church or charity. However, there is a deeper connection when we are able to minister directly as individuals.

*For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. - Mark 9:41*

There is much we could do for our brothers and sisters in Christ if we took the time to cultivate relationships through which we could know of their needs.

*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? - James 2:15-16*

One can think of selfishness as taking in and selflessness as giving out. As we transition from the former to the latter, we cross a point of ambivalence. The phrase "hunger and thirst" pictures an intensity of desire that indicates the passionate engagement of will. As passionate as an alcoholic can "thirst" for his next drink, we should be "thirsting" for righteousness.

*Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. - Titus 2:14*

If we let the flesh have free reign in our lives, we find ourselves drawn into the intense pursuit of sensations to fulfill various lusts. As the influence of the flesh declines from starvation, its passions likewise diminish. We become more able to stir up zealotry for the Lord. Modern Christian practice often conveys the idea of compliant inert pew filling Christianity. Whereas in the bible we get more of an idea of active and even diligent seeking.

*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. - Hebrews 11:6*

Dying to self compasses more than just self-denial. It is a replacement of selfishness with a zealous concern for and ministry to others. As we draw nearer to Christ and submit to being formed in his image, we should expect that we also would take on his concern for and ministry to others.

*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: - Philippians 2:5*

## Chapter 16 - The Renewed Mind

*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. - Ephesians 4:22-24*

A pivotal point in the transition from the flesh to the Spirit (from selfishness to selflessness) is the renewal of our mind. This is essentially a software change. The values we held in our mind to serve the flesh are replaced with ones that serve the Spirit. For example, we may have looked at a young woman immodestly dressed to stimulate the flesh by lusting after her. A renewed mind might observe the same woman and feel sorrow for one so desperate for attention.

*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; - 1 Peter 1:13-15*

Each observation and judgment we make is accumulated in our heart. Our heart accumulates these and inclines us in a certain direction in life. A mind that has not been “renewed” may continue to pour into the heart observations as to the value of things in terms of how well they stimulate self. A renewed mind will start to fill the heart with observations about what is true. This truth versus feeling orientation is a key distinction.

*That each one of you should know how to possess (control, manage) his own body in consecration (purity, separated from things profane) and honor, Not [to be used] in the passion of lust like the heathen, who are ignorant of the true God and have no knowledge of His will, - 1 Thesalonians 4:4-5*

*The backslider in heart [from God and from fearing God] shall be filled with [the fruit of] his own ways, and a good man shall be satisfied with [the fruit of] his ways [with the holy thoughts and actions which his heart prompts and in which he delights]. - Proverbs 14:14 AMP*

*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: - Proverbs 23:7a*

*There is that about renewal that requires our appeal to God.*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. - Psalm 51:10*

*There is also that in regard to renewal that requires our effort.*

*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. - Romans 12:2*

There is a picture of a continuing process of renewal.

*For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. - 2 Corinthians 4:16*

## Chapter 17 - Truth versus Feelings

There are many activities in which we engage that are rather mundane. We have to work to provide for food, clothing, and shelter. It is often tempting to segregate our thoughts into lofty ones about ideals, religion, or truth and more pragmatic thoughts about daily living. This is a common way we avoid applying truth to ourselves.

We might ambitiously contend for a promotion at work telling ourselves that the financial increase would be good for our family. However, we can fall into seeking that which appeals to the flesh by deceiving ourselves with noble justification. Work promotions can appeal to prestige, power, and the things more money can purchase. The deficit of increased time away from family and the values that imparts to one's children are often minimized in one's mind.

The decision to put one's children in public school as opposed to the expense and effort of homeschooling can reflect a self-oriented priority similar to the decision not to have children at all. It can be difficult to consider truth if it suggests that we might be in error or have less than noble motives. Like the drunkard faced with the loss of alcohol or the addict facing withdrawal, the flesh is reluctant to allow anything that might threaten it.

There are two methods of transitioning from the flesh to the Spirit. The first is to slowly reflect on our motives and actions in light of truth. This usually results in a gradual letting go of the layers of self-serving motives we have accumulated in life.

The second method is a drastic one of mentally stripping away of every thought, value, and opinion as if we had died and stand naked before God. At this point we add on to ourselves that of which we feel the Lord would approve.

Both techniques represent "dying" to self. The second method is not often selected but rather may be forced onto one by harsh circumstances.

Modern times have been designed to elevate the flesh through things like "self-esteem", affirmations, "positive thinking", and advertising. It has been said that stories are more powerful than facts because they touch the heart more than the mind. Our feelings serve a useful purpose when they allow us to enjoy life or even warn us when something is wrong. Feelings serve a malignant purpose when they lock us into a cycle of self-stimulation or motivate us to distort truth to sustain the comfort of delusion. For this reason feelings need to be subordinate to truth.

*who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. - Psalm 15:1b-2*

*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. - Psalm 51:6*

Truth can have an almost surgical effect on the fleshly inclinations of the heart.

*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil. - Proverbs 16:6*

Selfishness leads to distortions of truth from which increasingly greater iniquities flow. The influence of others compounds the problems of our enslavement to the deceptions of the flesh.

*Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD. - Jerimiah 9:4-6*

The bible calls four things “truth”, the bible itself, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God. While the Holy Spirit leads us in truth, we have the opportunity to abide (live) in the words of God and receive a constant source of truth.

*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. - John 8:31-32*

Jesus is called the “word” of God and there is an element of vitality such that the “living word” works inside of us.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. - Colossians 3:16*

*For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. - Isaiah 55:10-11*

God’s word is truth and it is alive and sent to work in us to accomplish what God wills. This work requires our active participation. One measure of the extent to which we have died to self is our interest in God’s word. If it is a chore to even read a sort passage in the bible, we may not have made much progress. If we get a concordance or use computer software like esword to dig into the bible to try to understand word studies or topics, it may reflect more progress God’s word has had working in us.

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. - Psalm 119:105*

*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. - Psalm 119:9*

*Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. - Psalm 119:133*

Once God's word (truth) enters in and works in transforming us, our feelings also transition from the sensual to the sublime.

*Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart. - Psalm 32:11*

## Chapter 18 - The end of flesh

We can see that all flesh ends in death. The Greeks expended much thought wrangling with various philosophies of how to maximize the pleasures of the flesh. Seeing nothing beyond the grave, they understandably saw obtaining the greatest pleasure in this life as the best they could hope for.

However, even maximum pleasures ultimately fail to satisfy. There is a world weariness summarized by the character in a movie who said that he could participate in any romantic activity with an urbanity born of disinterest.

Having a family and children begins to draw us out of the gloomy end selfishness brings us to. Even if a person has never heard of God, he can recognize the soul satisfying reward of giving to his children and receiving their thanks and affection. In a way, familial love and affection point towards the love God extends to us.

Christ is our example in all things. His example of selfless love when he laid his life down for our sakes is the ultimate example of selflessness.

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. - Romans 5:8*

*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. - Philippians 2:6-8*

The flesh resists the loss of all that it values. The death of self and the surrender of all that we have is the only way to receive all that God has to give us. All that life can give us will pass away. All that God can give us will last forever.

*As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. - Ecclesiastes 5:15*

*But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: - Matthew 6:20*

All flesh ends in death. Without the salvation and eternal life found in Jesus, our dying bodies would drag our souls into the second death. As Christians, we can escape this fate because we have a reconstituted spirit by which we have within us the life of Christ and thus eternal life.

*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.—1 John 5:13*

Dying to self and selfishness is part of the process of Christian maturity. It is not with teeth clenched that we summon the steely determination to quash the flesh. It is with brokenness and a humble heart that we acknowledge our need for help.

*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.—Hebrews 4:16*

All too often in our Christian life we come to regard our spiritual life as similar to fairy tales, space aliens, and ghosts. It is something we have a slight familiarity with, but is so distant from our actual lives that it seems fanciful and irrelevant.

Life in this body of flesh will end.

*So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. - 1 Corinthians 15:42-44*

*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.—1 Thessalonians 4:16-17*

We know that riches are deceitful, that there will be false teachers, and that the world will hate us. We can even be deceived with our own sin.

*But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. - Hebrews 3:13*

For the Christian who desires to advance in his faith, the first step is to see Jesus as substantive and living within us. We have to come to the point of view that Jesus is real and the life he offers us is real. There are forces that would have us see the artificial world Satan has crafted as real and Christianity as some fiction.

The sword of truth can free us from the deceptions that would keep us from drawing nearer our Lord. We need to consider this within the context of how short our life really is.

*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.—Ephesians 5:16*



We do not want to be found guilty of having squandered the time Jesus gave us to be of use to him in this life.

*And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. - 1 John 2:28*

*Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.—1 Corinthians 3:13-15*

Once we can begin to see the reality of Christ and the life he offers, we begin to receive truth. This also helps us see that which we need to jettison from our life as well as that which we need to embrace. Once we let truth illuminate and direct our life, we are beginning to walk by the Spirit of Truth.

Once we start to draw nearer our Lord, we begin to see his example of selfless love. The active Christian life is one of movement from the flesh to the Spirit and from selfishness to selflessness.