

BATTLING LIFE'S MULTIPLE TEMPTATIONS

Ron Christian, Compiler

“Growing A Godly Life” - Devotional Series

Book 4 - “Temptations”

BATTLING LIFE'S MULTIPLE TEMPTATIONS

Ron Christian, Compiler

“Growing A Godly Life” - Devotional Series

Book 4 - “Temptations”

“Growing A Godly Life” - Devotional Series

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As compiler of this series, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley J Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscripts of this devotional series. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessing to many persons.

‘GROWING A GODLY LIFE’ - Series (13 Books)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

BOOK 1. ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING GOD (Salvation)

Introduction To Book 1

- Chapter 1. Consider The Need For Salvation (1)**
- Chapter 2. Understand the ‘Plan’ Of Salvation (2)**
- Chapter 3. Receive The Gift Of Salvation (3)**
- Chapter 4. Enjoy The Grace From Salvation (4)**

BOOK 2. PRACTICING THE MEANS OF GRACE (Means of Grace)

Introduction To Book 2

- Chapter 1. Experience Corporate Fellowship (5)**
- Chapter 2. Explore Biblical Truths (6)**
- Chapter 3. Enjoy Holy Communion (7)**
- Chapter 4. Practice Personal Disciplines (8)**

BOOK 3. PURSUING A HOLY LIFESTYLE (Holiness)

Introduction To Book 3

- Chapter 1. Visualize The ‘High Calling’ (9)**
- Chapter 2. Make The ‘Full Surrender’ (10)**
- Chapter 3. Cultivate A Christlike Character (11)**
- Chapter 4. Pursue A Constant Growth (12)**

BOOK 4. BATTLING LIFE’S MULTIPLE TEMPTATIONS (Temptations)

Introduction To Book 4

- Chapter 1. Conquer ‘Personal’ Temptations (13)**
- Chapter 2. Overcome ‘Circumstantial’ Temptations (14)**
- Chapter 3. Model Humility and Confidence (15)**
- Chapter 4. Discover Restoration and Victory (16)**

BOOK 5. PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD (Divine Communion)

Introductions To Book 5

- Chapter 1. Contemplate His Majestic Personhood (17)**
- Chapter 2. Appreciate His Constant Presence (18)**
- Chapter 3. Anticipate His Compassionate Intervention (19)**
- Chapter 4. Follow His Careful Guidance (20)**

BOOK 6. OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO CHRISTIAN GROWTH (Growth)

Introduction To Book 6

- Chapter 1. Forgive Others Quickly (21)**
- Chapter 2. Serve God Enthusiastically (22)**
- Chapter 3. Treat Yourself Honestly (23)**
- Chapter 4. Handle Life Positively (24)**

BOOK 7. REFOCUSING ON LIFE'S PRIORITIES (Priorities)

Introduction To Book 7

- Chapter 1. Esteem People Above 'Things' (25)**
- Chapter 2. Reject Corruption Of 'Worldliness' (26)**
- Chapter 3. Embrace 'Simplicity' Of Spirituality (27)**
- Chapter 4. Appropriate Power Of 'Kingdom' Resources (28)**

BOOK 8. APPROPRIATING THE POWER OF PRAYER AND FAITH (Prayer)

Introduction To Book 8

- Chapter 1. Practice Discipline Of Prayer (29)**
- Chapter 2. Acknowledge Conditions Of Prayer (30)**
- Chapter 3. Celebrate Benefits Of Prayer (31)**
- Chapter 4. Relish 'Perks Of Faith' (32)**

BOOK 9. MANAGING LIFE'S VARIOUS STEWARDSHIPS (Stewardships)

Introduction To Book 9

- Chapter 1. Realize 'Rationale' For Stewardship (33)**
- Chapter 2. Correct 'Attitudes' For Proper Giving (34)**
- Chapter 3. Recognize 'Potential' Of Generous Giving (35)**
- Chapter 4. Encompass 'Dimension' Of Total Stewardship (36)**

BOOK 10. RESCUING THE LOST ONES (Witnessing)

Introduction To Book 10

- Chapter 1. Understand Preparation For Witnessing (37)**
- Chapter 2. Stimulate Motivation For Witnessing (38)**
- Chapter 3. Experience Power In Witnessing (39)**
- Chapter 4. Expect Results From Witnessing (40)**

BOOK 11. REACHING OUT IN HOLY LOVE (Service)

Introduction To Book 11

- Chapter 1. Take Time For Empathetic Communication (41)**
- Chapter 2. Build 'Bridges' For Effective Witness (42)**
- Chapter 3. Serve Humbly For God's Glory (43)**
- Chapter 4. Perform 'Actions' Of Practical Compassion (44)**

BOOK 12. SURVIVING LIFE'S HARD TRIALS (Adversities)

Introduction To Book 12

- Chapter 1. Trust God Amidst Adversities (45)**
- Chapter 2. Process Grief For Healing (46)**
- Chapter 3. Rejuvenate Life Following Defeats (47)**
- Chapter 4. Transform 'Losses' Into Gains (48)**

BOOK 13. MAINTAINING THE LIFE OF FAITH (Perseverance)

Introduction To Book 13

- Chapter 1. Avoid 'Drifting' From Grace (49)**
- Chapter 2. Maintain Faithfulness To God (50)**
- Chapter 3. Honor Spirit For Victorious Living (51)**
- Chapter 4. Keep Focus On Heavenly Goal (52)**

**SUMMARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON
'PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS'**

**LIST OF WRITERS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE CONTRIBUTED
DEVOTIONALS.**

BOOK FOUR

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1. CONQUER 'PERSONAL' TEMPTATIONS	7
CHAPTER 2. OVERCOME 'CIRCUMSTANTIAL' TEMPTATIONS	25
CHAPTER 3. MODEL HUMILITY AND CONFIDENCE	43
CHAPTER 4. DISCOVER RESTORATION AND VICTORY	60

INTRODUCTION TO BOOK FOUR

**By
Ron Christian**

There is an effective way to cope with temptation. We must recognize the source of temptation, maintain the right attitude toward temptation, recognize the nature of sin and temptation, and use the right weapons against temptation.

James writes, “*A man must not say when he is tempted, ‘God is tempting me’. For God cannot be tempted by evil, and does not himself tempt anyone.*” (James 1: 13, Phillips)

Satan is the source of temptation. Evil is not an abstract entity, but evil is a personified power. The Bible speaks of evil in terms of a spiritual person who is in opposition against God and man. The Bible speaks of Satan - man’s adversary. The Bible pictures Satan as the ‘Prince of the power of the air’, and he is said to be the leader of a demonic kingdom which is constantly plotting evil against man. Satan is also called the Devil (Matthew 4:1), which means the slanderer par excellence. He is called the Accuser of the Brethren (Revelation 12: 10). Satan is called the Tempter (Matthew 4: 3) who seeks the ruin of mankind. In John 8: 44, Satan is called a murderer and a liar. Satan is described as the roaring lion in I Peter 5: 8, and he is called the Wicked One in I John 2: 13. In Revelation 20: 2, he is called the old Serpent -reminiscent of Satan’s first appearance to man. He is a Robber, stealing the seed of God’s Word out of the heart of man (Luke 8: 12).

The power of Satan in the world is not illusionary but very real. While Martin Luther was in his room in the Castle of the Wartburg in Germany one day, he felt the power of Satan so greatly that he threw his ink-pot at the devil! Robert Louis Stevenson was convinced that Satan was a personal, active power of evil. He said one time: “You know the Caledonian Railway Station in Edinburgh? One cold, east windy morning, I met Satan there.” It is said of Jesus that he “*suffered being tempted*” (Hebrews 2: 18). On several occasions Jesus personally encountered Satan (Matthew 4).

It is important that believers maintain a right attitude toward temptation. It is helpful to note that the Greek word from which we translate ‘to tempt’ means ‘to test’ far more than it means ‘to tempt’ as we understand the word. Satan tempts us with one purpose in mind - to seek to seduce us into sinning. However, we must not look at temptation from Satan’s viewpoint, but rather from God’s viewpoint. God looks at the temptations we endure as mere tests of our character and loyalty. If we look at temptation from God’s viewpoint, then temptation becomes not a stumbling stone, but a stepping stone to God. Sometimes it is only in the crucible of life’s difficult experiences that man can be purified. Oftentimes it is only after man has been triumphant in life’s challenging tests that he can meet life with maturity and strength. Life’s tests are for the purpose

of purifying character. To pass one test successfully is to increase ones strength for the next test.

**“Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin,
Each victory will help you,
Some other to win.”**

The man who has been successful in life’s test is the man whom God can use greatly in His service. “If metal is to be used in a great engineering project, it is tested at stresses and strains far beyond those which it is ever likely to have to bear. So a man has to be tested before God can use him greatly in his service.” (Daily Study Bible; Matthew, vol, 1; pg. 226; William Barclay)

For instance, sorrow is not meant to make you bitter, but it is meant to make you sympathetic and understanding and tender-hearted. A difficult life experience is not meant to make you cowardice, but it is meant to make you more courageous. Suffering is not meant to develop self-pity, but it is meant to develop pity and compassion and empathy for other fellow sufferers. When life’s tests force you to choose, you are given an opportunity to choose the pathway which leads to greatness and nobility. Life’s tests give you an opportunity to choose good instead of evil, truth instead of falsehood, bravery instead of cowardice, generosity instead of selfishness.

When a child is given an arithmetic test, he is given the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge. The test is not given to him to cause him to fail; it is given to him to demonstrate to him that he is allowed to progress to more advanced math and more difficult tests. God permits us to be tested in order to demonstrate our loyalty to Him and to better prepare us for greater service for Him.

It is important for believers to recognize the nature of sin and temptation. There are various definitions for sin, but one of the most revealing is the following: Sin is a perversion of natural, legitimate desires. Satan seeks to twist and to pervert that which is wholesome and natural. Let us note some specific examples. Self-preservation is an inherent instinct in man, but it can be misused and abused. There are times that it is better to die than to live. Example: To be loyal to Christ and to die rather than to reject Christ and to live is to be victorious. (In the 20th century there were more persons who died as martyrs for their Christian Faith than who died as martyrs in all the previous centuries of Christianity put together!)

The desire for social approval is natural but it can be misused. It is most natural to have the social urge (i.e., the desire to be acceptable and accepted by others), but this basic urge can be twisted and abused, resulting in sin. An obsession to be accepted ‘at any cost’ can lead to a sacrifice of ones witness, a compromise in ones standards, and even

a surrender of ones integrity. The story is told of President Garfield who was once urged to take a profitable, but a dishonorable, course of action. It was said to him, ‘No one will ever know’. His answer was, “President Garfield will know - and I’ve got to sleep with him.”

The desire for success is natural but it can be misused. God wants us to be creative in our work and diligent in our labors. However, to desire success and advancement at any cost is a temptation which a believer must resist. An obsessive desire for success can cause one to disregard other people, can cause a sacrifice of personal integrity, and can result in succumbing to secular and materialistic values.

The desire for sexual fulfillment is natural and God-approved - if such fulfillment is experienced within the sacred confines of marriage. Too often this basic instinct and drive is perverted, resulting in sin. Man can change love into lust, the beautiful into the ugly, the sacred into the profane. Satan wants man to treat sex lightly, but sex is not a sensual toy. Sex is a God-given pleasure to be used under God’s control. “Sexual sin is never right: our bodies were not made for that, but for the Lord, and the Lord wants to fill our bodies with himself...That is why I say to run from sex sin. No other sin affects the body as this one does. When you sin this sin it is against our own body.” (I Corinthians 6: 13, 18, Living Bible)

The legitimate desire for food can be misused, and the result is gluttony. The natural desire for ease and pleasure must be guarded, lest one misuse time, develop laziness, or spend money needlessly on excessive and indulgent (and even harmful) entertainment. The inquisitive (curiosity) urge is normal, but it too can be misused and abused. The result? The horrible sin of gossiping and tale-bearing! Christians must carefully guard themselves from the misuse of natural desires, for Satan seeks to exploit and to destroy mankind through the perversion of natural instincts.

Vigilance is important because of the subtle forms which temptation takes. Wrote Peter (who had himself fallen into terrible sin when he denied his Lord three times): “*Be self-controlled and vigilant always , for your enemy the devil is always about, prowling like a lion roaring for its prey.*” (I Peter 5: 8)

One must be vigilant because Satan is a lying deceiver. One observer noted that Satan promises a crown but gives shame, promises ‘heaven’ and ‘happiness’ but gives a ‘hell’ of a life!

One must be vigilant lest Satan attack him at his weakest point. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link; no Christian is stronger than at his weakest point. Satan attacks one at his weakest point. One must guard against bitterness during times of unexplained sorrow. One must guard against skepticism if he finds it hard to accept the unique and the miraculous. One must guard against compromise if he is a person who is easily led

by the 'crowd'. One must guard against egotism and pride if he is an unusually gifted and talented and capable person. If one is a very affectionate type of a person, he must guard against undue intimacy in some relationships. If one finds discipline hard to exercise, he must especially guard against the wasting of time. One who has a vivid imagination must guard against wandering thoughts. If one is inclined to look on the dark side of life, he must especially guard against pessimistic and negative attitudes. If one is unusually ambitious and energetic, he must guard against the temptation to be domineering (exploiting others for his own 'gain').

It is important to realize that Satan not only attacks one at his weakest point, but that often times also attacks a believer at his strongest point. Notes William Barclay, "We must always remember that again and again we are tempted through our gifts. The person who is gifted with charm will be tempted to use that charm "to get away with anything". The person who is gifted with the power of words will be tempted to use his command of words to produce glib excuses to justify his own conduct. The person with a vivid and sensitive imagination will undergo agonies of temptation that a more stolid person will never experience. The person with great gifts of mind will be tempted to use these gifts for himself and not for others, to become the master and not the servant of men. It is the grim fact of temptation that it is just where we are strongest that we must be for ever on the watch." (Daily Study Bible; Matthew; Vol. 1; pg. 59). Simon Peter (the 'natural' leader of Jesus' twelve disciples) was known for his courage and forwardness and boldness, and yet Peter's greatest strength failed him in the most critical hour of testing. The result of his overconfidence was horrible! Peter denied his Master three times! Overconfidence has been the downfall of many believers. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall " (I Corinthians 10: 12)

It is important to recognize the difference between temptation and yielding to temptation. Jesus was severely tempted on several occasions, and for as long as He lived, Satan would tempt and then depart "for a season", only to return later to tempt Jesus again. There are conscientious Christians who wonder why they cannot come to a spiritual level in their experience in which they are no longer tempted. But Jesus never came to any such level, for as long as life endures on this 'fallen planet', the Christian must be engaged in 'spiritual warfare' - in the fierce battle against sin and the 'evil one'. Jesus was tempted, but Jesus did not yield to temptation. It is not sin to be tempted; it is sin to yield to temptation. Having evil suggestions come to ones mind is not sin; meditating upon them and cherishing them is sin.

Believers must be prepared to use the 'right weapons' against temptation. The Bible exhorts believers to 'resist Satan'. "*Give no opportunity to the devil* " (Ephesians 4: 27) "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you.* " (James 4: 7) "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist

him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.” (I Peter 5: 8, 9)

Christians must arm themselves with the Word of God. Jesus always resorted to the Word of God in His resistance of Satan. He said, “*It stands written*” (Matthew 4). What God said in the prophets of the Old Testament many years ago is established truth! God’s Word is relevant for today’s battles! The Bible is forever ‘contemporary’! The Psalmist said, “*Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.*” (Psalm 119: 11) “*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*” (Ephesians 6: 17)

Christians are commanded to submit themselves into the hands of Almighty God (James 4: 7) “*As thy days, so shall thy strength be.*” (Deuteronomy 33: 25) Promised strength for one day at a time! “*Because Jesus Himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.*” (Hebrews 2: 18) “*He is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing.*” (Jude 1: 24)

THE MIND THAT WAS IN CHRIST

**Equip me for the war,
And teach my hands to fight;
My simple, upright heart prepare,
And guide my words aright.**

**Control my every thought;
My whole of sin remove;
Let all my works in thee be wrought;
Let all be wrought in love.**

**O arm me with the mind,
Meek Lamb, that was in thee;
And let my knowing zeal be joined
With perfect charity.**

**With calm and tempered zeal
Let me enforce thy call;
And vindicate thy gracious will,
Which offers life to all.**

**O may I love like thee,
In all thy footsteps tread;
Thou hatest all iniquity,
But nothing thou hast made.**

**O may I learn the art,
With meekness to reprove;
To hate the sin with all my heart,
But still the sinner love.**

By Charles Wesley

CHAPTER ONE
CONQUER 'PERSONAL' TEMPTATIONS

Joshua 1: 1-9; Psalm 34: 12-22

CONQUERING THE 'GIANT' OF FEAR!

One of life's greatest temptations is the temptation to succumb to life's many fears. Practically-speaking, how can you use faith to cancel out (conquer) your fears? First, you must face your fears and determine to overcome them. One old cowboy noted that during a severe storm (high wind and blinding snow), the Hereford breed of cattle, in contrast to other breeds, would stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing the storm's blast, with their heads down against its onslaughts. "You most always found the Herefords alive and well," said the cowboy. "I guess that is the greatest lesson I ever learned on the prairies - first face life's storms." Theodore Roosevelt one time wisely said, "I have often been afraid, but I wouldn't give in to it. I made myself act as though I was not afraid and gradually my fear disappeared." Joshua was doubtless afraid when the leadership over the Israelites was placed in his hands, following Moses' death, but God spoke to Joshua and alleviated his fears: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified: do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1: 9, NIY) There are hundreds of times throughout the Holy Bible when God tells His people "Fear not, for I am with you!" How very comforting! Face your fears honestly (don't deny their presence), but listen to the calm voice of faith, not to the clamorous voice of fear! If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, remember that whatever happens to you in life, God is right beside you, protecting you, correcting you, and guiding you through all of life's storms (troubles and tragedies)!

The second step in 'conquering' your fears in this: Find out why you have these fears. Use the reasoning quality of your mind to attack the illusive emotions of fear. List the fears individually and pray about each one. It may be necessary to seek the counsel of a wise friend. Try to identify those fears, for instance, which originated in your early childhood, fears that have long been suppressed in your subconscious mind.

Third, relax, let go of your fears, and let God constantly fill you with His power and poise. God conquered all your fears on the Cross and through the Resurrection, and He is able to impart the benefits of that victory to you. There is no problem too big but what Christ's power is bigger yet! Regularly tap into that limitless power!

Fourth, exercise yourself daily in faith meditations and faith affirmations. One man who was haunted for a long time with fears, read through the Bible underlining in red pencil every statement relative to courage and confidence. Engage daily in faith prayers. Memorize 'faith verses'. Associate with people of faith. Involve yourself in faith actions and projects. To see God work miracles through your life, in answer to 'faith prayers', will make your faith grow more and more throughout your 'life pilgrimage'.

“Father, heal me of the paralysis of fear, and help me to rise and walk straight into the face of life’s challenges and problems, not with a screwed-up courage of my own but with a Spirit-wrought trust. I am calm in the calmness of Christ.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When fear comes knocking on my heart’s door, I will send Jesus to the door.

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Philippians 4: 4-7; James 13-17

CONQUERING THE ‘GIANT’ OF WORRY!

One ‘trap’ (sin) in which many Christians are ensnared is that of ‘worry’. It seems that the temptation to worry is ever present. Perhaps the most powerful ‘trinity of evils’ is that of ‘fear, worry, and anxiety’. There are few sins which Christians indulge in that have more serious consequences than that of ‘worry’. One morning when Martin Luther was ‘blue’ and discouraged, his wife appeared, dressed in black. At Luther’s inquiry as to what the mourning meant, she replied, “Haven’t you heard? God is dead!” This dramatic portrayal of the ‘folly of worry’ helped Luther to regain the perspective of faith. When believers worry and fret, they declare that God is weak or unable to cope with life’s circumstances. Worrying is a characteristic of the pagan - not the Christian! Here are a few ‘steps’ you can take to help you conquer the ‘giant’ of worry:

First, remember that Christ overcame all sin, including the sin of worry, on the Cross, and through the Resurrection, and that He thus is able to help you overcome your nagging fears and worries. Notes E. Stanley Jones: “When fears and sicknesses and sins come upon you to overwhelm you and to beat you into submission by their very overbearing presence, just calmly look each one in the eye and say, ‘I am not afraid of you. You have been and are decisively beaten by my Lord. Will you bend your neck?’ There, I knew it! The footprint of the Son of God is upon your neck.” (Abundant Living: pg. 73) “One man had ‘A Worry Tree’ in his front yard, where he hung his worries before he came into the house. For the Christian, that ‘Worry Tree’ is the cross of Christ. Hang your worries there.” (Ibid; pg. 353)

Second, realize that worry itself is usually worse than the thing you are worried about. Said a great father to his son as his son was leaving the nest of the home, “Johnny, remember the biggest troubles you have got to face are those that never come.”

Third, relax in God’s presence, and don’t try to hold up the world by your own strength. The story is told of a Bishop who was so worried about the affairs and problems of the world that he could not sleep. As he lay awake, tossing and turning, the Lord lovingly spoke to him, “Bishop, you go to sleep and I will stay awake all night and watch over the problems of the world!”

Fourth, meet troubles one day at a time (Matthew 6: 34).

Fifth, become involved in tasks. Those who are most involved in loving projects, are those who think and worry less about their own problems. Focus on need of others.

“Father, help me to cast all my cares on you, knowing that you care for me. Cleanse me from the acid of anxiety that erodes away my sense of security, and please give me a childlike trust that cancels my paralyzing worries. Let me enjoy life in all its fullness!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Realizing that worry contradicts my faith in a God of infinite love, power, and wisdom, I determine to turn my ‘worry energy’ into ‘prayer energy’!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Ephesians 4: 26-32; Luke 9: 51-56

CONQUERING THE ‘GIANT’ OF DESTRUCTIVE ANGER!

Although it is likely true that most believers who experience ‘anger’ indulge in a destructive (carnal) type of anger, it is also true that there is a Biblically sanctioned and God-honoring type of ‘anger’. Call it a ‘righteous’ anger if you wish. Jesus was without sin of any kind, and yet the pure Son of God experienced anger, on some occasions (see Mark 3: 1-6; John 2: 14-16). The apostle Paul was (righteously) angry on one occasion with his fellow apostle Peter, because the latter betrayed the basic principle of ‘salvation by grace through faith’, and Peter attempted to bind Gentile converts with Jewish laws (Galatians 2: 11-16). When Abraham Lincoln, as a young man, saw the slave market at New Orleans for the first time, he is reported to have said, “Let’s get out of this boys. If I ever get any chance to hit this thing, I’ll hit it hard.” Lincoln’s anger over the slave trade proved productive when eventually, as President, he signed the “Emancipation Proclamation” which freed all slaves in the United States!

Aristotle once said, “Anyone can become angry; it is easy. But to be angry with the right person to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not easy!” Unfortunately, many Christians get angry for less than holy reasons! Declared the distinguished minister, Clarence E. Macartney, “Anger is one of the most common sins, yet one of the most dangerous and injurious to the peace and well-being of man. More than any other sins, it blasts the flower of friendship, turns men out of Eden, destroys peace and concord in the home, incites to crime and violence, and turns love and affection into hatred.” It has been shown by some scientists that anger can cause ulcers, arthritis, indigestion, partial blindness, and a variety of other physical problems.

The answer to controlling anger is found in surrendering the anger to the Spirit’s control. “Many of the forces which consume men - like anger - must themselves be consumed by something more powerful. Only the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit is capable of devouring the driving forces that devour us and waste our lives. There is only one answer - turn your anger and your life over to Christ.” (Robert Andrews) James and John were called ‘sons of thunder’ in their early lives, for they apparently were often filled with anger. Even as followers of Christ they found themselves wanting God to exercise His divine powers to destroy God-rejecters (Luke 9: 51-56). But Jesus cleansed and rechanneled their anger, and the day came when they were love-filled disciples. John is now known, not as a ‘son of thunder’, but as the ‘Beloved Disciple’!

“Father, many times I have felt the turmoil of inner anger, and have seen that anger either well up into outrage or harden into a bitter grudge. O God, cleanse me from all

carnal anger. Rechannel my anger into constructive channels of expression, and may my anger be motivated by unselfish consideration and focused on righteous causes. Through the cleansing power of Christ. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My anger can be a powerful force for either good or evil causes. I will allow the Holy Spirit to use my anger for His holy cause!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Matthew 18: 21-35

CONQUERING THE ‘GIANT’ OF RESENTMENT!

Because the human body is weak, and temptation is strong, and Satan is subtle, it is possible for a Christian to stumble into sin and, as a result, seriously to offend his ‘brother’. Your forgiveness (of an offending ‘brother’) is important to assure your own continuing happiness and health. You are not built to hate and to carry grudges, but to love. The apostle Paul wrote: *“Be kind to one another; be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.”* (Ephesians 4: 32, Phillips) *“Never pay back evil for evil...Don’t quarrel with anyone. Be at peace with everyone, just as much as possible. Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it. Don’t take the law into your own hands. Instead, feed your enemy if he is hungry. If he is thirsty give him something to drink and you will be ‘heaping coals of fire on his head.’ In other words, he will feel ashamed of himself for what he has done to you. Don’t let evil get the upper hand but conquer evil by doing good.”* (Romans 12: 17-21, Living Bible) There is a saying: “Doing an injury puts you below your enemy, revenging an injury makes you but even with him, forgiving it sets you above him!”

“I never forgive”, General James Oglethorpe said to John Wesley. “Then I hope, sir”, replied Wesley, “you never sin!” Said Jesus, *“If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* (Matthew 6: 14, 15) When you pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” you are proposing to God that He treat you in the same way you treat your fellow men, in regards to offenses and sins. How do you want God to treat you? With justice or with mercy? With mercy! You want God to forgive you Immediately, Constantly, Finally, Completely, and even Forgetfully!

George Herbert once wrote, “He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for everyone has need to be forgiven.” Bishop Herbert Spaough of The Moravian Church in the U.S.A. writes about four symbolic objects in a tray on his desk. “First is the pincushion. The purpose of a pincushion is to receive the pins and needles stuck into it. So part of our tasks in maintaining emotional health is bearing the pin pricks of others who are frustrated and harassed. The purpose of the second object - a nail - is to remind me that I must keep myself nailed to the Cross and keep Christ on the throne of my life. The third object - a sprinkler head - is a part of a sprinkler system. This is a reminder to turn on the Bible promises and let them permeate my thinking and my emotions. The fourth object - an oil can - is a reminder of my responsibility to be loving and appreciative in human relationships. This is the best lubricant..”

“Father, help me not to hold grudges. May there never be room in my heart for the memory of a wrong. Release me from all bitterness and resentment! In Jesus’ name.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My God-honoring goal in my life: Hardly even notice when others do me wrong, and when I do notice, to quickly forgive and to restore fellowship.

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Ecclesiastes 4: 1-8; Matthew 14: 25-33; John 20: 24-29

CONQUERING THE 'GIANT' OF DESTRUCTIVE DOUBT!

Not all doubting is destructive. Honest doubts are compatible with an honest commitment to Christ, and in fact the degree of commitment to Christ will be reflected in the degree of serious thinking one does in finding a satisfying answer to the difficult questions of life. Honest intellectual doubting will lead you to the adequacy of the evidence which will result in the assurance of the heart! An intellectual understanding of Christianity is vital, for Jesus commanded us to love God with all our minds as well as with all our hearts. "Always be ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you." (I Peter 3: 15) An unexamined faith is not a faith worth having - and is indeed dangerous! One must know that his beliefs are based on objective truth, for it is the object of belief that determines the value of belief. To accept anything in an unthinking way is possibly to accept error. Also, to accept truth on the basis of dogmatic authority, without thinking it through yourself, is to accept a secondhand faith. A secondhand faith is a dying faith! There is that type of doubting (questioning of 'religious belief') that can be an 'ally' rather than an 'enemy' of your Christian faith. There are times when you need to 'work out your salvation' with the aid of honest doubts which will eventually lead you to the outcome of honest beliefs. So, in dealing with doubting 'in general', realize that not all doubting is destructive.

The following are some 'steps' you can take to help you to combat destructive doubting. First, make a 'daily surrender' of yourself to God, and allow the Holy Spirit daily to impart the gift of faith to your seeking mind and tender heart. Second, let Christ handle your doubts as they arise. Say to the Lord, "I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." Third, recall past mercies of God. Build your faith, based on the faithfulness of God's past actions. Use a daily journal to recall His past mercies in your life. Fourth, reaffirm your present confidence in Christ's sufficiency for you. His grace is sufficient, even for your doubts. Fifth, wait on God and don't try to reason. "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2: 4) is a statement of men's faith in the faithfulness of God, when facing a problem (of evil) which causes your nagging doubts. Trust God during your times of 'unexplained suffering and sorrow'. Notes William Sangster: "We believe that in the same way as human parents must sometimes allow pain and discipline to press upon their dearly-beloved children, so must the gracious Father in Heaven allow pain and discipline to press upon us, not in any neglectful and unloving spirit, but for some high and holy purpose known to Him. Though He does not will the calamities, He wills the conditions in which these calamities are possible ... When we cannot interpret the dark mystery of life. ... it is just because, as yet, our minds are too small, and we cannot take the explanation in." (Daily Readings; pg. 29)

“Father, when I cannot understand with my mind, help me to trust with my heart. When my doubts assail and my fears annoy, I thank you that you are totally in charge of my world, and that you will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Resting in the arms of Jesus, I can go through the darkest night, for He assures me that ‘joy comes in the morning’!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Habakkuk: 1: 1-4; 2:1-4; 3:17-19

CONQUERING THE 'GIANT' OF DESPAIR!

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk felt the unfairness of a situation at a time in history when it appeared that the wicked nation of Babylon was devouring God's chosen people, the nation of Judah. Boldly the prophet asked the Lord his question: "Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Habakkuk 1:136) When the wicked man (or nation) prospers and the righteous man (or nation) suffers loss, the godly man is tempted to question the justice of Almighty God. Doubt and confusion can give birth to anger or to depression. Getting one's focus off of God and onto others can cause one to lose his spiritual foothold.

What should a believer do when righteousness goes unrewarded and when evil seems to be rampant, to go unchecked and unpunished? In the midst of a set of circumstances which seemed so unfair, and at a time when the prophet Habakkuk could have so easily succumbed to despair, or to anger, or to envy, he instead learned to flex his spiritual muscles and to put his full trust in his Sovereign God. The Lord instructed Habakkuk during this time of national crisis and moral turmoil: "The righteous will live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2: 4b)

Habakkuk chose the way of faith in God instead of the pathways of despair or envy or bitterness. How do you exercise faith in God during a time when, morally-speaking, things are "topsy-turvy" - when the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering? Faith means you wait for God to vindicate the righteous and to punish the wicked. Said the Psalmist: "As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them (the wicked) as fantasies. " (Psalm 73: 20) Said the prophet Habakkuk: "Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the (wicked) nation invading us. " (Habakkuk3:16b) Years later, God vindicated His people (Judah), and the wicked kingdom of Babylon was conquered!

Faith, during a time of personal or national crisis, means that you continue to serve God regardless of the material or the visible benefits that you derive from serving God. To succumb to despair is to fall away from faith in the God of ultimate justice. Faith means trusting God, regardless of visible results, and in spite of the fact that the wicked appear to go unpunished and unchecked in their wickedness. Faithfully loving and serving God, even when outward circumstances are 'dark' and 'forbidding'! "Even though the fig trees are all destroyed, and there is neither blossom left nor fruit, and though the olive crops all fail, and the fields are barren; even if the flocks die in the fields and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be happy in the God of my salvation. " (Habakkuk 3: 17-18, Living Bible)

“Lord God, you are my strength, and you will give me the speed of a deer and bring me safely over the mountains.” (Habakkuk 3: 17, Living Bible)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When the ‘outward’ look is dark, the ‘upward’ look is always bright!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Matthew 5: 27-30; Timothy 2: 22; I Peter 4: 1-5

CONQUERING THE - 'GIANT' OF LUST!

Sex is beautiful and sexual feelings are normal and God-given, but lust is always wrong. Paul told young Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts." Lust is wanting to use another person to gratify your own selfish desires. Adulterous actions and adulterous thoughts are both wrong. Said Jesus: *"You have heard that it was said, 'do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5: 27) Treating people as 'things' to be exploited is sinful! Lust turns the beautiful into the ugly, the sacred into the profane.

God is of "purer eyes than to behold evil", and, as God is holy, so Christians also are to be holy! What is the secret of self-control in your life? Cultivating the mind of Christ! Learning to 'think Christ's thoughts'! Submitting to Christ's lordship! As a man thinks, so is he! You are the product of your thoughts! What you imagine, you will become! "What you hold in the mind passes automatically into act, if you hold it there long enough... Your secret meditations become you, for good or ill." (Growing Spiritually, pg. 2021; E. Stanley Jones) *"Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about."* (Philippians 4: 8, Living Bible) *"Meditate on God's laws day and night! If you do, you will be like a tree that is planted by the rivers of water which bringeth forth its fruit in its season. Its leaves also shall not wither and die."* (Psalm 1) Why do people wither and die morally? Because they wither and die mentally! Ignoble thoughts lead to ignoble lives! Lustful thinking leads to lustful living! Dr. George A. Buttrick says, "We dramatize temptation in our secret thought, thus gathering gasoline for the devil's spark."

When lust has conceived it eventually brings forth death! (James 1: 15) How is lust conceived? By failing to control the thought life! You cannot help it if birds fly above your head, but you are responsible if you allow birds to make nests in your hair! You cannot help it if Satan suggests evil thoughts to you, but you are responsible if you entertain evil thoughts, resulting in developing patterns of evil thinking! You are not responsible for having temptations, but you are responsible for yielding to temptations. You may not be responsible for the 'first look', but you are responsible for the 'second look'! If you can 'go around' temptation, you cannot expect God to take you 'through' temptation. If you put yourself in the very 'trap' of temptation, don't be surprised if you are trapped in sin! How do you conquer the 'giant' of lust? By prayer. By committing your mind to Christ's cleansing blood, by guarding what you look at and what you mediate on and what you read, and by guarding what music you listen to. "Sow a habit, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a thought, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny!" It all begins with your "thought life".

“Father, help me to guard my affections, for my affections guide my life. Make me pure in thy purity, and holy in thy holiness. In the holy name of Jesus. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will focus my attention on the Holy One in order that I might become a man of holiness!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Put a check beside the following "Fears" which have most troubled you, and which you would most desire to conquer:
 a. Fear of failure in job or occupation.
 b. Fear of rejection by others (peers).
 c. Fear of the future.
 d. Fear of pain and loss of health.
 e. Fear of financial loss.
 f. Fear of loss of loved ones and friends.
 g. Fear of physical death.
 h. Fear of future condemnation for personal sins.
 i. Fear of apostasy (i.e., fear of "falling away" from God because of "hardening of heart").
2. From your own personal experience, and from your observation of other "victorious" Christians, and from your knowledge of "Scriptural Principles", what steps can you take which will greatly aid you in ridding yourself of your debilitating fears? (Note Joshua 1: 1-9; Psalm 34: 12-22)
3. What has been considered by some experienced observers of the Christian Life to be the greatest "trinity of evils"?
4. Why is "worrying" considered to be a characteristic of the "pagan" - not the "Christian"? (Note Matthew 6: 25-34)
5. Share ways in which "worrying" can be most destructive to one's spiritual, mental, emotional, and social life.
6. Have you learned to turn your "Worry Energy" into "Prayer Energy"?
7. What specific "steps" have you taken (or can you take) to successfully conquer the giant of worry?
8. How would you distinguish between "righteous anger" and "unrighteous (destructive) anger"?
9. What specific steps have you taken to conquer your destructive anger? Tell if you agree with the following statements: "Only the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit is capable of devouring the driving forces that devour us and waste our lives. There is only one answer - turn your anger and your life over to Christ."

- 10. Why are resentment and bitterness such destructive forces in the life of a Christian?**
- 11. How can justice properly be administered to those persons who intentionally mistreat you, without at the same time you yourself becoming involved in vindictive actions and resentful feelings? (Note Romans 12: 17-21)**
- 12. Tell to what extent you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging an injury makes you but even with him; forgiving it sets you above him!”**
- 13. According to Matthew 6: 14-15, what terrible consequence do you personally incur if you (as a believer) refuse to forgive a person who has wronged you? Give your personal response (or reaction) to the following statement: “He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven, for everyone has need to be forgiven.”**
- 14. During the times when you (as a believer) are “assailed” by doubts and tempted to despair, which of the following Biblical principles would you likely find the most helpful (in aiding you to gain victory and to find reassurance)?**
 - _____ a. Make a “new surrender” of myself to God.**
 - _____ b. Allow the Holy Spirit to impart the gift of faith to my troubled mind and the gift of comfort to my sorrowing heart.**
 - _____ c. Committing doubts in prayer to the Lord Jesus, who Himself battled doubts when He dwelt as a man on earth.**
 - _____ d. With the use of a Daily Journal (diary), rebuild my faith as I recall God’s past mercies and miracles in my personal life.**
 - _____ e. Through personal verbalization of praise and thanksgiving, reaffirm my confidence in God’s faithfulness and sufficiency to deliver me from my doubts.**
 - _____ f. Through reading the Bible, recall those accounts of persons (like Elijah and John the Baptist) who struggled with doubts and who eventually discovered reassurance of God’s goodness.**
 - _____ g. Through heart sharing and confidential counseling with a personal friend (or pastor), discover the “reasons” for my doubts and, through prayer with my friend, claim victory over my doubts.**
 - _____ h. Wait patiently upon God and don’t try to “reason out” my problems during my times of “unexplained suffering and sorrow.”**

- _____ i. Humbly acknowledge that God, who is full of goodness and who never directly causes calamities and evil happenings, nevertheless wills the conditions in which these calamities are possible; and acknowledge that God has the power to use the evil happenings of life to serve His ultimate righteous causes.**
- _____ j. Retrain my thinking to affirm the fact that, although I may not have visible rewards for my efforts, I can nevertheless remain steadfast and faithful in my loyalty to the Lord (Note Habakkuk 3: 17-19).**

- 15. How would you distinguish between legitimate (God-given) sexual desires, and illegitimate (sinful) sexual lusts?**
- 16. How do you conquer the ‘giant’ of lust?**

CHAPTER TWO

OVERCOME 'CIRCUMSTANTIAL' TEMPTATIONS

Matthew 20: 20-28

CONQUERING THE 'GIANT' OF JEALOUSY!

Let that 'mind' be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. The battle against jealousy is won in the mind. Step by step, let us note how this deliverance is accomplished. First, see the possibility of deliverance through Christ alone who never envied another.

Second, honestly face your personal need for deliverance. It is humiliating to admit you have this problem, but the Great Physician can only heal you if you confess it.

Third, rechannel your tendency towards comparison with others. God accepts you just as you are and, therefore, you don't need to build up your ego by comparing yourself with others in a less favorable condition than you (which leads to ugly pride), and you don't need to plunge yourself into despair or into jealousy by comparing yourself with others who appear to be in a much more favorable condition than you. The quest in our society for power, popularity, dominance, and leadership breeds envy, strife, and jealousy. Compare yourself only with yourself, that you might continue to grow.

Fourth, rejoice in the God-ordained place which Christ has for you personally. God has a place for all in His great family. There is no need for any member to compare itself with any other member of the Body of Christ (Church), for each member has a different function and each member is needed for the healthy functioning of the entire Body. A great antidote against envy and jealousy is learning to enjoy others and learning to enjoy giving preference and honor to others. The only competition, worthy of the name of Christ, is the competition of love - seeking to outdo one another in acts of compassion and love! This attitude makes for a harmonious Church!

Fifth, realize that Christ can take away the desire for the approval and praise of the 'Crowd' - the source of much envy and jealousy - and that Christ can replace this desire with the sole desire for the praise and approval of God. The one-talented servant of God, who is inwardly confident that he is sincerely seeking to 'please the Master', may feel the 'smile of God's approval' on his life. If his Savior approves of him and 'praises' him, why should he need the applause of mere men?

Sixth, play down your own successes. Emphasize long-time brotherhood. Don't magnify new differences in status or attainments or successes. *Never deliberately provoke envy in another, either through overt remarks of conceit or through actions of pride. "Let your love be perfectly sincere...allowing one another to enjoy preference of honor."* (Romans 12: 9, Berkeley) Says Proverbs 27: 2, *"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips."* Focus on others, not on yourself!

“Father, help me to die, both to the praise and to the blame of men, and study only to show myself approved by You. Make me ‘jealous’ only for your ‘smile of approval.’”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will rejoice in the God-ordained place which God has given to me and not envy God’s place for someone else!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

I Corinthians 4: 1-5; Matthew 7: 1

CONQUERING THE ‘GIANT’ OF JUDGMENTALISM!

One ‘trap’ (sin) that believers must always guard against is the ‘trap’ of judgmentalism. It is far too easy for Christians, who are ‘very different’ from each other, to succumb to the temptation to judge each other. The Christian with an impulsive temperament may be misunderstood (and judged) by the Christian whose temperament is passive. The cheerful temperament may have ‘problems’ with the artistic temperament which is given more often to moodiness. The activistic temperament may have ‘problems’ with the meditative temperament. The extrovertive temperament may grow impatient with the introvertive temperament. When different temperaments conflict and patience grows thin, there is need for the ‘grace’ of tolerance and understanding, and for the ‘oil’ of forgiveness. Try to overlook the ‘personality flaws’ in others, and focus instead on their strengths and virtues. Be patient with others, slow to judge, quick to forgive!

William Barclay suggests three reasons why no one is capable of judging another: (1) We never know the whole facts or the whole person. We cannot understand his circumstances or temptations. (2) It is almost impossible for any man to be strictly impartial in his judgement. (3) No man is good enough to judge another man. Our own faults and our own inability to resolve them automatically disqualify us as fair critics.

Notes John Church, “This leads me to call your attention to the fact that in the Book of Leviticus, the 13th and 14th chapters, the truth is brought out in a very striking way, that sometimes there was brought to the High Priest a person who had an eruption which looked very much as if the person was a leper. However, the High Priest was not hasty in his judgment on that person, for it was a serious thing to pronounce him a leper. If there was any doubt at all in the mind of the Priest, he always gave the person involved the benefit of the doubt. He had him shut up for seven days and then he looked again. If he was still not sure, he withheld judgment and had the person shut up for seven more days. In some cases this was repeated until a period of twenty one days passed before he would pass final judgment on a person. I have often read this passage and thought of what a wonderful thing it would be if all Christian people would manifest the same patience in judging their fellow men about their sins and faults. Just suppose that we would be willing to wait twenty one days before we finally passed judgment upon the conduct of our brother. What a different world this would be! The trouble with us is that we condemn and pass judgment before all the evidence is in, and many people are condemned before they have a hearing. Too bad that this is true, for many lives have been hurt and reputations have been ruined by such hasty judgment. Let us be patient and wait until all the evidence is in; it may not be as bad as we think.” (Earthen Vessels; pg. 16, 17)

“Father, forgive me for my critical, judgmental attitude towards my fellow Christians. Help me to be slow to speak and quick to listen, slow to judge and quick to forgive.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus said ‘*Judge Not*’ and He also said ‘*Ye shall know them by their fruit.*’ Fruit-testing (I John 4: 1-3)? Yes! Critical Judging (Matthew 7: 1)? No!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Matthew 6:19-21

CONQUERING THE 'GIANT' OF ENVY!

Have you ever felt like you took two steps forward and three steps backward, that the harder you tried to live a godly life the more adversities and reverses you seemed to experience? Have you ever felt a spirit of envy and covetousness come over you when you observed the wicked in their prosperity in contrast to your hardships and obstacles and financial troubles? Have you ever wondered why God allows the wicked man to enjoy pleasures and power and position and prestige, while God, at the same time, allows the righteous man to suffer hardships of all kinds - financial losses, physical infirmities, heart-breaking sorrows, spiritual depressions? Have you ever thought that health and wealth automatically belonged to you by virtue of your spiritual sonship in God's family, and that, when you weren't enjoying prosperity, God must be failing to keep His promises? Have you ever been tempted to demand an explanation of why some who are not as righteous as you are, seem to get ahead in life? If you believe that material prosperity is a sure sign of God's blessings, then you will be very confused, maybe even bitter, if you observe the wicked prospering while you are not prospering! Envy is the result of one person (in this case, a believer) making an unfavorable comparison with another (in this case, with a prosperous wicked man). If we are honest, most of us would have to admit that the seeming "prosperity" of our unsaved friends, in contrast to our seeming "failure", causes envious feelings to rise to the surface of our hearts.

What is the answer to your evil coveting? He who falls in love with God soon falls out of love with the things of this world! It is learning to covet what God covets, to treasure what God treasures, to delight in what God delights in. Setting your affections on God and on heavenly things, is exchanging the world for heaven, is exchanging the temporary for the permanent, is making the Living God the object of your coveting rather than making your false and manmade gods the object of your coveting. Treasuring God and desiring the smile of God's approval, and coveting a God-like character - these new affections replace the old affections. It is the object of your coveting that determines whether your coveting is right or wrong. Jesus did not forbid you to lay up treasures, but He did define the kind of treasures you are to lay up and He did pinpoint the place where those treasures are to be deposited. *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6: 19-21) Loving God and His eternal Kingdom is one of the best antidotes for evil coveting! He who is preoccupied with trying to please and obey God, is not preoccupied with trying to outdo his fellow men. The one who follows God need not envy the worldling whose desires are inflamed by what the world has to offer-houses and lands, power and pleasures, fortune and fame.

“Jesus, You are the “Water of life” and the “Bread of life” - the satisfaction of my greatest ‘hungers’ and my insatiable ‘thirst’! In Thee, all my needs are fully supplied!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus never promised His followers material wealth or worldly power, but He did promise “abundant life” here and “eternal life” hereafter!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

I Corinthians 13: 1-13

ARE YOU ‘EXCLUSIVE’ OR ‘INCLUSIVE’ IN YOUR LOVE OF OTHERS?

One of the temptations which believers often face is the temptation to be ‘exclusive’ in their attitudes and actions towards other persons (persons who are ‘professing Christians’) who greatly differ in their religious beliefs and practices from themselves. Followers of Jesus Christ must never forget that love (given to humble believers as a gift by the Holy Spirit, Romans 5: 5) not only covers a multitude of sins (James 5: 20 and I Peter 4: 8), but that love also seeks to include in one’s circle of fellowship the greatest number of believers that one can possibly include. Love is ‘inclusive’, not ‘exclusive’! There are certain negative words which accurately describe what love is NOT. Love is not narrow, sectarian, judgmental, rigid, critical, proud. Rather, love is broad, open-minded, charitable in judgment-making, accepting, positive, humble, teachable, flexible, and tolerant. Notes the great Christian theologian and philosopher, Francis A. Schaeffer, “One must realize that there is a great difference between believing in absolutes and having an absolutist mentality about everything.” (The Church At The End of the 20th Century; pg. 151)

In his excellent book ‘Love Covers’, Paul Billheimer notes, “The only power that will bring unity in the Body of Christ is the power of agape love. Adequate love for Jesus enables one to accept and love those whom He accepts and loves, regardless of their opinions in non-essentials. We shall never be united by conceptual truth, church polity, liturgy, or any canon or confession of faith - only by agape love. With a sufficient flow of love in the Body, all divisive factors will shrink and diminish in significance. No breach in the Body of Christ is caused primarily by superior knowledge, differing convictions, or divergent views of truth; but by one thing and only one - lack of agape love. Therefore, the only remedy will be found in growth in love, that is, authentic love for God. God knows that finite minds will never reach absolutely inerrant conclusions. He knows that many controversies will never be settled this side of heaven. If infallibility in doctrine or conceptual truth in nonessentials is all important in God’s sight, why did He leave room for doubts and differences of opinion? May it not be that He permits uncertainty in nonessentials to give opportunity for practice and growth in love? Which is more important, to be right in opinion and wrong in spirit or to be wrong in opinion and right in spirit? What happens when one is wrong in spirit? Is not the Holy Spirit within him consciously grieved and does He not witness to offense by an inward sense of disapproval? God may, and does, bless those with opposite views on nonessentials. God may and does bless those with contradictory views but He never blesses lovelessness.” (‘Love Covers’ by Paul Billheimer; portions, pgs. 106, 107, 112)

“Loving Heavenly Father, I confess that I too often have sinned by excluding your children from my personal fellowship, simply because they think and act and react and worship differently than I do. Please forgive me for my sectarianism, and now open my

heart to embrace all true believers in my affections. In Jesus’ charitable name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: All who have bowed their knees and who have declared with their lips that ‘Jesus Is Lord’ are my brothers and sisters in God’s big Family!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES

I Samuel 17: 8-11, 32-51

CONQUERING THE 'GIANT' OF NEGATIVISM!

In your 'battle' against the 'giant' of negativism remember that, as a follower of Jesus Christ, you serve the most positive person who ever lived! Jesus is the 'Divine Yes' to all of life, for He puts a positive Yes upon every No that comes to a Christian! When a believer experiences unexplainable tragedy or when he observes life's many inequities, injustices, and mysteries, he is tempted to become cynical, bitter, pessimistic, and negative. When you are severely tempted to become an 'agnostic', you must express your faith in God! That is to say, in spite of your confused mind and your 'bleeding' heart (because of life's losses and disappointments), you must reaffirm that God knows what is best (He is all-wise), God wants to give what is the best (He is all-loving), God can do what is best (He is all-powerful)! Even though you can't understand with your mind, you can accept (trust) with your heart! In all of life's experiences you can learn to give thanks, for nothing can happen to the true believer but what God allows, and God will not allow His children to shed any 'needless tears'. To help you avoid falling into the 'trap' of 'negativism', you must often quote Romans 8: 28 - *"And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans."*

As in the case of young David who courageously confronted the evil giant (Goliath) - as recorded in today's Scripture Reading - you must not dwell on the 'discouraging' conditions which surround you, and you must not absorb the negative spirit of reactionary and critical people! What is one of the greatest 'secrets' to overcoming the 'giant' of negativism? David didn't lose heart and succumb to the temptation to be negative and pessimistic because he had his eyes on God, not on Goliath. David did not make youthful boasts based on his own supposed strength. David made confident claims based on his personal faith in Almighty God! David remained 'positive' and did not become paralyzed with fear because he knew God, and in knowing of God's power, the power of Goliath looked like nothing to David! The 'secret' to facing threatening situations (the 'giants') is to know God, to have so much confidence in God's strength and might that the might of human problems looks small in comparison!

Your faith in God (during life's crisis) can be contagious. David's close contact with God was David's basis for encouraging others not to lose heart, as they faced the 'death threats' of Goliath. If you choose 'optimistic faith' instead of 'pessimistic doubt', you will be amazed at the number of 'timorous believers' whom you will excite and awaken in their exercise of faith in the Almighty God! Like David, when you live close to God, you are in a position to be a great encourager to others (especially to those 'weak believers' who are wavering in their faith - who look at the 'dark side' of life).

“Father, hold me ‘steady’ during life’s losses and griefs, when I find it too easy to think and speak and act negatively. Use me to help ‘rally’ others to exercise positive faith!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because God is on the ‘throne’ of the universe, I believe there is ‘sunshine’ behind every ‘cloud’, purpose in every mystery, ‘grace’ for every tragedy!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

I Samuel 17: 8-11, 32-51

IS FAITH 'IDEALISM' OR 'REALISM'?

When the adults (including King Saul) confronted the mighty giant (Goliath), they believed that their reaction of 'fear' was a reaction of 'realism'. These negative-thinking and negative-speaking adults (Israelite soldiers) ridiculed young David for his optimistic talk, in defiance of Goliath. The faith-filled and positive-minded David asked: "Who is this heathen Philistine, anyway, that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?" (I Samuel 17: 26b, Living Bible) David, who was accused of 'youthful idealism', was the only one present who was truly 'realistic'. David alone 'focused' on the God of Israel, whose power was far greater than the boasted strength of Goliath who served the false gods of the Philistines. When a believer (like David) trusts alone in the God of the universe, that believer is the person who has truly 'connected' with reality! In this classic story of David and Goliath, adult pessimism (in the name of 'realism') confronted youthful idealism (in the name of 'faith') and David's victory over Goliath proved to everyone that day that 'faith in God' (not 'pessimistic fear') was what constituted 'realism'!

So-called 'youthful idealism' (as seen in the courage and faith of David) is too often criticized by 'sophisticated' adults. When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard David speaking with the Israelite soldiers, Eliab burned with anger at David and he asked: "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle." Eliab and the other brothers were negative, faithless, critical, pessimistic - and all in the name of 'realism'! What a 'perversion of reality'! David alone was the 'realist', for David focused his sole attention on Almighty God! King Saul too was negative and faithless: "You, David, are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him, you are only a boy, and Goliath has been a fighting man from his youth. " Saul pointed out David's limitations. David was small and Goliath was big! David was inexperienced, and Goliath was an experienced warrior!

There are adults today who try to discourage a child's or a youth's exercise of faith and optimism. There are those who attempt to bring death to youthful aspirations and dreams and hopes. What kind of 'word' do you give to young persons - a 'discouraging word' or an 'encouraging word'? Do you help inspire the visions and dreams of young people, or do you, in the name of 'realism', throw 'cold water' on their zeal and enthusiasm? Parents (and other adults) who destroy the faith, idealism, and spiritual visions of their children, cause their children to lose hope and to despair and to become (like the adults) pessimistic and negative! What tragedy and what a sin! Woe to such an adult (see Matthew 18: 6)!

“Father, I want to be a person of positive faith, encouraging young people to ‘focus’ on their potential, not on their limitations; to ‘reach for the stars’, not ‘wallow’ in the mud.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There are no ‘impossible’ situations in life, only people who have grown faithless when confronting the challenges of life!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

I Corinthians 13: 1-13

ARE YOU ‘EXCLUSIVE’ OR ‘INCLUSIVE’ IN YOUR LOVE OF OTHERS?

One of the temptations which believers often face is the temptation to be ‘exclusive’ in their attitudes and actions towards other persons (persons who are ‘professing Christians’) who greatly differ in their religious beliefs and practices from themselves. Followers of Jesus Christ must never forget that love (given to humble believers as a gift by the Holy Spirit, Romans 5: 5) not only covers a multitude of sins (James 5: 20 and I Peter 4: 8), but that love also seeks to include in one’s circle of fellowship the greatest number of believers that one can possibly include. Love is ‘inclusive’, not ‘exclusive’! There are certain negative words which accurately describe what love is NOT. Love is not narrow, sectarian, judgmental, rigid, critical, proud. Rather, love is broad, open-minded, charitable in judgment-making, accepting, positive, humble, teachable, flexible, and tolerant. Notes the great Christian theologian and philosopher, Francis A. Schaeffer, “One must realize that there is a great difference between believing in absolutes and having an absolutist mentality about everything.” (The Church At The End of the 20th Century; pg. 151)

In his excellent book ‘Love Covers’, Paul Billheimer notes, “The only power that will bring unity in the Body of Christ is the power of agape love. Adequate love for Jesus enables one to accept and love those whom He accepts and loves, regardless of their opinions in non-essentials. We shall never be united by conceptual truth, church polity, liturgy, or any canon or confession of faith - only by agape love. With a sufficient flow of love in the Body, all divisive factors will shrink and diminish in significance. No breach in the Body of Christ is caused primarily by superior knowledge, differing convictions, or divergent views of truth; but by one thing and only one - lack of agape love. Therefore, the only remedy will be found in growth in love, that is, authentic love for God. God knows that finite minds will never reach absolutely inerrant conclusions. He knows that many controversies will never be settled this side of heaven. If infallibility in doctrine or conceptual truth in nonessentials is all important in God’s sight, why did He leave room for doubts and differences of opinion? May it not be that He permits uncertainty in nonessentials to give opportunity for practice and growth in love? Which is more important, to be right in opinion and wrong in spirit or to be wrong in opinion and right in spirit? What happens when one is wrong in spirit? Is not the Holy Spirit within him consciously grieved and does He not witness to offense by an inward sense of disapproval? God may, and does, bless those with opposite views on nonessentials. God may and does bless those with contradictory views but He never blesses lovelessness.” (‘Love Covers’ by Paul Billheimer; portions, pgs. 106, 107, 112)

“Loving Heavenly Father, I confess that I too often have sinned by excluding your children from my personal fellowship, simply because they think and act and react and worship differently than I do. Please forgive me for my sectarianism, and now open my

“Father, help me to be positive, not negative, so that my believing the best about others will help others to become their best. Help me to see God-given potential in everyone.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is a ‘gold mine’ of creative genius hidden in every person; I determine to help others discover their God-given treasures!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Tell to what extent you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “God accepts you just as you are and, therefore, you don’t need to build up your ego by comparing yourself with others in a less favorable condition than you (which leads to ugly pride), and you don’t need to plunge yourself into despair or jealousy by comparing yourself with others who appear to be in a much more favorable condition than you.”**
- 2. What steps have you personally taken to curb your tendency (temptation) towards selfish (hurtful) competition with others?**
- 3. Have you learned to rejoice in the God-ordained place which God has uniquely given to you and not to envy God’s place for someone else? (Note John 21: 15-23)**
- 4. Why do you think there’s such a strong tendency (temptation) for Christians to judge (i.e., to criticize) their fellow Christians (or other persons, in general)? What is the difference between properly evaluating (testing) the life and character of other persons, and improperly judging (criticizing) other persons? (Note Matthew 7: 15-20; I John 4: 1-3; Matthew 7: 1-5)**
- 5. Give several reasons why you (as a believer) are incapable of ‘judging’ another person.**
- 6. Have you ever felt a ‘spirit of envy and covetousness’ come over you, when you observed the wicked in their prosperity in contrast to your hardships and obstacles and financial troubles? If so, what is the ‘answer’ (solution) to your wrongful coveting? (Note Psalm 73)**
- 7. From your own personal experiences and from your observation of other godly persons, tell if you believe the following statement reflects ‘reality’: “He who is preoccupied with trying to please and obey God, is not preoccupied with trying to outdo his fellow men.”**
- 8. Why is it “so dangerous” for Christians to teach that financial prosperity and physical health are “evidences” (“signs”) of God’s special favor on a person’s life? Tell to what degree you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “Jesus never promised His followers material wealth or worldly power, but He did promise ‘abundant life’ here and ‘eternal life’ hereafter!”**

- 9. What should your attitude be towards fellow Christians whose theological beliefs and personal ‘convictions’ and Biblical interpretations and material lifestyle and worship style are very different than your own? (Note I Corinthians 13: 1-13; Romans 14: 1; 15: 7)**
- 10. Which is more important, to be right in opinion and wrong in spirit, or to be wrong in opinion and right in spirit? Tell if you agree or disagree with the following statement: “God may and does bless those with contradictory views but He never blesses lovelessness.”**
- 11. How does belief in God’s sovereignty help you to cope with life’s inequities and mysteries and injustices? (Note Romans 8: 28) Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: “In spite of your confused mind and your ‘bleeding’ heart (because of life’s losses and disappointments), you must reaffirm that God knows what is best (He is all-wise), God wants to give what is best (He is all-loving), God can do what is best (He is all-powerful)!”**
- 12. What is one of the greatest ‘secrets’ to overcoming the ‘giant’ of negativism?**
- 13. From the example of David’s defiance against the pagan giant (Goliath), what affect will your “positive attitudes of faith” have upon other persons surrounding you? (Note I Samuel 17: 8-11, 32-51)**
- 14. Is faith in God ‘idealism’ or ‘realism’? Why? Why can it be said that the Christian, whose sole focus is on God, is the genuine ‘realist’?**
- 15. Do you help inspire the visions and dreams of young people, or do you, in the name of ‘realism’, throw ‘cold water’ on their zeal and enthusiasm?**
- 16. Are you a ‘possibility thinker’ or do you tend negatively to focus on the problems in people and in situations? What steps have you taken to rid yourself of your tendencies (temptations) towards negative (pessimistic and faithless) thinking?**
- 17. Do you, like the apostle Paul, tend to see the possibilities and potential in other people (in even ‘down-and-out’ people), or do you tend to disqualify and disinherit and discriminate against people? (Note Philemon 1: 1-25) In your ‘general outlook’ on life, do you tend to see ‘problems’ or ‘possibilities’ in people and in life’s situations? Generally-speaking are you a ‘positive-minded’ or a ‘negative-minded’ person? From a Biblical and practical perspective, why is it so vitally important for you to be a ‘positive-minded’ person? What are some of the specific benefits which you and others receive as a result of your positive thoughts and positive actions?**

- 18. Do you see a ‘bundle of possibilities’ in every child you meet, or do you see most children as an ‘immature annoyance’? Do you believe that encouragement will do far more for people than rebuke will do? Why or why not.?**

CHAPTER THREE

MODEL HUMILITY AND CONFIDENCE

Daniel 4: 27-37; Acts 12: 20-23

CONQUERING THE 'GIANT' OF PRIDE

Of all the 'enemies within' which are difficult to 'conquer', it is 'self-centered pride' which is the most difficult of all. The Bible says much about pride and humility. First, remembered that the 'Fall' of Satan (Isaiah 14: 12-15), as well as the origin of human sin, is attributed to this sin of pride!

Second, remember the serious consequences of 'self-centered' Pride. Pride is man's attempt to steal the glory away from Almighty God - a very serious sin, indeed. Eventually, the God-ordained judgment of God falls upon the prideful and the arrogant and the boastful person! History demonstrates this fact time and time again! Recall the story of Nebuchadnezzar, and the story of King Herod (today's Scripture readings).

Third, recognize that one of God's 'basic requirements' for mankind is humility. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6: 8)

Fourth, compare yourself, not with others (which often leads to pride), but compare yourself with Jesus Christ, and you shall always remain humble. When I and my family often returned from visiting my parents-in-law in Nebraska, we would travel the flat lands of eastern Colorado, returning to our home in Fort Collins, Colorado. Eventually, on the horizon, we would view the "slight outline" of the Rocky Mountain range, which appeared so very small. The closer we got to our city, the larger the mountain range appeared - and, in contrast to the mountains, the smaller we felt. So it is with your relationship with Christ. The closer you draw to him, the more realistic will be your understanding of reality - and the "smaller" (more humble) you will feel!

Fifth, realize that all of your moral and intellectual achievements were given to you from God. Wrote Paul to the arrogant (carnal) believers in the Corinthian Church: "What are you so puffed up about? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God why act as though you are so great, and as though you have accomplished something on your own?" (I Corinthians 4:7, Living Bible)

Sixth, realize, at the end of your successful life, you are still an "unworthy servant" (Luke 17: 7-9). Karl Barth, considered by many to be the greatest Christian theologian of the 20th century, writes: "When once the day comes when I have to appear before my Lord, then I will not come with my deeds, with the volumes of my 'Dogmatics' on my back. All the angels there would have to laugh. But then I shall also not say 'I have always meant well. I had good faith.' No, then I will only say one thing: 'Lord, be merciful to me, a poor sinner!'"

“God, help me to remember who I am - a ‘servant’ obeying the Master, a ‘subject’ submitting to the King, a ‘creature’ reverencing the Creator, a ‘son’ honoring the Father! I am not worthy of the least of Your ‘favor’, but thank you for loving me so!

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall!” I choose to walk humbly before my God all the days of my earthly pilgrimage!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Mark 9: 33-37; Luke 22:24-27

WALK HUMBLY BEFORE THY GOD!

When my grandson, who at the time was two years old, took regular nature walks with me, he loved to listen for the sounds of birds. When he heard the mourning dove, he thought it was an owl. Interested in the owl, I would repetitiously say to him on our hikes: "Lucas, the owl says 'Who, Who, Who are you?'" What one imagines the owl says is a good question for each of us to ask of ourselves: "Who, Who, Who are you?" In spite of what our God-rejecting society says about the 'importance' of the 'Ego', God declares that you definitely are not a self-sufficient, self-made person who can make it in life without God and without anyone else! You must determine, by God's grace, to conquer pride!

Seventh, realize that you are totally dependent upon God for both your physical and spiritual life. Wrote Paul to the intellectually sophisticated Athenians: *"God himself gives life and breath to everyone and everything, and satisfies every need there is. He created all the people of the world from one man, Adam, and scattered the nations across the face of the earth. He decided beforehand which should rise and fall, and when. His purpose in all of this is that they should seek after God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him - though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and are!"* (Acts 17:25-28, Living Bible) The Lord of Heaven is not only the Creator, but he is also the Savior who gives and who sustains all spiritual life. Said Jesus: *"Yes I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in me and I in him shall produce a large crop of fruit. For apart from me you can't do a thing."* (John 15: 5, Living Bible)

Eighth, remember that "God resisteth the proud" (James 4: 6). Who, in his 'right mind', wants to experience the 'pressures of God's resistance' against himself? A 'losing contest' for sure! But, remember also that God will eventually 'exalt the humble' (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5: 6)!

Ninth, learn from your own past experiences of humiliation (as a result of God's 'chastening' of your sinful pride) never to be self-sufficient and proud again. Peter learned his 'lesson in humility' the hard way, but he became a humble disciple!

Tenth, realize that God did not create you to be independent, but to be interdependent. You need other believers, for you don't possess all the 'spiritual gifts' (Romans 12: 4-8).

Eleventh, learn to "count your many blessings", all of which come from God. A spirit of gratitude is a great 'antidote' against pride.

“Father, deal with me ‘tenderly’ and yet ‘decisively’. Kill the remnants of self-centered pride in my life, and resurrect me to a Christ-centered life of genuine humility!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When I bow at the feet of Jesus, then I can stand tall in life with ‘confidence without pride’, and I can experience ‘humility without humiliation’!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

James 4: 6; Peter 5: 5-7; John 13: 1-4

HUMILITY IN THE LIFE OF A 'GREAT'

In a most interesting issue (February 2000) of the insightful magazine 'Christian History' the "10 most influential Christians of the twentieth century" are featured, with Billy Graham as the 'most influential'! For more than 50 years, Billy Graham has preached to more persons than any other person in human history! When history is written a thousand years from now, the name of Billy Graham will be recorded as one of the greatest evangelists of all times!

It is my privilege to share a friendship with Ralph Bell, one of Graham's associate evangelists for the last 35 years. Ralph has preached in crusades in many locations. Also, for many years, Ralph sat on the platform at many of Graham's crusades (to act as his 'back-up man' in the event that Billy would be unable to preach because of illness, etc.). At the weekly men's luncheon, where I often visit with Ralph, I asked him a few questions regarding the character and ministry of this world renowned evangelist. Ralph shared several facts with me. Billy has been most gracious through the years, always loving and kind and personable, giving full attention and total 'eye contact' to every person with whom he is speaking; caring deeply for his staff members from whom he readily receives counsel and input (such as sermons illustrations and commentary on contemporary events from men like John Wesley White, his associate evangelist who had two PhD degrees). He has been careful to avoid conflict with the news media and with 'ultra-conservatives' who have criticized Graham's co-operation with some liberal churchmen. Graham has long told his associate evangelists that their call is to preach the simple gospel, not to be drawn into needless controversies. He remains loving toward his opponents and critics. It is his purpose to unite the body of Christ, not to be divisive. Ralph said that Billy readily acknowledges that there are thousands of other preachers who can preach better than he can, but (even if there are kings and presidents and theologians in his audience) he has always preached the 'simple gospel'. He knows he has been given the gift of evangelism, so he does not attempt to involve himself in 'apologetic debates'. When a TV talk host (Larry King) recently pointed out that Billy Graham had long been chosen (year after year) as one of the most popular persons in almost all of the polls, Billy responded that he did not feel he deserved such ratings. During his preaching Billy points out that he will only make it to heaven because of the 'grace of God and the shed blood' of Christ, not because he has performed 'good works' (including the fact that he has preached to countless millions of people). I asked what was the 'secret' to his success, and Ralph answered "Prayer". Why has "the most influential Christian of the 20th century" remained so 'humble'? Because he owes everything to Christ's atonement and the empowering presence of the Spirit!

“Father, enable me in all my relationships - as a spouse, a parent, a friend, a worker- to be a ‘loving servant’, not a ‘cruel tyrant’. Help me to use the ‘towel and basin’.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Increasingly I want to be like Jesus who came to earth, not to be served, but to serve!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Romans 14: 1-23

THE CONDEMNATORY VOICE OF AN OVERLY-SENSITIVE CONSCIENCE

Among the many causes of false guilt is the condemnatory voice of an overly-sensitive conscience, seeking to accuse, even though there is no Biblical or objective basis for such condemnation. Sometimes this overly-sensitive conscience is developed in one's childhood. Children can develop notions and impressions that some things are wrong or evil, even though the things which are producing guilt feelings are not wrong at all. Such false guilts need to be thrown aside and a new confidence with God and man regained. God is greater than human ideas and notions, and in God's sovereign love and mercy He will calm human doubts and deliver from false guilt.

Perhaps a few illustrations will help make this point clear. Some have said that sex feelings are sinful or that attraction to the beauty of the opposite sex is sinful. These feelings and attractions are not lust or sin, but are part of our normal, healthy life. Nearly everybody has them. Lust is sin, but not sexual attraction.

Some have imposed false guilt on conscientious persons by saying that self-love is sinful. Self-love is not sinful. Self-love is assumed in Christ's commandment to love one's neighbor as one's self. To act as if you had no self-love is to act dishonestly. Self-centered love is sinful, but not self-love. Loving Christ supremely, you are to love yourself subordinately and others sincerely. But to love others sincerely, you must love yourself truly. You need not feel guilty because you love yourself.

Some have imposed false guilt on teenagers by saying that ambivalent feelings by teenagers toward parents is wrong. During adolescent development, it is normal for young people to experience ambivalent feelings towards parents at times, for these feelings are part of the unconscious struggling for adult status and independence.

Writes J.B. Phillips, “All religions, Christianity unfortunately not excepted, tend to excite in certain people an artificial sense of guilt, which may have little or no connection with a man's actual standing before God. Probably Pharisaism, which Christ attacked with bitter scorn represents this tendency at its highest. The danger of such a system, and the reason why Christ attacked it so violently, is that its values are artificial. The proud and correct feel ‘right with God’ just when they are not, and the sensitive humble man feels hopeless and overburdened for the wrong reasons.” (The Newborn Christian; pg. 174) As C.S. Lewis says, “We may create scruples. And scruples are always a bad thing - if only because they usually distract us from real duties.” (The Joyful Christian; pg. 170.)

“Father, awaken my conscience to discern the sinfulness of real sin and the innocency of manmade scruples. Help me to deposit in the moral wastebasket all false guilts which are robbing me of peace of mind and joy in living. I want to live abundantly!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Son has made me free, therefore I will not burden myself today with the needless baggage of false guilt!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Revelation 12: 7-12

'THE ACCUSER OF THE BRETHREN'

In Revelation 12: 10, Satan is called 'the accuser of the brethren who accuses them before our God day and night.' Satan is able to disguise himself as 'an angel of light' (2 Corinthians 11: 14). Satan is the 'accuser' of the brethren who appears at times as an angel of light - seeking to produce a condemning conscience in the Christian. This is one of the common sources of 'false guilt'. Satan enjoys accusing the believer of things of which he is not guilty!

Believers can be thankful that against this darkening, confusing, subtle force stands the powerful and merciful Spirit of God who comforts believers and who stills the accusing voice of Satan.

The Scriptures tell us how to counter this dreadful accusation of Satan: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." (Revelation 12: 11)

Satan hates the blood of Christ, for it is Christ's blood which cleanses from all sin. (1 John 1: 7) Satan also hates the testimony of the humble believer, for that testimony declares Christ's power - the very power that will ultimately vanquish Satan altogether!

In speaking of Satan, there are two traps to avoid. First, it is possible not to take Satan seriously at all. There are those who outrightly deny his existence, which is a great and dangerous mistake! There are others who are ignorant of his evil devices, and thus they are often entrapped in his subtle snares. Paul warned us not to be ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2: 11). There are others who believe that if they never think of Satan or mention Satan by name that Satan will leave them alone. All of these responses are responses which show that the persons involved are not taking Satan seriously.

There is a second trap to avoid in dealing with Satan. It is possible to be overly preoccupied with Satan. Someone wisely said, "What gets your attention, gets you!" Don't give credit to Satan if you can help it! Don't give Satan undue attention by talking too much or too often about him. Don't focus your attention or interest on Satan; instead, focus your attention on Jesus Christ! Glance at Satan but gaze on Jesus Christ! Recognize that, while Satan's power abounds, Jesus' power super abounds! Be knowledgeable of Satan's tactics, but be more knowledgeable of the Holy Spirit's works! Never forget that you do not work for a victory, but that you work from a victory - a victory which was won on the cross and through the empty tomb!

“Father, help me to distinguish between your voice of true conviction of real sins in my life, from Satan’s disguised voice of false accusations. Help me to arm myself with the

Word of God and learn to resist the devil, as I remain steadfast in the faith. Victory is mine, through the Lord Jesus Christ! Thank You. Thank You!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Satan’s head has been crushed! Satan’s death sentence has been pronounced and his execution date has been set! He is a defeated foe!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES

I John 3: 18-24

THE BASIS OF CONFIDENCE

Listen to the apostle John’s wise advice: *“My children, let us love not merely in theory or in words - let us love in sincerely and in practice! This is how we shall know that we are children of the truth and can reassure ourselves in the sight of God, even if our own conscience makes us feel guilty. For God is greater than our conscience, and he knows everything.”* (I John 2: 18-20, Phillips)

Notes John Stott, “The suggestion seems to be (from verse 20) that it may not be either an unusual or infrequent experience for the Christian’s serene assurance to be disturbed. Sometimes the accusations of our ‘conscience’ will be true accusations, and sometimes, they will be false...In either case, the inner voice is not to overcome us.” (Tyndale Bible Commentary: The Epistles of John; pg. 145)

Stott continues, “Our conscience is by no means infallible; its condemnation may often be unjust. We can, therefore appeal from our conscience to God who is greater and more knowledgeable. Indeed, He knows all things, including our secret motives and deepest resolves, and, it is implied, will be more merciful towards us than our own heart. His omniscience should relieve, not terrify, us. It is knowledge which alone can quiet the condemning heart, our own knowledge of our sincere love for others and supremely God’s knowledge of our thoughts and motives. Stronger than any chemical tranquillizer is trust in our all-knowing God.” (Ibid: pg. 146)

The one who experiences the divinely-imparted love can be assured that he is of the Truth, and therefore he can have a tranquil heart. “It is the mind’s knowledge by which the heart’s doubts may be silenced...Love is the final objective test of our Christian profession, for true love, in the sense of self-sacrifice, is not natural to man in his fallen state. Its existence in any man is evidence of new birth and of the indwelling Spirit, and it shows itself ‘in deed’. ‘There are actual things we can point to - not things we have professed or felt or imagined or intended, but things that we have done.’ (Law) If we thus love ‘in truth’ (v. 10), we may indeed have full assurance in our hearts. “The fruit of love is confidence.’ (Wescott)” (Ibid; pg. 145, 146)

Suppose the condemnation which you feel is because of real sin in your life, and is not the result of false guilt? Then recognize that the sovereign mercy and love of God is still ‘greater than your heart’ (I John 3: 20). God knows your heart and can judge rightly. Whatever the source of condemnation - be it false guilt or real guilt - God is greater than the condemnation and can restore the believer to true confidence!

“Father, restore unto me the joy of my salvation. You are the source of my joy, for you are the solution to the problem of my guilty feelings which have stolen away my joy. You came to earth, not to condemn, but to save - to save me from the real guilt of my sins and from the false guilt resulting from my inadequacies. Thank you for your total provision!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who is greater than my heart will stand guard over my heart, delivering me from all guilt - both real and false.

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

2 Corinthians 1: 8-11; 4: 7-12; 1 Kings 19: 1-9

LIVING IN 'EARTHEN VESSELS'

As a believer, one temptation which you will often confront is the temptation to 'judge' your own degree of spirituality by the kind of 'feelings' which you are experiencing. Living by 'feelings' rather than by 'faith' is a 'trap' which you must avoid if you are to grow dynamically in your Christian life. Because the 'treasure' of God's salvation is contained in 'earthen vessels', the emotions of Christians can play 'tricks' on them. Christians are not exempt from bouts with depression caused by physical and mental weariness. Believers must remember that they are not 'saved' by their feelings nor do they remain 'saved' by their feelings! You are called by God to walk by faith - not by sight or by feelings! You must not gauge your spiritual life by the tone of your feelings. You must continue to live by faith, based upon commitment of your will to Almighty God. Do not live by your emotions which are influenced by changing circumstances.

"Many of the greatest saints have witnessed to the fact that there were times in their lives when it seemed that they had no faith at all. They tell us that Francis Asbury used to preach with great unction and power, and then go to his room and have spells of melancholy until he would feel that he was lost and there was no hope for him at all. Now this feeling came from the fact that his body was exhausted and his nerves frayed. I think that the same thing must have been true with Elijah when he went off under the juniper tree and had such a spell of the blues. It was the physical reaction that came after his great conflict with evil on Mount Carmel. His spiritual condition was not changed, for God went out to him and helped him." (Earthen Vessels; John Church; pages 44, 45)

When you are mentally and physically exhausted, you can easily be plagued with 'guilt feelings'. This kind of guilt is not caused by sin (i.e., breaking God's moral laws). Wisdom would dictate that you need to 'be kind to yourself' and not give 'counsel' to your feelings of 'false guilt'. You need, for a short time, to 'get away from ministry' and simply rest your body and renew your mind with proper 'diversions' (i.e., exercise, leisure, entertainment). "If you expect to live by your feelings, you will find yourself in a constant state of doubt and uncertainty and you will always live an up-and-down life. You will find that your feelings fluctuate and go up-and-down like a window shade, but thank God that does not have to be true of your spiritual state and standing in Jesus. The fact that you are in Jesus Christ is a fact that was established by a deliberate choice of your will, and that fact can only be changed in one way and that is by a choice of your will." (Ibid; pg. 45, 46) You are 'secure' in Christ, regardless of feelings!

“Jesus, thank you for remaining steadfast and faithful to me, amidst my changing emotions. In my sadness, you are my gladness; in my loneliness, you are my companionship; in my depression, you are my hope. Amidst the changes and chances of life, your resources are infinite to meet all my needs! I am profoundly thankful!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My faith is fixed on the fact of God’s trustworthy character - a fact that keeps my feelings intact!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Tell why you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “Of all the ‘enemies which are most difficult to ‘conquer’, it is ‘self-centered pride’ which is the most difficult of all!”**
- 2. According to Micah 6: 8, what basically does God ‘require’ of all persons?**
- 3. In light of I Corinthians 4:7, why is it so foolish (and wrong) for any individual to boast of his personal accomplishments.**
- 4. On whom are all human beings dependent for both physical and spiritual life? (Note Acts 17: 25-28 and John 15: 5)**
- 5. According to James 4: 6, what is God’s reaction toward the proud (arrogant) person? How does God respond toward the truly humble person? (Note John 4: 10 and I Peter 5: 6)**
- 6. From the life of the apostle Peter, what can you learn about the dangers of overconfidence, self-reliance, and boastful pride? (Note I Corinthians 10: 12)**
- 7. Give your personal explanation and interpretation and application of the following statement: “A spirit of gratitude is a great ‘antidote’ against pride.”**
- 8. Is it Biblically accurate to state that every believer should live with ‘confidence without pride’ and with ‘humility without humiliation’?**
- 9. What kind of divinely-sent punishment has sometimes come to wicked persons who have attempted to ‘steal’ the glory away from Almighty God through their boastful words and actions? (Note Daniel 4: 27-37 and Acts 12: 20-23).**
- 10. Why is it such a dangerous thing for a believer to gauge the degree of his own spirituality by the kind of “feelings” and “emotions” which he experiences? (Note 1 Kings 19: 1-18)**
- 11. When a believer experiences feelings of discouragement and despair and depression should he conclude that he has spiritually backslid and that God is looking upon him with great disfavor? Why or why not? (II Corinthians 4: 7-12)**
- 12. Share some specific “issues” in your personal life which have become the occasion of causing you to suffer some needless and groundless and false guilt. Share steps which you have taken to distinguish between “false” and “real” guilt, and share ways in which you have ridden yourself of “false” guilt.**

- 13. According to Revelation 12: 10, what is the source (cause) of some feelings of “guilt” which are not the result of violating objective (God-given) moral laws? (Note 2 Corinthians 11: 14)**
- 14. How can a believer effectively deal with his feelings of guilt, imposed upon him from an outside source and force? (Note Revelation 12: 11; Matthew 4: 1-11; James 4: 7; (Peter 5: 6-9)**
- 15. What are two “traps” to avoid in one’s attempt to deal realistically with Satan?**
- 16. According to I John 3: 18-23, what should a Christian do when he realizes that his serene assurance and peace is greatly disturbed (either by real or by false guilt)?**

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCOVER RESTORATION AND VICTORY

I Samuel 17: 38-51

HOW DO YOU CONQUER ‘GIANTS’?

When you are confronted with the many ‘giants’ of temptation in your life, remember that it is not human weaponry, but divinely-given weaponry, which wins the victory! Wrote Paul, *“It is true that I am an ordinary, weak human being, but I don’t use human plans and methods to win my battles. I use God’s mighty weapons, not those made by men, to knock down the devil’s strongholds.”* (2 Corinthians 10: 3-4, Living Bible)

What were the ‘secrets’ to David’s victory over the pagan giant Goliath? David stepped out from the crowd and he believed God. Listening to God instead of listening to the unbelieving and cynical world around you is the first step to spiritual victory. David could have listened to his cynical brothers and to the unbelieving King Saul, but, instead, David took his counsel from Almighty God! He did not succumb to peer pressure, but instead he responded to the pressure of faith in his heart. David’s inner belief in God was expressed outwardly: *“I will go out and face the giant regardless of the blasphemy of the giant, and regardless of the unbelief of the crowd of Israelite soldiers.”* If you are to win a spiritual victory, you too must ‘step out’ for God, giving heed to God’s call to courage rather than succumbing to the peer pressure of an unbelieving and compromising and godless world around you! God commands you to separate yourself from the evil advice of godless persons: *“Come out from among them and be ye separate”, saith the Lord, “and then I will receive you and ye shall be my sons and daughters!”* (2 Corinthians 6: 17-18)

David used his God-given weapon - his sling. The weapon which God puts in your hand - the weapon of faith - like the simple sling which David used in battle, may appear to others to be too simple and crude and ineffective. Faith wins the battle! Not dependence on the heavy armor of Saul, but dependence on the living God, as symbolized by the simple sling of David! David flung the stone from his sling and the stone found its target. The stone sunk into Goliath’s skull and the enemy of Israel tumbled to the dust! The stone represents the ‘Word of God’. The ‘Word of God’ - the Bible - is the ‘stone’ which brings down the ‘giants’ in your life. Think of Jesus when He was being tempted (Matthew 4). Jesus used the Scriptures against the devil, and Jesus won the victory! Remember, the ‘battle’ is the Lord’s. The Word of God (represented by the stone) alone can conquer your giants. But, also remember that without David’s obedient cooperation the battle could not have been won. God gave David faith to face the enemy, but David, nevertheless, had to exercise that gift of faith. The victory over the ‘giants’ in your life is not automatic. It is David who put the stone in his sling, and it is you (as a believer) who must exercise faith in God’s power, by using the Bible against the ‘giants’ in your life.

“Father, give me courage, as you did to David, to put my faith into action. Help me to use the Holy Scriptures to bring down the many ‘giants’ in my spiritual life!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is no ‘giant’ in my life which cannot be conquered, by the use of my ‘sling’ (God-imparted Faith) and my carefully-selected ‘stones’ (God-empowered Scriptures)!

Luke 22: 54-62

DOES JESUS CARE WHEN YOU FAIL?

Have you ever failed morally or spiritually or socially, and after your failure, wondered if God still cared for you? Have you ever felt so guilty that you had a hard time thinking that you could ever love yourself again? Have you ever had a hard time looking at yourself in the mirror after you did or said or thought something that was ignoble? Have you ever had an experience when you knew, like Simon Peter, that you had denied your Lord (Luke 22: 61, 62)? He who climbs the highest, may fall the hardest. Jesus warned us to watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. He said that the spirit of man is willing but that the flesh is weak. Everyone is vulnerable at one time or another. Wrote Paul to the overly - confident Corinthian believers: *“So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow.”* (1 Corinthians 10: 12, Phillips)

God promises to help us during temptation. *“And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can’t stand up against it, for He has promised this and will do what He says. He will show you how to escape temptation’s power so that you can bear up patiently against it.”* (1 Corinthians 10: 13, Living Bible) As believers, we need never yield to temptation. We can say ‘No’ to Satan’s allurements. Because God controls even the temptations that beset us, every believer can handle temptation. God is strong and able and willing to help every believer during his times of moral struggle and spiritual warfare. Jesus has already won the battle against Satan, on Mount Calvary and through the Empty Tomb. The power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that is available to give Christians victory over temptation. We do not work ‘for’ a victory; we work ‘from’ a victory. The victory belongs to Jesus, and each believer has a right and a responsibility personally to appropriate that historic victory as his own personal victory. Great is God’s protection of his trusting children. *“The Lord is faithful; he will make you strong and guard you from satanic attacks of every kind.”* (2 Thessalonians 3: 3, Living Bible) *“He is able to keep you from slipping and falling away, and to bring you sinless and perfect, into his glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy. Amen.”* (Jude 24, Living Bible) *“For since he (Jesus) himself has now been through suffering and temptation, he knows what it is like when we suffer and are tempted, and he is wonderfully able to help us.”* (Hebrews 2: 18, Living Bible)

“Even so, we do sometimes fail. We get careless, we stealthily lessen our trust in God, and we let a spirit of disobedience bewitch us. Suddenly we have yielded to temptation and are filled with sorrow.” (A Faith To Grow By; Donald Bastian; pg. 42, 43)

“O Father in heaven, ‘does Jesus care when I’ve tried and failed to resist some temptation strong; when for my deep grief I find no relief, though my tears flow all the

night long? O yes, He cares; I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When I fail, falter, or sin, I will allow the ‘tender eyes of Jesus’ to pierce my heart with conviction, which will bring the tears of genuine repentance!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Psalm 51: 1-19; I John 2: 1-2

WHAT IF YOU YIELD TO TEMPTATION?

You need not yield to temptation, but what should you do if you find yourself sinning against God? There are specific steps you must take if you yield to temptation.

First, recognize the reality and the seriousness of sin. It was sin which crucified the most beautiful person in the universe on a cross! Sin blunts one’s sensitivity to spiritual matters. Sin obscures one’s witness for God. Sin causes one to lose his fellowship with God. Sin makes it easier to continue to sin. Sin can cause others to fall (weaker brothers). Sin can even open the door to a life of apostasy.

Second, don’t rationalize or deny your sins. There are those who compare their sins favorably to someone else’s sins. God is our standard, not someone else. There are those who minimize the seriousness of sins by failing to realize that a life of sinning not only breaks one’s fellowship with God, but eventually will actually sever one’s relationship with God! There are those who strangely believe that, once they are sanctified (i.e., ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’), it is impossible to sin. Those with such a static view of sanctification tend to deny their sins, calling them ‘mere mistakes’ or ‘human weaknesses’.

Third, accept personal moral responsibility for your failure and your sins. Do not ‘scapegoat’ your guilt on others and do not blame Satan for your sin. It is true that others can influence one wrongly, and it is also true that Satan is called the Tempter, but it is also true that (as James writes) *“a man’s temptation is due to the pull of his own inward desires, which greatly attract him.”* (James 1: 14, Phillips) Every temptation is resistible. No one needs yield to temptation. It is because one has become careless or overconfident that he has fallen into sin. Jesus said, *“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak”*. Man’s natural and legitimate desires can become the ‘bridgehead’ or ‘door’ to sinning. Failure to guard one’s affections can result in one becoming vulnerable to sin.

Fourth, recognize that forgiveness is always costly. It took Jesus’ death to make possible your forgiveness! It is because of the shed blood of Jesus on the cross that God is able to forgive you of all your sins (I John 2: 1-2). God has turned His just wrath against sin upon Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ. A simple analogy would be that of a parent who is wrathful because of his child’s disobedience. The child deserves punishment, but the parent takes the punishment for the child and thus releases the child from the punishment, and, at the same time, appeases the wrath of himself (the parent).

“Holy Father, thank you for sending your Son to die on the cross to satisfy your justice, to rightly appease your wrath against sin, and to demonstrate your love for sinners.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God will not despise a ‘broken and a contrite heart’, but will quickly and gladly restore the penitent one to full and joyous relationship with himself!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Psalm 32: 1-11

RESTORATION AFTER MORAL FAILURE

We are looking carefully at the steps for spiritual recovery after a moral failure in the life of a believer.

Fifth, confess all your sins to God, and repent deeply of your sins. Both Psalm 32 and 51 record David’s prayers for recovery after he failed so tragically in his spiritual and personal life. When David’s sins were revealed, David did not try to deny his sins, or rationalize them, or ‘scapegoat’ them on someone else. He forthrightly and humbly confessed his sins to Almighty God and he pled for mercy and asked for restoration. Humble contrition (repentance) is the door back to God. Peter, after his denial of Jesus, wept bitterly and repented wholeheartedly. Do not try to conceal your sins. Wrote David (after he had sinned grievously), “When I kept silent my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.” (Psalm 32: 3) If you yield to temptation, follow David’s example. He wrote, “*Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ - and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*” (Psalm 32: 5)

Sixth, accept God’s forgiveness gratefully and humbly. Never take God’s forgiveness for granted! One man was asked how he could sin so brazenly. He replied something like this: “O, I am not worried, for it is always God’s business to forgive!” Such blasphemy! God is not obligated to forgive anyone! Forgiveness is a gift of God’s mercy. You cannot earn it or deserve it or purchase it! You can only receive it with brokenness and humility. Every sinner deserves to die! Never make the mercy of God an excuse for sinning. Sin is not only a violation of the ‘laws’ of God. Sin is a violation of the ‘love’ of God (i.e., sin ‘breaks’ the heart of God!) Sin is never a virtue! “*Well then, shall we keep on sinning so that God can keep on showing us more and more kindness and forgiveness? Of course not! Should we keep on sinning when we don’t have to?*” (Romans 6: 1,2a, Living Bible)

Seventh, after you have confessed your sins to God, be willing, if necessary, to confess your sins to others. Notes Donald Bastian: “If in your lapse you have wronged others, make amends. If you have wronged God alone - by a failure in your imagination, for example -confess to Him. If you have wronged another person, correct it with him. If you have wronged the church, confess to the church. This is a costly thing to do. But it is right, and doing so will help prevent future failures.” (A Faith To Grow By; pg. 43) Said Jesus, “*So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and suddenly remember that a friend has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar and go and apologize and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer your sacrifice to God.*” (Matthew 5: 23, 24, Living Bible)

“Heavenly Father, ‘restore to me again the joy of your salvation and make me willing to obey you. Then I will teach your ways to other sinners, and they - guilty like me - will repent and return to you.’” (Psalm 51: 12-13, Living Bible)

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: *“Heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who haven’t strayed away!” (Luke 15: 7, Living Bible)*

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

I John 3: 17-24

LEARN TO FORGIVE YOURSELF!

In considering the steps for spiritual restoration, we noted in the last devotional that sometimes it is necessary for a ‘repentant believer’ to confess his sins to others. Restitution - i.e., confessing your sin to someone else whom you have wronged - is a ‘bitter pill’ to swallow, but restitution will give you at least four positive benefits: (1) It will give you humility which, in God’s eyes, is very valuable. The Bible says that God ‘resists the proud, but He gives grace unto the humble’. (2) It will give you a ‘clear conscience’ which is important if you are to maintain your joy and confidence in Christian living. (3) It will leave a positive witness with the one whom you have wronged. God can use your humble confession to another as a means to incite repentance in the life of that other person to whom you are confessing. Confession is often ‘contagious’. Unbelievers (as well as believers) are impressed with persons who are courageous enough to confess their wrongs, especially in a world where most persons like to blame others rather than accept personal moral responsibility for actions. You do not lower yourself, but you raise yourself in the estimation which others have of you, when you humbly confess your sins to them! (4) It will act as a deterrent against further sinning in the future. Anything that is so painful (and humbling) as restitution will act as a ‘barrier’ against yielding to temptation in the future.

Eighth, forgive yourself and learn valuable lessons from your moral failures. Notes William Sangster, “Having accepted the forgiveness of God, don’t brood over the past. There are many people in the family of God who do not doubt God’s forgiveness, but they never seem able to forgive themselves. The memory of their sin lacerates them. It is hardly ever out of their minds. So, far from being able, as some are, to forgive themselves lightly, they seem unable to forgive themselves at all. Just like some unhealed wound in the body, this unhealed wound in the spirit drains their strength, hinders their progress, pours pus into the blood-stream, and keeps them in a state of spiritual invalidism. (1) Can’t you see that your unwillingness to forgive yourself is a form of spiritual pride? What you are really saying, at the deep level of your mental and emotional life, is this: ‘How could I ever have done that?’ (Note the stress on the ‘I’.) (Me”! A spiritual giant like me!’ Now look! That self-hate is doing you no good...It is like poison injected into your veins. Accept the forgiveness. You cannot undo the past. God has forgiven it, and, if God has forgiven you, who can justly accuse you? (2) In some mysterious way - beyond your human fathoming - God can use sin...The God who is mighty in creation is also mighty in transformation.” (Daily Readings; pg. 71)

“Heavenly Father, I thank you that, as I surrender my failures and sins to You, You are able to use my ‘moral weaknesses and transgressions’ in some mysterious way, to help accomplish ultimate good in my life and in the lives of others. How amazing!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If I refuse to ‘forgive myself’, I proudly declare that my ‘moral standards’ are higher than God’s! Gratefully accepting God’s forgiveness, I will learn quickly to forgive myself, and gladly resume my ‘sweet communion’ with my Father!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

I Peter 1: 3-9; 4: 12-13

PUT YOURSELF AGAIN UNDER GOD’S CONTROL!

There are valuable lessons to be learned from every moral failure. When one suffers, as a result of his wrong moral choices, it is important to remember that God always is ready to forgive the ‘repentant believer’, and that God is able mysteriously to use any sin to ultimately accomplish some kind of good! God will not allow anything from your past life to be ‘wasted’ - if you surrender your past to God. God is the Great Transformer! One man, before he was a believer, involved himself in deceptive practices and ended up in prison for several months. After becoming a Christian and after he was released from prison, this man (Charles Colson) began a Christ-centered prison ministry which has gained international recognition and acceptance (‘Prison Fellowship’)! Simon Peter, after his dreadful fall into sin, wept bitter tears of regret and remorse. However, God’s mercy made possible the forgiveness of Peter and, as a result, Peter was restored to dignity and usefulness. However, after Peter’s terrible fall, caused largely because of pride and overconfidence, Peter forever thereafter maintained a spirit of deep humility and trust in Christ alone.

Allow your failures to help you to develop greater character in Christlikeness. If you have been lustful in the past, be notable for your moral purity now! If pride has been your downfall, let yourself be clothed with the ‘garments of humility’. If stinginess has been a problem for you, then make generosity a way of life now! It is said that where a broken bone heals is where the bone of the body is the strongest! Where you were the ‘weakest’ in your past, you can be the ‘strongest’ in the future! The eagle with a broken wing can be healed and can again soar high in the sky.

Ninth, “put yourself again under God’s control and submit to His testing.” (Donald Bastian) What is from Satan’s viewpoint a ‘temptation’ is from God’s viewpoint a ‘test’. God intends to use problems and troubles in life to produce steadfastness in believers. Notes William Barclay: “Now here is a great and uplifting truth. What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad, it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger and finer and purer from the ordeal. Temptation is not the penalty of being a man, temptation is the glory of being a man. It is the test which comes to a man whom God wishes to use.” (Daily Study Bible; Matthew; vol. 1; pg. 56) Throughout life, believers will encounter temptation. It was even so with Jesus. After Jesus successfully resisted the devil and overcame temptation, what does the Scriptures say about Satan? *“And when he (Satan) had exhausted every kind of temptation, the devil withdrew until his next opportunity.”* (Luke 4: 13, Phillips)

“Father, give me insight to face my ‘troubles’ in a positive way, to see them as ‘stepping stones’ to strengthen me in the development of Christlike character, not as ‘stumbling

blocks’ to defeat and destroy me, as the enemy of my soul would desire.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Despite my past moral failures and sins, my future can still be bright and productive - all because of God’s forgiving grace and transforming power!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

2 Samuel 12: 9-25; Galatians 6: 7

HUMBLY ACCEPT GOD-ALLOWED CONSEQUENCES FROM SIN

The tenth ‘step’ in the recovery process’ is to accept without complaint the God-allowed consequences from your past wrong moral decisions (sins), and to expect God to continue to use you even while you are suffering from the consequences. Even though God forgave David his terrible sins, there were many consequences that David lived with for many years. The Bible says, *“Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.”* We can choose initially, but we cannot choose the consequences of our choices. For instance, a man who has smoked all his life can be forgiven, but he must oftentimes bear, as a forgiven person, the consequences of his smoking habit - namely, bad health perhaps in the form of lung cancer or heart disease.

However, in spite of the ongoing consequences which David had to bear because of his past sins, David enjoyed restored fellowship with God. Joy that is lost because of willful sinning can be restored to a ‘fallen believer’, because of sincere confession and total surrender (Psalm 51:12). The joy which God gives to the repentant believer is combined with dignity which comes as a result of God’s willingness to use a restored believer in effective evangelistic ministry (Psalm 51:13). A person who personally experiences forgiveness and inner cleansing is equipped to help others whose experiential needs are the same as his own. While David had to bear some of the scars of his past sins, David’s future was not totally jeopardized by his past sins. David had to live with some regrets because of the wrongs of his past, but David’s fellowship with God was mended and his joy was restored. Instead of becoming ‘bitter’ and ‘hard of heart’ against God, David humbly accepted the God-sent consequence from his sin, namely, the death of his illegitimate son. When David learned of the death of his newborn son (whom David deeply loved), the Bible says, *“David got up off the ground, washed himself, brushed his hair, changed his clothes, and went into the Tabernacle and worshiped the Lord. Then he returned to the palace and ate.”* (2 Samuel 12: 20, Living Bible) No wonder David was considered “a man after God’s own heart!” I once received a letter from a convicted man - a man who was a backslidden believer but one who had been restored to fellowship with God. “I was given a 32 year sentence. It came as no surprise. My attitude was one of a fighter, knocked down but not knocked out...I’ve had the ultimate privilege of leading a young man to Jesus in this jail and the Lord used me in preventing a suicide, so I’m not idle at all. I don’t believe for a second that God put me here. But I do believe He will use me where I am at...I turned myself in on all this. I could not run from God any longer. Being right with God meant more to me than being physically free. I believe with all my heart I will be free again on the outside to lead a productive life, one that will count for Jesus, so while I’m disappointed in some things, I am not discouraged.”

“Loving Father, heal the ‘hurts’ in my life which remain as a result of my wrong choices in the past, and make me a compassionate servant because of my lasting ‘scars’.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Regardless of how ‘bad’ my past life has been, if I confess my sins and I surrender totally to God, I can ‘turn my scars into stars’!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share an experience from your own life (or from your knowledge of the experience of another believer) which demonstrates the truth of the following statement: “If you are to win a spiritual victory, you must ‘step out’ for God, giving heed to God’s call to courage rather than succumbing to the peer pressure of an unbelieving and compromising and godless world around you!” (Note: 2 Corinthians 6: 17-18)
2. In effectively dealing with temptation, what is your part (as a believer), and what is God’s part?
3. Tell to what extent you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “The victory over the ‘giants’ of temptation in your life is not automatic. It is David who put the stone in his sling, and it is you (as a believer) who must exercise faith in God’s power, by using the Bible against the ‘giants’ in your life.”
4. Share your personal response (or reaction) to the following statement: “There is no ‘giant’ of temptation in my life which cannot be conquered, by the use of my ‘sling’ (God-imparted faith) and my carefully-selected ‘stones’ (God-empowered Scriptures)!”
5. What has God promised to do for a believer during his times of temptation? (Note I Corinthians 10: 13; II Thessalonians 3: 3; Jude 1: 24; Hebrews 2: 18)
6. Give your explanation and interpretation of the following statement: “We do not work ‘for’ a victory; we work ‘from’ a victory!”
7. What should you (as a believer) do if you discover that you have sinned against God? (Note I John 1: 9; Psalm 51: 1-19)
8. Put a check beside the following Biblically-based statements which you personally find to be the most difficult for you to accept (appropriate) during your attempts to recover from a spiritual failure (due to your transgression against God’s moral laws and God’s revealed will to you):
 - _____ a. Recognize the reality and seriousness of my sin.
 - _____ b. Openly confess my sins to God rather than rationalize or justify my personal wrongdoing.
 - _____ c. Accept my personal moral responsibility for my failures and sins, rather than ‘scapegoating’ my wrongs on others.
 - _____ d. Recognize that my forgiveness is very ‘costly’, i.e., it took Jesus’ death to make possible the forgiveness of my sins.

- _____ e. Acknowledge that God will never despise a ‘broken and a contrite heart’, but will quickly and gladly restore a penitent person to full and joyous relationship with Himself.**
 - _____ f. Repent deeply of my sins, i.e., decisively turn away from all wrong behavior (a moral U-turn).**
 - _____ g. Gratefully accept God’s forgiveness of all my sins, and humbly express gratitude to God for my complete spiritual restoration.**
 - _____ h. Be willing to make amends (restitution) to those persons who have been hurt.**
 - _____ i. Be willing to forgive myself for my past wrong decisions (sins), and to humbly learn valuable lessons from my moral failures.**
 - _____ j. Refuse to brood over my past wrongs and failures and sins, and instead to joyfully accept God’s complete forgiveness and total restoration to spiritual fellowship.**
 - _____ k. Allow God to use my past moral failures (sins), to perfect my character and to prepare me for greater and more tender-hearted ministry in His Kingdom Work.**
 - _____ l. Accept without complaint the God-allowed consequences from my past wrong moral decisions (sins), and expect God to continue to use me even while I am suffering from the consequences of my past sins.**
- 9. List at least four positive benefits which you (as a believer) incur when you make ‘restitution’ to a fellow Christian (or to a non-believer) whom you have personally offended through your deliberate sinning or through your unintentional (careless) actions.**
- 10. Why can it be said that your unwillingness to forgive yourself is a form of spiritual pride?**
- 11. From your own life experience (or from the life experience of others whom you have carefully observed), give an example which demonstrates the truth of the following statement: “God, the Great Transformer, is able mysteriously to use any sin to ultimately accomplish some kind of good!”**
- 12. Share specific ways in which you can use your past moral failures and sins to develop greater Christlikeness in your character.**
- 13. Tell with what degree of ‘conviction’ you believe the following: “Where you were the ‘weakest’ in the past, you can be the ‘strongest’ in the future! The eagle with a broken wing can be healed and can again soar in the sky.”**

- 14. Do you believe that, despite your past moral failures and sins, your future can still be bright and productive - all because of God’s forgiving grace and transforming power?**