

Balancing the Christian Life

Pastor Kelly Sensenig



I remember my days in high school gym class. At one point, we were trying to walk on a balance beam. The trick was to walk across the beam without falling. Of course, in order to do this, we needed to balance ourselves. We would stick out our hands to the side and do the balancing act. I don't remember if I ever fell off, but I can tell you this, balancing on that skinny beam is not the easiest thing to do.

There is nothing more devastating to the practice of spiritual living and enjoying life than an imbalance between the secular and sacred. An unbalanced application of the teachings related to biblical spirituality and the enjoyment of life will result in an unbalanced Christian life. We are to be primarily focused on the spiritual pursuits of living but this does not mean we cannot participate in other things in life that God has given to us enjoy.

Living the Christian life is all about finding a balance of time between the secular and physical aspects of enjoying life (wholesome hobbies, exercise, sports, going to Dairy Queen, etc.) versus sacred or spiritual activities, and seeking a balance between the eternal versus temporal, our service to God versus recreational life. Of course, there is a sense where even our secular activities in the normal daily routine of life (our jobs, sports, hobbies, household duties, etc.) should be done with the sacred goal of glorifying God (1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 5:22; 6:5,7; Col. 3:23).

But what we are talking about in this study is balancing out our secular activities in life with our specific sacred goals, priorities, and pursuits in life such as worshipping, praying, and enjoying our relationship with God, serving Christ with our gifts, and being part of a local church ministry and work.

Balancing the Christian life involves properly fearing God versus being outright scared of God. Balance is a life that possesses a healthy fear of God but not an

unhealthy fear toward God, which results in misunderstanding God's nature and the relationship we are to possess with God as Christians.

Balance means living a life that is truly fulfilling without possessing the fear and anxiety that God is never pleased with our life and threatens to withdraw His love from us, if we underachieve, or don't perform enough good works to satisfy Him.

Balance is knowing the difference between trying to live in a state of perfection versus progressive sanctification by the Spirit's enablement and power (Gal. 5:25). Balance involves knowing the difference between discipline and becoming so overly structured that we lose the joy of experiencing the simple things of life. Balance is knowing the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger. It's knowing the difference between legalism and license.

Balancing the Christian life relates to opposing the abuses in government (corruption and socialism) through prayer and voicing our opinions while at the same time maintaining a strong belief in the sovereignty and providence of God. It means we will not allow the times in which we live to steal away our communion with God and our commitment, focus, and faithfulness to Him. As we balance our Christian life we will stand against political corruptness and communism without allowing the signs of the times to hinder our spiritual growth and progress.

Balance also involves judging righteously without developing a legalistic and critical spirit toward fellow Christians whom we might disagree with doctrinally and in areas of sanctification. A balanced Christian life is biblically discerning while at the same time it does not become overcritical and develop a "holier than thou" attitude toward others. We will realize the importance of making wise judgments without becoming like a Pharisee and possessing a wrong attitude toward saints who may see things differently than us.

Balancing the Christian life involves possessing zeal while at the same time having knowledge and discernment so that we do not promote pseudo experiences in our lives that are not of God. It also involves not substituting or replacing inward beauty for mere outward beauty and giving without grudging. It pertains to the stewardship of financial giving. We must learn to give joyfully, motivated by grace, without possessing reluctance in giving. It's these types of areas that we want to

address in this study. May the Lord help us to balance our Christian lives as we progress in His transforming grace.

Of course, balance does not mean compromise, to try and put your foot on both sides and receive approval from God and the enemy. Bob Jones Sr. has likened the Christian who compromises to a soldier in the civil War who tried to save his neck by wearing a Confederate jacket and Union pants at the same time. The Yankees fired at his jacket and the Rebels shot at his legs! It never pays to compromise! It's never right to compromise with errant doctrine or unsanctified living (Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2).

A balanced Christian life is one that enjoys living and serving God while at the same time finds wholesome pleasure in the things that God has freely given the Christian to enjoy in life. How can we balance our Christian life during these changing times and our busy schedules? We want to investigate how to do this in this study.

Balancing the Christian life is important if we want to live an effective and authentic Christian life.

There are several areas of balance that need to be maintained in our Christian life.

I. Priorities and God

It's important to find a biblical balance in living the Christian life that is related to the area of priorities. If we are not careful, we can become lopsided in our Christian approach to living. We can serve God but miss out on worshipping God or sitting at the feet of Jesus.

➤ The priority of worship

Jesus revealed in Luke 10:39-40 that worship is the number one priority: "And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word (priority #1). But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him (priority #2), and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me."

Jesus talked about priorities in the Christian life. Here He was referring to the priority of worship. Like Martha, we are sometimes anxious and distracted by many things in life, “but one thing is needful.” Yes, only one thing (not many things) is needful in life, which is having the priority and taking the time to sit at the feet of Jesus, worship Him, and enjoy His presence. All service and activity without worship results in a life of emptiness and missing out on the abundant life that Jesus promised and wants us to experience on a daily basis (John 10:10). Frederick Faber wrote:

“Only to sit and think of God,
Oh what a joy it is!
To think the thought, to breathe the Name;
Earth has no higher bliss.
Father of Jesus, love's reward!
What rapture will it be,
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on Thee!”

Psalm 29:2

“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”

Psalm 96:9

“O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.”

What is the chief end of man? It has been said that “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever” (Westminster shorter catechism). In short, the chief purpose and priority in life is to worship God.

Oswald Chambers once said:

“Beware of saying, ‘I haven't time to read the Bible, or to pray’; say rather, ‘I haven't disciplined myself to do these things.’”

You see, we need to prioritize worship in our lives, where we open the Bible and allow God to speak to our hearts through His Word and as we pray and worship the Lord through ascribing worth to Him and what He means to us.

Hebrews 10:19 talks about worshipping and enjoying God:

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness (*confidence*) to enter into the holiest (*the presence of a loving, forgiving, accepting, and worshipful God*) by the blood of Jesus. By a new and living way (*the recently slain and resurrected sacrifice of the New Covenant*), which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (*a reference to Christ’s body that suffered and died on the cross in our place which gives us full and final access into the Father’s presence*).

In Old Testament times, and Old Testament imagery, God’s presence in the most holy place behind the curtain was once was a barrier to man. It signified that man could not be fully, finally, and forever accepted in God’s presence. It also kept the people at a distance from the “holiest” (the place of God’s presence behind the veil – in the Holy of Holies). But as we come to the New Testament, we discover that the veil into God’s presence has been removed through the shed blood of Christ (His sacrifice suffering and death upon the cross which includes His blood) and we have eternal and complete access in the throne room of God today. This means we can sense that we possess a new relationship with God, which is one of total acceptance, grace, and mercy that He extends to us on a daily basis as New Covenant believers.

This is talking about positional acceptance and access before God’s throne through Christ’s shed blood on Calvary’s cross. The blood of Jesus Christ gives us access into the presence of God where we not only find complete acceptance and forgiveness but so we can worship Him in a new and living way, finding God’s life enriching, fulfilling, and satisfying. If we lose sight of acceptance and worshipping God, we will become unbalanced in our Christian life.

Hebrews 4:16 adds this about experiencing God’s life:

“Let us therefore come boldly (*confidently that God accepts us and wants to help us*) unto the throne of grace (*a throne where God’s grace is extended toward us in both salvation and for sanctification*), that we may obtain mercy (*experience God’s sympathy*), and find grace (*strengthening and enabling grace*) to help in time of need.”

“Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment,
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear,

He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what he deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.”

Yes, as we approach God through prayer, we discover the number one priority in life is to worship and enjoy God, experiencing the joys and comforts and grace that come from His life! Entering the presence of God through Christ is a New Testament reality and experience which Old Testament saints could not experience and enjoy like we can do today. We are talking about New Testament ground – not Old Testament ground. This new and living way (Christ’s sacrifice which takes us into the presence of God) provides us with a new awareness of God’s acceptance, fellowship, help, strength, and comfort. It is something recent, fresh, vibrant and it’s something very wonderful. The wonder of worshipping in God’s presence when passing through the veil is a New Testament privilege that is more than just a position, but also a new practical awareness of God’s acceptance, fellowship, grace, mercy, and time of worship with God that we can experience through the New Covenant.

“Through the veil God bids me enter
By the new and living way;
Not in trembling hope I venture—
Boldly I His call obey;
There, with Christ my God, I meet
God upon the mercy-seat!”

Charles Spurgeon once remarked:

“I can admire the solemn and stately language of worship that recognizes the greatness of God, but it will not warm my heart or express my soul until it has also blended therewith the joyful nearness of that perfect love that casts out fear and ventures to speak with our Father in heaven as a child speaks with its father on earth. My brother, no veil remains.”

Aiden Wilson Tozer was an American pastor, author, editor and mentor. Most of the more than 60 books that are attributed to A.W. Tozer were compiled after his death from sermons he preached and articles he wrote. At least two of Tozer’s works, “The Pursuit of God” and “The Knowledge of the Holy” are regarded as Christian classics.

Tozer said this about the enjoyment of God and worship:

“If you’re not worshipping God on Monday the way you did the day before, perhaps you’re not worshipping him at all.”

He also remarked:

“It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God.”

This means our worship is to be God-centered – not man-centered or entertainment centered. Here is the point. To balance our Christian life, we must practice the true worship of God which involves worshipping Him “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Worship is our number one priority. We need to stay in a worshipping frame of mind! This should be our desire, goal, and priority in life. Let’s consider several s we think of the priority of worship.

- The priority of sanctification and Christlikeness.

Paul also spoke of priorities. Like Jesus, he said, “This one thing I do.” Paul spoke of the priority of becoming more like Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:12-14 declares:

“Not as though I had already attained (*arrived at a state of perfection*), either were already perfect: but I follow after (*aggressively pursue progressive and practical sanctification in my life*), if that I may apprehend (seize or lay hold of) that (*sanctification and Christlikeness*) for which also I am apprehended (seized) of Christ Jesus (*at his conversion on the road to Damascus*). Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended (*come to a state of perfection where I am finished pursuing Christian living, growth, and Christlikeness*): but *this one thing I do (not many things but one thing!)*, forgetting those things which are behind (*his past fame, fortune, fruitless works, failures, and family history or heritage*), and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (*the privileges and responsibilities that relate to the Christian life, Christian character development, and spiritual disciplines*). I press toward the mark (*this is looking back to “this one thing I do” and refers to the goal of Christlikeness as we move toward the finish line*) for the prize (*reward we will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ – 2 Cor. 5:10*) of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (*the purpose that God has in saving us, which is conformity to Christ through holiness, sanctified living, and spiritual growth*).

Paul was being realistic and theological at the same time. Paul did not count himself to have “arrived,” as we would say today. He still had more spiritual heights to climb and so do we!

I once met a man at the Green Dragon who said he no longer sins. He told me that he still does make mistakes, but he does not sin. This man is living in a Fool’s Paradise. There is no PERFECTION in this life when it comes to sanctification but praise God there is PROGRESSION!

“He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be.
It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.
How loving and patient He must be, He's still working on me.

In the mirror of His Word reflections that I see
Make me wonder why He never gave up on me.
He loves me as I am and helps me when I pray
Remember He's the Potter, I'm the clay.”

The verb “apprehend” (Phil. 3:12) means to lay hold of and to pull down. It is comparable to making a tackle on the football field from behind. This word once again indicates the constant pursuit of sanctification. We are to follow after something (sanctification) and Someone (Christ). Here it suggests that we should want to get to know Christ better, accomplish everything in life that He has for us to do, and become more like Him in our everyday living.

This verb “follow after” (Phil. 3:12) indicates hard pursuit, such as a hunter following the tracks of his prey. Last winter I thought that I had a real Big Foot in my back yard (an Ephrata Big Foot). There were giant tracks through the snow and the gaps between the footprints were incredibly stretched out. It seemed that something giant walked across my yard. I finally did follow the track and when they got around to the side of my house, I noticed that they turned into small rabbit tracks. I was told that rabbits can jump through the snow at certain times and can create what appear to be large tracks.

Well, I followed the tracks and solved the Big Foot mystery. Paul is saying that he followed and pursued sanctification like a hunter that was pursuing his prey. He followed after sanctification and Christlikeness – not fame, glory, the platitudes of men but sanctification. The “one thing” has to do with staying focused on sanctification - knowing Christ, becoming more like Christ, and following Christ. This is true holiness. We are to possess this single purpose and priority in life.

Most Christians are involved in too “many things” when the secret of progress is to concentrate on “one thing” (living a sanctified life – experiencing Christ’s delivering power and transformation in our lives).

D L Moody is credited with the statement:

‘It is better to say, “this one thing I do” than to say, “these forty things I dabble in”’

When Paul says, “forgetting those things which are behind” (Phil. 3:13) he means that he disavows the past and does not allow the past to destroy his future sanctification and service for Christ. “To forget” in the Bible sense means “no longer to be influenced by or affected by the past.”

It has been said that:

“Memory is a nursery where grown children play with broken toys.”

Too many Christians are shackled by regrets of the past as they always remember their broken toys and worthless lives. They are essentially trying to run the race by looking backward!

The story is told of the businessman who was notorious for saving everything that came across his desk. Invariably the office files were bulging. One day his secretary asked if she might dispose of the old material. He was reluctant but finally he said: ‘OK, Mary, but make sure you make a copy of everything before you shred it and throw it away.’

God wants us to stop making copies of our past! Don’t look back! Forget the past! Let bygones be bygones! Whether we like it or not, we cannot rewrite the history of our lives. It happened yesterday and we should be content to leave it there. We can all learn from the past. But the man is a fool who tries to live in the past.

I heard about the little fellow who was listening to his Sunday School teacher tell about Lot's wife and how she looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. 'That's nothing,' he piped up, 'my mum was driving the car yesterday and my mum looked back and turned into a telephone pole.'"

It never pays to look back!

The verb "reaching" (Phil. 3:13) gives us the imagery of an athlete who runs without swerving off course and who strains his entire body to cross the finish line (Acts 20:24; 1 Cor. 9:26). Living a sanctified and Christlike life should be a spiritual exercise which occurs every day of our lives. The "things which are before" (in the future) in verse 13 would include our personal knowledge of Christ, victory over sin and self, more personal growth or spiritual achievement, and overall Christlikeness (Phil. 3:10).

Someone once asked Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone (1813–73), when he was back in England briefly, after having worked for many years in Africa: 'Well, Dr Livingstone, where are you ready to go now?' Like a flash, the not-so-easily-put-off Dr Livingstone answered: 'I am ready to go anywhere, provided it be forward!'

Our life should NOT be lived in the rearview mirror! It should be lived in the here and now with the prospect that we are moving forward from this point! God has called us to live in the present tense. Paul is saying that we need to live differently this very day and move forward from this particular point in our lives – looking ahead to bigger and better things (greater sanctification). God has called us to live for today and begin a new transformation that will change our future. Living in the past keeps us from victory today and changing the trajectory of our life for the days ahead. We are to experience growth and sanctification in our life today. Today! Today! Today! Not yesterday, last month, last year, ten years ago, twenty years ago! Today! Today is the first day for the rest of your life! Only as we change today can we reshape our future.

The verb "press" (Phil. 3:14) describes vigorous, concentrated pursuit. God has called us to press on – not give up! It's always too soon to quit! At the foot of one of the Swiss Alps is a marker honoring a mountaineer who fell to his death attempting a steep ascent. The simple brass marker gives his name and this brief

epitaph: 'He died climbing.' The epitaph of every Christian should be that they died climbing the upward path as they lived out a Christ honoring life of sanctification. We are to press on in our sanctification (living by Christ's power and living for Christ).

Johnson Oatman (1856–1926) wrote:
I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I onward bound,
'Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.'

Why should we keep running and moving forward (advancing) in our life of sanctification? It's because there is a prize awaiting us. The prize (Phil. 3:14) is likely a reference to our reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim 4:7-8). Someday we are going to stand before Jesus Christ and be examined for how we have run the race down here on earth.

2 Corinthians 5:10

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

2 Timothy 4:7-8

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

There is a race to win and a prize to obtain!

1 Corinthians 9:24

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain."

The story is told of an elderly missionary couple who were returning home on a ship after many years of sacrificial service in Africa. On the same ship was Theodore Roosevelt. He had just ended a highly successful big game hunt. As the ship docked in New York harbour, there were thousands of well-wishers and dozens of reporters

to welcome Roosevelt home. There was not a single solitary person there to welcome the missionary's home.

As they made their way to a cheap hotel for the night, the man turned to his wife in the back of the yellow taxi and said: 'It just doesn't seem right. We give forty years of our lives to Jesus Christ to win souls in Africa, and nobody knows or cares when we return. Yet the president goes over there for a few weeks to kill some animals and the whole world sits up and takes notice.'

A few hours went by and before they went to bed that night, the two of them prayed together and the Lord seemed to say to them: 'Do you know why you haven't received your reward? It's because you're not home yet!' Friend, it will be worth it all – when we see Jesus! Today we must stay focused on the "mark" (goal) of sanctification and Christlikeness.

The word "high" (Phil. 3:14) speaks of an upward or heavenly calling that comes from God. This word refers to the northern quarters of the heaven and likely speaks of God's goal for the believer which comes from heaven – the goal of sanctification and Christlikeness. However, some conclude that it may be a reference to the Rapture of the church when we receive that upward calling to Heaven and receive the prize that we have earned for being like Jesus Christ. This is a probable understanding of this passage. This was a call from Heaven to live a sanctified and Christlike life, but it can also be a call to Heaven. However, in the immediate context it seems best to see this verse as teaching that God wants us to follow His heavenly call and goal for our lives which is to be like His Son. God's heavenly call is to live a sanctified life that is committed to knowing Christ and becoming more like Him.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification."

Ephesians 4:1

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

There is no time to relax! There is a race to win. Have you been winning the race? Or have you been falling behind? Keep running! There are victories to be won!

So, we have seen that Paul admits he was not perfect, but he was a man of single purpose. He had one aim and ambition. His goal was to forget the past, not live with regrets or be overcome with the past, but instead become more Christlike in his present life. He had abandoned the unworthy goal that he had pursued in the past. Now he had a new goal toward which he was looking and running – Christlikeness in character and conduct!

Paul found that his wires were crossed before he was saved, but since his salvation he got a new set of spark plugs and wires and his life was now rewired to live for Christ and act like Christ.

God does not expect you to do everything, but He does expect you to do one thing – become more like Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18). This should be our overall goal, longing, and priority in life.

➤ The priority of spiritual things.

Another primary priority for discipleship living is “to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things (*our physical needs and provisions*) shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Of course, we can draw some application from what Jesus taught. Kingdom living for the disciples was a type of living that revolves around transformation of character and conduct, the same kind of living that was expected of Christ’s disciples, who would one day enter the earthly Kingdom or Millennium.

The priority of importance is seen in seeking kingdom living which means to possess a spiritual outlook on life versus a physical outlook that only centers only on making a living and fulfilling one’s material needs. I remember asking an old friend of mine how he was doing. He immediately began to speak of all the physical things he had, where he lives, his vacations, and the money that he made. Here was a Christian man who had become unbalanced in his living. His focus was on the material things of life instead of the spiritual and eternal things that mattered. In fact, he may have sacrificed the spiritual things of life for the material things and satisfaction of the present. Esau was as an example of a man who replaced the spiritual for the physical and lost sight of what was most important in life.

Hebrews 12:16 reminds us of Esau's blunder:

"Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person (*unhallowed, desecrated*), as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

Esau's loose and profane character led him to sell his inheritance rights as the oldest son for the temporary gratification of a single meal. He yielded to transitory pressures of lesser things and forfeited his inheritance (the greater thing) as the first born. This was a foolish step in life, but if we are not careful, we can take a series of steps that can gradually take us away from the priority of spiritual living and replace it with physical pursuits. Esau despised his birthright (the spiritual blessing) and sold it to Jacob for soup (the physical and temporary), and he missed the blessing because it was given to Jacob.

Now let's not misunderstand what Jesus was teaching when He spoke about our needs in life (Matthew 6:33). Everyone must make a living and they need a certain amount of material things in life to get by. However, we can become a "workaholic" and work our life away, not investing our days and time in the King's business! I've known Christians like this. We need to be reminded about something at this point. Beware of the baroness of a busy life! All work (the physical) without the spiritual will result in emptiness and futility in life.

In addition, we can lose focus on the spiritual when we worry about never having enough and when we seek to gain the material at the expense of our spiritual living and commitments to God. Seeking first what Jesus called "kingdom righteousness" means to be more concerned about our character and conduct and to be more concerned about virtuous living and spiritual things before the physical and lesser things of life.

In other words, Jesus taught that our primary interest should be in developing righteous standards for living, to walk in the paths of righteousness (Ps. 23:3) instead of the paths of sin, self, and Satan's diabolical traps. Jesus is teaching that righteous and spiritual living is of utmost importance when compared to physical things of life. In other words, the spiritual must be more important than even our physical needs. Staying on track spiritually is more important than straying from the right path to fulfill our specific needs in life. As important as our needs might be, Jesus promised that they would be supplied if we make the choice to remain on the righteous path.

Philippians 4:19

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

This is essentially what Jesus was saying in Matthew 6:33 when He stated, “all these things shall be added unto you.” Put the spiritual first and then you can be reassured that the physical provision will follow. This means keep worshipping God, staying committed to the King’s business, keep attending and giving to church ministry, keep doing what you know is right, and then you can be sure that all of your basic needs in life will be met.

We need to balance out our Christian life when it comes to the priority living that pertains to worshipping God, sanctification, becoming more like Christ, and seeking the spiritual path or practicing daily righteousness. These priorities and goals should be part of our day to day living and in some sense be inbred in our hearts and lives. These spiritual goals should be our number one priority and everything else must pale in significance and not override these spiritual priorities in life.

There are two notes of caution at this point. First, we should be careful to live by a specific checklist that we must follow every hour and day of our lives to be sure that we are meeting God’s requirements. As we live close to the Lord (James 4:8) and walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) we will naturally want to worship the Lord, live a sanctified life that pleases Him and walk in the paths of righteous living. This means we do not need to live by a specific checklist that we must mark but simply keep our hearts open to daily communion and worship of the Lord as we reflect upon His Word, eternal being, and the joy/peace/satisfaction He brings into our lives.

For instance, it certainly is normal to have a specific quiet time with God everyday but at the same time we must be careful of over-regimenting or regulating our life to the point that we lose the joy of spontaneous worship with God and practicing daily Christlikeness in our everyday living. Living by strict checklists and schedules is not the same as living close to God and walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25) who enables us to be like God (2 Cor. 3:18).

Second, we must remember that pursuing these priorities and goals does not mean we must exclude all other activities (the lesser things in life) that pertain to leisure, and which can bring a measure of enjoyment into our life. Solomon observed that

there is a time for rest, relaxation, recreational activity, and secular enjoyment that is found outside spiritual activity and service (Eccl. 3:1-8). The lesser things in life (those things which are not on our priority list) are not necessarily evil things when they are kept in their proper place and priority. Again, BALANCE is the key.

What this means is that I can and must take time with my family (playing with the children, going on vacations, etc.). I can enjoy watching and playing sports. I can go hunting and fishing. I can also enjoy a morning jog or some other exercise to maintain my health and strength.

1 Timothy 4:8 is a case in point:

“For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

Paul was not teaching that bodily exercise did not have any profit for our life as a Christian. It does have profit as it pertains to our health. Paul was simply making a statement about priority when he used the word “little.” In comparison to the pursuit of godliness, taking time to exercise has a lower priority. What was Paul doing? He was balancing his Christian life. This is the same thing we must do. We must prioritize our lives by pursuing and practicing what is most important (worship, sanctification, Christlikeness, righteous living) while at the same time balance out our spiritual pursuits with the physical pleasures and enjoyments which are to be a normal part of everyday life.

Let’s add some insight here. Golf profiteth little. Hunting and fishing profiteth little. This does not mean there is no profit or good in them but in comparison to living a godly life, these things pale in their importance and significance. What Paul is teaching us is that golf should not keep us from church on Sunday morning. He means that hunting and fishing or other hobbies should not absorb our lives and time to the extent that they keep us from pursuing the most important things in life which are worshipping and serving God, living a dedicated and sanctified life, becoming more like Jesus Christ, and expressing daily righteousness in our lives. Some men must stay on top of every baseball stat while others find a need to always have their nose in politics and trying to solve the world’s problems. None of these things are wrong in and of themselves but when we become absorbed by them (the lesser things and priorities) and they begin to replace our godly pursuits (the greater things and priorities), then we become unbalanced in our Christian life.

God did not make us as spiritual robots that move about without any feeling, enjoyment, and pleasure. There are certain pleasures in this world that are not vices and fleshly habits which we can enjoy.

1 Corinthians 7:31-33

“And they that use this world, as not abusing it (we can use the amoral and earthly things of life without abusing them) for the fashion of this world passeth away (even the lesser things of this life and world have no eternal value). But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord (in a greater and more committed fashion since one has no other family obligations to fulfill): But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife” (has additional worldly or earthly responsibilities that he was meet in that he lives to please and take care of his wife).

This sounds like Paul is sanctifying worldliness, but this is not what he is teaching. Paul is not approving of worldliness. He is talking about balancing the Christian life. Caring for the things of this world in this context and sense means to take care of the physical needs of your wife. There are certain things in this world and life which we must pay attention to – our marriage in one of them! We need to concentrate on improving our marriage and family life while at the same time not abandoning our spiritual pursuits in life (spreading the Gospel, living to please God, worshipping God, etc.). It’s understood that a man who is married has additional obligations to think about in relation to the life of his wife. He needs to take time to care for her and supply her needs in life. As Vine has pointed out: “In general, if a man is married, he has limited his range of service. If he is unmarried, he can go on to the ends of the earth and preach the gospel.”

So, there are other things that are part of the natural world (family life and family time) which are necessary to maintain a healthy marriage relationship and home life. We must attend to these things for avoiding them is a disaster. But we can do so without ignoring the things of worship, sanctification, service, Christlikeness, righteous living, and spreading the Gospel. Again, this is called balancing the Christian life! We are talking about family time without neglecting our spiritual commitments, experiencing down time without avoiding godly living, enjoying our hobbies without neglecting our spiritual priorities.

There are many natural, needful, and non-sinful pleasures that God has given us to enjoy and experience and which when kept in their proper place and priority can help us to refocus, while providing us with rest, relaxation, and real enjoyment of living. The key is to BALANCE our sacred living with our secular enjoyments of life. Our prominent priorities must revolve around the sacred and godly pursuits of life. This means we must be careful that we do not allow the secular pursuits to override our spiritual goals and priorities.

For instance, I need to maintain a job, and this is necessary and even biblical (1 Tim. 5:8). However, when a job takes me away from attending church, keeps me from setting an example for my family, and zaps all of my strength so I cannot effectively serve and live for the Lord, then I have become unbalanced in my Christian life. Secular work and enjoyments can cause us to become unbalanced in our Christian life if we do not make proper priorities.

Mark 4:19 explains it like this:

“And the cares of this world (*the worries and pressures of life*), and the deceitfulness of riches (*material things can mess up our mind about spiritual things*), and the lusts (*evil cravings*) of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

Yes, even the necessary things like work or the cares (pressures) of this life that we all experience and pass through can cause us to lose our spiritual priorities and focus. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” This is the priority of the spiritual over the material and fleshly.

We need time for God and golf, biking, sports, exercise (time for leisure). We must also earn a living and meet the needs of our family. But we should never use these excuses to keep us away from what Jesus called “kingdom living” in relation to our spiritual outlook and commitment in life.

A man wanted to get his grandfather's clock repaired. The repair shop said that they could do the repair, but it would cost 50 dollars for them to pick up the clock. The man did not want to pay this much so he decided that he would carry the clock over to the shop to save money. He strapped it on his back and carried it. After he had gone a little way he lost his balance, fell and started rolling down a hill with the

clock still tied to his back. He then rolled right into a lady who was at the bottom of the hill, and fortunately he did not kill her. As the lady got back up on her feet, she gave him an angry look and said, "Why don't you just wear a wrist-watch like everyone else?"

Well, this man lost his physical balance but if we are not careful, we can lose our spiritual balance as a Christian. We must learn the secret of balancing the spiritual with the material, the eternal with the temporary, the secular enjoyment of life with the sacred things that matter most.

Jesus taught an important life principle in Matthew 6:19-21:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth (live for only financial, fortune and physical things), where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal (the temporal and transitory). But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven (live for reward and recognition in the future), where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal (the eternal and heavenly): For where your treasure is (what you value most in life), there will your heart be also" (your affections, desires, and drive and determination in life).

Jesus was teaching how we need to balance out our lives as His followers. There is a vast difference between having money and money having you! We can possess physical things as long as physical things do not possess us. Again, balancing our Christian life is the key.

Warren Wiersbe once said:

"It's not wrong to have the things that money can buy provided we don't lose the things that money cannot buy."

Yes, we need to possess spiritual priorities in life over the physical pursuits. And we must take time to be holy! However, this does not mean that we must totally avoid enjoying other things that pertain to this life (exercise, sports, hobbies, fishing, etc.), since the Bible says that God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" which in this context includes material things and riches (1 Tim. 6:17). We should not allow the *material* to override the *spiritual* or the *secular* to overtake the *sacred*, but neither should we avoid the wholesome enjoyments of life that God has allowed for our refreshment, and which are a natural and needful part of our human existence and experience.

IMBALANCE: Pursuing the physical and giving the spiritual a backseat. Putting worship, sanctification, Christlikeness, and spiritual priorities on the back burner or viewing them only as secondary matters of importance which are primarily practiced on Sunday at church. This results in unbalance in the Christian life.

BALANCE: Living our lives in a way where worship is a main ingredient in our lives. We should live in such a way that we are always ready to praise the Lord and meditate on Him and His Word. We are to be practicing daily sanctification, and righteousness, and seek to become more like Christ in our attitudes and conduct as we interact with people. All of these spiritual priorities can be part of our daily routine in life but this does not mean we can never enjoy the lesser things of life.

1 Timothy 4:2-4 is set in the context of apostasy, but it reveals an important life principle for us when it states: “Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.”

You will notice that the false teachers might forbid marriage, concluding that an unmarried life is more spiritual than a married life. Of course, this is contrary to Scripture (Gen. 2:18; Matt. 19:1-9). Beware of any teaching that tampers with God’s institution of marriage.

The false teachers of that day also taught to abstain from meats that were forbidden under the Mosaic Law. However, the epistles and under the New Covenant we discover that no meats are forbidden, and food has nothing to do with a person’s spirituality (1 Cor. 10:23–33). A person may not be able to eat certain foods for physical reasons (allergies or other health reasons); but no food is to be rejected for spiritual reasons.

I once had a lady ring my doorbell. When I answered the door, we began to talk, and I sensed she was part of a cult. At one point, she said to me: “I can tell by just looking at you that you eat meat.” I replied to her: “I can tell by looking at you that you don’t eat meat.”

Here is the obvious point. If we can give thanks for something which is pure and wholesome (amoral in nature and design), then we can do it without offending our conscience and God. Remember, God has given us marriage, food, and other material things to enjoy. We should not shun them, or become a hermit in a monastery, but enjoy them for God blesses them and we can give thanks for those things which are not strictly forbidden in Scripture. Yes, we can enjoy many things (food, vacation, hunting, golf) without feeling guilty in doing them! Why? It's because we can effectively balance the Christian life between the sacred and secular, the spiritual and physical, and the most important with the less important.

We have all heard the expression, "Get a life!" Well, in balancing our Christian life we will "get a life" once again and live what many have called the normal Christian life. This is a life that is filled with spiritual commitments but also a life that enjoys God's presence, accepts God's forgiveness, experiences God's love, and a life that is not overcome by worry, anxiety, and frustration that stems from trying to earn God's favor and acceptance through constant spiritual service and activity. The balanced Christian life is a life that can slow down, be replenished, and enjoy all aspects of life that God has created for one's benefit and pleasure.

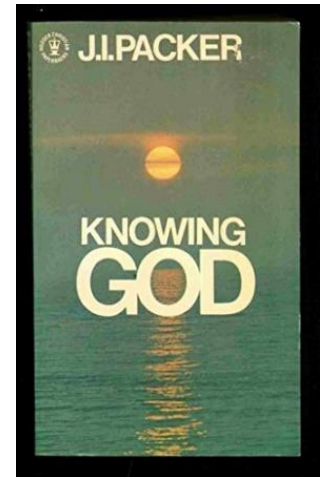
Do you remember when a Christian man decided to walk across the Grand Canyon on a cable line? This must have been a real balancing act! The guy was praising Jesus all the way across the canyon. When I think of this Christian man walking across the Grand Canyon on a skinny cable, I can correctly assume that he was balancing the Christian life. His balance was between being crazy (nuts) and praising God! Seriously, the point is this. We must learn to balance our Christian life by making sure the spiritual pursuits of living are not overtaken by other physical enjoyments of life.



Blessed are the balanced!

II. Understanding God

I remember one book that I had purchased years ago. It was written by J.I. Packer. It has been rebound and reprinted many different times since it came out. But I can always remember the picture on the front cover and the title which was this: "Knowing God."



As Christians, we must also possess a balanced view of God, but this can only happen when we truly know and understand who God is in His eternal character and how He views His relationship with His children. The Bible repeatedly reminds us that God is a holy God (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:14-16) but that He is also a loving God who loves His people unconditionally and wants to bring blessing upon their lives (James 1:17). We must learn to possess a balanced view about God by understanding that His is both holy and filled with love and compassion at the same time. We need a balanced view between God's chastening hand and love that He expressed toward His children. We discover in Scripture that God does chasten and discipline His. However, even when God chastens His own children they can always be sure that He loves them through the disciplinary process.

Hebrews 12:6 reminds us:

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

Since God is holy He wants us to maintain our holiness as His children (1 Pet. 1:16). Therefore, the motivation behind God's chastening is to keep us focused on holy or consecrated living that honors God. Notice that when He chasten His children, they are still considered to be His son. They have not ceased being His son.

Hebrews 12:10-11

"For they (*our earthly fathers*) verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure (*according to what they thought was right regarding discipline however imperfect they might have been in the discipline process*); but he for *our* profit (*God always disciplines us for spiritual profit*), that *we* might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous:

nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.'

The goal of God's chastening is to keep us moving in a holy path or direction but the motive behind God's chastening hand upon our lives is love. Chastening is always evidence of the Father's love. When we stray and sin against God, He chastens us through inner conviction, through pricking our conscience, sometimes through outward circumstances, but we can be sure that whenever God chastens His children it is part of His loving disciplinary process.

In a proper family relationship, children know that even when parents discipline them that they are also loved by them. In fact, parents should let their children know that they are loved after disciplining them. In other words, there should be no question of God's unconditional love that He has for His own children even when He must chasten them at times throughout their Christian lives. The Bible teaches that we all receive in some measure His chastening hand or else we are not a legitimate child of God (Heb. 12:8).

Here is the point. Satan wants us to believe that God's chastening hand and the difficulties of life which God allows to come into our lives is proof that He does not love us. Of course, this is just another one of Satan's lies. Whatever the experience we pass through, even in relation to God's chastening hand of discipline, we can be sure that His paddle is always controlled by His loving heart.

When we read about God's chastening or chastisement, we tend to only think of a good whipping. To be sure, it does sometimes include this. But the word in its entire meaning refers to training or education. It includes instruction, discipline, correction, and warning. All of these things are designed to cultivate Christian virtues and drive out evil. In this case and context, chastening has to do with punishment for wrongdoing which is part of the training or educating process (Heb. 12:11).

Sometimes God's chastening is seen in that He rebukes us from the Word of God and brings strong conviction into our hearts about something we did or said that was wrong. At other times when we are persistently defiant, He might allow some difficult circumstance (perhaps some type of physical suffering or trying circumstance) into our life to teach us some important lesson and bring spiritual

growth into our lives. In general, God shows His love to us by punishing us (“the Lord ... scourgeth” – Heb. 12:6) with His various methods of discipline which are designed to mature us and make us into what He wants us to be. The idea that we are only chastened by God when we are really bad is not necessarily true. God knows how to chasten us with His Word, His inner conviction, and Holy Spirit on a daily basis as He seeks to redirect our lives and mold us into His likeness.

Dr. Wiersbe states:

“The Father does not want us to be pampered babies; He wants us to become mature adult sons and daughters who can be trusted with the responsibilities of life.”

We can be sure that God chastens all of us in various ways and at different times in our lives if we are one of His children (Heb. 12:7-8). This means that none of us as God’s children are exempt from His parental paddling and chastening hand over our lives. We all need it just like our children need a good licking now and then!

Why do we spank our children? It’s because we love them (Prov. 13:24). The same is true with God. Because God loves us, He chastens us with conviction, difficult circumstances, and other various means to get our attention.

At this point, I need to give another word of caution. Some Christians believe that whenever something bad happens to them that it must be the result of God’s continual chastisement or punishment upon their lives. For instance, as they grow older and pass through the normal experiences of aging, they somehow think that God is chastening them for some specific neglect or sin in their life, even some sin they might have committed years ago. We must remember that God allows suffering as part of the normal aging process (Rom. 8:23). It’s not a sign of God’s disciplinary judgment.

Also, God allows difficult circumstances to enter our lives (sickness, pain, loss of work) for other reasons than His chastisement or punishment (1 Pet. 5:10). Suffering will often occur in relation to our Christian lives, not because we have sinned against God, but because God has simply allowed it to occur for our own good, His own glory, and greater purpose related to our life - Christlikeness (Rom. 8:28-28; Job 23:10). Be careful of always assuming that God is always walking around holding a paddle in His hand waiting to wallop you one when you get out of

line. God certainly is not like this, and neither is any Christian parent who loves their child. Be very careful that you do not begin to view God as a strict disciplinarian that is always out to get you, come down hard on you, whenever you fail Him. This is not a proper view of God.

John 11:1-4

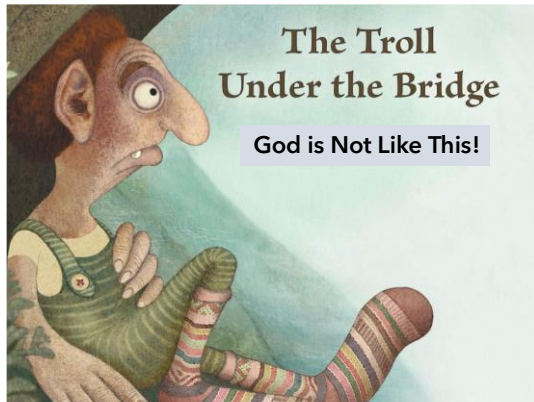
“Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death (*would not end in permanent death*), but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”

Why was Lazarus sick? Was it because God was chastening him and going to take him down? No! God allowed the sickness of Lazarus to display His glory in raising him from the dead. It had nothing to do with any specific sin that was in the life of Lazarus. It had nothing to do with God chastening him and taking his life.

John 9:1-3 is another case in point:

“And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

No, God was not punishing this man because of sin in his life. Jesus reminded the people that the sickness was for the glory of God as He demonstrates His healing power and touch upon this man’s life. As a Christian, you must be careful that you do not keep beating yourself over the head for every wrong thing that you might do. Confess your sins (1 John 1:9) and go on with life without living in the constant fear that God is always punishing His children for every little thing that they do wrong and that somehow God demonstrates disfavor and a lack of love toward them! This not the way God presents Himself and His relationship with His children.



Christians can become unbalanced in their thinking and approach about God's disciplinary judgment. They sometimes will conclude that God is punishing them for their past sins, for everything that they do wrong, that God is always on their backs like an angry and out of control dad chasing his son with a paddle across the room. They almost conclude that "God is always out to get me"

or that God is like the mythical ogre or troll waiting under a bridge to pounce on a traveler and terrorize another victim.

What did the troll say who was waiting under the bridge for its victim? The old story goes something like this. On the way up was a bridge over a cascading stream they had to cross; and under the bridge lived a great ugly troll, with eyes as big as saucers, and a nose as long as a poker. So first of all came the youngest Billy Goat Gruff to cross the bridge. ... "Now, I'm coming to gobble you up," said the troll.

Some Christians stereotype God in this way. But this is not a biblical view of God who loving disciplines His children and the God who predominately showers grace and mercy upon His beloved children as they pass through difficult times in their lives. God is not out to get us but to express His loving care and provision for our lives.

Sometimes Christians believe that God is more concerned about clubbing them over the head than with providing them with spiritual grace and strength for their difficult journey in life. A Christian can become absorbed with God's chastening hand or punishment in his life instead of being absorbed with the merciful care of a loving God that wants to extend His healing touch and mercies in his Christian life.

God is a loving and merciful God that pities His children and repeatedly reaches out to them to meet their needs in life (Ps. 84:11).

Psalm 25:6

"Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they *have been* ever of old."

Psalm 103:13

“Like as a father pitieth *his* children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.”

James 5:11

“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

We must realize that God unconditionally loves His children even when they are not all that they should be in their Christian life (Romans 8:38-39). Likewise, we must always remember that we do not earn God’s love and favor by how much we live for Him or how much we do for the Lord in comparison to our sins and failures. God’s love and acceptance for us is based upon Jesus Christ, our eternal forgiveness and justification before God’s throne. It has nothing to do with our faithfulness to Him or our failures before Him.

I was recently corresponding with a Christian woman about eternal security. She seemed to be living in fear over the prospect of losing her own soul if she would allow some specific sin to remain in her life. She tried to give me some prooftexts (pretexts) in the Bible to prove her position (one can lose their salvation), but I reminded her that nothing stops God from loving His own when they are truly His children because they are positionally justified and accepted before God’s throne in the saving merits and righteousness of God’s Son.

At point she said, “That is scary” to live with known sin in your life that you may not immediately confess. It could mean that you would die and go to hell. This woman needs to balance her Christian life. Living the Christian life is not to be scary (God threatening us with our salvation) but is to be lived out under the unconditional love of God, knowing that God always loves His own children who are in Christ, even when they fail Him.

A parent does not expect children to earn their love and acceptance. They love their children in spite of their shortcomings. The same is true regarding God and His children. God loves His children unconditionally (Jer. 31:3) and does not pound us over the head every time we fail Him. He is a merciful, gracious, and forgiving God that is slow to anger and full of compassion (Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8; 145:8; Nah. 1:3).

Psalm 103:8

“The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”

God is slow to anger, which means that He is not quick to judge or discipline us and He certainly is not holding grudges against us. We should not view God as a mean old troll waiting to hurt us but as a loving Father waiting to take us in His arms and love us. Even after He might spank us! Many times, we live a lopsided Christian life because we have a lopsided view of God.



IMBALANCE: We misunderstand God when we paint the picture that God is a grumpy, mean, old man in Heaven that is never pleased with our life, someone who is always out to “get us” and “condemn us” for every failure or lack of service rendered unto Him. To be sure, God wants to prune us (John 15:2) by allowing us to pass through the trials and tests of life, but He does not

want to pound us down a rat hole every time we fail Him! Some Christians misunderstand how God views them as His children.

BALANCE: The New Testament reveals that every Christian is “accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6) which means the Father accepts us in Christ and we are loved by God with an everlasting love. We are taken into the family of God (John 1:12) and God loves us dearly and unconditionally as a father loves their children. As Christians, we must live as if we are sitting in the arms of a loving and merciful God, a God who hugs and loves us, while at the same time demonstrating deep respectfulness for His holiness, greatness, and glory.

God is not an ogre under the bridge waiting to club and victimize us if we don’t measure up! He is a forgiving (1 John 1:9), loving (John 13:1), merciful (Ps. 117:2) and a faithful God (Lam. 3:23).

Deuteronomy 33:27 explains God’s relationship with His people:

“The eternal God *is thy* refuge, and underneath *are* the everlasting arms.”

“I feel the touch of hands so kind and gentle,
They’re leading me in paths that I must trod;
I have no fear when Jesus walks beside me,
For I’m sheltered in the arms of God.
So let the storms rage high, the dark clouds rise,
They won’t worry me for I’m sheltered safe within the arms of God;
He walks with me and naught of Earth shall harm me,
For I’m sheltered in the arms of God.”

This is the true picture of God. God is not waiting to harm us and take us down but to heal us, lift us up once again, and make us into what He wants us to be. If we are unbalanced in our view of God we can begin to live in constant fear and dread that God is always dissatisfied with us, that we are never good enough, that we can never please Him, and that He is always chasing us around to bring us harm and difficulty in life.

Blessed are the balanced!

III. Loving God

Jesus taught in Mark 12:30:

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart (*affectionately – what we inwardly desire*), and with all thy soul (*personality – what we are inwardly in our total being – passions, perceptions, thoughts*), and with all thy mind (*mentally – what we think about inwardly*), and with all thy strength (*physically – what we do for Him outwardly*): this is the first commandment.”

Our love for God must be balanced as well. First, there is the priority of love. No other love can be allowed to rival our love for God. God is to have the supreme place in every Christian’s life. Our love for the Lord should be what some have called “first love.” In fact, the Bible says we can lose this first love and replace it with other types of love that drown out our love for God.

Revelation 2:4

“Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”

The caution we must take in our Christian lives is that we replace our love and loyalty to God for other worldly loves (1 John 2:15-17). What Jesus and John are talking about is a deep and committed love for God in our hearts and lives. It is a supreme and loyal love that does not lessen or become cold over time. It's a honeymoon type of love that continues to blossom in our relationship with the Lord. Jesus was teaching in Mark 12:30 that our love for God must be first in priority and importance. All other loves must be secondary in importance and expression.

Second, we should not substitute outward obedience for inward love for God. In Mark 12:30, Jesus was teaching that we are not only to love God with our strength (what we do for Him in service and work) but with our heart, soul, and mind which pertains to the inward part of our human existence and life. In other words, we must make sure that we possess a daily relationship and close walk with the Lord that stems from our heart or inner being, a relationship that is real, vibrant, alive, and not merely something that is outward. Our outward service must be balanced with inward love for the Lord and the desire to please Him.

There is a reason why Jesus began with the inward relationship before getting to the outward ("strength"). It's because we need to balance our love for the Lord and be careful that we are not merely serving and doing things on the outside while missing out on the inner life of loving God with our heart, soul, and mind.

Jesus said in John 15:10:

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

1 John 5:3 similarly declares:

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

Of course, it's absolutely true that we express our love for God through our outward acts of obedience. However, we must be careful that we do not fall into the trap of rigid obedience or compliance to God's commands without possessing a genuine and deep, loving relationship with God on the inside, where we love God with our heart, soul, and mind. The expression of our love toward God must maintain balance – the balance of inwardly loving God and outward loving God through service and obedience.

If we are not careful we can develop a legal relationship with God without possessing a real loving relationship with God. We can pass through the motions of obedience without possessing a genuine heart of love toward God through fellowship, worship, and enjoyment of His personal presence in our lives.

Amos 5:21-23 illustrates obedience without love:

"I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept *them*: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols."

Sometimes God does not accept our obedience! Yes, it is true. God rejects our obedience when we try and obey Him on Sunday by going to church but then sin the rest of the week and never express true love toward Him and His ways. When we try to superficially obey Him without possessing a genuine loving relationship with God, we become unbalanced in our Christian life. Here the people were doing what is right, being obedient to God in bringing the right sacrifices, but God says He would not accept them. Behind their giving was the corruption of sinful living and a heart that was cold toward God. God's people did not really love Him at this point in their lives and they had turned their living into ritualism without possessing a true, inner, and loving relationship with Him.

It's clear the only reason the Hebrew people ever went through the hassle of bloodying up the altars was because God specifically asked them to do such things. They were doing precisely what God asked them to do and one would think this to be commendable in the eyes of God. But it's not. Obedience without a true inner love for God is nothing but cold, legalistic, heartless, compliance.

Introduction: An old countryman, visiting London for the first time in his life, went into one of the great picture galleries to look around. He came to a painting of the Lord Jesus Christ hanging upon the Cross. He stopped before it, and as he gazed at the picture a great love for the One who hung there flooded his heart. "Bless Him!" he said, aloud. "I love Him! I love Him!"

Others in the gallery heard the old man's words, and seeing the tears trickling down his old, furrowed cheeks, as he stood beside the picture, hat in hand, forgetful of

all else, were touched, and stopped before the picture, too. A stranger drew near to the old countryman, and grasping his hand, said: "I love Him, too, brother."

Seeing what had taken place, a third stepped forward, saying: "So do I." Then a fourth joined them, and a fifth. There they stood together, perfect strangers to one another, but drawn together by the love of the Lord Jesus.

Mark 12:30

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment.

Last time in our study, we left off talking about loving God inwardly with all of our heart, soul, and mind while at the same time expressing love to God outwardly (loving Him with our strength – the things we do for Him). Balancing out our love for the Lord is important. We must be careful we do not begin to stress the outward acts of service and fall into the trap of mere performance for God without possessing an inward love for God – with all of our heart, soul, and mind).

Again, obedience should be a demonstration of our love for God, but rigid, wooden, cold compliance toward God, without possessing a genuine love for God can turn into a legalistic relationship with God. Therefore, there is a sense where we must learn to balance obedience with our personal walk and loving relationship with God. Christianity is a LOVE relationship – not a LEGAL relationship!

Romans 7:4 illustrates this loving relationship we are to have with the Lord:

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ (the old legal and condemning relationship we had with the law prior to salvation has been severed by Christ's death which freed us from this condemning and enslaving relationship to sin); that ye should be married to another, even to him (Jesus Christ) who is raised from the dead (a loving, intimate, marriage relationship with Christ), that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

A marriage is designed by God to be a loving relationship where two people share their lives together. They are deeply in love with one another and express love in the relationship. This is the way it's to be when it comes to our relationship with Jesus Christ. It's comparable to a loving and intimate relationship between two marriage partners. Christianity is really a love relationship. Everything we do in our

Christian life is because we are in love with the Lover of our soul, Jesus Christ. So we must be careful we do not fall into the trap of outward compliance without possessing a deep, loving relationship with the Lord. Compliance while possessing a cold relationship with God, without possessing a strong love for the Lord, causes us to become unbalanced in our Christian life.

Romans 7:6 goes on to say:

“But now (since we have been saved) we are delivered from the law (the LEGALISTIC relationship = a legal relationship without salvation, spiritual life, and love for God), that being dead (spiritually dead) wherein we were held (under the bondage and penalty of sin); that we should serve in newness of spirit (the LOVING relationship = as a result of the New Covenant work of the Spirit taking place in our hearts, we can now serve and live for Jesus Christ out of love, gratitude and joy instead of the fear of being condemned and judged by God’s legal code and standard, and we can also by the Spirit’s divine enablement or power live victoriously over sin, experiencing a newfound freedom and liberty from sin’s bondage), and not in the oldness of the letter” (the old unloving, insensitive, enslaving, legalistic, powerless, condemning and futile relationship we had with the law in our unsaved state).

“Run, John, run, the law commands
But gives us neither feet nor hands,
Far better news the gospel brings:
It bids us fly and gives us wings!”

Beware of becoming unbalanced in your Christian life when you forget that you are to serve God out of love and gratitude verses cold, outward compliance. Our inward love for God (our heart, soul, and mind) must be the origin and true reason for our actions of outward obedience. If we forget this, we can quickly become unbalanced in our Christian life.

We must remember that living the Christian life revolves around a PERSON – not our PERFORMANCE.

Philippians 1:21

“For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.”

If we strive for only performance we lose sight of the personal relationship with God which revolves around loving and enjoying God on a daily basis. As a result of obedience without an inner love for God and gratitude for His blessings, our life can become out of balance from a spiritual perspective, and we can even lose our sense of true need and enrichment (Rev. 3:17).

IMBALANCE: I become unbalanced or out of sync when I obey God out of duty, necessity, and cold compliance without truly loving Him and wanting to please the Lord in every area of my life. When my love for God grows cold I can turn my life into a legalistic trap of following God's directives and commands without possessing a real, vital, and loving relationship with God.

BALANCE: We have been delivered from the old law or legal relationship and can now serve and live for God out of the "newness of the spirit" (serving God out of gratitude, thankfulness, and love) instead of obeying without a sense of love and gratitude for God's salvation and spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Our focus in our Christian life must continually be upon Christ, our loving relationship with Him and dependence upon His power for victory (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21). As we maintain our love for Jesus Christ through our spiritual marriage and relationship with Him, we will not develop a legalistic relationship with the Lord and become bogged down with a type of wooden obedience toward keeping God's commands. Instead, we will possess a relationship that is built upon gratitude and thankfulness for everything that God has done for us.

"How can I say thanks
For the things You have done for me?
Things so undeserved
Yet You gave to prove Your love for me
The voices of a million angels
Could not express my gratitude
All that I am and ever hope to be
I owe it all to Thee."

Blessed are the balanced!

IV. Fearing God

Christians need to possess a balance when it comes to fearing God. The Bible has much to say about fearing God in our Christian life. But there is a balance to strike when it comes to fearing the Lord.

When looking at the Hebrew word for “fear” it has the focus of possessing a type of dreadfulness before God, which metaphorically means to possess a sense of awe and respect for the majesty of God, while at the same time possessing a healthy fear or dread that is related to not pleasing God with my life and actions. There is a dreadfulness that is related to fearing God in a reverential manner for who He is in is eternal being and a dreadfulness that is related to fearing God by not wanting to disappoint Him with my actions and disobedience but instead honor Him with all my living.

As a Christian, I also need to possess a balanced view regarding what it means to fear God. A healthy fear of God means that I demonstrate deep and profound reverence for God (a reverential fear of God) by the way that I live, act, and worship. In general, fearing God means that I respect God and His ways and therefore want to honor Him with my life and never dishonor, displease, or disappoint Him in any way.

Fearing God is often associated with worshipping God.

Psalm 5:7

“But as for me, I will come *into* thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: *and* in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.”

Psalm 89:7

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all *them that are* about him.”

Psalm 96:9

“O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.”

Fearing God relates to possessing a reverential awe and deep respect toward God. This is seen within the contexts of worship. As we worship God, we are to demonstrate a deep and profound reverence for God because of His eternal being of holiness, purity, righteousness, justice, sovereignty, providence, and eternity.

As we worship God and even live for Him, we are to do so with a deep sense and awareness of His greatness and glory as the eternal, majestic, and holy God.

So, there is a holy dread or reverence that we are to express toward God. But originating or flowing out of this deep and profound respect we have for God (His majesty and eternal character of holiness and righteousness) comes a healthy dread or wholesome fear of not wanting to dishonor, displease, or disappoint the Lord with my life. There is a sense where we should possess the fear of not honoring God with our life and obedience and therefore failing to demonstrate reverence and respect toward God and His ways. So, a biblical fear of God revolves around reverentially fearing God which results in the healthy desire to please God, not dishonor His name and ways. Other Bible verses reveal the importance of fearing God and walking in His ways.

Deuteronomy 8:6

“Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him”

In this verse we see that fearing God is linked to walking in His ways. This means that when I fear God, I will not only obey God out of a deep and profound reverence for Him, but I will also possess a healthy dread in my heart of not pleasing God with my life when I am disobedient to Him and His ways. As a Christian, I should want to obey God and not deny God’s right to rule over my life. Why? Because of the thought that I might not honor God’s holiness, that I might not respect His ways and please the Lord when I break His commandments.

Joshua 24:14

“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.”

Again, we see that a profound fear or reverence for God’s unmatched majesty and holiness is coupled with a healthy fear or dread of not wanting to displease God but actually please Him with every area of my life – my worship, my marriage, my speech, my obedience, etc.

Ecclesiastes 12:13

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man.”

In other words, live to please God because of who He is (a holy and righteous God). Live in such a way that your life pleases Him and does not offend Him and His ways. Once again, fearing God is always attached to obeying God for there is to be a healthy fear that is related to not offending God, displeasing Him with my life, but instead wanting to please God through my obedience actions.

2 Corinthians 7:1

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

The New Testament word for “fear” (phobos) also connotes to be afraid, to possess terror and once again takes on the metaphorical meaning of possessing a sense of reverence toward God, respecting His holiness, and not wanting to displease God with our acts of disobedience but instead honor Him with our life, lips, and every aspect of our lives.

In summary, fearing God takes on the meaning of expressing reverence and respect toward God for who He is and possessing a health desire of never wanting to offend God but instead please Him with our entire lives. Again, we must throw up some words of caution when it comes to fearing God in our Christian life. We need to balance our Christian life by understanding how fearing God works in our daily Christianity.

First, I become unbalanced in fearing God when I show disrespect toward Him. Possessing a reverential fear toward God, wanting to honor God and not displease Him with our actions is a fear that is often lacking in contemporary evangelical Christianity. If we are not careful we get very flippant and disrespectful with God. For instance, the bumper stickers which say God is our Co-Pilot seems to be disrespectful. He is not a co-pilot but our Savior and Lord – the great glorious and majestic God who created us and holds the universe in His hand.

Yes, we are invited to call Him Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6), and to have the personal intimacy promised to us (Rom. 8:15), a Father and child relationship, but still, we

are never to possess a flippant or cavalier relationship with God (showing disrespect and disregard for Him). Instead, we are always to maintain a healthy respect and adoration for the Lord while possessing a very close relationship and walk with Him.

Second, I become unbalanced in fearing God when I am constantly scared of Him. This may sound contradictory but fearing God in our Christian life does not mean to be scared out of our wits that God is always ready to judge us, that He is going to take us down, that He threatens our salvation and will withdraw His love from us if we do something wrong.

As we have seen, Christians who stray from God's ways and who harbor sin in their hearts and lives should realize that God can and does discipline His children (Heb. 12:6). All Christians need to realize that they are accountable to God and that God can sometimes bring stronger discipline upon them for stubbornly following their own sinful paths. A healthy fear of God does not exclude the possibility that He can discipline us in a more pronounced way when we are defiant against Him and stubbornly persist in our disobedience.

Revelation 2:5 is a case in point:

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick (lampstand) out of his place, except thou repent.”

The Christians at the church of Ephesus were called upon to repent of their diminishing “first love” for Christ and repeat their devoted service to Christ which was characteristic at the beginning of their Christian lives. Evidently their love and service for the Lord had eroded over time. They needed to repent of their loss of love and commitment to the Lord. Otherwise, Jesus warns that He would remove the lampstand at Ephesus which probably means their testimony would die out and eventually the church would cease to exist. They needed to get with it. Here is a word of warning that comes from the lips of our Lord. The church that loses its love will soon lose its light, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be.

When God tells us to repent, that should raise our eyebrows! It should get our attention. We should realize that God means what He says.

Revelation 2:16 adds another warning to the church of Pergamos:

“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

In this case, the Christians were warned to repent for accommodating false teachers and they were to expel them from their local churches. If they chose not to do so, Jesus promises that He would fight against these evil men and take care of the matter Himself.

Revelation 3:16

“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (*their Christian lives were nauseating before God*).

Revelation 3:19

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”

So yes, there are warnings in Scripture about the repercussions that come from disobeying God or when we stubbornly rebel against what is right in the eyes of God. These warnings should evoke a sense of alarm and fear in our hearts. But this is not the fear of losing God’s love, the fear of losing our salvation, or a constant fear that should plague our lives when we are seeking to live for the Lord and do what is right. When we lack respect for God, His holiness, and His Word, we should naturally develop a sense of God’s disfavor toward our actions and His need to reprove or correct us.

We have seen that the general concept and biblical teaching of fearing God pertains to possessing a deep reverence for God and His ways, possessing the desire to never disobey Him but please Him with our lives. However, when we lose sight of the biblical concept of fearing God and persist in sin, it can result in fearing His reprisal and demonstrating His disfavor toward our sinful living.



But the fear of God’s reprisal is not the way we live when properly fearing God. God should not be compared to a mean and dreadful dog catcher who is seeking to round up all



the stray dogs and put them in the pound! God does not deal with His children in this way. Once again, the Christian should not develop the mindset that God is always out to get him for everything he does wrong. This is not the biblical teaching about fearing God. God is not the mean dog catcher trying to trap us and put us in cage every time we do something wrong.



We have seen that God is slow to anger and longsuffering (Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8; 145:8) and will give us plenty of warning before He gives us an old-fashioned whipping. This needs to be reemphasized for it is God's attitude and primary actions that He demonstrates toward His children.

Fearing God pertains to possessing a deep reverence for God and His ways. Fearing God also means I don't want to displease or disappoint God with my life. However, when we lose sight of the biblical concept of fearing God and persist in sin, it can result in fearing His reprisal against our sinful and stubborn living. But the fear of God's reprisal (judgment) is NOT the way we live when properly fearing God.

Although there are times we might sense God's loving and chastening hand upon our lives (Deut. 8:5), our overall view and concept of God is NOT to fear His reprisal or constant punishment or condemnation over our lives, but to understand that He is a longsuffering and merciful God that is slow to anger, and that he will never withdraw His.

The fear that we possess toward God is to be a respectful fear that wants to please God, a respectful fear that does not want to dishonor or disappoint God with our lives. When we possess this type of fear we won't have to fear God's reprisal and whipping for wrongdoing. But when we do live in defiance against him, we can develop the fear of His chastisement and reprisal.

A child might fear the paddle of his father but after the event he goes about playing and enjoying life once again without fearing the constant wrath of the parent over his life. This is the way it should be in our daily Christian living. Generally speaking, properly fearing God results in true reverence for God, respecting His holiness, wanting to please and not dishonor Him with wrong attitudes, fleshly habits in our

worship and musical choices, and general disobedience of living. But again, we must understand that fearing God is not some kind of slavish and paralyzing fear that believes God is waiting to judge us, get even with us, and damn us to hell if we don't get things right in our life. There are some Christians who do not correctly understand what a healthy fear of God entails.

A doctor once said to his patient:

"I might *hurt* you when performing surgery, but I won't *harm* you so that you lose your life."

In a similar way, God sometimes paddles and hurts us, but he will not harm us (take away our spiritual life). This is because He loves us through Christ and will not take away His promise of eternal life (John 3:16; 6:47).

Again, some Christians are scared out of their wits for they really believe that God will strike them down if they don't measure up to His perfect standard. Of course, this is not God's attitude or aim in His overall dealings with His children and people. Fearing God does not mean to live in such a way that I am always frightened and terrified that God is going to bang me over the head with a club when I don't please Him. A proper fear of God involves respecting God and His ways without experiencing constant rejection from Him.

When we possess a healthy fear of God it means that we will demonstrate reverence for Him. We will want to please Him with our actions and attitudes and everyday living. But we will avoid viewing God and fearing God as the heavy-handed taskmaster in the sky who is waiting to always punish us for every little thing that we do wrong.

A while back when my wife and I were watching the grandchildren, I had to give a little spanking to Natalie. I mean, she got off really easy. It was literally nothing. But she began to cry like the world was coming to an end. A bit later she came back to me and crawled up on my lap and said to me, "Papa, I love you." Now, as I think of that incident, it relates to the kind of relationship we are to have with God in our Christian life. We are to possess a loving relationship with the Father even when He chooses to sometimes discipline us. And the fact of His discipline does not mean that I am to live in constant fear of His reprisal and judgment over my life.

When we have a biblical understanding about God, we will possess a proper fear toward God, but it won't be a fear of His condemnation of our lives.

First, I become unbalanced in fearing God when I show disrespect toward Him and His righteous ways. Second, I become unbalanced in fearing God when I am constantly scared of Him.



We need to balance our Christian life by realizing that God is not an evil tyrant (like the bad cowboy in a western TV show) seeking to always harm us if we fail Him. At the same time, we should show deep respect, reverence, and awe for Him and His righteous ways and always want to please Him with our life – not wanting to displease and disappoint the Lord.

Proverbs 8:13

“The fear of the LORD (respect God’s character and ways and therefore wanting to honor God and never disappoint Him with our life) is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.”

We fear God when we reverence Him as our supreme Lord and Master and turn away from sin – always desiring to please God. When we properly fear God, worshipping and glorifying Him becomes our number one priority in life (Rev. 15:4). In fact, when fearing Him we will always show reverence toward the Lord in our worship and daily living by the words that we use, the attitudes we possess, the music we play, and as we apply sanctification to all aspects of our life. In fearing God, we will also possess the wholesome fear and desire to never do anything that would dishonor Him. Possessing a healthy fear of God means we never want to misrepresent God with our lives and therefore disappoint Him.

“Oh, be careful little hands what you do.
Oh, be careful little hands what you do.
For the Father up above is looking down in love.
Oh, be careful little hands what you do.

Oh, be careful little feet where you go.
Oh, be careful little feet where you go.
For the Father up above is looking down in love.
Oh, be careful little feet where you go.

Oh, be careful little lips what you say.
Oh, be careful little lips what you say.
For the Father up above is looking down in love.
Oh, be careful little lips what you say.

Oh, be careful little eyes what you see.
Oh, be careful little eyes what you see.
For the Father up above is looking down in love.
Oh, be careful little eyes what you see.

Oh, be careful little ears what you hear.
Oh, be careful little ears what you hear.
For the Father up above is looking down in love.
Oh, be careful little ears what you hear.”

This is what fearing God essentially means! If we really fear and respect God and want to please Him (not offend Him), we won't seek to do anything contrary to His will but always seek to glorify God with our lives. We need to remember that a healthy fear of God keeps us living a life of holiness, separation, and brings many spiritual blessings into our lives.

Like a young child in an earthly family relationship, we should want to reverence, honor, and please our heavenly Father by the way we live and act. We should strive to want to please Him in everything that we do (John 8:29; 2 Tim. 2:4) and this attitude creates a healthy fear of God in our hearts that relates to never wanting to offend His holiness and displease Him by our sinful actions and diversions in life.

In a normal family relationship, an earthly son wants to get a good report card to please his earthly father. He wants to bring good grades home so his father will be pleased with his hard work at school. This is what fearing God is to be like. We should want to live in such a way to please our Heavenly Father. And even if we don't get all "A's" on our report card, we will know that our Father in Heaven will still love and accept us.

IMBALANCE: Don't turn the biblical teaching of fearing God into something that is scary, life-debilitating, and which keeps Christians in a state of dreadfulness by thinking that God is always ready to judge them and strike them down when they fail Him. This kind of fear results in bondage – not liberty!

Galatians 5:1

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (free from the legal relationship we had with the law prior to our salvation, which resulted in the fear of God’s judgment, the condemning relationship we had under the law), and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (legalism – using the law and good works as the means to receive God’s grace and the measuring stick of our acceptance before God).

We can and should possess a healthy fear of God by avoiding temptation and those things that take us away from God, but the fear of God is not some kind of HOUNDING fear that seeks to dominate us, condemns us, and which keeps us from enjoying the Lord’s presence, life in general, and even leisure time. I can live in such a way that I serve God out of duty, possessing an unhealthy fear toward God, always sensing His disapproval and rejection upon my life instead of experiencing His loving embrace and acceptance in Christ, even when I fail (Eph. 1:3, 6).

BALANCE: Know the difference between a holy fear of God versus a harmful fear toward God that debilitates your Christian life. We should always possess a deep reverence for God, His truth, and righteous ways. We should also possess a longing and desire to please the Lord with our life, not dishonor Him, so we might glorify Him in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31). At the same time, we must understand that God always loves us, that He does not have a club over our head, waiting to punish us every time we fail Him.

First, I become unbalanced in fearing God when I show disrespect toward Him and His ways. Second, I become unbalanced in fearing God when I am constantly scared of Him. Third, I become unbalanced in fearing God when I lose sight of His unchanging and unconditional love for me.

Yes, it’s true, even when I fail God and do not please Him with my life, I can know that God still accepts me and loves me unconditionally without having to meet

specific obligations or requirements on my part. God loves me in spite of my sin, but this does not mean God approves of my sin.

Romans 8:39

“Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Does God really love His children unconditionally in Christ, and if He does, how does this align with fearing God? It seems that many Christians struggle with this concept of the unconditional love that God has toward His children. Somehow they think that the teaching of unconditional love means that we are given a license to sin and do as we please without every fearing God’s reprisal or the loss of our salvation. This certainly is not true (Romans 6:1). Grace and God’s love for us does not teach us to live in sin but live separate from sin.

There are those who are weary and leery of teaching the concept of God’s unconditional love for His children (without a lot of exceptions attached to their explanation) for fear that it might lead others astray into living a licentious lifestyle that possess no fear of God. However, as we have seen in this study, the biblical teaching on the fear of God does not mean to doubt God unconditional love for us, or to doubt our salvation in any way, but to fear God by maintaining a deep and profound reverence toward Him and possessing the desire to please God with our life – not to dishonor and displease Him by the way that we live.

Actually, a proper understanding and consistent fear of God keeps us from living a rebellious and sinful life for we don’t want to dishonor and disappoint God with our life. However, when we do sin and fail to immediately confess our sins (1 John 1:9), we have discovered that God does chasten His children with conviction and desires to correct them with His loving but firm hand (Heb. 12:6). Nevertheless, the fear of God’s chastening hand upon our lives does not negate the fact that God still loves us. The child of God always knows that it’s a loving Father that chastens His children (Prov. 13:24).

Here is the point. God’s chastening of His children does not negate the teaching of God’s unconditional love for His children. Fearing God in a biblical sense does not dismiss the wonderful truth that God always loves me! Live again, laugh again, let God know that you love Him, and learn to accept His unconditional love and

forgiveness (1 John 1:9). God is not mad at you. God accepts you in grace. Grace means that God accepts you in Christ (Rom. 5:1), His perfect righteousness, which frees you from the fear and dread that God will withdraw His love from you if you don't measure up (1 John 3:1). Grace reminds us that God forgives us completely and forever while loving us unconditionally as His sons without any strings attached (2 Cor. 13:14). We can bask in the sunshine of God's unchanging love.

Jude 1:21

“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

Those who teach conditional salvation will tell you that keeping yourself in the love of God means to maintain your good works so that God will continue to love and accept you, and so you don't lose or forfeit your salvation. Of course, the Bible teaches nothing like this as it pertains to God's love (Rom. 8:38-39) and our salvation (John 3:16; 6:41; 10:28-29). This verse is actually talking about maintaining a proper perspective and understanding of God's love that he has for His children. It is a love that is not conditioned on how we live, what we do, how good or bad we have been. It's constant because of our positional forgiveness and righteousness that we have in Christ before God's throne.

The fact that God loves His children unconditionally in Christ is grace beyond measure! The Bible teaches that we should live under grace (Rom. 6:14-15), grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18), be taught by grace (Titus 2:11-12) and experience grace in our life (His forgiveness, acceptance, and loving embrace – Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 1 Pet. 2:3). When we are living by grace it means we are experiencing God's dynamic and life-transforming power, freedom from sin, His personal presence in our life, and His unconditional, loving acceptance in spite of our sins and shortcomings in life.

When we are experiencing grace it also means that we will sense God's continual love and mercy in spite of our imperfections and sins.

Romans 5:5

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

Instead of possessing an unhealthy fear toward God, His unconditional love that is experienced in our hearts because of the Spirit's work, frees us from the taskmaster of legalism (earning God's favor through good works and acts of service rendered unto Him). In general, grace living results in a balanced life of victory, godliness, service, loyalty, wonder, praise, appreciation, acceptance, and love for God in view that He loves us unconditionally – without any requirements.

My wife was reading an internet blog to me the other day that a woman had written. The author was declaring that the Bible never teaches about God's unconditional love and this teaching has led to universalism and other false teachings. She tried to support her finding by the Greek and other statements and books that were written that oppose the unconditional love of God. However, when the Bible says "nothing shall separate us (His children) from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" it can only be talking about one thing – unconditional love!

Our salvation and life as a Christian are based upon unconditional love. We are forgiven because Jesus Christ was condemned and forsaken by the Father in our place. We are accepted and loved forever by God because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. If you deny this, then you are either not a Christian or you are unbalanced in your Christian life.

Unfailing love,
Flows from His heart,
And heals my soul.
In spite of who I am,
He loves, and makes me whole.
I almost can't believe it's true,
Unfailing love, and yet I know,
He gave His life,
To give to me,
Unfailing Love.

Unfailing love,
Flows from His heart,
And heals my soul.
In spite of who I am,

He loves, and makes me whole.
I almost can't believe it's true,
Unfailing love, and yet I know,
He gave His life,
To give to me,
Unfailing Love.

You are living in the bondage of fear and dread, without the assurance of God's security, if you believe that God does not love His children unconditionally. It's a terrible way to live the Christian life. You are missing out on you true freedom and liberty you can have in Christ, to know that God loves you, keeps you, and will never leave you through the saving merits of Jesus Christ.

As a Christian, I can know that the loving arms of our God are wide open, ready to forgive me and that He is "plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Ps. 86:5). As a loving father loves his son, even when he strays, so our Heavenly Father loves His children in spite of their failures, sins, and shortcomings in life.

A man in a particular family, Uncle Oscar, was apprehensive about his first airplane ride. His friends, eager to hear how it went, asked if he enjoyed the flight. "Well," commented Uncle Oscar, "it wasn't as bad as I thought it might be, but I'll tell you this. I never did put all my weight down!"

I'm glad that when it comes to God and our relationship with God, we can put all of our weight down! This is because our relationship with Him is based on grace, and we can know that God is always there for us, ready to forgive, ready to receive, ready to uplift, and ready to bless us once again. This is the kind of God we are to live for and serve. As a Christian, we can properly fear God without possessing a life-altering fear of God's reprisal and the withdrawing of His love from our life. I should fear God, wanting to reverence and please Him with my life, while at the same time understanding that God will never leave or forsake me, but love me as His beloved child unto the end of my days on earth and even throughout eternity!

John 13:1 says that "when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." Were His disciples perfect? No! But Jesus loved them unconditionally to the end of His days on earth. Yes, it is amazing, amazing grace

that God does love His children unto the end! Nothing will ever separate from God's love! What a beautiful and wonderful way to live the Christian life! Instead of possessing an unbiblical view of God and fearing His constant reprisal, I can live in the sunshine and gentleness of His love and acceptance that He extends to me on a daily basis. 1 John 3:1 says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ..."

"His love is like a rolling river
A clear and cool retreat
Flowing on and calm and beauty
Gentle, ever sweet

Ever gentle, ever sweet
Gentle, ever sweet
His love is like a rolling river
Gentle, ever sweet."

Blessed are the balanced!

V. Serving God

It's certainly important to serve God throughout our Christian days here on earth. The Bible speaks of the importance of serving the Lord. There are many ways we can serve the Lord. We serve Him with our gifts, by sharing the Gospel with others, and offering our time to help build up and support local church ministry. We can serve the Lord through prayer, giving, and writing letters of encouragement. We can sing, play musical instruments, and invest our time in missionary work. We can serve the Lord by serving others who are in need. We can do even menial tasks that often go unnoticed, but we must remember that in doing them we are actually serving the Lord (Matt. 10:42). There are many ways we can engage in serving the Lord – doing His work in His way.

The word of caution that relates to our service for the Lord is that we can become unbalanced in our approach to serving the Lord. This occurs when we lose our joy in serving the Lord, forget who we are serving, when we lose our zeal and love for the Lord, and when we think we can never do enough to please God.

Having a balanced view regarding our service to God is also very important.

How do we become unbalanced while serving and ministering?

- We forget who we are serving.

Serving the Lord should be part of our everyday Christian life. We should look for ways we can serve the Lord on a daily basis by handing out Gospel tracts and talking to others who are looking for spiritual guidance. Maybe we can serve the Lord by helping someone in need. Yes, even the deeds of kindness rendered unto others actually become specific ways in which we can serve the Lord.

Matthew 25:40

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.”

We must remember who we are really serving when we engage in the service and work of the Lord! Of course, some days we might be more involved in serving the Lord than other days depending on our work and schedules. But serving the Lord should be a practical thing in our lives – not just a Sunday thing. The important thing is that we are always looking for opportunities to serve the Lord and stay busy in working for Christ. Someday it might just be a general word of encouragement to someone, other days it might involve more specific service that God has called us to do.

Romans 12:11 gives this command:

“Not slothful in business (*outwork service*); fervent in spirit (*inward desire*); serving the Lord” (*upward look*).

This verse in one sense reveals how we can balance out our service for the Lord. We are to keep it up, stay fired up, and keep looking up remembering who we are serving.

When we remember who we are serving (the Lord Jesus Christ) we will keep up our service, stay excited about serving Him, and keep serving the Lord enthusiastically and in a committed fashion.

The word “slothful” means to be sluggish and lacking in our service that we should render unto God. The word “business” means diligence which in the context is speaking about serving the Lord with the use of our gifts for the furtherance of the Gospel and edification of the saints. We are not to be lacking behind in the matter of diligently serving the Lord. The word “fervent” has the idea of boiling over which means to be really excited about doing the Lord’s work.

We are to have plenty of zeal when we remember that we are serving the Lord Himself – the One who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2;20). In other words, we should be eager to be involved in the service of the Lord. It should be an overwhelming passion of ours – not just something we view as needing to be done so we can check it off our list.

When we are boiling over, possessing a fervent spirit in serving the Lord we will not view our service as duty but a delight! After all, we are serving the King of Kings! Every time I do something for the Lord, I’m really serving the Lord. So, this should keep me excited about serving and while serving. I should never forget that I am serving the very One who hung on the cross for me, who died for me, who lives for me, and who has given salvation and eternal life.

Colossians 3:24 adds:

“Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

Yes, we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that you are engaging in work that is for the Lord, His glory, which is eternal, and which furthers His purpose in the world.

➤ We lose our joyful spirit.

Another way we can become unbalanced in our services rendered unto God is when we lose the joy of service.

Psalm 100:2 reminds us of serving the Lord joyfully: TURN

“Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.”

Yes, we are to serve the Lord. But the key is that we are to serve Him with joy and gladness! We are not to serve Him out of a military sense of duty. This makes service a drudgery instead of a delight. We are to have a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving in our hearts as we live for Him and serve the Lord.

“There is joy in serving Jesus,
As I journey on my way,
Joy that fills the heart with praises,
Ev'ry hour and ev'ry day.
There is joy, joy,
Joy in serving Jesus,
Joy that throbs within my heart;
Ev'ry moment, ev'ry hour,
As I draw upon His power,
There is joy, joy,
Joy that never shall depart.”

2 Corinthians 9:7 reminds us of the joy of service:

“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

When serving the Lord, which includes giving, we must always do it cheerfully, with an overwhelming desire to please Him, counting it a privilege and honor to serve and live for Him. It's all about Him – not us! As God children we should possess the attitude of gratitude. We are to serve the Lord with a joyful heart that is motivated by love and appreciation for what He has done for us.

1 John 4:19

“We love him, because he first loved us.”

Let us never forget this. We are to love and serve the Lord because He first loved and served us! We are to respond to the love that He has for us and in doing so we will love and serve the Lord with

Psalms 18:1-3

“I will love thee, O LORD, my strength (*I love you Lord*). The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength (*I depend upon the Lord*), in

whom I will trust (*I trust you Lord*); my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the LORD, *who is worthy* to be praised (*I praise you Lord*): so shall I be saved from mine enemies.”

Love for the Lord is to be the underlying motivating factor of why we are serving Him. If your love for the Lord is lacking then your service will be lacking, or at least the joy and heart will be taken out of it. Your service will become like a deflated balloon. There will be no gladness or joy in your service. But when we maintain our love and walk with the Lord, stay close to Him, we can be sure that will continue to serve Him with the right heart and attitude.

Psalm 40:8

“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law *is* within my heart.”

Delight is the key. If your service has turned into drudgery and not delight, then you need to check up on your love for the Lord. Delighting in God’s will is equivalent to serving the Lord with gladness. It’s possessing a deep desire and longing to do what God wants us to do, when He wants us to do it, and in the way He wants us to do it.

1 John 5:3

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

Loving God is obeying God and obeying God is easy when we remember that His commands which are related to the Christian life are not a drudgery but a delight. The word “grievous” means to be heavy, burdensome, or weighty. Listen folks, when we have a right spirit and attitude toward God’s commands, they won’t be a weight to us but a delight. And the same is true about all our service that we render unto God. It should be a joy to us when we obey and serve the Lord – not a drudgery and chore. As believers, we must remember that when duty becomes delight, we are always more efficient in our service and living for Christ. On the other hand, when our service turns into drudgery it becomes opportunity with the heart taken out of it!

Isaiah 29:13 warns us about the drudgery of service:

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me (*superficial living and service*), but have removed their heart far from me (*sincerity of love for the Lord is lost*), and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (*spurious and flawed type of fear based on man-made legalistic rules*).

Beware of becoming unbalanced in your service and outreach. This occurs when we lose our focus on *why* we are serving, *who* we are serving, and *when* we lose the joy of serving because we have lost our love and gratitude toward the Lord. When we lose the zeal and love we once had for the Lord our living and service can quickly turn into drudgery and not delight. In fact, we can begin to lose the joy of living the Christian life and walking close to the Lord. William Cowper wrote:

Oh! for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill.”

- ✓ Have you developed a half-hearted and half-baked attitude when it comes to serving the Lord?
- ✓ Are you merely serving Him out of a sense of duty and drudgery?
- ✓ Why are you really serving the Lord?
- ✓ What is your attitude when serving the Lord?
- ✓ Have you lost your first love which you had for the Lord?

- We can never do enough.

Lastly, when we develop the mindset and attitude that we must serve God to constantly meet His approval or be accepted by Him, or that we can never do enough to please Him, we set ourselves up for legalism and lose our liberty in Christ (Gal. 5:1). We can overregulate our service and miss out on the joy of service and the normal life of freedom and acceptance in Christ.

We must remember that the frantic pace of service does not necessarily mean that I have a close walk and relationship with the Lord. Nor does it mean that I am necessarily growing in my Christian life. I can arrive at the faulty conclusion that service is the most important thing in life while God places an equally important emphasis on the inner spiritual life (Eph. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:4), loving Him (Rev. 2:4) and the development of Christian character (Gal. 5:22-23).

Here is the point. We must balance out our service and work for the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58) while at the same time working on our love for God and spiritual growth in the Lord. We must always remember that God is not solely measuring our spiritual life by how much we serve Him but how much we are like Him. Balance is the key.

2 Corinthians 3:18 states:

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord (seeing Christ’s reflection in our lives), are changed into the same image from glory to glory (one manifestation of Christlikeness to another), even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (through the Holy Spirit’s transforming power).

Living the Christian life is not just about serving the Lord but living in such a way that we are fellowshiping with God and growing in our inner and outward Christlikeness. This is what really counts.

How do we become unbalanced when serving the Lord? There is one more aspect to deal with.

- We cannot enjoy God’s presence.

Each Christian must learn the balance of enjoying God’s presence, maintaining a close fellowship and walk with Him, while at the same time serving Him. All service

without enjoyment and fellowship with God results in a type of legalistic service rendered to the Lord that lacks real love for the Lord. In order to find balance in the Christian life, we must learn to serve the Lord while at the same time enjoy His presence through worship and by maintaining a personal walk with Him.

Psalm 37:4

“Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”

To delight oneself in the LORD means to enjoy His presence and have a close walk and relationship with Him. This means that all service without enjoying God’s presence results in a bareness which misses out on the true meaning of life.

Warren Wiersbe once said:

“It’s amazing how much easier the wheels of mortal life spin when we take time to worship God.”

We need to enjoy God’s presence everyday and possess the desire to stay close to Him through fellowship, obedience to the truth, and doing what pleases Him.

Psalm 42:1

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.”

This verse is on many pictures and plaques but drawing closer to the Lord must be in our hearts! Beloved, learn to slow down, worship God, and stay close to Him. Remember that your first obligation in life is to worship God – not service. Once again, constant activity and even right doctrine is not necessarily a sign of spirituality (Rev. 2:1-5). God is looking for our hearts before our service and during our service.

The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things! Life is not merely about “doing things” for Jesus but as we’ve already mentioned above, life is about slowing down and sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:30-40) and keeping the main things the main things – revolving our entire life around Christ (Phil. 1:21) and becoming more like Christ (Phil. 3:13). Furthermore, as we have seen, there are other responsibilities in life than just serving God (1 Cor. 7:32-33).

Friend, God isn't in a hurry! Learn to slow down and live! Slow down and enjoy the presence of God. Be still and know that He is God (Ps. 46:10). You can't be still if you are frantically serving at the same time!

Warren Wiersbe adds:

"Learn to take blessing breaks during the day. Millions of people take coffee breaks two or three times a day, but very few take time for blessing breaks. What is a blessing break? It is a brief time of praise and prayer for the purpose of quieting the heart and getting new guidance and strength from the Lord."

Learn to relax and just enjoy God's presence in your life. Also, learn to relax and enjoy some leisure time. Even God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). It is not a sin to take time off! Jesus taught His disciples to rest and relax and not feel guilty in doing it.

Mark 6:31

"And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."

Vance Havner warned us:

"If we don't come apart and rest, we will come apart."

Balance is the key! Learn to balance your Christian life. We can and must balance our service with leisure time. Of course, all leisure and little service results in spiritual neglect and loss of reward (1 Cor. 3:15) but all service without leisure time results in burn out, drudgery, and loss of focus on what is most important in life (James 4:8; Ps. 119:161).

William Sangster of London died in 1960 after three years of gradual paralysis. He was a tornado of energy and ministry. However, he himself confessed, "I rushed about too much. I talked too much. I was proud of my health and work. I never had time really to look. The trouble was in the will - I lashed the body on, imprisoned in a timetable." I don't know but Dr. Sangster might have lived longer if he had taken time to relax. There is nothing wrong with recreation and relaxation. We must simply balance it out with our service and work for the Lord, along with our secular jobs.

Someone wrote:

"Slow me down, Lord; ease the pounding of my heart by quieting my mind. Steady my hurried pace. Give me calmness amid the confusion of my day. Break the tension of my nerves with the soothing music of Thy love that lives in my memory. Teach me the art of taking 'minute vacations' to pray for a friend or to look at some beauty of nature. Help me to realize there is more to my Christian life than speed. Let me look upward toward the branches of the towering oak and remember that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly. Slow me down, Lord, slow me down."

There are times we must stop burning the candle at both ends. We must learn to slow down in life. Stop and smell the roses again! Enjoy the beauty of a tree. And don't feel guilty in doing it! I once saw a waitress balancing two plates on each arm as she walked through a restaurant serving people their dinner. I'm not sure how she did it. However, each one of us as a Christian must learn how to balance our Christian life between the sacred and the secular, ministry and leisure time, activity and worship, and spiritual commitments versus rest. And finally, beware of the bareness of a busy life! Take time to be holy, take time to enjoy God, and take time off.

IMBALANCE: I can serve God without possessing love, gratitude, and a joyful heart. I can pass through a religious routine without truly rendering and directing my service to the Lord. I can become stale and stagnate in my service. I can possess a routine without a real relationship with the Lord. In other words, I can be so caught up in service that I can lose my close walk and relationship with the Lord (Phil. 3:10). On the other hand, I can fall into the trap of thinking that I can never do enough service, never please God with my life, since I take time off and enjoy some of the added enjoyments of life that God gives to us.

Here are some practical questions that illustrate how imbalanced we can become in our Christian life when our service is based on the premise of God accepting and loving us or when we legalistic try to gain God's favor, approval, and acceptance through acts of service rendered unto Him.

- When have I done enough to please God?
- How much service is enough?
- What percentage of my life must I involve in activity and service to find God's favor?

- How much activity must we do to gain God’s love, approval, and acceptance?
- How little service must we engage ourselves in to lose God’s approval and acceptance?

Of course, there is no answer to these questions which proves that our acceptance before God is not based upon how much we serve and live for Him for we are accepted before the Father through His beloved Son (Eph. 1:3, 6). We do not gain God’s favor and love through outward activity. Nor is there an exact percentage of Christian service that results in God’s approval and which somehow makes us a better Christian than someone else. This approach to living the Christian life originates from a misunderstanding of God’s nature and results in an unhealthy fear of God, legalism (trying to earn God’s favor), and burn out! Be sure of this one thing. There is no life left in a Christian who is burned out.

BALANCE: Serve the Lord with gladness and from the deepest depths of your soul, recognizing that there are other commitments you have in life which are important. Always serve the Lord with your gifts and look for the little ways you can serve the Lord every day. Remember that little is much when God is in it (Zech. 4:10) It’s not always the size of your service that is important but the smaller opportunities the Lord gives you on a daily basis to serve Him. It’s not always the amount of the service that you do but the quality of it that is important.

Blessed are the balanced!

VI. Sanctification and God

What is sanctification? It means to be set apart unto God, to live a consecrated and holy life that honors and pleases God. It pertains to spiritual growth in the Word of God, the Son of God, and will of God for our lives.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4

“For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.”

The word “sanctification” once again speaks of purity and holiness before God - being set apart for His holy use and purposes. Our “vessel” refers to our body and

how it should be used to reflect God's purity and holiness. Our bodies have been bought or purchased with the great redeeming price of Christ's blood (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and therefore we should use them only for His holy purposes.

Our sanctification (consecration and holiness unto God) applies to all areas of living – our relations, marriage, worship, music, language, habits, goals, sports, hobbies, work ethic, etc. No area of our life should be left untouched when it comes to sanctification. In other words, we should apply sanctification (holiness) to all aspects of our living, making sure we do not misrepresent God and His holiness as we live out our daily lives.

The Bible teaches that sanctification is based on the liberty of grace (Rom. 6:1-15) – not legalism or license. So, we need to live a balanced sanctified life as Christians. How do we do this? How do we balance our Christian life as it relates to sanctification and holiness?

There are three reminders about sanctified living.

- Sanctification but not legalism.

Many Christians throw around the word legalism today as a theological cuss word, but they do not have a proper understanding of the word. The word legalism does not appear in the Bible but there is a biblical concept of legalism that is represented in the teachings and actions of people. Biblically speaking, legalism means to follow the legal letter of the Mosaic Law as a means of obtaining sanctification which results in affecting one's salvation and eternal destiny.

Acts 15:1

“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses (legalism – following the legal document of the Mosaic Law), ye cannot be saved.”

This is the underlying premise of legalism. You must observe the law (a form of man's works) in order to be saved. The substance of the legalizer's message was that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved. It was not enough that they should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; people must also put themselves under the Law of Moses. Of course, this was a frontal attack on the Gospel of the grace of

God. The true Gospel of grace teaches that Christ finished the work necessary for salvation on the cross (John 19:30).

So, essentially, legalism in its simplest form is the works of man or the way of human effort which becomes a necessary part of one's salvation. A person must not only believe on Christ but also do something, become something, or follow something in order to be saved from hell.

In legalism, sanctification of some kind becomes a necessary part of a person's salvation. They must follow something, do something, and conform to something in order to be saved. Of course, the Bible teaches that the way of human effort (works) has nothing to do with the Gospel of grace and our salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9

“For by grace are ye saved through faith (no legalism); and that not of yourselves (no legalism): *it is* the gift of God: Not of works (no legalism), lest any man should boast.”

Closely related to the legalism of salvation is the legalism of sanctification (holiness). This is because people believe that sanctification results in salvation. In other words, you must live according to a legalistic standard or law to be saved. Without strict compliance to a code of conduct, to some form of human achievement or works, a person cannot be saved. However, the Bible teaches that sanctification has to do with the Christian life (Rom. 6:1-15) and has no part of a person's actual salvation and standing before God (Rom. 5:1).

We become unbalanced in our Christian life when we try to use sanctification as the means and measuring stick of our salvation. This is what the Galatians were doing, and they became unbalanced in their Christian life in the specific area of sanctification.

Galatians 3:2-3

“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law (*legalism*), or by the hearing of faith (*faith in Christ alone*)? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit (*their justification was through the Spirit's work*), are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (*human works – legalistic conformity to law for sanctification and salvation*).

How did they receive the Spirit? By doing, or by believing? Obviously it was by believing in Christ alone to be their Savior. But the error of the Galatians pertained to a legalistic sanctification (keeping the law) as an added requirement to produce their final salvation. Paul's point is that you did not receive the Holy Spirit by keeping the Law (legalism) and you certainly cannot grow and advance in your Christian life without the work of the Spirit operating in your hearts. It takes the Spirit's work to save us but also to sanctify us. However, the Galatians were beginning to follow the Judaizers who taught that a person needed to follow the Mosaic Law to experience sanctification and ultimately seal their salvation through human compliance. Paul asks: "are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" or by the legalism and fleshly efforts of keeping the law as taught by the Judaizers (Gal. 4:10; 5:2; 6:13).

His point is that the believers cannot grow in sanctification and spiritual maturity without the Spirit's work of power and transformation in their lives. The way they began their Christian life (faith alone in Christ for salvation) is the way they should continue to live their Christian life (faith alone in the Spirit's power for sanctification). Their human effort (legalism) didn't work when they were sinners seeking salvation, and it wouldn't work now that they were saints seeking sanctification. Human effort cannot save us or change us!

John Phillips summarizes in this way: "Does a butterfly—having emerged from its chrysalis transformed, regenerated, metamorphosed to live a new life, and equipped with gorgeous gossamer wings—continue as a caterpillar? Does it say to itself, Well, I have been born again. I must do my best to be a butterfly. I will crawl up this stem and gnaw on these leaves! Of course not! It spreads its wings. It catches the rising air currents. It soars from field to field seeking the nectar of the flowers. It has new life. That new life cannot be lived on the principles of the old life.

Here is the obvious point. Neither salvation nor sanctification has anything to do with the legalistic efforts of man to comply to the Mosaic Law. Man with his own legalistic abilities, achievements, and requirements has nothing to do with salvation or sanctification. It takes the work of God to produce salvation and sanctification.

David Guzik summed comments on legalism in this way: "This deception was cultivated by Satan to set our Christian life off-track. If he cannot stop us from being saved by faith, then he will attempt to hinder our blessing and growth and maturity by faith."

Why is it important to maintain balance in the body? Experts tell us that a healthy balance system gives you more energy and strength and helps you move freely and confidently. Keeping your balance system healthy is especially important if you have problems due to illness, such as joint pain, weakness or dizziness. Engaging in some activities helps sharpen your physical balance, especially if you're an active person. Other balance-strengthening activities are routinely taught in classes held at many YMCAs and senior centers. For example: Walking, biking, and climbing stairs strengthen muscles in your lower body. A recumbent bike or stair stepper is a safe way to start if your balance needs a lot of work. Stretching loosens tight muscles, which can affect posture and balance.

We have not been studying about physical balance but spiritual balance in our lives as it relates to the subject of sanctification. Sanctification can be false viewed as legalism. Essentially, legalism in its simplest form is the works of man or the way of human effort which becomes a necessary part of one's salvation. In legalism, sanctification becomes a necessary part of a person's salvation. They must follow something, do something, and conform to something in order to be saved. Like the Galatians, we become unbalanced in our Christian life when we mix legalism with grace, sanctification with salvation, and spiritual growth with human ability.

There are many Christians who initially trusted Christ as their Savior but were then led astray by the false teaching of legalism, living a sanctified life to maintain one's salvation, which results in conditional salvation.

Luke 18:18 is an illustration of legalism:

“And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

This is the heart of legalism. What must I do to merit and maintain my salvation? What does God require me to do to get into Heaven? Of course, it's not what we do but what Christ has done (His grace and forgiveness) that brings eternal life into our human spirit (John 19:30). Literally millions of people living today have a similar view of this man that Jesus talked about. They think that God has a scale in Heaven, and that if their good works outweigh the bad, they will be received with the righteous in the day of judgment. But they are wrong. Very wrong!

Erwin Lutzer wrote:

“In one word, legalism is *self-righteousness*. It is the belief that God is satisfied with our attempt to obey a moral code. The legalist lives the Christian life (or what he thinks is the Christian life) by sheer willpower and is proud of his efforts.”

Legalism with its false assessment of sanctification (using sanctification as the means to maintain one’s salvation) can also take on the form of possessing many extra biblical rules which do not reflect any Bible commands or principles set forth in Scripture. This too can cause us to become unbalanced in our Christian life. Of course, it’s not legalism to live by virtues (2 Pet. 1:5-9), values, and valid Biblical principles (2 Thess. 2:15) and commands stated in New Testament Scripture (2 Cor. 6:14-17). However, we must be careful we do not reassign different meanings to these commands and principles and create manmade rules and regulations that have no Scriptural, moral, or ethical directive or basis attached to them.

The original legalism of the Judaizers and Pharisees has over time blossomed into all kinds of hybrid forms of a works-oriented salvation. In other words, one must follow a certain moral or external code of some kind to be sure you are going to Heaven. But this legalism also extended to kinds of ex cathedra laws that weighed down others with regulations that had no bearing on spiritual living. The legalists of Jesus’ day claimed to be following the Mosaic Law with their manmade traditions. Of course, they invented a plethora of rules to follow that in no way reflected the Law.

The original intent of the Pharisees may have been good as they sought to properly apply the Law to the lives of the people. They wanted to make the commandments practical and applicable to their lives. But eventually the application became outlandishly stretched to the point where the Talmud forbid walking more than 2,000 cubits on the Sabbath except between one’s own personal possessions! The Babylonian Talmud is so comprehensive and detailed that an English edition of this work fills 36 volumes and almost 36,000 pages! The extremes to which the rabbis went bordered on the insane.

Josephus (the Jewish historian) records how it was forbidden to stuff a little piece of wax in the hole of a container to stop the liquid from running out since this was viewed as working on the Sabbath. Nor could a person wipe a wound on the Sabbath. A man could not move a sheaf in his field on the Sabbath, but

he could lay a spoon on the sheaf and in order to remove the spoon, he could also indirectly remove the sheaf on which the spoon lay.

Mark 7:1-9 records some of their ridiculous rules:

“Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as* the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.”

The type of legalism in Bible times not only was identified as following the Mosaic Law (God’s legal code) in order to be saved (Acts 15:1; Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; 5:4), it also developed into many ritualistic, religious, and ridiculous rules that had no bearing on God’s Law. The legalists who claimed to be following God’s Law had misinterpreted and misapplied God’s Law and truth and turned it into the traditions of men and brought people under bondage with their many manmade rules.

"What must I forsake?" a young man asked. The reply of the legalist was this. "Colored clothes for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don't eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths or shave your beard. To shave is to lie against him who created us, to attempt to improve on his work."

This is the answer given in the most celebrated Christian schools of the second century! We must beware of trying to live by rules that have no biblical reality

attached to them. We can become bogged down with rules and regulations that have no Scriptural basis or spiritual emphasis.

The story was told some years ago of a pastor who found the roads blocked one Sunday morning and was forced to skate on the river to get to church, which he did. When he arrived the elders of the church were horrified that their preacher had skated on the Lord's day. After the service they held a meeting where the pastor explained that it was either skate to church or not go at all. Finally one elder asked, "Did you enjoy it?" When the preacher answered, "No," the board decided it was all right!

What this boils down to is this: rules themselves do not change us. Furthermore, we can never solve the problem of legalism by simply changing our standards however good they might be. The Christian life is more than conformity to rules or a given behavior pattern; it is more than a life lived by sheer willpower. It is a radical transformation or change that occurs from the inside out. It is God doing what the best laws and rules cannot do. It is God giving us Christ's perfect righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21) as well as qualities of righteous behavior through the infusion of His divine life and power (2 Pet. 1:3; Phil. 2:13).

Of course, a Christian who lives according to certain standards based upon God's clearly stated commandments is often classified as a legalist. If there are any rules to follow some Christians immediately throw up the red flag of legalism. Some claim the very existence of laws or rules results in legalistic behavior. But in the Old Testament, God spelled out His will in the Ten Commandments and hundreds of other detailed laws (613 to be exact!). If the existence of laws constitute legalism, then God is the greatest legalist that has ever lived and has obviously encouraged legalism in every conceivable way and form. However, obedience to laws does not constitute legalism.

A Christian who lives within the commands of the New Testament, or even regulations he has set up for himself through the application of the Word to his life, is not necessarily legalistic. So, what is legalism? It is a wrong use of laws and rules. Or, to put it another way, legalism results when people misuse the Mosaic Law and established rules as the sole means of their sanctification and salvation.

There is a call for balance in this area. Some Christians possess what we might term as the “liberated syndrome” and believe they should have no restrictions upon their lives. This leads to license and is a form of grace gone wild! New Testament Christianity, living under grace, does not mean we are lawless. Being liberated does not mean lawlessness (antinomianism). It means to live in such a way that we are no longer bound to the power of sin and free from the inroads of both legalism and license. Balance is the key. Liberty is neither legalism nor license.

Some Christians restrict themselves by using their list of do’s and don’ts as the means of their sanctification and final acceptance before God, not depending upon their completeness and sufficiency in Christ (Col. 2:10). Actually, both extremes are wrong. The answer to legalism is not to get rid of all restrictions but to rest in Christ’s imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:3, 6; 22-24) and live by Christ’s power and nature within (Phil. 1:21; 3:10). At the same time, we are to be disciplining our lives through the application of the Word of God which results in obeying specific commands and placing restrictions over our lives.



No person is free without any restrictions. Living without any restrictions is the playboy philosophy. People might think that they are free without any restrictions but they only fooling themselves. What we need are restrictions based upon the Word of God (John 17:17) while at the same time never using rules and restrictions, in and of themselves, to promote our sanctification or merit our salvation.

John Miles, the president of the Bible Institute where I attended, once said this about standards and rules: “Rules are made in times of quiet to protect and guide us in times of stress. Rules are simply goals, fulfilled through God’s power, that can help discipline and direct us to God-honoring lives. Rules can make group living more pleasant, declare a stand, and help establish order in lives that are undisciplined.”

- Sanctification but not leniency (lacking discipline).

There is discipline related to the Christian life. Discipline that is based upon God's New Testament regulatory commands and principles, when practiced through the Spirit's power, is not legalism! It's actually freedom!

In our last point, we observed that we must be careful of becoming overly structured in our living by creating rules that are not based on any scriptural commands or principles and which tend to take us away from our dependence upon the Holy Spirit's power to live the Christian life and enjoy our freedom in Christ. However, this is not to say that discipline and structure in the Christian life is wrong. Freedom cannot be obtained and experienced in our lives without some form of structure and discipline. Many Christians practice leniency and looseness when living the Christian life. Total leniency is lunacy! When we live this type of lifestyle, we are setting ourselves up for a fall. There are always limitations attached to Christian living for without limitations and discipline there could be no true freedom or liberty.

Winston Churchill once said:

"I spent the first twenty-five years of my life wanting more freedom, and the next twenty-five years of my life wanting more structure, and the last twenty-five years of my life realizing that structure is freedom."



Freedom does not mean the absence of constraints or moral absolutes. Suppose a skydiver at 10,000 feet announces to the rest of the group, "I'm not using a parachute this time. I want freedom!" The fact is that a skydiver is constrained by a greater law--the law of gravity. But when the skydiver chooses the "constraint" of the parachute, he is free to enjoy the excitement

of the skydive. God's moral laws act the same way: they restrain, but they are absolutely necessary to enjoy the happiness that comes from real freedom.

We do know that sanctification applies to the area of discipline and structure. Unless we discipline our lives we will be overcome by the flesh and Satan. Discipline has become a dirty word in modern evangelicalism. But discipline is not legalism. Paul recognized this for he disciplined his life without restricting his freedom in

Christ. In fact, true freedom requires a disciplined life. Without discipline I will become defeated and live in defeat.

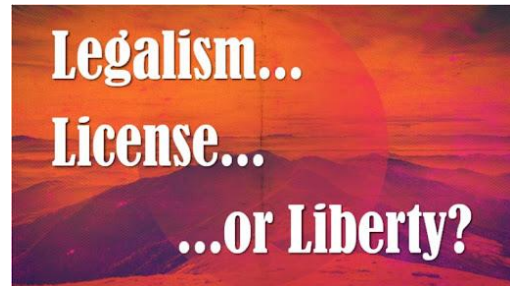
In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 he teaches: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain (*Christian living involves stamina*). And every man that striveth for the mastery (*Christian living involves agonizing and fighting*) is temperate in all things (*Christian living involves self-control*). Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body (*give it a knock-out blow*), and bring *it* into subjection (*Christian living involves strict discipline of the body*): lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (*disqualified from receiving reward*).

Paul is using these sports-related metaphors to teach the importance of discipline. The overall analogy is that we must run to win or be victorious in our Christian life! But the athlete needs to discipline his body in order to win and this is what Paul is teaching. Discipline, based upon God’s New Testament regulatory commands and principles, when practiced through the Spirit’s power, is not legalism! It’s actually freedom! Paul attests to this.

The disciplined person is the free person. There is a fable of a kite that once said to itself, “If I could just get rid of that man who is holding me back, then I could fly above the clouds and kiss the stars.” One day the string broke. Now at last the kite was free to fly without any restrictions and soar to heights that it never had gone before. But much to its surprise, it did not rise above its present height. The kite had not realized a fact of aerodynamics: the string holding a kite down is the same string holding it up. In a similar way, when we discipline our lives according to biblical truths, our discipline will actually hold us up, while at the same time hold us down! And yes, this is true liberty. Jerry Bridges called this “the discipline of grace.” Grace does not make us liberal but actually liberates from worldliness and the power of sin (Titus 2:11-12).

When disciplining ourselves, including our bodies, we must know the difference between legalism, license, and liberty. We will not be a balanced Christian without understanding the distinction between these biblical concepts.

In LEGALISM we *reject freedom* and rely upon our own good works and ability (strength) for sanctification and even our future salvation and final deliverance, many times causing us to become overstructured with regulations and adopting unbiblical rules that burden and weigh us down. This results in us losing our freedom in grace and Christ's sufficiency (Gal. 2:4; 5:1; Rom. 7:14-25; Mark 7:1-9; Col. 2:10; 2 Cor. 3:5).



In LISCENSE we *abuse freedom* and become way too lenient, lack spiritual discipline, and open ourselves to sinful and fleshly living which abandons truth and dishonors God (Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16; 2 Pet. 2:19; Rom. 6:1-2).

In LIBERTY we *experience freedom* through properly disciplining and structuring our lives in accordance with God's Word, relying on Calvary's work and Christ's present risen power and transforming grace for victory (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 2:20; Titus 2:11; Phil. 3:10; John 8:31-32).

We need to be disciplined to do what is right and follow God's will but at the same time we must be careful that we do not become overly structured that we lose the joy of just living and enjoying the Lord (Ps. 37:4) and the common enjoyments related to everyday life (1 Tim. 4:3-5).

When grace is misunderstood license is the result (Rom. 6:1-2; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16). When grace is understood holiness is the result (Titus 2:11-14; Rom. 6:14, 22; 2 Cor. 3:3, 18). When grace is ignored, legalism is the result (Acts 15:1; Romans 7:7-25).

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

"I have found, in my own spiritual life, that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit. The habit of regular morning and evening prayer is one which is indispensable to a believer's life, but the prescribing of the length of prayer, and the constrained remembrance of so many persons and subjects, may gender unto bondage, and strangle prayer rather than assist it."

In other words, we can become unbalanced when we live an extremely overstructured lifestyle where we can no longer just live for the Lord and experience our freedom and blessings in Christ.

➤ Sanctification but not license.

Being freed from the Mosaic Law system (Rom. 6:14-15) does not mean that we are to live as outlaws and rebels. The false teachers during Bible times turned the teaching of liberty into license. It was a false assessment of liberty. They taught that Christian liberty was actually libertinism (a free for all) where one could engage in licentious living and other forms of sinful practices in the name of liberty.

2 Peter 2:19

“While they promise them liberty (a pseudo liberty), they themselves are the servants of corruption (slaves to sin): for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”

The false teachers taught their converts that true liberty allowed them to live in the fulfillment of their fleshly appetites. But this causes a person to lose liberty and brings them under bondage. Liberty was being misinterpreted, misused and misapplied during Bible times to mean license, the right to be able to do as one pleases, which includes indulging in sinful degradation. Of course, this is the very opposite of the meaning and nature of true liberty. Liberty in Christ frees a person from sin – it does not promote being overcome by sin. This once again reminds us that true liberty has limits.

1 Peter 2:16

“As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness (a cover up for evil practices), but as the servants of God.”

Peter seems to be speaking in a general manner about our liberty given to us through Christ’s death and the New Covenant. We have been liberated to live a holy life – not a worldly and carnal life. In other words, we should not use our liberty for license or as an excuse to feed our flesh (our carnal appetites) or even disobey the laws of government which do not override God’s laws. The idea of a “cloke” speaks of a disguise. The false teachers tried to hide or disguise the true nature of liberty by reinterpreting it and reinventing it to mean license. They spun its meaning around like the politicians of today do with everything. They assigned a different meaning or understanding to liberty by teaching that liberty means you can indulge your flesh and live for yourself. Of course, turning liberty into license causes a

person to actually lose liberty. A license to sin is not liberty – it's bondage of the worst sort!

Jude 1:3-4

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness (*unbridled or unrestrained lust*), and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The false teachers taught that grace (being freed from God's condemnation) meant that one could live in absolute anarchy against God. Liberty was turned into lawlessness and grace was turned into glaring acts of sinful departure from God. A person could fulfill their base desires and live in total abandonment to sin. Of course, Jude condemns this teaching and those who taught it. Does license have any application to Christians today? It most certainly does.

Christians can also commit license, in varying degrees and ways, when they misunderstand and misapply the teaching about liberty in their attempts to apply and adapt to the cultural contamination of the world. In other words, they can indulge in sinful habits in the name of liberty and find themselves living in bondage to sin's influence and power. Christians need to beware of this. They can become unbalanced when substituting license for true liberty and abusing their liberty in Christ. Yes, even God's saints can in some capacity turn the grace of God into a form of lasciviousness (unbridled and unrighteous living).

Every Christian can in various ways turn their liberty into license, when they disobey clearly stated New Testament commands, which are designed to direct them away from sinful activity through the power of God's spirit. Many have turned the grace of God into a form of lasciviousness. New Testament Christianity, living under grace, does not mean we are lawless. Once again, being liberated does not mean lawlessness (antinomianism). Liberty means to live in such a way that we are no longer bound to the power of sin and free from the inroads of both legalism and license. Balance is the key. Liberty is neither legalism nor license.

To keep us from misinterpreting and misunderstanding the teaching about this subject, we must learn what the Bible teaches concerning liberty. Christians have been set free in several ways.

a. Christians are free to live for Jesus Christ and His commands.

There is a genuine freedom to be experienced when we follow God's New Testament commands which are based on His unchanging moral laws.

John 8:32 illustrates this:

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”

There cannot be freedom without knowing and following the truth! Actually, the greatest freedom is not to be without any commands (restrictions), but to be able to follow God's moral commands and directives by the Spirit's power and experience true freedom from the bondage of sin. The only true freedom is liberty from the strongholds of sin.

1 John 5:3

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

Following God's moral and ethical instructions for New Testament living should not be a burden but a delight to us. This is because they produce true freedom or liberty in our Christian lives. Remember that God's commands are His enablement's and in following them we can live a life that is no longer bound to sin.

b. Christians are free from the Law.

❖ The non-moral laws of God

First, being free from the Law means that Christians are no longer obligated to follow the non-binding moral laws of ancient Israel. The Bible reveals that living under grace frees us from the Law from a dispensational perspective (Rom. 6:14-15). Dispensationally, we are no longer bound to follow or observe the non-moral laws of God that were related to ancient Israel. This truth pertains to the area of our Christian liberty.

Colossians 2:16 states:

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday (festival), or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*.”

There are many today who still try and follow religious calendars and laws, whether they are related to sabbath days meats, and other practices unrelated to spirituality and New Testament Christianity. The religious calendar mentioned here was based on the Mosaic regulations and included annual observances (holy days), monthly festivals (new moons), or weekly holidays (sabbaths). The expression “Let no man therefore judge you” means that a Christian cannot be justly condemned by others if, for instance, he eats pork, or if he fails to observe specific religious festivals or holy days. The Bible teaches we have been released from these types of law observances and must no longer be bound to them since they were not part of the enduring prescribed moral laws of God (2 Cor. 3:7–11).

All religions place men under bondage to ordinances, rules, regulations, and a religious calendar of some kind. For instance, some false cults, such as Spiritism, insist on their members abstaining from meats. For centuries Roman Catholics were not supposed to eat meat on Friday as a form of their penance (earning their justification before God). Today Catholics substitute other forms of penance (works they must perform or follow) as part of their religious routine which brings them into a favorable position before God.

Then you have the Lenten observances of today. Many liberal and apostate churches require abstinence from certain foods during Lent. Some refuse to eat meat, fish, chocolate, bread, and other foods.

One person asked, “Can I eat pizza during Lent?” The answer that was given was rather hilarious. “It's fine as long as people don't order double cheese, pepperoni or sausage. Those kinds of toppings make it much higher in fat, calories and sodium. With such Lenten toppings as broccoli, onions, peppers and mushrooms, the pizza becomes heartier and more filling without adding to calories or fat.”

Here is another question. What do you eat for breakfast during Lent? Again, the answer is hilarious.

- ✓ Breakfast ideas for the Great Lent.
- ✓ Fruit kebabs.
- ✓ Lenten waffles with jam or syrup.
- ✓ Peanut butter & honey on bagels.
- ✓ Fruit salad.
- ✓ Applesauce cake.
- ✓ Tahini & honey on toast made with Lenten bread.
- ✓ Lenten pancakes.
- ✓ Lenten crepes with dairy-free chocolate sauce.

Here is one more example:

“While in the past it was common to abstain from meat on Fridays as well as during Lent (the forty days leading up to the Easter holiday), most believers only observe this fast during Lent. ... The rules are black and white; therefore, coffee is by no means allowed.”

These types of things have nothing to do with spirituality or growth. They are mere cover-ups for what we really need to change and that is our inner life, and our character and conduct so that it resembles Christlikeness.

God has not called Christians to live under these types of manmade, artificial rules and regulations. We have been liberated from these types of religious and ridiculous observances.

Others, like the Mormons, say that a person cannot be a member in good standing if he drinks tea or coffee. Still others, like the Seventh Day Adventists (the Sabbath keepers), insist that a person must keep the Sabbath in order to please God. The Adventists are adamant on observing the Sabbath today and many of them look down upon others (the Sunday Keepers) who do not observe the Sabbath day and days of ancient Israel. Christians are no longer obligated to live under the Mosaic and manmade religious ordinances.

One Seventh Day Adventist writes:

“The Sabbath safeguards our relationship with God. It encompasses our entire relationship with God. It is an indication of God’s action on our behalf in the past, present, and future. The Sabbath protects man’s friendship with God and provides the time essential for the development of that relationship. When the Sabbath is

kept, it is a witness to the rest that comes from trusting God alone as our sustainer, as the basis of our salvation, and as the ground of our hope in the future. As such, the Sabbath is a delight because we have entered God's rest and have accepted the invitation to fellowship with Him."

This conclusion about the Sabbath is utter nonsense. It is built upon a religious calendar of the past and lumps together spirituality and salvation in keeping the Sabbath observance of ancient Israel. Our relationship with God is not built upon observing the Sabbath. It is built upon our relationship with Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:10).

Many religious people were taught in the past, and even today, that following certain religious calendars is a form of humility and spirituality, which enhances one's sanctification, while at the same time enables them to enter Heaven. The ridiculous extremes that some people go to impress God are not impressing God at all – their works of penance and legalists performances before God are nothing but "filthy rags."

Beloved, we have been freed from the rules and regulations of the past and present which have no bearing on spiritual living and salvation. We are liberated from such teachings and observances. Sadly, many people feel that following certain ritualistic calendars and observances have something to do with their acceptance before God.

Did you ever ask someone if they knew that they are going to Heaven? And did you ever get the replies, "I hope so, I think so, probably?" Whenever someone answers the "Are You Going to Heaven" question in this way, they have fallen into the trap of legalism. Legalism means to follow the letter of the Law (God's legal code) to obtain and maintain one's salvation. The original legalism of the Judaizers and Pharisees has over time blossomed into all kinds of hybrid forms of a works-oriented salvation. In other words, one must follow a certain moral or external code of some kind to be sure you are going to Heaven. But this same legalism also manifests itself in all kinds of ex cathedra laws that weigh down others with regulations that have no bearing on spiritual living.

The story was told some years ago of a pastor who found the roads blocked one Sunday morning and was forced to skate on the river to get to church, which he did. When he arrived the elders of the church were horrified that their preacher had skated on the Lord's Day. After the service they held a meeting where the pastor

explained that it was either skate to church or not go at all. Finally, one elder asked, "Did you enjoy it?" When the preacher answered, "No," the board decided it was all right!

As a Christian, we should not be bound to this type of manmade criteria, thinking that somehow it will produce sanctification and in the end help us to gain God's favor.

❖ The moral laws of God

Not only are Christians free from following the non-moral laws of ancient Israel, they are also free from following even the moral laws of God, as the means to gain or maintain their justification before God (Rom. 3:20, 24, 28). The Bible teaches that we are not bound to observe any laws to gain or maintain our salvation status before God. Legalism raises its ugly head when we must follow certain laws, even the moral laws of God to merit or in some measure earn our justification.

Galatians 5:1 once again declares:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

The liberty Paul is talking about is freedom to no longer live under the entirety of the Mosaic Law system (the stated non-moral and moral laws of God) as the means to obtain one's salvation and acceptance before God. During the days of Jesus and Paul the system of the Mosaic Law was turned into a legal system of regulations that one must follow to be saved and justified before God. Living under this legal system means to follow the rules and regulations of the Law as a requirement for justification before God and salvation from hell. This is a great bondage for the Law condemns us for breaking it and repeatedly confirms that we are under God's wrath and judgment. There is no liberty in legalism.

Romans 3:19-20

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law (*the unsaved are still under the condemnation aspect of the Law*): that every mouth may be stopped (*stop bragging about your penance, performance, and particular good deeds*), and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore

by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified (*declared legally righteous*) in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.”

The purpose of the Mosaic Law was to condemn sinners (show them that they are sinners) - not to become the way of salvation for sinners. And yet, following the Law for salvation and justification before God was the teaching of the Judaizers, Pharisees, and legalists of the early church. In making the law the way of justification before God, it became a dreadful curse upon the people and a works/system of bondage that could never sanctify or save a person. It takes God’s saving and sanctifying grace to change people and release them from both the penalty and power of sin!

Here is the point of Galatians 5:1. Bondage is the opposite of liberty and freedom. Paul reminds us that following the law system for sanctification and salvation brings a person under tremendous yoke of bondage. Being yoked to the Mosaic Law (the slavery, service, and control of the Law) alludes to the perverted false teaching that was so prevalent throughout the early church. Once again, the false teachers



promoted that justification before God came about through circumcision and following the other Sabbath laws and dietary regulations of the Mosaic Law. So, the legalism of the law and human works became the final way of justification and salvation. Paul is essentially saying, “Don’t go back to this system of bondage, don’t yoke yourself to legalism, for it will condemn you to hell and never give you the power to live a victorious life.”

To go back to Law is to become entangled in a maze of “do’s and don’ts” which the legalizers or false teachers actually turned into a system of slavery and bondage that the people must follow to earn and maintain their salvation. Paul is teaching that we should not become entangled in this legal system for it will haunt you, harm you, and send you to hell, never freeing you from the fear of condemnation and God’s wrath. In fact, living under the law system will give you what we call a double whammy (a twofold blow)! First, the law system does not give you freedom from the power of sin. It has no delivering power to enable you to live a sanctified and

victorious life over sin (Rom. 8:1-4). Second, the law cannot justify you and give you freedom from the penalty of sin.

“Run, John, and live,” the law commands,
But gives me neither legs nor hands;
Far better news the Gospel brings,
It bids me fly and gives me wings.

C. H. Mackintosh correctly summarizes:

“The law demands strength from one who has none, and curses him if he cannot display it. The gospel gives strength to one who has none, and blesses him in the exhibition of it.”

It’s here that we have a very good illustration of the difference between law and grace. The law or legal system says: “If you earn your freedom, you will become free.” But grace says: “You have been made free at the tremendous cost of the death of Christ. In gratitude to Him, you should stand fast therefore in the liberty with which Christ has made you free.”

Beloved, we have been freed from the bondage of legalism, attempting to earn or merit our justification before God based on human performance. We are free from the bondage and fear that comes from being cursed and condemned by the law for our sins and the threat of God’s wrath and judgment hanging over our heads for we are “not condemned” (John 3:18; Rom. 8:1). We do not have to live under the legal system of the law, following the rules and regulations of the law to merit or maintain our justification before God.

Galatians 3:10

“For as many as are of the works of the law (*legalism and the law’s requirement of perfection*) are under the curse (*to live perfectly or die the sinner’s death and go to hell*): for it is written (Deut. 27:26), Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

What was once a physical curse that ended in death for the Israelite was turned into a spiritual and New Testament dreadful curse, by the teaching of the legalists, who declared that the people had to follow the Law to be saved and justified before God. This became a terrible form of spiritual bondage upon the people since the Law did

not provide any person with the power for sanctification or the provision of justification before God. When we trust in ourselves, our own ability and performance to get us into Heaven, we are under a dreadful curse – the curse of God’s condemnation. We can never know that we are saved or justified in God’s presence. There is fear, dread, condemnation, and a curse that hangs over our lives.

Galatians 3:13 reveals out the glorious redemptive truth:

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree.”

“Free from the law, O happy condition,
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.”

Generally speaking, living by legalism (adherence to law and works) becomes a curse to us. When we live under the law of legalism (a works-performance salvation) we are actually living under the dreadful curse of God’s wrath and judgment for nothing we can every do could provide us with salvation and justification before God. Therefore, when we place ourselves under law (legalism) we bring the bondage of fear, wrath, and judgment upon us. This is why the person who lives by legalism can never experience true freedom from God’s wrath and condemnation. They can never be sure that God has finally accepted them for they keep trying instead of trusting in Christ.

Have you ever tried to exercise every morning to improve your health? Have you ever tried to eat right to lose weight? Imagine if you had to do these things to obtain or maintain your salvation? You would turn something that is actually good for you into a curse! Folks, there is nothing wrong with God’s moral Law, but even that becomes a curse to us when we try and use it as the means and measuring stick of our salvation.

Here is good news. The Bible teaches that Jesus bore the curse of the law when He became our substitute on the cross (“on a tree”) and was judged in our place. As a result, we are freed from the law (the system and practice of legalism) which curses us or condemns us to hell. We can live free from the fear of being condemned in

our sins for Christ was condemned for everyone of our sins when He suffered and died on the cross. Now we can sing:

“I’m free from the fear of tomorrow,
I’m free from the guilt of the past,
For I’ve traded all my shackles for a glorious song,
I’m free praise the Lord, free at last.”

c. Christians are free from the rule and tyranny of Satan and sin.

God’s people are to experience the freedom that comes from living a sanctified life that frees them from the power of sin (Rom. 6:1-15). The whole Biblical concept of living under grace (not law), the power and liberty that grace brings over sin through identification with Christ, means to stop living under the law’s lifeless power to transform us or grant us victory.

Romans 6:14-15

“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.”

Remember that Romans chapter six is placed within the context of sanctification (living a holy and victorious life).



Romans 6 teaches that our identification with Christ’s death and resurrection power is the grace that brings sanctification into our lives today. Being at union with Christ, identified with His death, burial, and resurrection, is the manner in which God’s sanctifying grace is experienced in our lives. You cannot experience sanctification from the power of sin without practicing your identification

with Christ. We must KNOW (Rom. 6:6-9), RECKON (Rom. 6:11) and YIELD (Rom. 6:13). Our union and identification with Christ’s death and resurrection provides us

with a new dynamic for victory today which produces sanctification and Christlikeness in our lives (Phil. 3:10). In knowing I understand the truth of my identification with Christ, in reckoning I count on it as being true, depending upon it), and in yielding, I actually put my identification with Christ into practice.

So, when Paul teaches that we are no longer under the law, it means that we should never use the Mosaic Law as the means and power for our victory. Instead, we must use Calvary's cross and Christ's resurrection as the ground of our victory.

Romans 6:18

“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

We are freed from the power of sin because of our identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The union we share with Him in these vital areas results not only in the provision of our salvation but also sanctification. Many Bible verses teach how the New Testament believers has been freed from the power of Satan and sin (Col. 2:15; Eph. 2:1-4; 7:22; John 8:36).

Hebrews 2:14-15 declares:

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same (*the humanity of Jesus*); that through death (*Christ's sacrificial death on the cross*) he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (*abolishing and annulling Satan's power or authority over the lives of God's redeemed people*); And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (*providing us with deliverance from Satan's power, bondage, and authority by giving us salvation and new life in Christ*).

This is liberty! Here we see liberty being juxtaposed or contrasted with bondage. There is no liberty in bondage and no bondage in liberty. The good news is that through Christ's death the Devil's legal and enslaving authority has been broken over the lives of people as they come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan no longer can control their eternal destiny for Christ's death and



resurrection has brought each believer out of the realm of spiritual death and Christ now has the keys to death and hades (Rev. 1:18). The devil uses the “fear of death” (Heb. 2:15) to enslave the unsaved. But through Christ’s death, the Son of God eliminates our fear of death and breaks the bondage or enslavement to sin and spiritual death which comes from the Devil.

The Bible teaches that the suffering and death of Jesus Christ removed the strongholds of Satan from our lives including His power, blindness, and accusations against us, demanding that God should judge us as sinners. When placing personal faith in Christ, the devil’s power and authority over our lives is broken and removed and we are given eternal life, the hope of Heaven, and a new way of life. This is because the death of Jesus Christ is the basis of our deliverance from Satan’s power and sin’s penalty. Beloved, by virtue of Christ’s work and our position in Him, we are no longer Satan’s slaves or slaves to sin! This is true freedom! Anything less than liberty from sin cannot be termed as freedom. It is simply a false type of freedom or license.

Our liberty in Christ and the New Covenant work of grace means that we should never use our freedom to sin but to refrain from sinning and be liberated from the power of sin and Satan.

As we have already discussed, some within the relaxed evangelical community have in some ways turned liberty into license, using liberty as an excuse to engage in sinful and unseparated practices (drinking alcohol or booze, smoking, swearing, listening to rock music, dating unsaved people, watching nudity on TV, etc.). We must remember that we can abuse the teaching of our liberty in Christ (freedom from the Mosaic Law, legalism, sin, and Satan) and become very unbalance in our Christian life and lopsided in our view of grace. This freedom is not a freedom to “live and let live” but is a freedom that is still based upon God’s unchanging moral code and the commands and principles set forth in New Testament revelation. It’s a freedom or liberty that does not condone sin or bring man under the authority and power of sinful activities and practices.

Once we understand about the true nature of liberty in Christ, we won’t digress into practicing license. We won’t turn true liberty into an excuse to get our way, to indulge our flesh, and to live in the pleasures of sin.

Galatians 5:13 is another verse that speaks of the abuse of liberty:

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh (*a base of operation for sin to get a foothold*), but by love serve one another.”

Yes, we are called to liberty and live out our true freedom in Christ. This means we won't allow sin to get hold of our lives and steal away our liberty from the power of sinful inclinations and actions.

Guzik mentions:

“It is worth asking if people see us as people of freedom and liberty. Often, Christians are seen as people more bound up and hung up than anyone else is.”

2 Corinthians 3:17

“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.”

Paul spoke of our liberty in the context of being freed from the Mosaic Law. The Holy Spirit (not the law) liberates us from sin's penalty and power. The Spirit's work in our lives produces liberty from sin.

d. Christians are free to make choices based on liberty.

Since we have from a dispensational standpoint been freed from the Old Testament regulations and rituals under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 6:14-15; Col. 2:16), we can now make decisions based upon our newfound liberty from the Mosaic Law.

1 Timothy 4:3-4 reminds us how some were keeping people under the law by commanding Christians “to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.”

Let's face it, we have certain liberties given to us under the Grace Dispensation that were not allowed under the Mosaic Dispensation. If something is morally neutral then we should have no qualms of scruples about engaging in the activity. Paul speaks to this issue in Romans chapter fourteen. Of course, liberty does not mean you can do whatever you want to do whenever you want to do it. It's not open game season!

Galatians 5:13 is worth repeating:

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh (*a base of operation for sin to get a foothold*), but by love serve one another.”

We abuse our liberty when we disguise it as fulfilling our own fleshly desires. In other words, we can deceive ourselves and conclude that we are living in freedom while promoting our own fleshly cravings. Paul is talking about liberty in the context of serving the interests of others in the Christian assembly. There are times we must limit our liberty and not use it to simply get our own selfish way. Paul is talking about abusing our freedom in the context and community of other Christians. We can take the glorious freedom Jesus has given us, spin it, and use it in a way to please ourselves at the expense of others. Because the context focuses on the way we treat one another, Paul has in mind using our freedom in a way that tramples on the toes of others.

Christian liberty does not permit sin and selfishness; it rather encourages loving service toward others. Findlay says: “Love’s slaves are the true freemen.” If we don’t learn the secret of limiting our liberties at certain times we can begin to bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15).

When a particular man trusted Christ as his Savior, his first major adjustment was to abandon the game he had come to love. With his new set of priorities, he had no time for pool, which had ensnared him these many years. Sometime later, he was invited to a Christian home for dinner. To pass time, his Christian friend suggested they have a game of pool. The new convert was appalled. He could not believe that any Christian could play such a sinful game. Yet his friend insisted that pool was as innocent as Ping-Pong or shuffleboard.

Remember that this man who was a slave to the game of pool before he was converted. He did not have the knowledge (at that time) to see that pool is no different from any other games in principle, but because he had become a slave to it, he falsely assumed that the game was wrong for every Christian.

What does the Scripture say about this situation? To God it makes no difference: a pool table is nothing. But just because believers are free to play pool, that does not mean that they ought to do so in the presence of others and send a wrong message

to them. Limiting our liberty is sometimes important. We must remember that our liberty is never to be a “free for all” without considering the conscience of others. We don’t have the license to destroy other saints by flaunting our liberty before them and offending them.

1 Corinthians 8:9

“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.”

Some worldly-minded Christians have imagined that the “weak” Christian of today is the person who is against smoking, drinking alcohol, ecumenicalism, Rock Music, and who seeks to live a separated life from the controlling elements of the world. Of course, you cannot place this “weak” (or the weaker brethren) caricature on Christians who want to practice basic Bible separation. This is an inappropriate comparison that is often used to promote and sanction license in the lives other Christians.

The “weak” during the early church were Christians who could not make the transition from law to grace and who were still bound to some of the Mosaic meats, rituals, days and Jewish calendar. They did not feel that eating meats which were once forbidden and worshipping on Sunday (not the Sabbath) were morally neutral. Therefore, the stronger brethren were not to force their freedom or liberty from these rules on to others. They would not push their agenda on the weaker brethren.

Cedar speaks of liberty in this way:

“Liberty misused is like a mighty river flooding its banks and bringing terrible destruction upon all in its path. Liberty used as service is like a mighty river flowing within its banks bringing life and refreshment to all who drink of its waters.”

Liberty, yes! A servant’s heart toward others, yes!

We are sometimes tempted to use our liberty in Jesus as an “occasion for the flesh” (Gal. 5:13) or “base of operations” for selfish sin. In other words, we turn liberty into license to get our own selfish way and ignore both God and other Christians in the process. Vos explains the “occasion fo the flesh” as “an opportunity for giving way to carnal passions.”

The perverted view of liberty says, "I have the right to sin" or "the privilege to do whatever evil my heart wants to do." But instead, true liberty is the Spirit-given desire and ability to do what we should do before God and others. It's the liberty that comes from not sinning and being a servant to others!

Remember the old adage:

"We live in the world, but we are not of the world."

This is balance!

1 Corinthians 5:9-10 reminds us about this:

"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world."

Trying to separate from everyone in the world that is a sinner is an impossibility. You would have to become a monk who lives alone in a monastery or get into a rocket, blast off to the moon, and live there all alone. And when you get the moon you will still have a problem. You will be there with your sin nature still residing in you! The Bible teaching on living a separated life does not mean to live an isolated life from sinners. Jesus was a friend of sinners (Luke 7:34) while at the same time separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26). Christians are not of the world, just as Christ was not of the world. We should remember this when tempted to engage in some worldly vice or enter worldly associations where the name of Jesus is unwelcome.

Being a friend of sinners, while remaining separate from sinners, relates to balance in our sanctified living. We are to live in the world and rub shoulders with sinners, but at the same time we are not to identify with the sins of the people living in the world. We are to take the Gospel to the heathen but not become like the heathen (Jer. 10:2). Being in the world but not of the world helps us stay balanced in our Christian sanctification.

Jesus prayed in John 17:15:

"I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil."

Now this is balance! The reference points to protection from Satan and all the wicked forces following him (Matt. 6:13; 1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18, 19). In other words, Jesus did not pray that the Father should take believers home to Heaven immediately. They must be left here to grow in grace and to witness for Christ. But Christ's prayer was that they might be kept from the Evil One. Jesus is not talking about escape, but preservation.

In essence, Jesus was praying about balance in the lives of His disciples. His followers were not to live in seclusion and practice monasticism but always remain protected from imbibing the evil practices of the world system and Satan. This means we are in one sense part of the culture, but many times we must counteract and separate from the culture, the evils within the society in which we live. He was petitioning the Father to keep His disciples loyal to Himself while they continued to live in the world.

Jesus taught in John 17:17:

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

Jesus taught that sanctification comes through knowing and obeying the Father's words that He had revealed to them, and which were the final standard of truth (“thy word is truth”). In fact, He sends them out into the world to practice sanctified service (John 17:18). It's impossible to live a sanctified life without reading and obeying the truth. And what we need today is truth over Satan's lies, truth instead of false teaching, truth in place of deception and evil. Following the truth is the way to live a pure, consecrated, and sanctified life. We need to remember this in the midst of our cultural contamination and stop desensitizing ourselves to the acts of sin, depravity, evil, and error.

Earlier He stated in John 15:3:

“Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”

Here is the point. If we don't practice Bible separation and sanctification (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:14-17), we will eventually open ourselves to some form of libertinism and not experience true liberty (freedom from the power of sin and Satan) within our personal Christian lives. And what is Bible separation? It is separating from the world, the flesh, and the devil. The more we read and apply God's Word to our lives, the more we will live a separated life.

We have seen that Biblical sanctification does not pertain to legalism, leniency, or license. There is a final reminder about sanctification.

- Sanctification but not looking for perfection.

Of course, we should strive to live a sanctified life and become more like Christ in our daily lives. This should be the constant aim, goal, and desire of living the Christian life.

Philippians 3:14

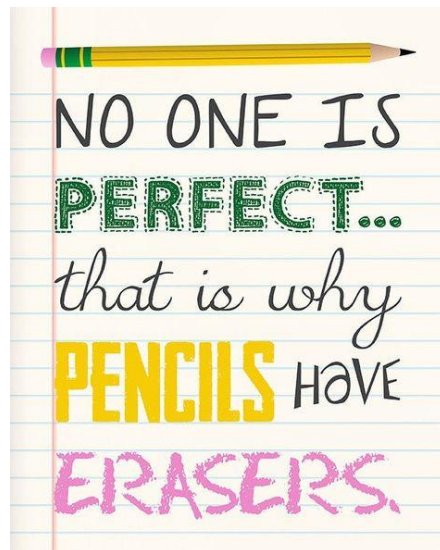
“I press toward the mark (goal) for the prize (reward) of the high (upward) calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Paul was certainly seeking to sail new heights and live on higher ground and become more like Christ in his Christian journey. But please note that Paul was pressing on, but he was not perfect. While setting the goal of greater sanctification and Christlikeness, Paul realized that he was not perfect and had many faults of his own.

Philippians 3:12-13

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: (*reached the goal of perfect sanctification and Christlikeness*) but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.”

As previously mentioned, there is no PERFECTION in this life when it comes to sanctification but praise God there is PROGRESSION! When it comes to sanctification, there are some brethren who feel they can reach a state of perfection. They call it “entire sanctification.” Somehow they believe they can get to a point and place in life where they become entirely free from sin which is the teaching of eradication whereby the sin nature has been eradicating from one’s life. In Paul’s journey of sanctification, he did not become bogged down in his pursuit of perfection since he knew that no Christian can ever attain perfection in this life.



And yet, there are Christians today who still believe that can reach the place of perfection in this life. Many Christian fail to distinguish between their standing in Christ and state in their Christian life. The Bible teaches we already possess a perfect and positional sanctification before the Father's presence in Heaven (Heb. 10:10; 14). This is what brings us acceptance before God. Our struggles on earth with the sin nature and Satan are a constant reminder that we will not be sinlessly perfect in this life. The Bible does not teach this anywhere.

Some will point to Matthew 5:48:

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Jesus had just rebuked the religious leaders, the legalists of the day as being unrighteous in their dealings with others, and then turns to His disciples and says, “I want you to be better than them. I want you to be perfect.” The word “perfect” in this context does not mean to be spotless or flawless. The word “perfect” (teleios – Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:14; 6:1) speaks here of spiritual maturity which enables a follower of Christ to imitate God when following His righteous standard. According to Christ's sermon, a person becomes more spiritually complete and mature when dispensing blessing and love toward everybody without showing partiality like the Pharisees.

John Walvoord said this about the word perfect:

“Perfection here refers to uprightness and sincerity of character with the thought of maturity in godliness or attaining the goal of conformity to the character of God. While sinless perfection is impossible, godliness, in its biblical concept, is attainable.”

Although we must press on in our sanctified and godly living, we must do so realizing that we will never reach perfection. Christian who have been raised with certain theological backgrounds, such as the Wesleyans, Nazarenes, and even some Pentecostals like to talk about perfection and entire sanctification in this life. But this false assessment of sanctification can cause a Christian to become unbalanced in their Christian walk. If one's goal is perfection, then they will be disappointed when they don't reach perfection. They can become discouraged when they don't reach this unrealistic goal. Our goal is to become more like Christ, to press on toward this goal in a gradual and practical manner. Our goal and focus should not

be on perfection but on the person of Christ and our personal relationship with Him (Phil. 1:21; 3:10).

The Bible teaches the biblical concept of “progressive sanctification” or “process sanctification” (separation and consecration to God) in relation to living the Christian life (Phil. 3:12; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10; 1 Thess. 4:4).

Philippians 2:13

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.”

“He's still working on me
To make me what I need to be
It took him just a week to make the moon and stars
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars
How loving and patient He must be
'Cause He's still workin' on me.”

The sanctification in the Christian life is never ending, and Christians never reach a state of perfection where they can claim to be sinlessly perfect. It's the difference between “able to sin” and “not able to sin.” Of course, the Bible teaches that Christians can and do live without sin ruling their lives, but at the same time they can never claim they have arrived at a state of perfection, where they are no longer able to sin.

Striving for perfection can very easily turn into legalism. A perfectionist begins to build many walls around themselves to protect them, and they can begin to shelter themselves in fear that they might sin and lose God's favor and salvation. This is exactly the doctrine of the perfectionists. When they lose their sanctification they can also lose their salvation. There is no such thing as “an entirely sanctified Christian” on this side of Heaven!

We should be pressing on but not be unrealistic, thinking we can or ever will reach perfection. A Christian man once approached me and said that he was perfect. He really had felt that he had come to a point where he no longer sins. I told him that I wanted to talk to his wife! Many years ago, when I was getting a haircut, my barber who was a Nazarene Christian, was cutting my hair and talking about sanctification and holding out to the end. I wanted to tell him about the “entire sanctification” we

already have in Christ and that none of us were perfect in this life. But I kept my mouth closed and figured I had a good excuse for not saying anything. He had a big scissors in his hand and was cutting my hair!

IMBALANCE: We become unbalanced in our Christian life when we choke out our liberty by living a legalistic life, a life that revolves around human effort and achievement, striving to live a sanctified life in order to secure one's own salvation by good works. Then too, we can create many unbiblical rules and regulations, which have no scriptural basis, and which binds up people's lives with ex-cathedra laws. We can also turn liberty into some form of license in order to get our own selfish and sinful way. Many Christians are fooling themselves. They think they are living a liberated life from sin but are actually condoning a type of legalism or license in their daily Christian lives. Lastly, we can view sanctification as looking to achieve perfection which is a goal that we can never reach in this life. All of these wrong views of sanctification can cause us to become unbalanced in the area of our Christian living.

BALANCE: Practice your liberty in Christ by living a life that is free from the law, the fear of God's condemnation and wrath, freedom from sin's power, without swallowing the myth of perfectionism. We are not perfect. To live a balanced Christian life, one needs to know the differences between legalism, license, and liberty. The liberty that comes from living a sanctified and separated life based upon God's Word and reliance upon Christ's total sufficiency in relation to both sanctification and salvation.

Blessed are the balanced!

VII. Patriotism and God

A Christian shared this story. One Sunday morning in college, I attended church with an Austrian friend who hadn't been to many American churches. So after the service, I asked him what he thought of the experience. "It was fine," he said. I could tell something was troubling him. So I pressed him a bit. Finally, he said, "Why was there an American flag by the pulpit?"

This is a good question which can be answered in the framework of other questions. Can Christians be patriotic and still possess a testimony for Christ? Where do we

draw the line between patriotism and Christianity? Once again, balance is the key. The Bible teaches we can be patriotic to a country without losing our Christian distinctiveness as salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-14). Actually, being patriotic while at the same time promoting various aspects of righteousness within a nation can be a way to promote salt and light.

We can be patriotic but at the same time we must always put God's Word and will first no matter what. We cannot allow government, or any unbiblical aspects relates to patriotism to override the clear commands of God.

Daniel balanced out his political and patriotic life in the Babylonian and Medo-Persian Empires with his religious life and walk with God while being involved in government. Remember that Daniel was one of the highest government officials in Babylon. Daniel was equivalent to the prime minister of the nation. He held his position as adviser to the king until the first year of the reign of King Cyrus.

Daniel 2:48

"Then the king (Nebuchadnezzar) made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise *men* of Babylon."

Daniel 5:29

"Then commanded Belshazzar (Nebuchadnezzar's son who became king), and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and *put* a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom."

As a reward for interpreting the writing, Daniel is promoted by King Belshazzar to the third highest position in the Babylonian kingdom. Later he would also be promoted under King Darius as the Persian Empire took over as the world power. Under the new ruler, Daniel excelled in his duties as one of the administrators to such a degree that King Darius was contemplating making him head over all the kingdom (Daniel 6:1-3). This infuriated the other administrators so much that they looked for a way to bring Daniel down. They could find no wrongdoing on Daniel's part, so they focused on the matter of Daniel's religion. Using flattery, the administrators coaxed Darius into issuing a decree forbidding prayers to any god other than the king for the next thirty days. The penalty for disobedience was to be thrown into a den of lions.

Of course, Daniel disobeyed the edict and continued to pray openly to the true God of Heaven.

Daniel 6:10

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”

As Daniel made no attempt to hide his activity, he was seen praying and arrested. With much regret the king gave the order for Daniel to be thrown into the lions' den (Daniel 6:16). Earlier in Daniel 1:8 we read: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” Here are the practical points.

We discover that Daniel was promoted to a high position under various kings and God blessed him in these positions. This means that possessing a political career and being patriotic to a country is not unchristian. God allowed Daniel to have this unique position to help His Jewish brethren. At the same time Daniel never compromised his values even though he held some of the highest positions in a government which in many ways was pagan. This means we can be patriotic but at the same time we must not participate with the culture that is corrupt within any government or nation. This is how we can balance our Christian life in relation to God, government, and patriotic commitment to a nation's welfare.

Patriotism should never override our commitment to God and His truth. At the same time, we can be patriotic and still possess a testimony before others even when government goes against God's truth and purpose for Christianity. So, balance is important. We can be patriotic but at the same time we can never disobey God and His Word on any matter.

Another question we might ask in relation to Daniel practicing his faith and living out his convictions is this. When can a Christian disobey the government? Of course, the answer is when the government forces the Christian to disobey God's Word and His standards for Christian living. Daniel's reaction to the king's edict sets the example for other believers to follow. In fact, Hebrews chapter eleven gives many

examples of God's saints who stood against the culture of their own time and who were persecuted for doing so. God's children should respectfully disobey those edicts which are not in accordance with God's Word, and which would compromise their faith and practice of the truth.

Acts 5:29 is another example of this:

"Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

The disciples were being ordered to not preach in the name of Jesus Christ. But Peter's reply sets a precedence and standard that we should follow today as God's people. God and His truth come first, above the government and any edicts they send out. We are to be followers of Christ and not followers of a pagan system of government. Our freedom to obey Christ extends above manmade ordinances and governmental laws. Peter reminds us that sometimes we need to maintain our freedom or liberty from sin by disobeying the governments commands, when authorities are enforcing manmade laws over God's moral laws.

At the same time, 1 Peter 2:16 reminds us to not abuse our liberty in the context of obedience to governmental authority: "As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness (a cover up for evil practices), but as the servants of God."

1 Peter 2:13-14 gives this command:

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."

Suppose the government forces you to do things contrary to God's Word and truth? As a Christian we are free to follow God's commands over man's laws. However, we must be careful we don't abuse our liberty in Christ by committing acts of disobedience against the civil government just because we don't like their laws. Peter clearly teaches that we can abuse our liberty in Christ (1 Pet. 2:16) by turning it into license and end up doing what is wrong – disobeying governmental jurisdiction over our lives. Our liberty does not mean to disobey the authorities who are seeking to establish law and order within a society (1 Pet. 2:13). This is a perverted form of liberty. It's a form of license – not liberty. In disobeying government laws which do not override God's moral and ethical laws, we do not

represent Christ, and can lose our light (1 Pet. 2:13) and testimony among the unsaved (1 Pet. 2:15).

So here is the balance. According to Romans 13, we are commissioned to follow the government as long as the government does not override God's truth and force Christians to follow cultural pagan practices that go against God's holy standards. Here is one example. Technically, those who smuggle Bibles into closed countries are breaking the law. But they are obeying a law that has precedence over any human law which is the command to go into all the world with the Gospel (Mark 16:15). So, a Christian cannot be condemned on scriptural grounds for refusing to no listen to the government. Another example is when a government forbids and seeks to hinder the meeting of God's people. The command for Christians meeting together is very clear (Heb. 10:25). God gives us the green light to meet together and no government can undo God's law. Therefore, in an edict such as this, we should obey God rather than man as Peter said.

God's laws must always trump man's laws. However, as we have seen in the last section, within the context of governmental authority over Christians, we must be careful to never turn our liberty to follow Christ into clear acts of civil disobedience. The problem arises when Christians seek to disobey the government, not over any biblical matter, but only because they don't like something the government has told them to do. Peter warns Christians that they are not to abuse the true nature of liberty by turning into a license (1 Pet. 2:16) in order to disobey government and local authorities over matters of personal preference – not biblical precedence.

Some Christians believe that the recent vaccine mandates and requirements overturn and overrule God's moral law since in the development and experiment of the vaccines fetal tissues were used. The point is this. There are plenty of areas of legitimate freedom and debate in America between citizens and government. However, even within the context of heathen rulers and their societal laws, we must always remember to never use our Christian liberty as a means to disobey the human laws we simply don't like, or which might be an inconvenience to us. In doing so, we turn our liberty in Christ into license by disobeying the authorities over us, engaging in disobedient practices above and beyond the scriptural limitations of our liberty.

Again, balance is the key. Obeying the government in everything except those areas which clearly violate God’s truth and commands for virtuous and ethical Christian living.



Of course, this brings up one more sticky question. Can a Christian disobey the government in America when the government itself is not obeying the Constitution and Bill of Rights (the highest law of the land)? This is a valid question when considering America’s historical documents of the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Should the government be held

accountable to its own documents, and can Christians disobey the government when their freedoms are being stripped away from them?

The last I looked, we are still living in America and under a constitutional republic, and Christians and all citizens have certain rights under our founding documents which are the highest laws of the land.

Let me pose this question. Would Paul follow the Constitution if he were living in modern America? I think he would, since this was the law, and Paul always sought to obey the laws or ordinances of man when they did not contradict God’s laws.

Romans 13:1

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

The Constitution with the Bill of Rights is the supreme law and highest power of the land – not Marxist mandates and a tyrannical government seeking to take away our freedoms. Constitutionally and lawfully, we have a right to maintain our freedoms and disobey the absurd rules of Marxist taskmasters that do not align with our Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed our freedom from tyrannical rule and led to our form of government (the Constitution) and eventually the Bill of Rights (explicitly expressing our freedoms).

How do we balance all of this out when our government and society is gradually moving away from our founding documents into a Marxist philosophy? First, we should obey our government but when the government oversteps its bounds we are given the right in America to follow our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Of course, each Christian will need to examine how far his defiance will go in relation to governmental extremes being placed on society. Sadly, things may get worse unless the communist philosophy of controlling our children, our health, and wealth is not changed. We have every right in America to disobey these moral atrocities.

Do you see how the schools were offering pizza to children if they would get a shot against their parents' consent? The left-wing loonies are promoting pornography in the grade school libraries to ruin the minds of young children. They are now trying to sexualize our children. These people are depraved and demented and unless we stand against these things, we are headed for a lot of heartache and misery. Places like Australia have become full-blown communist countries through the mandates related to COVID. The same will happen here if we do not fight for our freedoms and liberties.

Second, we need to remember that as Christians we should strive to be a peacemaker as much as we possibly can in the midst of all of the madness overtaking America (Rom. 12:18). But sadly, we cannot always live peaceably with the status quo when Marxists are overtaking American freedoms. There comes a time when we must stand against the anti-American plot to take away our freedoms. If we don't, then our freedoms will be lost forever.

Here is another point when seeking to find a balance between our rights and liberties versus governmental measures to control our lives in a greater way. We should be careful we do not judge other Christians in an unrighteous manner for their personal convictions regarding constitutional rights. We have seen Christians attacking other Christians as the Left seeks to divide America with the recent push of mandatory masks, shots, and the limitations of our freedoms to move about and live without the heavy hand of government overriding our rights as citizens of the United States. A Christian can become a divider instead of a uniter when they push their own convictions on others without possessing any biblical evidence or constitutional precedence. Beware of this.

Titus 3:10

“A man that is an heretick (schismatic, divider) after the first and second admonition reject.”

In other words, God’s people should never develop the mindset within church ministry that it’s “my way or the highway.” They should not become a divider and Diotrephes “who loveth to have the preeminence” (3 John 9) when seeking to push unbiblical or unconstitutional mandates within the context of the local church.

Lastly, as much as we can, we should always seek to serve the interests of others in the best way possible as we pass through these changing times in America. Remember that Paul taught we should seek to serve others through expressing love and consideration toward them as much as possible.

Galatians 5:13

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”

The key is balance! We have no right to disobey governmental laws when they are not overriding any moral or ethical standards. At the same time, we also have specific rights or freedoms that do not limit our speech, our travel, to restrict “we the people” from living in a free county. And in the end, we should strive for peace as much as we can while serving others. Yes, this is a real balancing act!

**Respect the Truth
Respect Others
Respect the
Constitution/Bill of
Rights**

The important thing is that we do not “bite and devour one another” (Gal. 5:15) over the issue of shots, masks, and other related pressures that are being placed on our society. Beware of committing Christian cannibalism. Every person must be persuaded in their own mind (Rom. 14:5) over these mandates (not laws) without causing a ruckus in the church and the lives of other people. When it comes to issues like this, nobody is probably right about everything, and nobody is wrong about everything. So, don’t let Satan divide us.

IMBALANCE: I become imbalanced in the specific area of Patriotism when I follow the pagan culture within any given society. I am also unbalanced when I am

insensitive and totally desensitized to the interest of others and use my liberty to disobey the government or override the concerns of others.

BALANCE: I can remain patriotic and supportive of a country and its welfare without imbibing its cultural corruption. I can also serve others and seek to live a peaceable life as much as possible without giving up my constitutional rights.

Somebody said:

“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

Blessed are the balanced!

VIII. Anger and God

A 27-year-old man pleaded guilty to assault after he was arrested for accosting a 59-year-old woman in St. Paul, Minnesota. They were waiting for a bus when he began yelling at her, “Why don’t you show me some respect?” When she took out a cell phone to call police, he hit her in the face. When a 63-year-old man intervened, the angry young man also hit him with a folder, which fell on the ground as he fled.

Police tracked the man down after finding his name in the folder, along with his homework from an anger management class, where he was headed when he lost his temper and hit the woman! Well, I guess we can be glad that he’s working on the problem! Anger is a huge problem, not only in the world, but also in the evangelical church.

Pastor Steven Cole said:

“During my years in the ministry, I’ve seen many Christian marriages break up because of abusive anger. I’ve even heard of pastors who use anger to intimidate and control their families and to dominate others in the church. I have seen fathers and mothers who are abusively angry towards their children, usually under the excuse of exercising biblical discipline. I’ve seen church members angry with other church members to the point of leaving the church, rather than be reconciled.”

In balancing the Christian life, we must also make the distinction between righteous and unrighteous anger. This is very important. It’s one thing to condemn

unrighteousness being promoted by wicked people but it's quite another thing to wish they would burn in hell for all eternity. If we are not careful, our righteous anger against sin can lead to a hateful and vengeful attitude which is actually a form of wrath, an unbiblical expression of anger.



**“Let not the sun go
down upon your wrath”
(Ephesians 4:26)**

Ephesians 4:26

“Be ye angry, and sin not (*justifiable anger*): let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (*unjustifiable anger*).

There are two types of anger mentioned in this Bible verse – righteous indignation and unrighteous indignation. The first word is “anger” (*orgizo*) and means to be provoked or enraged about the evil that surrounds us. Righteous

anger is a God-given emotion that can help if we can process it biblically.

The second word is “wrath” and means to be stirred up to hostility and experience indignation toward others who are practicing some evil or wrong, which causes you to become filled with a revengeful and hateful spirit. The Bible often speaks of anger “being kindled” (Gen. 30:2; Deut. 6:15) which means anger can be compared to fire. Sometimes a person’s anger smolders but the same anger can suddenly burst forth and destroy, and this we would call wrath. If you analyze your own anger, you will probably come to the embarrassing conclusion that most of it stems from the old nature.

One of my granddaughters sits in her chair as the food is being prepared. But she cannot wait very long before she gets angry. She wants her food pronto. Like a two-year-old throwing a tantrum, I can become angry because I wanted my way, and I didn’t get my way! I had a right to something, and my rights were violated! This is wrath. But there is a righteous anger that we need to practice in our daily Christian life. Jesus expressed this righteous anger in the temple and with other people (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 3:5). There are times when a believer may exhibit righteous anger. For instance, when the character and holiness of God is repudiated and thrown

under the bus, it should stir up anger in our hearts. In such cases anger is commanded: “Be angry” (Eph, 4:26).

The New Testament teaches that the believer should be angry at sin but loving toward people. But righteous anger is a good quality to possess and practice. “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Ps. 97:10). Hating evil is a very important part of living the Christian life. We have gotten away from this important guiding principle for 21st century Christianity. Amos 5:15 declares: “Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate...”

Today they have turned the tables on God’s Word and conclude that we are to “Hate the good and love the evil.” Our society has degenerated into a godless system. Hating sin is a virtue. Many will tell you that to hate is always wrong. But they don’t know who God is and what living a sanctified Christian life involves. In sanctification we must hate the evil and love the good or the evil will overtake us and defeat us spiritually. If we are truly angry at sin and unrighteousness, then we will choose not to sin. Righteous indignation will keep us from sin. It will keep us from giving in to the culture and trying to please everyone. It will keep us from “going along to get along.”

I was out exercising in the garage and watching some TV. A commercial came on with a lady talking in a soft voice. She was promoting abortion. She said, “I went through the trauma of aborting, but you don’t have to go through the same trauma I did. We are here to help you see you through your goals and help you meet your needs.” It all sounded very sickening. It reared up righteous indignation in my heart against such wicked reasoning and talk. This woman was butchering babies and she made it sound like it was something commendable and right to do.

We should have righteous indignation against these types of ideas and mindsets within our society. Here is another case in point. As previously mentioned, the left-wing kooks within this country are forcing pornographic books on children in our public libraries across America. They are trying to sexualize our children. They are indoctrinating our children into pagan sexuality. These people are morally depraved and need to be stopped or they will destroy the lives of innocent grade school children. These kinds of people are like wolves among the little lambs seeking to overtake the minds of children through sexual indoctrination.

One lady wrote a poem against evangelical Christians claiming they do not want our children to read. No, as always, they are liars. We just don't want our children looking at porn. These people are sinister, sick, and they are of the Devil. In fact, it's coming out more and more that various elites in the Washington DC crowd have been involved in the sexual abuse of children. They are responsible for participating in sex trafficking of children. Yes, we should possess righteous indignation against these types of people and practices. Anger against evil can be righteous.

But there are other times when anger can be very sinful. When anger turns into an emotion of revenge, jealousy, resentment, or hatred because of personal wrongs done against you, this kind of anger is forbidden. This is why the Bible immediately adds, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." This is a command. The Bible teaches that we can control our anger because God commands us to do so. He would not do so if it were impossible. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Gal. 5:23), which certainly includes the control of anger.

The sun setting is a figure of speech that emphasizes the need to not follow the path of anger and if you do, you must deal with this sin sooner than later. The way to get rid of the sin of wrath is to "keep short accounts with God" and deal with the anger before the sun goes down.

Proverbs 28:13

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy."

The truth of the matter is this. There is sometimes a fine line between righteous indignation and the sinful expressions of wrath toward others. If we are not careful, our righteous indignation can quickly morph into unrighteous wrath toward others. We can make the transition from righteous anger to wrath.

Aristotle said:

"Anybody can become angry—that 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."

We need to analyze our anger and see whether it is righteous, unrighteous, or mixed in nature. Don't try and justify your wrath and revengeful spirit? Don't fool

yourself. If you have crossed the line from righteous anger into the realm of possessing a spirit of wrath toward others, then the sun is going to set upon your wrath. You need to confess your sin and get right with God (1 John 1:9).

Remember that the Devil's work is to accuse and divide the family of God and to sow discord among them. When we harbor anger in our heart, we do the Devil's work for him. He wants us to be filled with a spirit of wrath toward others for the things they say against us or the wicked lawlessness they promote in society. This is why Ephesians 4:27 follows with these words: "Neither give place to the devil." The Devil wants to stir up a wrathful and revengeful spirit in us so that we say and do things contrary to the Spirit's direction and leading.

IMBALANCE: We must be careful of becoming unbalanced in our Christian life by sanctifying our unrighteous anger toward others. Don't deceive yourself about this.

BALANCE: We can remain balanced in this area of our Christian life by hating sin but loving the sinner, expressing righteous indignation toward the unethical and depraved ways within our society without being overcome with a revengeful and wrathful spirit toward people. Maintaining righteous anger without turning it into unrighteous revenge and hate is important. We can very quickly become imbalanced in this area.

In St. Petersburg, a pastor saw in the square in front of St. Isaac's Cathedral, the magnificent statue of Peter the Great with his hand lifted, pointing his nation onward and eastward toward the sea. Peter was the maker of modern Russia. In many respects, he well deserved the name "great," but he was subject to outbursts of fury and anger. In one of his outbursts, he killed his own son. Toward the end of his reign, Peter the Great once remarked, "I have conquered an empire, but I was not able to conquer myself."

This can be true for Christians when they allow wrath to control their hearts and lives. Instead of conquering wrath, wrath conquers them. They live with the kind of anger that divides, destroys, and causes disruption in marriages, families, and churches.

Ephesians 4:26 is talking about balancing the Christian life by managing our anger. It is easy to lose control of our anger, to let it control us instead of controlling it. So, we must conclude once again:

Blessed are the balanced!

IX. Discernment and God

An umpire named Babe Pinelli once called Babe Ruth out on strikes. When the crowd booed with sharp disapproval at the call, the legendary Ruth turned to the umpire with disdain and said, "There's 40,000 people here who know that the last pitch was a ball." Suspecting that the umpire would erupt with anger, the coaches and players braced themselves for Ruth's ejection. However, the cool headed Pinelli replied, "Maybe so, Babe, but mine is the only opinion that counts." Believers need to realize that God's judgment is the only one that counts and resist the temptation to argue over the truth of God's Word.

In this portion of our study, we need to ask a very important question. Is it wrong to judge other people? The immediate response by many in the evangelical community is that it's always wrong and legalistic to judge people and we should never send negative remarks of criticism toward other people. Instead, we should be open-minded and keep to ourselves and never seek to reprimand and correct or become divisive in any way or fashion. The general consensus and conclusion by many in the Church today is that judging is not Christlike and is always wrong.

It's assumed that judging is always a sign of an unloving and critical spirit toward other people. However, we need to question and unmask this unbiblical conclusion. We need to maintain a Scriptural and balanced approach to judging or else we will become undiscerning, gullible and find ourselves compromising with the world system that is against God and those things that God is not pleased with (1 John 2:15-17). On the other hand, we must learn to balance out our righteous judgment by possessing a loving, humble, and compassionate spirit toward others.

It was F.B. Meyer, I believe, who once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same

circumstances. So, when making a proper assessment regarding those who are captured by sin, we should do so possessing a loving and humble attitude toward them, always seeking to restore and help them whenever we can.

The Bible gives to us the balance we need when judging others. It says, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). This informs us that I can address sinful issues in the lives of others if I approach them in love and with the truth. If we could not judge others then we could not disciple them or seek to restore them (Gal. 6:1). We could only say, "Your okay and I'm okay" and leave it at that. But this is not what God expects of us as Christians. Love does not rejoice in iniquity but always rejoices in the truth (1 Cor. 13:6). This means that when we truly love someone we will be able to address areas of sinful departure in their lives with a loving spirit of concern and correction. If we balance out our love, showing kindness as well as correction, we will balance out our judgment of others. The whole concept of biblical "rebuke" (1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:13; 2:15) informs us that there are times we must judge one another, not to show that we are better than anyone else, but that God's Word is true, that God is holy, and that we need to align ourselves to His character and ways.

An incident in the life of Joseph Parker, the great British preacher, illustrates the need to sometimes pass along rebuke. Parker was preaching at the City Temple in London. After the service one of the listeners came up to him and said, 'Dr. Parker, you made a grammatical error in your sermon.' He then proceeded to point out the error to the pastor. Joseph Parker looked at the man and said, 'And what else did you get out of the message?' What a fitting rebuke!" There is a time and place for proper judgment.

It's interesting to hear billionaires passing judgment on one another these days. Microsoft's Bill Gates compared the computer industry with the auto industry and stated, "If GM had kept up with technology like the computer industry has, we would all be driving \$25 cars that got 1,000 miles per gallon." Not liking this comparison, General Motors responded to Gates by releasing this statement, "Yes, but would you want your car to crash twice a day?"

Today many well-meaning Christians will say, "I don't want to judge" or "It's not my place to judge" and seem to suggest by their comments that it's always wrong and unspiritual to judge others. These statements would seem to imply that

spirituality is evidenced by those who choose to never judge. But this is a false conclusion and misleading philosophy that has overtaken the Church today and it is one that needs to be corrected as we study what God's Word says about judging.

So how do we balance out our Christian life in the area of being discerning and judging others without becoming like the dog that is constantly biting at the ankles of someone and nitpicking them? What does the Bible say about judgment and how can we balance our Christian life in this area?



Let's begin this part of our study by understanding what the word "judge" actually means. The biblical word for "judge" is based on the Greek word "krino" which means to distinguish or decide, be discerning, to scrutinize, and connotes that we must choose what is right from a biblical and moral perspective. This involves a decision or judgment that can relate to one's actions, activities, teachings, worship, or anything that crosses over the line of truth and into the area of unsanctified living.

Discernment really is judgment.

Hebrews 5:14 calls us to a life of discernment:

"But strong (solid, stable) meat (the deeper teachings of God's Word) belongeth to them that are of full age (complete or mature in their Christian faith), even those who by reason of use have their senses (perception) exercised (trained) to discern (distinguish, separate) both good and evil."

Judgment is discernment which means that we determine what is right and wrong. Discernment or judgment is linked to a seasoned, developed, and biblically informed mind. Discernment can only flourish in an environment of faithful Bible study and teaching. Without proper discernment of judgment, I become susceptible to the ideologies of our present day and age. Discernment is always connected with judgment. Essentially, when I have discernment, I have a sense of proper judgment.

Psalm 119:104

“Through thy precepts I get understanding (*meaning discernment, perception, and proper observation*): Therefore I hate every false way” (*the result is judgment upon evil*).

Psalm 119:66

“Teach me good judgment (*discernment, discretion*) and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.”

1 Corinthians 2:14-15

“But the natural (*soulish*) man (*who follows the natural instincts of his old nature*) receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them (they don't make sense to him and cannot understand how spiritual realities work in relation to life)*, because they are spiritually discerned (*unable to distinguish or discern the spiritual nature of things*). But he that is spiritual (*the person who has God's life and nature communicated to Him through the Holy Spirit and is following the spiritual instincts of the new nature*) judgeth (*discern, pass judicial sentence on something*) all things, yet he himself is judged of no man” (*he is incapable of being discerned or understood by the unregenerate person*).

The Bible teaches that the natural (soulish) man lives according to the dictates of his sin nature and therefore cannot properly assess the life of the spiritual man who is saved and has God's Spirit indwelling him. He has only one nature which is the old nature. Without the new nature he cannot discern the realities and spiritualities of the Christian life. The spiritual man in contrast to the unregenerate man is a different person that has a different outlook. This is because he possesses a new nature and God's life within.

The phrase “judged of no man” means that the life of the spiritual man and his spiritual living cannot be properly assessed by the unregenerate or even the carnal Christian. In other words, they just don't get it or understand it for the simple reason they are blinded and unwilling to discern right from wrong, the good from the bad, based upon the biblical revelation of God's Word.

The spiritual man “judgeth (discerns) all things” which means he looks at everything somewhat differently than the natural man because he has spiritual perception. He

can see the difference between right and wrong, truth and untruth. This proper judgment affects his values and decisions. For this very reason the spiritual man who is living according to truth and righteousness is a puzzle or enigma to the natural man. The unsaved person cannot properly judge or assess the saved person living in this world who is holy and filled with the Spirit (“yet he himself is judged of no man”).

This means the unsaved or unregenerate cannot properly discern or pass proper judgment on the born-again believers for they cannot grasp their way of thinking and living. They think we are kooks and religious freaks. The profane person cannot understand holiness. Even carnal believers cannot fully understand the spiritual person and their “Spirit-directed” lifestyle. Here is the point. Being discerning involves being a judge. If we don’t have discernment that comes from a biblically informed mind, then we won’t possess a proper judgment that will enable us to live a sanctified life.

Harry Ironside said this about the spiritual man:

“He is able to see the difference between what is of God and what is of man, what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit, what is of the new and what is of the old nature.”

It’s important to be a discerning Christian during today’s cultural contamination and carnality. We need to judge whatever is soulish (of man’s base instincts) and what is truly spiritual in nature.

Grosheide gives the balance on the judgment of the spiritual man:

“Not as if the spiritual man would have to state his opinion about everything. The implication is rather that he is able and permitted to judge. The spiritual man is not limited in his judging: everything he desires to judge he may judge.”

In other words, we must naturally (according to our new nature) evaluate all evil that is occurring around us and we must do so every day of our lives. However, this does not mean I must become like the ankle biting dog that is constantly on the attack against everyone and everything. We must balance out our judgment with building relationships, living peaceably among the unsaved (Rom. 12:18), and know when the timing is right to bring forth some rebuke and judgment against those who need salvation or transformation in their Christian life.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 gives this timely advice:

“Prove (*discern*) all things; hold fast (*keep or retain*) that which is good” (*what is inherently genuine, true, noble, and right*).

The word “prove” (*dokimazo*) means to discern, examine, or test and suggests that we must literally judge everything by the standard of God’s truth and only espouse those things which are good or ethical in nature. Quite literally, when we are proving something, we are testing it, and everything must pass the test of God’s standard which is found in Scripture. This is what the word “prove” suggests.

I remember passing my church history final in college. It was a huge test. I had to study about a lot of historical figures, but I did manage to get an “A” on the final examine and I was really surprised. My friend and I had stayed up half the night studying for it, but it paid off the next day. Passing a church history test was important but there is something far more important than this. If we are going to balance the Christian life every practice that we engage in should pass the test of God’s truth. We should discern or examine everything to determine if it meets God’s standard. It must pass the test of biblical revelation and sanctification.

Well, God has called us to test the spiritual authenticity of everything (Acts 17:11). Proving or testing something means to distinguish between true and false, right and wrong, or good and bad, and sometimes the better and the best. If something does not pass the test, then we should not engage in the practice, teaching, or worship style that is not based on any scriptural or holy standard. Evil and deception can show itself even in a spiritual setting, so it is important for Christians to test all things.

Sometimes the word is used in the process of distinguishing what is pleasing to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:10

“Proving (*discern, examine, test*) what is acceptable unto the Lord.” The Bible is unmistakably clear about judging. It is not wrong for God’s children to be discerning, to possess a seasoned judgment on all matters. We must judge the actions of people, places, programs, and our personal lives to make sure we are aligning our lives to God’s standard of truth.

Philippians 1:10 conveys the same thing:

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment (*discernment*); That ye may approve (*discern*) things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.”

We see once again that discernment or proper judgment is not optional for the believer. Genuine love for others and Jesus Christ is to be rooted in “knowledge” and “judgment” which again speaks of possessing keen insight and discernment regarding the true nature of things. True love is based upon truth, spirituality, and righteousness. Love is not simply a mushy, gushy type of thing that sweeps sin under the carpet and never discerns right from wrong. Love has nothing to do with compromising God’s truth, righteousness, or holiness.

When we express a Biblical and discerning love toward others we will be able to point them in the way of truth or righteousness and demonstrate Bible-centered and Christlike living before them. We will also be able to express loving obedience and Christian character before God and others in a greater way when we know truth and discern from Scripture how to live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15).

Again, we meet up with this word “approve” (*dakimazo*) in Philippians 1:10 which means to test, examine, and discern right from wrong and sometimes discern the difference between the better and the best. We can see by these Bible verses that there is a need for constant assessment and discernment to be occurring in our lives or else we will not discern the things which are best for our Christian life. The word “excellent” (*diaphero*) means to “distinguish things that are different” and implies that we are to only approve those things which are superior in nature and practice. This is very important if we are going to live a sanctified life that is pleasing to the Lord. We need to keep developing proper judgment or discernment so that we will not be led astray by false teaching and maintain a separated and sanctified Christian life in the midst of carnality and

Lehman Strauss wrote:

“As we develop in this gift of discernment there is a growing appreciation of those things that are best in God’s eyes as set forth in His Word, and that becomes the finest quality of Christian character.”

The whole New Evangelical argument that judgment is legalistic and unloving is simply untrue. The fact of the matter is that we can be unloving when we fail to help and redirect a struggling and sinful saint. In the right way We can be very unloving when we ignore the truth and override the character of God's righteousness and holiness to try and create some kind of fake unity. We can actually be unloving to others and before God when we live without discernment.

Love without discernment (light and reason) is not a true expression of love. On the other hand, the way we express our discernment and judgment before others can also be unloving. We can be rude, obnoxious, unkind and exhibit a holier than thou attitude. It's important to maintain proper judgment but's is also important to maintain proper character when making proper judgment (Gal. 5:22-23). We will talk about this later. So once again, there is a balance to strike between discernment and love.

Paul Rees comments in this way:

"Light without love can be as forbiddingly cold as an iceberg in moonlight whilst love without light can be as flamingly destructive as a forest fire in the dry season."

I've taken the time to investigate these specific verses on judgment because of the importance of making proper discernment in our daily lives. Everyday we must assess the nature of things and either approve or disapprove them. Every teaching, thought, and practice must be examined or discerned to consider the ethical nature of it and to see if it aligns with God's absolute standard of truth.

The captain of the ship needs to discern what the weather is like before embarking on a journey. Jesus alluded to this.

Matthew 16:2-3

"He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be* fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, *It will be* foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not *discern* the signs of the times?" These weather indications were specifically valid for Israel but many also believe they are also true regarding North America.

When we see a red sky at night, this means that the setting sun is sending its light through a high concentration of dust particles. This usually indicates high pressure and stable air coming in from the west. Basically good weather will follow. However, a red sunrise can mean that a high-pressure system (good weather) has already passed, thus indicating that a storm system (low pressure) may be moving to the east. A morning sky that is a deep, fiery red can indicate that there is high water content in the atmosphere. So, rain could be on its way.



Of course, Jesus was using this navigation lesson to teach a spiritual lesson that the religious hypocrites of His day could not discern what was happening. They had missed all the signs given to them concerning the Messiah. For instance, they did not listen to heralder of the Messiah (John the Baptist), they rejected the miracles as proving Him to be the Messiah, and they did not listen to the spiritual message of salvation that the Messiah was sharing with them.

The problem with the church today is that many of God's saints are "babes" and not grounded in biblical truth. They have not been taught the doctrine of sanctification. Therefore, they overlook the sign that says, "Red sky at morning, sailor take warning." Out of ignorance and sometimes disobedience they cannot see the signs of the times, the clear paths and directions that the Scriptures lay out for living a sanctified and spiritual life. Instead of being discerning they become disconnected from the kind of sanctified and separated living that truly glorifies God.

Without discernment, discerning the good and the evil, we become like the sailor of a ship that is being "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14). We will also be carried away into worldliness and unethical patterns of living. Without discernment, we become open to the "wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11) and eventually accept carnality, no longer viewing it as something that is wrong, but an acceptable practice within the realm of contemporary and compromised Christianity.

Wise judgment or discernment is necessary and should become a lifelong pattern in our lives. We must assess evil, error, wrong patterns of living, that which is unethical and unsanctified in practice to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

There are two types of judgment recorded in the Bible. There is a righteous and unrighteous type of judgment that we must talk about. We must find the balance between righteous and unrighteous judgment if we are going to live a balanced Christian life.

John Sylvan didn't know what he had. Sylvan thought there was a market for a device that would brew a single cup of coffee at a time. After much experimentation, he came up with the device and the little plastic cup that would hold the coffee. He and his college roommate decided to name his invention using the Dutch word for excellence: Keurig.

In 2014, more than 9 billion of those little plastic cups were sold, generating more than \$4 billion of income, according to a recent issue of The Atlantic. However, Sylvan didn't receive any of that money; back in 1997, he sold his share of the company for \$50,000. Not a good or wise judgment on his part!

We have been talking about balancing out our Christian life in the area of expressing proper judgment without becoming a pesky little dog that is constantly biting at the heels of people.

Jesus begins by talking about a proper form of judgment.

- a. There is righteous judgment.

Like righteous indignation (Eph. 4:26), there is also righteous judgment.

Jesus taught in John 7:24

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”

Jesus taught that we should “judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24) which informs us that there is a proper or correct way to judge and be discerning in life.

RIGHT JUDGMENT

JOHN 7:24

We have seen that there is a wrong type of judgment that is not wise and which does not qualify as a proper discernment. But in conveying this Jesus was also reminding us that there was a proper or righteous

judgment that was necessary to distinguish right from wrong, the truth from lies, and separate the false teachers from true teachers of God's Word. We have talked about this righteous judgment in our introductory remarks under this point.

In summary, the kind of righteous judgment Jesus talked about (John 7:24) involves a natural and constant assessment of what is right and wrong in daily living (1 Thess. 5:21 – “prove all things”). As we go through life we will necessarily make assessments on what is right and pleasing to the Lord. This kind of judgment is right and spiritual (1 Cor. 2:15). It is to be a natural part of daily living as discerning believers go throughout their normal day-to-day routines approving those things that are “excellent” or superior (Phil. 1:10).

To “judge righteous judgment” involves judging on the basis of what is right, judging with true biblical commands in view instead of by hypocritical, unwarranted, unsound and unbiblical judgments not based upon the proper interpretation of Scripture. As we have seen, this type of judgment is necessary and important or else we will be overtaken by religious hucksters, false teachers, errant doctrine, worldliness, carnality, and paganized forms of worship.

When we make judgments we must ask: What biblical truth is being denied? What truth is being substituted? What truth is being ignored? What truth is out of balance? Possessing discernment means that there will be times when we must “rebuke” others. Discernment necessitates a righteous judgment on unrighteous actions and compromise.

1 Timothy 5:20

“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.”

2 Timothy 4:2

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

Titus 1:13

“This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.”

Galatians 2:14

“But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?”

This informs us that there are times we must judge one another. Some old-fashioned rebuke is good to engage the mind of the compromising Christian with the intent to set them on the right course of living and keep them rowing in the right direction. Of course, we need to stay balanced with our judgment and discernment in life. We need to realize that judgment does not necessarily involve personal confrontation and rebuke with every person that we meet whom we might disagree with. Rather, it manifests itself as a settled conviction in our own heart as we walk with the Lord in the light of His holiness and Word (1 John 1:7). Psalm 119:66 once again states, “Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.” Of course, practicing “righteous judgment” does not dismiss the importance of separating from error and unrighteousness ourselves (2 Cor. 6:14-17) but we can do this gracefully as we take our stand for the truth, holiness, and what is ethically right.

b. There is unrighteous judgment.

Jesus taught that we should “Judge not according to the appearance” (John 7:24) which informs us that there is also a wrong type of judgment.

If Jesus taught us to judge righteously (John 7:24), according to true biblical commands and principles, then there must be an opposite form of judgment which is flawed and unrighteous in practice.

The Bible speaks of various unrighteous judgments.

1. The unscriptural judge – John 7:21-24

Right here in this text we discover about the unscriptural judge. When we judge others based on a faulty interpretation of the Bible, we become an unscriptural and superficial judge without knowing the true facts of Scripture. The Pharisees misunderstood the Sabbath law and therefore were committing a form of improper judgment on Jesus and others. Jesus was forbidding judgments based on inadequate information. This is why He said, "Judge not according to appearance" or in some kind of superficial and external way without having proper knowledge (Bible facts) regarding a specific action.

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Jesus made this statement in relation to healing a person on the Sabbath. What to some appeared to be breaking the Sabbath law had nothing to do with breaking the Sabbath law of rest. The Jews circumcised on the Sabbath (John 7:21-22). Therefore, Jesus argued that if a person was permitted to take care of one part of the body on the Sabbath, then certainly the healing of a whole body, that of the paralyzed man at Bethesda, should be allowed and not be looked upon as breaking the Sabbath rest (John 7:23).

This means the religious Jews had no reason to be angry with Him for healing on the Sabbath. Jesus reprimands them for their faulty judgment and then tells them to clean up their act and judge righteously.

The Jews had been taught the traditions of the Pharisees (Matt. 15:1-6) which concluded that helping someone on the Sabbath was wrong and a violation of the Sabbath rest. It was taught that helping others in need (Matt. 12:10-12) and picking corn on the Sabbath to eat was a violation of the Sabbath rest (Matt. 12:1-5). But Jesus is explaining to the Jews that this was a wrong type of judgment based upon Jewish tradition and folklore instead of according to God's standard of truth. Therefore, he calls upon them to judge righteously instead of wrongly.

Of course, we must understand that Jesus was not condemning all judgment in this verse. Rather, He was asking for righteous judgment. Righteous or correct judgment is what we need today within the Church. We are never to judge by artificial standards that have no biblical principle or basis attached to them. Instead, we are to judge righteously which means to use clear-cut biblical commands and principles (not the faulty traditions of men) to arrive at proper conclusions regarding unethical actions that defy scriptural directives.

The religious Pharisees were falsely judging Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, but their judgment was only a false external judgment that was not based on true biblical standards. In other words, what they saw Jesus doing and thought that He was doing (breaking the Sabbath) was a false assessment. It was an errant type of judgment instead of a right judgment. It became a rash judgment without knowing the real truth about the teaching of the Sabbath. It did not have the facts right. The Pharisees standard of judgment was not honest. Instead, it was critical and not thought through from a biblical perspective.

It is said that Dr. Mortimer Adler suddenly left a discussion group at a tea in a very disgusted manner, slamming the door after him. One person trying to relieve the tension, remarked, "Well, he's gone." To this the hostess replied, "No, he isn't. That's the closet!" Sometimes we can act this way in our judgment. We can be rash in our judgment if we are not careful. You have heard of the old saying, "Don't engage your mouth before you engage your brain." The same could be true about judging too rashly without knowing the real truth about something or someone.

Don't engage your judgment before you know the Biblical facts! The main point Jesus is making is to always judge according to truth instead of tradition which lacks any Biblical sense or principle. When we do judge righteously we will not judge rashly but wisely and according to Biblical truth and proper interpretation.

So, we must obey the instruction of Jesus to "judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24) which means we should be careful that we do not engage in improper judgment that has no bearing on Bible commands or principles. We need to make sure that our judgment or assessment aligns with Scripture and warrants judgment. If we are not careful, we can become too quick to judge without knowing the facts, overcritical, and unrighteous in our judgments. It is foolish to jump to conclusions before investigating the facts.

Proverbs 18:13

"He that answereth a matter before he heareth *it*, *it is* folly and shame unto him."

A lady in an airport bought a book to read and a package of cookies to eat while she waited for her plane. After she had taken her seat in the terminal and gotten engrossed in her book, she noticed that the man one seat away from her was trying to open the package of cookies on the seat between them. She was so shocked that

a stranger would eat her cookies that she didn't really know what to do, so she just reached over and took one of the cookies and ate it.

The man didn't say anything but soon reached over and took another cookie. Well, the woman wasn't going to let him eat all of her cookies, so she reached over and took another from the package. When they were down to one cookie, the man reached over, broke the cookie in half, and got up and left. The lady couldn't believe the man's nerve, but soon the announcement came to board the plane.

Once the woman was aboard, still angry at the man's audacity and puzzling over the incident, she reached into her purse for a tissue. It suddenly dawned on her that she really shouldn't judge people too harshly without knowing the facts for there in her purse lay her still-unopened package of cookies. She was actually eating the man's cookies and he was sharing his own cookies with her! Her judgment was faulty and wrong. It was not based upon the real facts. This is what Jesus was saying in John 7:24. We are to "judge righteous judgment" which means we are to be careful that we do not commit unrighteous judgment or a type of flawed or improper judgment which lack biblical credibility.

2. The legalistic judge – Mark 7:1-10

Mark 7:1 begins by saying:

"Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem."

The legalistic judge, also known as the Pharisaical judge, is the person during Jesus' day who interwove their own traditions with the law of God and gave their traditions equal authority with God's law (the Scriptures). We identify them as legalists because they used the Mosaic Law (God's legal code) as the reason for forming their manmade traditions which were allegedly based on God's Law. However, their traditions were not based on the Mosaic Law or the truth or teaching of God's Word. The legalists claimed to follow God's legal code but at the same time placed their traditions on the same level as God's Word. Of course, the legalists in the days of Jesus also possessed an attitude toward others that was hyper-judgmental and critical without basing their judgments on Scriptural facts.

Mark 7:2-4 records this:

“And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders (the elaborate rituals of ceremonial cleansing invented by the legalists). And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as* the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.”

Here we find the Pharisees and scribes criticizing Jesus because His disciples ate with unwashed hands. This doesn't mean that the disciples didn't wash their hands before they ate, but that they didn't go through the elaborate ritual prescribed by tradition. Unless, for instance, they washed up to the elbows, they were considered ceremonially defiled. If they had been in the marketplace, they were supposed to take a ceremonial bath. This complex system of washing extended even to the dipping of pots and pans.

Jesus repeatedly talks about their “tradition” several more times in the following verses.

Mark 7:5-8

“Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.”

Here is the type of person who is judging on the basis of traditions but not truth. They are not really using the Bible to give them discernment but manmade traditions which have no bearing on Scripture. Jesus pointed out the hypocrisy of this type of behavior. The people possessed great devotion to the Lord but were inwardly corrupt themselves. This will be brought in our next point. The point is that this type of judgmental person was misusing Scripture by misinterpreting the truth and placing their own false interpretations above what the Scriptures actually

taught. Using God's legal code, they (the legalists) developed an elaborate system of traditions that were not based on God's Word.

The rabbis had built a fence around the law by erecting their dos and don'ts to keep the Israelites from breaking the law. However rather than protecting the law their legalistic requirements distorted and even contradicted the law.

Mark 7:9-10

"And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is Corban*, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free*. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

Jesus singled out an example of how tradition had overturned and made void the truth of God's law. One of the Ten Commandments demanded that children honor their parents (which included caring for them in their need). The death penalty was decreed for anyone who spoke evil of his father or mother. But a Jewish tradition had arisen known as Corban, which meant "given" or "dedicated." If Jewish parents were in great need they could look to their son for help. Perhaps their son had money to care for them but didn't want to do it. All he had to do was say "Corban" (this is a consecrated offering) implying that his money was dedicated to God or the temple. This relieved him of any further responsibility to support his parents. He might keep the money indefinitely and use it in business. Whether it ever was turned over to the temple was not important.

This type of reasoning was not according to the Scriptures. It was actually reasoning away the truth in their minds. The result was that traditions like these replaced the truth and the Pharisees used these traditions to judge others claiming that their ex-cathedra interpretations were God's truth. The Pharisees were cold-hearted and ruthless in their judgment of others

Some years ago, a church in Portland near a college wanted to develop more of a ministry to the students. They weren't sure how to do it, but they tried to make

them feel welcome. One Sunday, the church was packed and the service was already underway when a young man with unkempt hair, blue jeans, a T-shirt, and bare feet walked in. He came down the aisle, looking for a seat, but he couldn't find one. Finally, he just sat down on the carpet at the front of the church. It created an uneasy atmosphere in this crowd of people who were mostly dressed in suits and dresses, seated in their rows of pews.

Then, every eye noticed an elderly man in a suit walking slowly toward the young man. Everyone wondered, "Is he going to scold the young man for dressing like that for church? Is he going to ask him to leave?" There was a heavy silence in the church as everyone focused on this scene. Finally, he got down to where the young man was sitting. With some difficulty because of his age, he slowly sat down next to the young man and worshiped there on the carpet with him.

I don't think the Pharisees of Jesus' day would have acted this way toward this fellow. They were not gracious in spirit but critical and unbiblical in their thinking and approach to others. Christ gave a scathing rebuke of these Pharisees with their nitpicking judgments which had no biblical basis. We need to be careful that we do not develop a Pharisaical spirit in falsely judging others without any basis of Scripture for our judgment. This type of person judges others by a false standard they have erected, and they will often promote themselves as being pious and spiritual above others. This is what the Pharisees and legalist did in Jesus' day. They put the emphasis on the external and avoided the internal because their hearts were far from God. The major on minor things that many times do not matter and burden down others with their false assessments. They focus on self-glory. They pretend to be holy outwardly but inwardly they were full of dead man's bones (Matt. 23:27). They wanted to be a judge, but they were certainly in no condition to judge others. This brings us to our next point.

3. The hypocritical judge

The hypocritical judge is the person who judges with open sin and scandal in his own heart and life.

Matthew 7:1

"Judge not, that ye be not judged."



This is one of those statements of Jesus which is often misunderstood and taken to mean that we should never pass any judgment on anything or anyone. Many have misused what Jesus was teaching here to justify remaining in their own sinful acts of rebellion. From this statement many have concluded that we have no right to judge anyone's lifestyles or beliefs and embrace with the philosophy of "live

and let live" when it comes to other people – without discussion, evaluation, or rebuke. The one word that best describes our culture is "Whatever." But to "judge not" does not mean all actions are equally moral or that truth is relative.

Someone remarked:

"The current popular notion that judging others is in itself a sin leads to such inappropriate maxims as 'I'm okay and you're okay.' It encourages a conspiracy of moral indifference which says, 'If you never tell me that anything I'm doing is wrong, I'll never tell you that anything you're doing is wrong.'" There is a place for righteous judgment. It can be done in grace and with uncompromising allegiance to truth and holiness. 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful' (Prov. 27:6)."

With the "live and let live" mindset we allow Hollywood to come into our homes via the television and internet and try and pretend the entertainment industry does not adversely influence and effect our family. We are confronted by unholy pictures, philosophies, and worldliness. We need to judge doctrine, lifestyles, and entertainment. Folks, we need to be challenged at times to clean up our Christian lives and homes. Like never before we need to possess proper discernment. Why? It's because discernment will determine our destiny! In other words, it will determine who you will be and what you will do with your life.

Illust. - The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes is a children's story published by John Newbery in London in 1765. The story popularized the phrase "goody two-shoes" as a descriptor for an excessively virtuous person or do-gooder. People might call you a "goodie two-shoes" type of person but that is okay. I would rather be called a "goodie two-shoes" than a "bad two-shoes" type of person. Jesus was not

teaching in this Bible passage that it is wrong to judge. If that were the case He would have never warned against false prophets.

Matthew 7:6

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

Matthew 7:15

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

Matthew 7:16

“Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”

How could we obey these instructions to identify false prophets as dogs and pigs, whose outward actions are unclean, unless we pass judgment upon them? We are supposed to be looking for certain distinguishing marks of false teachers so that we can avoid them and warn others (Rom. 16:17). All of this presupposes judgment.

It's clear in this passage of Scripture that Jesus was not condemning proper judgment but was teaching that we should not make judgments while our own life is filled with hypocrisy.

Matthew 7:5

“Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

This is the wrong type of judgment Jesus was talking about here – hypocritical judgment. Here was the Pharisee who was judging others, probably being nitpicking and overcritical as they normally were, while all along this man had open sin in his own heart and life. His own life was a scandal before God. Jesus used the eye as a metaphor to represent the soul. Spiritually speaking the “eye” is that part of us (the soul) that reasons, thinks and wills (Matt. 6:22-23), A clear eye is then speaking of a mind and heart (inner life) free of spiritual impurities. But a plank in the eye would be suggestive of sin and uncleanness within the soul.

It's obvious that Jesus intends us to see the humor in this type of judgment. Visualize a man with a plank in his eyes walking through the lobby of the church trying to find a person with a speck of sawdust in his eye that he might remove it! Here is a person who is a total hypocrite. He is ready to judge someone else while being overcome with sin in his own heart and life. It's clear that sin always distorts our perceptions. But when we see ourselves in God's presence, we will never view others in a wrong way.

Do you remember the story of the woman caught in adultery is found in John 8:1–11? The scribes and Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus into saying something they could hold against Him. So they brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. They reminded Him that the Mosaic Law demanded her to be stoned to death. But the Jewish leaders had already disregarded the Law by arresting the woman without the man. The Law required that both parties to adultery be stoned (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22). Therefore, the leaders were using the woman as a trap so they could trick Jesus. If Jesus said the woman should not be stoned, they would accuse him of violating Moses' Law. If He urged them to execute her, they would report Him to the Romans, who did not permit the Jews to carry out their own executions (John 18:31).

John 8:6-11 picks up the story:

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

There is a lot of speculation about what Jesus was writing but I tend to think that He was writing a list of the sins committed by each of the Jewish leaders present. Perhaps adultery was one of those sins on the list! You see, the hypocritical judge is someone who loves to judge others while there is open scandal and sin going on in his own heart and life.

We all need to beware of hypocrisy that can occur in our own lives. We should always seek to live a pure life, so we can properly assess the faults of others and seek to redirect them and restore them. Remember, there are confused, self-seeking, and sinful Christians who need the loving approach of another saint of God to sometimes expose the error of their ways. But we must first be spiritual in our approach to living before we make judgments on others.

Galatians 6:1 reminds us once again:

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual (not ye who are hypocritical), restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

Jesus adds something to His teaching on hypocritical and heartless judgment in Matthew 7:2: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Jesus warned that an unrighteous and hypocritical judgment would be repaid in kind. In other words, what goes around comes around. This principle of reaping what we sow is built into all human life and affairs. When we are a pesky, unkind, hypocritical judge, like the Pharisees, sooner or later this type of person will get a taste of his own medicine. This could be referring to judgment from others but more likely to the final Judge who is Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 4:8

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

We need to remember this timely advice. The law of sowing and reaping is in effect. Therefore, a critical, wrong type of judgment will not bring reward but loss of reward when we stand before Jesus (2 Cor. 5:10).

Just before the death of actor W. C. Fields, a friend visited Fields’ hospital room and was surprised to find him thumbing through a Bible. Asked what he was doing with a Bible, Fields replied, “I’m looking for loopholes.” That is pretty sad. A person trying to find loopholes in the Bible on his deathbed. We would include that this fellow was of course casting an improper judgment on the Bible and in his case he would pay for it for all eternity in hell.

When it comes to judging others, we need to be discerning about the truth of Scripture and judge in a proper way and with a proper attitude. The philosophy of “live and let live” is simply not a Biblical philosophy. If we truly care about others and their spiritual growth, if we want to disciple others, we will have to pass some judgment upon their worldly ways and show them the right way to live. By the way, “charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:8).

4. The competitive judge (2 Cor. 10:12)

2 Corinthians 10:12

“For we dare not make ourselves of the number (*the Judaizers who claimed to be super spiritual and who were above all other saints*), or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves (*play the comparison game with the Judaizers who elevated themselves above others*): but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves (*by their own artificial standards*), are not wise.”

Paul is talking about a false measurement and judgment of others which is based on an individual’s debunked standards which are not in sync with Scripture. The Judaizers had many standards which were faulty and therefore they judged others based on these standards. These guys would “compare” themselves with others and then “commend” themselves as being super-duper saints. Paul said that he was not going to act like they did when confirming his apostolic credentials. He was not going to place himself on a pedestal and elevate himself above others. This was not his attitude or purpose for reminding the people of his apostleship.

Again, the Judaizes were using corrupt standards not based on Scripture. While wrongly condemning others they were at the same time elevating themselves. In other words, these people would set up an artificial standard and judge a person with this standard and in return they would elevate themselves as being the cream of the crop when it comes to saintly living, possessing a “holier than thou” attitude.

In a sense, the Judaizers belonged to what we might call the “mutual admiration society” that set up its own standards and measured everybody by them. Of course, those inside the group were successful but those outside their elite group were failures. Paul was one of the outsiders, so he was considered a failure. The unfortunate thing is that these Judaizers did not measure themselves by Jesus

Christ and the Word of God. If they had, it would have made a difference in the way they judged others and lived out their lives.

There are some practical lessons we learn from this type of false assessment or judgment.

First, as God's people, it's never wise or right to compare ourselves with others to determine who is more spiritual. This is not a proper form of discernment or way to judge others; it's actually an expression of the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). We are not to judge others with the intent and attitude to elevate ourselves above others, so we can in one sense write our own testimonial and make ourselves into some type of super saint that fly's around with a white cape.

Second, we should not be boastful by commending ourselves, singing our own praises, and sticking up our noses at others for not thinking or living like us. We need to be careful about playing the "who is more spiritual" game in life. Using proper discernment should not lead to this mindset and attitude.

Trapp's old commentary put is like this:

"Oh, pray to be preserved from this perilous pinnacle of self-exaltation. Look into the perfect law of liberty, and draw nigh to God. The nearer we come to God, the more rottenness we find in our bones."

Comparing ourselves with others isn't wise. It isn't smart. It isn't of God.

5. The self-righteous judge

This next form of false judgment follows on the heels of the previous competitive judge. It gets to the root of all false judgment – self-righteousness! Jesus rebuked the self-righteous judgment of a Pharisee in a parable that He gave long ago.

Luke 18:9-14

"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that

I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast (*indicating contrition and repentance*), saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Do you think this guy was stuck on himself? He referred to himself five times while comparing himself to the publican or sinner. He has a severe case of the “I” syndrome. He literally repeats the personal pronoun “I” five times. This man was self-righteous. By comparing himself with another sinner, one who seemed to be at the bottom of the barrel, he made himself out to be a saint.

Warren Wiersbe wrote:

“The Pharisee was deluded about prayer, for he prayed with himself and told God (and anybody else listening) how good he was. The Pharisees used prayer as a means of getting public recognition and not as a spiritual exercise to glorify God (Matt. 6:5; 23:14).”

In his (so-called) prayer, the Pharisee praised himself and compared himself to other men. It isn’t hard to have a high opinion of self when you compare yourself to other people; it often is not difficult to find someone worse. But again, the self-righteous Pharisee compared himself with the wrong person. He should have compared himself with Jesus! In this case, he would have realized his own sinful departures and ways.

One ancient rabbi (Rabbi Simeon, the son of Jochai) was an example of this kind of Pharisaical pride when he said: “If there were only thirty righteous persons in the world, I and my son would make two of them; but if there were but twenty, I and my son would be of the number; and if there were but ten, I and my son would be of the number; and if there were but five, I and my son would be of the five; and if there were but two, I and my son would be those two; and if there were but one, myself should be that one.”

It’s interesting to discover that the publican humbly came to God on the basis of the atoning sacrifice and was justified. He didn’t earn his justification, and he didn’t have a probationary period; he was simply declared justified which is a judicial act.

A person does not make themselves righteous through reformation and a series of self-improvements throughout one's life.

"God be merciful (Gr. "hilaskomai" – meaning propitious, satisfied) to me a sinner." The publican was justified because as a sinner, he humbly prayed for mercy, and this mercy was found in this day in the atoning sacrifice. He prayed, "O God, be satisfied with the atoning sacrifice, and forgive me."

- ✓ This sinner didn't say, "God, be merciful to me, I'm not a Pharisee."
- ✓ He didn't say, "God, be merciful to me - I'm only human."
- ✓ He didn't say, "God, be merciful to me, I'll try to do better."

Here is the point. We are called to humility, and we must remember that "God resisteth (opposes) the proud" (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). The Pharisee in Jesus' parable was confident in his own righteousness and from this prideful position judged the publican; however, God sees the heart and refused to forgive and justify the Pharisee's sin (Luke 18:9–14).

6. The scrupulous judge

This type of judgment involves judging others on the basis of our own personal convictions and preferences while ignoring the personal liberty of others. In other words, this individual has doubts regarding the nature of certain actions and therefore judges the actions of others based upon his own personal scruples, convictions, and preferences.

Romans 14:10-13

"But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? (*despise, have a low opinion of, scorn, reject*) for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way."

"But why dost thou judge thy brother?" "Let us not therefore judge one another any more." Of course, Paul was not condemning all forms of judgment any more

than Jesus was in Matthew 7:1. What Paul is referencing here is committing a type of judgment based on one's own scruples and convictions without taking into account the liberty that others have in Christ.

During the early church there was the problem of judging others concerning "days" and "diets."

Romans 14:1-3

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations (deliberating or purposed judgments, disputes, quarrels). For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him."

Romans 14:5

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Under the Mosaic law there were restrictions about sabbath days and specific diets were to be followed. However, under the dispensation of grace these restrictions were lifted. It was hard for some Jews to cross the bridge from the law to grace dispensation. It was imbedded in them for so many years to follow the dietary and sabbath laws that they began to wrongly judge others who were not following the old day and diet routine.

This type of judgment was based on a person's own personal convictions and scruples regarding "non-essential" matters since grace had removed the Mosaic regulations. The matter of the Sabbath day or days and the dietary regulations were no longer essential to follow. The problem was that the Jews were condemning the Gentiles who followed the freedom or liberty they had within the grace dispensation. The Gentiles did not adhere to the Old Testament regulations for they were no longer binding or essential.

But the scrupulous judge of this day would condemn others for not following what was now "non-essential" regulations of the law which has been superseded by grace and God's new work among the Gentiles. This caused a rift between the two parties. The scrupulous and unrighteous judgments were being made but this type

of judgment was not based upon liberty and grace. Instead, it was others trying to cram down the throats of others their own personal preferences and agenda.

We need to be careful about this as we fellowship with one another. We might have personal preferences about some specific matters and feel strongly about them, but if what we believe is not based upon the new Dispensation of Grace and is “amoral” and “non-essential” in nature, then we should not falsely accuse others of breaking God’s commandments.

Of course, some Christians carry “grace” too far and turn it in to license by using grace an excuse to sin and fulfill their own fleshly desires. We’ve talked about this already. But all of us must remember that if our conviction is not based upon our freedom under grace, if our conviction is not rooted in the truth of Christian liberty, then we should not wrongly judge others for living out their liberty in Christ.

Let me give you some examples of scrupulous judging, judgment that is based on our convictions but not our freedom under grace. Because of the way we were raised, we might never do anything on a Sunday afternoon, while other Christians have no problems going out for lunch or taking a walk. Some Christians might frown upon this, but we have no right to judge others about these things since Sunday is not the Sabbath day. Some Christians think that the Sabbath day somehow magically morphed into Sunday. But the Bible does not teach this.

In general, we must always be careful to not become a scrupulous judge, judging others on the basis of our own personal convictions, when those convictions are not based upon grace and liberty.

What about food? Some Christians are much more health conscious about their eating habits than others. If they are not careful they can set themselves up as judges over others, if they feel they are eating in an unhealthy manner. One person said to me while I was eating at a restaurant, “You know that what you are eating is GMO food - genetically modified food.” Apparently this type of thing was happening under the old covenant laws. People were judging others by placing taboos on certain meats that were forbidden to be eaten under the Mosaic Law. The problem was that under grace no limitations were given regarding food. Therefore, to judge someone on this basis was an improper form of judgment. If you like your tofu then go and have it but don’t force me to eat your tofu patties!

We could really apply the scrupulous judging to many things today. How about the matter of attire or appearance? If a person's attire and appearance is truly modest and does not represent rebellion or blur the distinction of the sexes, we should not judge others on the matter of their attire or appearance. In doing so, we become a scrupulous judge. We must be careful that we do not judge others on the basis of our preferences but not the truth.

How about head coverings? There are some Christians who wear a head covering and others who do not. We should not judge one another on these matters because they are morally neutral. A woman's hair was given to her for a covering (1 Cor. 11:15) but if certain traditions require some to wear a head covering we should not judge them for this.

There is some wiggle room in the household of God about these non-essential and morally neutral things. To state it succinctly, we can follow our convictions in certain areas without becoming a judge over others who don't follow our own personal preferences and convictions.

How about the subject of wearing masks? This is an up-to-date application of this principle during the epidemic times in which we now live. Even though it does not exactly apply to the law and grace issue, the principle of judging by our own personal preferences and scruples needs to be considered regarding the wearing of masks. Some Christians still believe strongly that masks should be worn at all the time and in all places despite the growing evidence from highly respected medical institutions that masks and lockdowns have not been effective in stopping the virus from spreading and people contracting it. In any event, those who form strong convictions and opinions on this should not become a judge over those who do not share their same opinion.

If you are not careful you can become a scrupulous judge over others, judging others on the basis of your personal conviction but not on the basis of revealed facts. This is what was happening during the early days of Christianity. These are the types of things that Christians can fight over and if we are not careful we can judge others in an unrighteous manner over these types of things.

Several weeks ago, I had an article in the Ephrata Review (the church section) that I entitled, "Covid, Christians, and Cannibalism."

We have mentioned Galatians 5:15 earlier in this study:

“But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

This is essentially Christian cannibalism. We need to be careful of devouring one another over false assessments and judgments that revolve around our personal preferences. Our scruples should not be the basis for judging others.

Romans 14:5

“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”

In other words, don't judge one another over these non-essentials or morally neutral activities. Some Christians will judge other Christians for having a Christmas tree in their house or celebrating certain holidays like Christmas and Easter because these holidays have pagan origins. If you are fully persuaded in your own mind about something, then go with it. But we should not be so cut and dry about judging others who may think differently about some of these things which have no doctrinal significance or any relation to sanctification or obedience to God.

Romans 14:13 says:

“Let us not therefore judge one another any more (*in areas where there is legitimate freedom*): but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way.”

Romans 14:17 adds this timely advice:

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

In other words, the major emphasis of the future Messianic and Millennial Kingdom will not consist of eating or drinking but a time of righteousness, peace, and joy. This is the way it should be today as we live together as God's saints and rub shoulders together. We should concentrate on living out the spiritual virtues we have through the Holy Spirit and not become bogged down in judging one another according to our own personal convictions or scruples which do not align with New Testament freedom under grace.

Barnes, another old commentator makes this observation of the scrupulous judge: “A contentious, quarrelsome spirit; a disposition to magnify trifles ... Contentions commonly arise from some small matter of doctrine, in dress, in ceremonies; and often the smaller the matter the more fierce the controversy, till the spirit of religion disappears, and desolation comes over the face of Zion.”

I could never say it in such an eloquent way as this, but he is right. We need to stop fighting over our own personal preferences and stop trying to force our scruples down the throats of others. If we keep pushing ourselves on others our churches will become places of desolation and demise. Our love for one another and fellowship in the truth will be lost.

7. The gossiping judge

The gossiping or slanderous judge is the backbiting, nitpicking and faultfinding judge. It's the type of person whose intent and goal is to defame and tear down people before others. This wrong type of judgment (slander) consists of defaming the character of other people and promoting their sins and faults before others.

James 4:11-12 address this type of judge:

“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of *his* brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: (*which teaches us to love our neighbor – not destroy him*) but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge” (*a wrong type of judge hurting the lives of people*). There is one lawgiver (*God*), who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? (*why do you take the place of God and judge others in this way?*).

We need to resolve something before looking at this verse. The need to discipline saints in the church who are committing sexual sins and living in open rebellion against God should not be considered slander. Discipline is important to keep the church pure (1 Cor. 5; 1 Tim. 5:19). Also, speaking out against the sins of homosexuality, adultery, fornication and false doctrines and teachers who are promoting and parading their error before others is not slander for the Bible says we are to “mark them who cause divisions” (Rom. 16:17).

The Bible teaches that we must oppose sin, error, and false teachers who have a corrupting influence upon the church and our own personal lives. Exposing open

sins and sinners who are corrupting the church, including apostates and false teachers is not slander – it’s separation! However, here is where balance comes into the picture. God has not called us to be a nitpicking, faultfinding slanderer that secretly goes around telling everyone else about the faults of others and who seeks to defame and destroy the character of others. Many times people do this because they have a score to settle with someone!

Slander involves a desire and intent to destroy other Christians who we may not like. It’s the person who openly broadcasts the sinful departure of others before everyone else and tries to destroy someone in the process. When we do this, we have opened ourselves to the sin of slander. 1 Peter 2:1 says we need to lay aside “evil speakings.”

This slanderer or gossip does not have personal concern for others, nor do they desire to see their restoration to God. Instead, they would rather bark about them and bash them to get even with them or promote themselves as being better than others. The slanderer is not the person who comes to you and says, “I have a deep concern about my family member or friend, will you pray for this person, their deliverance from their sin and restoration.” This is not slander – it’s a broken heart. In the spirit of loving concern and bearing one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), we share with one another and pray that our family and friends who have lost their way will find their way back to God. The slanderer is different. The gossip is the type of person that comes to you and says, “Did you hear about so and so, I cannot believe they did this, we had better let everyone know about this.” They used to call this “whisper down the lane” and it’s amazing how the story gets embellished.

Someone said:

“It isn't the things that go in one ear and out the other that hurt as much as the things that go in one ear, get all mixed up, and then slip out the mouth.”

The repeated phrase “speak not evil” (James 4:11) refers to slandering someone behind their back. It’s when we gossip about them and defame and destroy their character and reputation before others. This type of judgment is contrary to the humble spirit that God desires and James has just mentioned (James 5:7). Again, James is not relieving us from the responsibility of proper judgment which is needed in our daily decisions to maintain our purity, separation, and godliness. Here he is condemning another type of unrighteous judgment which is the

slandorous type of judgement. It is a wrong use of our tongue. This is the Christian who intently tries to destroy others through gossip. What they are saying about another individual may be true or it may be false. Whatever the case might be God's Word condemns slandering others which is a type of backbiting, backstabbing, nitpicking, fault-finding, and cruel type of judgment.

It is the rivalry and criticism of this judge that causes harm to others and division with God's people. Purposely going about spreading rumors about others, letting everyone know about the failures and faults of others, possessing an unloving and critical spirit toward others, and defaming the saints is all part of this type of errant judgment. Instead of becoming a slanderous gossip, we should seek to cover up the faults of others (1 Peter 4:8), not spreading them abroad, and go to an individual personally and try to win him back to the right way of living (Matt. 18:15–19; Gal. 6:1–2). Someone has suggested that there are three questions we should answer before indulging in criticism of others: What good does it do your brother? What good does it do yourself? What glory for God is in it?

The Bible clearly forbids bearing false witness (Proverbs 19:5). Titus 3:2 says we are "To speak evil of no man (not to slander anyone), to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men." We must guard our hearts and tongue from becoming a faultfinding, nitpicking, slanderous type of person.

James 5:8-9 states the reason for not becoming a gossiping judge:

"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh (*it is at hand*). Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door."

The word "grudge" (*stenazo*) means to groan or sigh and suggests that we are complaining and grumbling about other Christians which can lead to slanderous words about somebody. The Bible teaches that we must not become a slanderous judge for the simple reason that someday Jesus is going to return, and we will give an account for the way we have lived. The phrase "lest ye be condemned" does not mean the believer is condemned to hell at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema Seat) for our sins (2 Cor. 5:10). This could never be since Jesus was judged in our place (1 Pet. 3:18). What James is teaching is that from a relational standpoint with other believers, we should not be condemned at the appearing of Christ because we were argumentative, holding grudges, and were slandering other saints.

The fact that the “judge standeth before the door” suggest the imminency of Christ’s return and that the judgment could take place soon. The early Christians fully believed that Jesus could return at any moment and that they would be held accountable for their lives. In light of the concept of the imminent coming of Christ and the fact that the New Testament does teach His imminent coming, we can conclude that the Pretribulation Rapture view is the only view of the Rapture of the church that comfortably fits the New Testament teaching of the imminent coming of Christ.

I used to tell my children, “No fighting and no biting.” The point is that Christians should not be fighting and biting one another in view of the impending return of Christ and their examination and accountability on this day. James pictured Jesus poised at the door of heaven ready to step back onto the stage of human history in a direct way. The hope of His imminent (any moment) return should strongly motivate us to stop fighting one another and slandering one another.

Grantland Rice compares God to the One who is writing down our score and who will one day judge us on the basis of how we played the game. He wrote:

“When the One Great Scorer comes
To write against your name--
He marks--not that you won or lost--
But how you played the game.”

A Christian woman shared this true story. In Chicago a few years ago a little boy attended a Sunday school I know of. When his parents moved to another part of the city the little fellow still attended the same Sunday school, although it meant a long, tiresome walk each way. A friend asked him why he went so far and told him that there were plenty of other churches just as good nearer his home. The boy replied, "They may be as good for others, but not for me." "Why not?" the woman asked. The little fellows said, "Because they love a fellow over there," he replied.

People, even little children, pick up on the fact that Christians love one another. They will still know that we are Christians by our love! This is why we should always be expressing love with one another in the body of Christ, even when we need pass judgment on someone’s life for their compromise or sinful departure. One of the secrets of possessing a proper judgment is to do it lovingly and not obnoxiously.

Jesus calls us to judge righteous judgment (there is a proper type of judgment). However, He also taught to judge not according to appearance (John 7:24) which means there is a wrong type of judgment. In fact, if we are going to balance out our Christian life in the area of discernment and judgment we must be honest about possessing a wrong type of judgment toward others.

8. The obnoxious and unloving judge

We have talked about this earlier in our study. We must possess a loving spirit of concern and restoration toward others even when we must point out some specific sin that they must deal with and eradicate from their lives.

Once again, I want to stress how very important it is to possess discernment today which is the ability to distinguish biblical Christianity from the counterfeit and spiritual values of the world. We need to model discernment and guard the truth for the benefit of ourselves, children, and grandchildren. But we must choose our battles and season our judgment with love.

Ephesians 4:15

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even Christ.*”

The balance is important between love and truth. We need a right position but also a right disposition. It has been said that we must get the water out of the ship if we hope to rescue those who are drowning! In other words, people need to hear the truth to be rescued but the way you present the truth to God’s people who have strayed from the Lord or how we present the Gospel to the unsaved is very important. It must be presented with a graceful and loving spirit of concern for everyone. This is how you get the water out of the ship.

John Stott said:

“Truth comes hard if it is not softened by love, love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth.”

Colossians 4:6 once again states:

“Let your speech *be* always with grace (*personal kindness*), seasoned with salt (*preserving the truth*), that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

The way we talk to others is with grace and truth! We can be militant and meek at the same time. This is an important balance to find as we seek to be a discerning Christian during these last days. We should practice being gentle in our approach toward everyone (Titus 3:2). We need to remain balanced when sharing the truth and Gospel with others. When we bring judgment against others by declaring the truth, we must do so with gentleness, meekness, and love. People will pick up on our attitude and concern for them. They can tell if we are genuine or just going through a routine.

Someone once remarked:

“Until they know that you care; they don’t care what you know.”

When someone comes to your door to sell you something that will improve your home or your own self, what do we normally think? The primary thought in my mind is always, “How do I get rid of these people as fast as possible?” I want to stay polite and kind, but not have to listen to them! Many people feel that way toward us when we share the Gospel. They view us as another salespeople pushing our goods. And they may be right about us if our evangelism is no more than a slick sales tactic if it doesn’t flow from genuine love for the unreached. Love is always more important than methods. Showing respect, kindness, and love toward others as we share truth should be of uttermost important to us.

9. The heart judge

Some were challenging and questioning Paul’s sincerity in carrying out his stewardship as an apostle. They might have been concluding that he was in it for the fame and his own glory. They began to question his motives in his service and ministry. However, it mattered very little to Paul how some of the Corinthians or anyone else thought he was carrying out his stewardship. In fact, even his own personal evaluations of his own performance were irrelevant. What did matter to him was God’s estimation of his service and living for the Lord. Paul brings this out in our next verses.

1 Corinthians 4:3-5

“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment (*regarding the inner motives of his heart and ministry for the Lord*): yea, I judge not mine own self (*Paul was not adequate to judge himself*). For I know nothing by myself (*he knew of nothing that he was doing that was wrong but that he was faithfully serving the Lord*); yet am I not hereby justified (*by my own declaration since his conscience might not be as sensitive as it should be in some area*): but he that judgeth me is the Lord (*who knows the inner motives of the heart*). Therefore judge nothing before the time (*do not make false assessments or judgment regarding a person's motives of service and work for the Lord until the Judgment Seat of Christ*), until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness (*the true motives of a person's heart in serving and living for the Lord will come out in the coming day – the Bema Seat*), and will make manifest the counsels (*intent, will, purpose*) of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (*grace will be on display in that everyone will in some measure be praised and rewarded*).

The heart judge is the person who judges the inner motives of people. In other words, they think that they are God and can see down into the soul of a person and know what they are thinking and what their motives are in their service and work for the Lord. The Bible is very clear that this is a type of false assessment and judgment. Only God can know the individual motives of a person's heart as it pertains to serving the Lord and living for Him.

Once again, when Paul says, “judge nothing before the time” he is not concluding that there is no place for righteous and proper judgment. We have repeatedly seen this in our study. There is a righteous judgment. What he is referring to is an unrighteous judgment that pertains to judging the motives of a person's walk with God and their specific service for the Lord. In short, we are not God and cannot know or discern the inner motives of a person's heart and walk with God.

In the future, when we stand before Jesus Christ at the judgment seat for Christians, only He will properly assess our motives in our serving and living. Paul knew the truth of Solomon's counsel: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts” (Prov. 21:2).

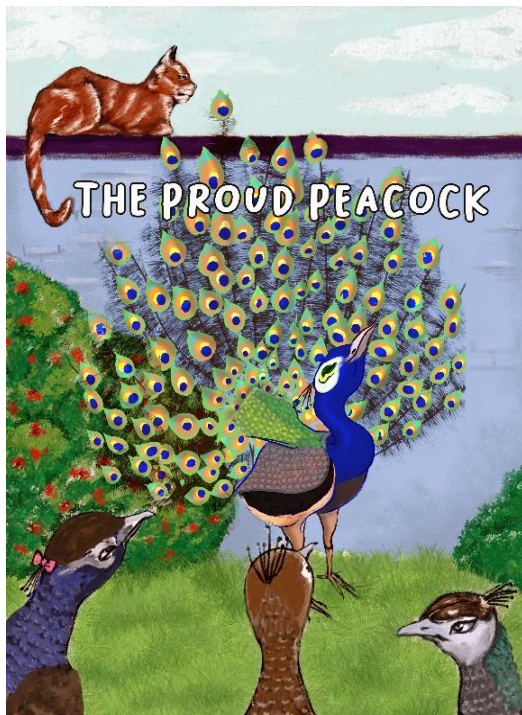
Adrian Rogers was correct when he said:

“You may judge your brother’s actions, but you must leave it to God to judge his motives.”

Let’s face it, not every Christian thinks alike on various issues related to theology, worship, and entertainments. We can use Biblical truth and axioms to judge our brother’s theology, worship, music, and form of entertainment and seek to point them in the right direction. In fact, we do need to exhort and challenge one another at times regarding consecrated and holy living. But we must be careful that we do not become a judge over a person’s heart, claiming we know all the motives and true nature of their heart in relation to serving, living, and walking with the Lord.

What Paul is talking about is setting ourselves up as judges over one’s heart, claiming to know the exact intent and purpose behind someone’s overall service and living for the Lord.

Imbalance: We become imbalanced in our life of discernment when we judge others falsely, not on the basis of Scriptural truth and axioms, when we become overcritical, nagging, unloving and unkind toward others.



BALANCE: God has called us to be external judges but not internal judges of the heart and motives of people as they seek to serve and live for the Lord. God wants us to be discerning while at the same time loving, kind, respecting others, and demonstrating that we really do care about them and their spiritual progress in life.

IMBALANCE: We should not strut around like a proud peacock claiming we are better than others and possessing what we have called a “holier than thou attitude. We must not become proud, boastful, self-righteous, and stuck on ourselves as we develop discernment and pass judgment on worldliness and improper actions related to rebellion and sin.”

It should be expected that some will misunderstand us at times for our stand for Jesus Christ and doing what is right. But this is no excuse for us to become unloving and unkind toward others and promote ourselves as being superior and above others.

Let's wrap up this point on judgment. In general, we need to be careful about being quick to condemn and short on mercy! We are called upon to "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). Harsh, unloving, unforgiving, and internal judgment is wrong.

But now I must challenge all of us on this matter of possessing proper discernment in life. Where do we draw the line in the sand? At what point do we have to say, "Enough is enough?" We certainly don't want to divide over nonessentials, nor do we want to treat others with a "holier than thou" attitude as if we were the only ones left who possess an edge on truth. But we must defend the truth, even when we have to risk being misunderstood or cause a break in personal fellowship among the saints.

2 Corinthians 13:8

"For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."

Paul is saying that all they do must be done with a view to the furtherance of the truth of God which would include the Gospel. Paul knew he was powerless if went "against" the truth or God's will. Therefore, he needed to "stick to the stuff" as we often say and not sidestep the truth in any way. This is a good reminder for all of us.

We must be discerning and draw those lines that distinguish the church from the world. This means we must lovingly take up the task of warning, rebuking, and instructing one another with the hope that we might reclaim the lost ground that we have given to the world (1 John 2:15-17). The task is urgent! We need God's strength to keep living out a testimony of light and to do what needs to be done!

Balance is the key when it comes to judgment or discernment. We can be right but at the same time we must be kind! On the other hand, love cannot ever replace the truth and allow for permissive attitudes and lifestyles. Jesus demonstrated that a spirit of love is not incompatible with warning about error and even the denunciation of false teachers. Jesus inspires and motivates us to life victoriously,

uncompromisingly, and obediently. If we keep our eyes on others, we can become discouraged and get out of the race. I've discovered over the years that when I stay focused on Christ (Heb. 12:2; Phil. 1:21) instead of the enemy and other people, I become more stable and balanced in my Christian life.

I have also realized, as previously mentioned, that I am not perfect and should not compare myself with other Christians as though I am better and living on a higher spiritual plain (2 Cor. 10:12). So, balancing the Christian life is very important in the area of discernment and judgment. Be discerning and "judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24) as Jesus taught, but at the same time we must be careful we do not claim that we are the last ones who have not bowed the knee to Baal!

A discerning pastor and friend of mine said there was a man in his church who was critical about everything. In fact, he told me that when he would come in the church it was like he was wearing a straitjacket. He was always trying to find something that was wrong with his preaching and ministry. This man had gone beyond discernment. He had developed a big head and bully attitude toward the saints and elevated himself to a status of superiority over the other saints. He was a nitpicking judge and not a real discerner who possess love toward the saints.



Blessed are the balanced!

X. Zeal and God

An imbalance occurs when you have too much of some things and too little of others. If you put so much pepper on your food and can no longer taste the food, then you caused an imbalance in your flavoring. If you put too much hot sauce on something, the food becomes imbalanced. I remember salting a particular brand of soup that came out of the can. However, I had forgotten to taste the soup first. To my surprise, I discovered the soup did not need salt for it already had 900 milligrams of sodium! I had caused the soup to become imbalanced by the excess salt. It was not conducive to the taste buds.

We have in this study and series been talking about balancing the Christian life. There are some specific areas where we must maintain our balance, our spiritual equilibrium, or else we will become unbalanced in our approach to living out the Christian life. Let me share another area where we need to find balance if we are going to stay spiritually fit and stable. It is the area of possessing zeal for God.

When he was pastor for the Methodist church in Scarborough, William Sangster had an eccentric member who tried to be a zealous Christian. Unfortunately, the man was mentally deficient and usually did the wrong thing. While working as a barber the man lathered up a customer for a shave, came at him with the poised razor, and asked, "Are you prepared to meet your God?" The frightened man fled with the lather on his face! This is zeal but it's not according knowledge!

Romans 10:2-3

"For I bear (testify, bear witness) them (Israel) record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge ("epignosis" – they lacked full or correct discernment of the truth, lacked precise knowledge of the truth). For they being ignorant of God's righteousness (imputed righteousness – a declaration of a person's justification before God), and going about to establish their own righteousness (legalism – a works righteousness), have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (the only righteousness that can give a person a justified standing before God).

Many within Israel were following the law as the means to gaining righteousness and acceptance before God. But God's plan is to reckon (impute) righteous to ungodly sinners freely who believe on His Son.

Their zeal was not based on knowledge; it was heat without light. Sadly, many religious people today are making the same mistake. They think that their good works and religious deeds will save them when actually their religious practices are keeping them from being saved. I think many people are sincere and devout about being a good person, but sincerity and devotion will never save the soul. "Therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20).

The godly Presbyterian preacher, Robert Murray McCheyne, was passing out tracts one day and handed one to a well-dressed lady. She gave him a haughty look and said, "Sir, you must not know who I am!" In his kind way, McCheyne replied,

“Madam, there is coming a day of judgment, and on that day it will not make any difference who you are!”

Zeal without knowledge! Zeal without knowing the truth! This is a perfect description of Paul before his conversion. Saul of Tarsus was a notorious persecutor of Christians and he thought that he was doing God a favor when persecuting the Christians. This was before Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–20).

Paul knew what he was talking about when he states that Israel had a zeal without knowledge, without knowing the truth of God’s imputed righteousness. He too was a Pharisee that depended upon his own legalistic works to merit God’s favor and entrance into Heaven.

Philippians 3:4-8

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ.”

You will notice that in Paul’s pre-conversion days he actually possessed a lot of zeal in his efforts to persecute the Church, God’s people (“Concerning zeal, persecuting the church”). This informs us that the zeal can be funneled in the wrong direction. Paul was filled with zeal and fervor in persecuting God’s people, but his zeal was a blind zeal. It was a zeal, excitement, enthusiasm, and passion that did not align with the truth.

We learn some practical lessons from this. Our zeal does not merely consist of emotions. Our zeal or passion is not excitement on steroids! Zeal is something that revolves around the promotion of truth and doing what is right in God’s eyes. It’s rooted in knowledge and not mere experience. We must be careful about attributing our zeal and passion for God to pseudo experiences which are not

rooted in the truth. Many Christians today possess zeal, but they lack knowledge of God's Word and end up passing through pseudo revival and experiences.

Paul reprimanded the Corinthian Church about their excessive emotionalism that was overtaking their local churches. In fact, they were attempting to rework their past mystical and emotional experiences they had with the mystery religions and incorporate them into their local churches by Christianizing these pagan experiences through uncontrollable and erratic tongue speaking. Their worship became paganized and full of frenzy.

1 Corinthians 12:2-3

"Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away (led and controlled by outside forces, deceived by the world of evil spirits) unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking (an attempt to simulate a real tongue experience through faulty pronunciation or some prophetic announcement of a heretical doctrine) by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed (damns Jesus to hell): and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

Paul reminded them that in their pagan past they had been dominated by Satan and by demons which involved speaking ecstatic words in their trances as they were being influenced by demons. Paul warned the believers of unintelligible and irrational outbursts of behavior that did not reflect God's order (1 Cor. 14:40). Their excessive and uncontrollable emotions were not a reflection of godliness or the Spirit's control over their lives. We must remember that our emotions can deceive us and lead us astray when we allow them to be mixed with carnality and unscriptural experiences.

I had been trying to disciple someone recently and giving them some spiritual guidance and biblical direction regarding their Christian life. Recently this person sent me a text that said, "I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I'm now free from sin's power. I never felt this way before."

There is a lot of zeal that revolves around the pseudo experience of the so-called baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in some type of gibberish (not the ancient, biblical gift of tongues described in the New Testament) and seeking other experiences, such as being "slain in the Spirit" where a person experienced

trancelike behavior, normally falling backward to the ground. Sometimes they are so “overcome by the Spirit” they respond with uncontrollable laughter, a type of mongrel barking, erratic twitching, and bizarre symptoms of intoxication. Falling backward to the floor, laughing uncontrollably, babbling nonsense, and acting drunk is not what it looks like when a person is a “Spirit-filled or “Spirit-controlled” Christian (Eph. 5:18-20).

None of these types of experiences have any biblical authority or basis. We must remember that the Scriptures are full of fraudulent signs and wonders that are not of God (Matt. 24:14; 7:22; 2 Thess. 2:7-9; Rev. 13:14-14). Many Christians fall into the trap of emotional experiences which are not rooted in knowledge – a biblical knowledge of the truth. They “feel” something and gravitate toward their feelings and emotions as the ultimate conveyor of truth instead of searching the Scriptures to investigate whether their experience is genuine or fraudulent.

Some Christians have a zeal but it’s not according to knowledge or God’s standard of truth. Though misinformation they manipulate themselves into believing an experience is true based on a sense of euphoria and feelings. We need to be careful about this type of thing. Although God built emotions into our human lives we must always funnel our emotions in the direction and way of truth.

John MacArthur correctly counters the pseudo experiences in the Charismatic Movement of today. “The real Holy Spirit is not an electrifying current of ecstatic energy, a mind-numbing babbler of irrational speech, or a cosmic genie who indiscriminately grants self-centered wishes for health and wealth. The true Spirit of God does not cause His people to bark like dogs or laugh like hyenas; He does not knock them backward to the ground in an unconscious stupor; He does not incite them to worship in chaotic and uncontrollable ways; and He certainly does not accomplish His kingdom work through false prophets, fake healers, and fraudulent televangelists. By inventing a Holy Spirit of idolatrous imaginations, the modern Charismatic Movement offers strange fire that has done incalculable harm to the body of Christ. Claiming to focus on the third member of the Trinity, it has in fact profaned His name and denigrated His true work.”

Pseudo experiences can also occur in relation to our worship experience. As we worship, we must funnel our emotions in the way of truth while separating from worldliness and refusing to conform to culture contamination (Rom. 12:2). Much of

what is occurring in the church today, which is labeled as worship, is nothing more than the leftover pagan music that has been adopted from the hippie culture of rebellion, sex, and drugs of the 1960's and 70's. The world entered sacred music and worship in the 1970's and it has been moving in a downward trend ever since.

The charismatics adopted the rebellious music of the hippie movement and sought to blend this worldly music with Christianity. They wanted to get the hippies off the harder rock music of the day on to a lesser or lighter form of rock music while at the same time attaching the word "Jesus" to the words in the music. Of course, this compromise has been growing like leaven in the church ever since its inception. It has grown into a monstrosity of paganized music which is totally contrary to God's character of holiness and orderliness. Today much of what is called worship is nothing more than zeal that is not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2). It's based upon *feeling* something rather than *knowing* something. It's mixes worldliness with the things of God which becomes a breach of God's holiness and His standard for worship (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

I know what many Christians say. "This music feels right to me. It's my style. It moves me. It makes me feel good." Of course, these are all fleshly responses to a morally debunked sound - not spiritual responses. Our response in worship must be based on the knowledge of God's Word which commands us to live separate from paganism and worldliness in all its greater and lesser forms. We should not learn and adopt the ways of the heathen (Jer. 10:2). The hippie music was created by heathen people and it had a heathen purpose which was to produce the fruit of carnality and rebellion in the lives of people.

Knowledge without zeal. Heat without light. False fire! This is one way to describe much of what is occurring in the church today in the realm of worship. God has not called us to adopt pagan forms of music into our worship but to present ourselves as a "called out" and separate people. God has declared that He has "called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Leviticus 10:1 reveals this:

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not."

Nadab and Abihu were guilty of worshipping in a wrong way. They burned the wrong kind of incense before God and God would not accept it. This reminds us that God reserves the right to reject our worship if it does not meet His standard of holiness.

Everything these two men did was wrong. They were the wrong people to be handling the incense and presenting it to the Lord. This was the task of their father, the high priest (Ex. 30:7–10). They also used the wrong instruments, their own censers instead of the censer of the high priest, sanctified by the special anointing oil (Ex. 40:9). They acted at the wrong time, for it was only on the annual Day of Atonement that the high priest was permitted to take incense into the holy of holies, and even then he had to submit to a special ritual (Lev. 16:1).

They acted under the wrong authority. They didn't consult with Moses or their father, nor did they seek to follow the Word of God, which Moses had received. In burning the incense, they used the wrong fire, what Scripture calls "strange fire" ("unauthorized, profane, foreign fire"). Since the altar speaks of Calvary, it was as if they tried to approach God in some way other than through the atoning work of Christ.

Here is the point. This worship was a false fire manipulated by man – not the true fire of God! Remember that the flesh is capable of imitating spiritual unction. Today many well-meaning Christians have adopted a secularized sound that dishonors God over a sacred sound that honors God. They compromise with paganism and slide into pagan music continues within the professing church. But the discerning Christian will want to obey God's timeless command.

2 Corinthians 6:17 gives Christians a straightforward command:

"Wherefore come out from among them (*the pagans*), and be ye separate (*from their pagan ways*), saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing* (*their unethical pattern of living – their forms of idolatry, worship, and cultural contamination*); and I will receive you."

IMBALANCE: When we imbibe the secularized culture of our day we can allow our emotions to become the driving force in our lives instead of the truth. We can become involved in counterfeit revival and experiences which are not based upon God's truth.

BALANCE: We need to possess great zeal and passion in living for Jesus Christ and serving Him while at the same time not allow ourselves to be enamored and overcome with pseudo experiences that are not based on Scriptural truth and reality.

We turn to Romans 12:11 once again in this study:

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”

The word “slothful” means to be sluggish, backward, lazy. In contrast to this type of Christian life, we are called upon to be “fervent in spirit” (Greek - *zeo*) which means literally to be hot, to come to a boil, to cook. It connotes possessing an untiring zeal, great passion, and burning desire to keep serving the Lord instead of being lazy and lackadaisical in our Christian life. We are to cook for Christ! We are to be on fire for God in a right and proper way. God does not want us to be lukewarm Christians but boiling Christians.

Revelation 3:16

“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

Illustration: Halford Lucock says, "I was impressed several years ago when I read the Eugene Ormandy dislocated a shoulder while directing the Philadelphia Orchestra. I do not know what they were playing, but he was giving all of himself to it! And I have asked myself sadly, 'Did I ever dislocate anything, even a necktie?'"

Folks, we need to possess a zeal for living and serving Jesus Christ today. Many times our zeal revolves around our hobbies and worldly pursuits. But when it comes to serving the Lord our zeal is lacking.

Many Christians get lazy over time and they no longer want to use their gifts for the Lord, give to God’s work, or be part of the answer to seeing a church grow. They become stale and stagnate in their service and outreach for the Lord. God wants us to be on fire for Him and His cause. We are to have a burning desire to live for God and serve Him. But it must be the true fire of God – not false fire. Romans 12:11 is saying to us: “Never let the fire in your heart go out. Keep it alive. Serve the Lord.”

“Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning
Give me oil in my lamp, I pray.
Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning
Keep me burning 'til the break of day.”

We should possess zeal in our Christian living, preaching, service, and worship. Christianity is not something that should be dead and lifeless like much of the organized religions of today who bow to statues and burning candles. But at the same time, we must always balance our Christian life with truth and reverence that upholds God’s unchanging character and truly glorifies Him (1 Cor. 10:31). It will be far better for us if we learn to balance our zeal with knowledge and not imbibe the “last days madness” of unscriptural theories, experiences, music and other practices which many times come through the Charismatic Movement.

I want to share some testimonies of those who were delivered from the Charismatic Movement through the biblical teachings of God’s Word. John MacArthur has exposed many of the errors of this movement and his teaching have helped many in this specific area.

Here are a few of the testimonies.

“I stayed six years in the charismatic church, until John MacArthur helped me reevaluate the teaching by comparing it to Scripture. My heart goes out to those still in the Charismatic Movement that are deceived. The prosperity they are promised eludes them. I saw people giving everything they owned of value, expecting to receive one-hundred-fold back. When the reward they sought did not materialize, they were told their faith was deficient. It is very sad.”

“We lost a child a few years ago, and several members of the church we attended told us that we just didn’t have enough faith for her healing. Others told us that we must have had sin in our lives. I praise the Lord for the ministry of John MacArthur. My wife and I have learned so much through his books and teachings, enough to leave the charismatic church environment we were in for over a decade. There are so many misguided charismatics out there that desperately need to hear the truth.”

“My husband and I are seniors, but it goes to show that whatever age a person is, the Lord can work mightily. We have been married nearly forty-nine years and for the first thirty-eight years we went to a charismatic church where feelings and experiences took precedence over Scripture. I felt uneasy and didn’t know what to do about it. Then John MacArthur helped us take a new look at the Charismatic Movement through the lens of Scripture. He taught us to be Bereans.”

“I have often thought recently that the Word of Faith movement is one of the greatest threats to real Christianity today. The message seems Christian enough to new and young believers. It definitely sounds good in a world obsessed with prosperity. It looks good for people who want to be wealthy, healthy, and happy. I used to attend a Word of Faith church. This church teaches us that God wants us to have total victory—in our finances, relationships and our health! Then why isn’t the pastor healthy? Why are people losing their jobs? They aren’t prosperous right now in their finances. They’re struggling and can’t make ends meet. People begin to wonder if God let them down. Why didn’t He fulfill His end of the bargain? The Word of Faith doctrine is a dangerous false gospel, and I’m grateful to John MacArthur for pointing us back to Scripture.”

“I was raised in a church where I was taught to speak in tongues and listen for God to speak to me personally. The God I was raised to believe in was mysterious, strange, mystical, and confusing. It was total chaos. I was so upset by those things, and by prophecies that never came true, that I turned from anything relating to the Bible. I wandered spiritually and avoided God’s Word for about ten years. The whole time, though, I knew I was wrong, and I did believe in God. I just did not understand how to live for Him. About three years ago, I discovered the teaching ministry of John MacArthur online. I went immediately to the sermons on 1 Corinthians to see what he said about speaking in tongues. It was refreshing to hear a sermon that made sense. I downloaded countless sermons. I was relearning the Bible. I joined a Bible-teaching church near me with a pastor who is committed to the Word without compromise. I am so excited about what the Lord is doing in my life.”

These are just a few testimonials that prove zeal without knowledge leads to confusion. Ignorance is not bliss! Our zeal must be centered upon truth. Fake healings and false hopes are the result of these “last days” counterfeit revivals and experiences. Zeal without knowledge can result in stunting our spiritual growth, crushing our spirit, keeping us from following the truth, and trusting in God’s daily

provision and sufficiency for our lives. So, it's very important we learn to balance our Christian lives in the area of our emotions, feelings, and zeal.

Out of gratitude, someone wrote this note:

“Thank you for teaching me to seek what is spiritually real and true.”

Our emotions and zeal must be directed in the way of the truth – not extra scriptural experiences. Blessed are the balanced!

XI. Beauty and God

Introduction: A farmer had never been to the city before. He came into a large building and saw an elevator for the first time. While sitting on a chair with his grandson he watched an elderly lady get in the elevator. About three minutes later the elevator opened again and a young woman came out of the elevator. He turned to his grandson and said, “Billy, go get your grandmother and run her through that thing!”

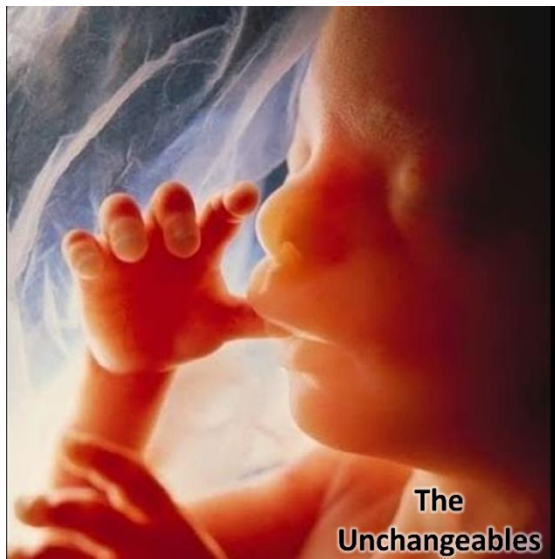
It's no secret that we live in an age where there is an excessive emphasis on outward beauty. The push for eternal youth continues and outward beauty has in many cases overtaken inward beauty. As Christians, we need to also possess a balance between outward and inward beauty.

In order to have a proper balance between the outward and inward, we must remember that God created us according to His blueprint. After creating us, He threw away the blueprint and said, “This is you. I made you this way.” For this reason, we should not become distraught over the way God made or created us. We must find acceptance and closure in the fact that God created us in a specific way for a specific reason. This will keep us from becoming overly obsessed and unbalanced in the area of

Psalm 139:14-16 declares:

“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made (*God's formation of the baby within the womb*): marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well (*the development of a baby is a marvelous work of God*). My substance (*the early stages of the development of a baby that follows conception*) was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret (*God creates life in the secret of the mother's womb*), and curiously wrought (*skillfully woven together – God is the Divine*

Weaver) in the lowest parts of the earth (*a metaphorical expression describing the mother's womb*). Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect (*the unformed mass of a baby from conception to its early stages of development*); and in thy book (*God's mind is compared to a book of remembrance of all living people – including babies inside the womb!*) all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned (*molded – God is the Divine Potter*), when as yet there was none of them” (*even before all the hands, feet, legs, arms, and fingers of the baby are formed, God had them recorded down, and throughout the course of time the folded unperfected mass of a baby developed and became a fully formed baby*).



In a speck of watery material smaller than the dot over the letter “i” all the future characteristics of the child are programmed - the color of his skin, eyes and hair, the shape of his facial features, the natural abilities he will have. All that the child will be physically and mentally is contained in germ form in that fertilized egg. From it will develop: “60 trillion cells, 100 thousand miles of nerve fiber, 60 thousand miles of vessels carrying blood around the body, 250 bones, to say nothing of joints, ligaments and muscles” (Radmacher). We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

You will notice that David talks about creation (not evolution) as it pertains to his life in the womb. He also uses the personal pronouns “I” and “my” which indicates a baby is a person from the time of conception and all through the process of formation within the womb (Psalm 139:15-16). The moment the egg is fertilized the formation of a baby begins and life has sprung forth from the divine Maker. David exclaims how we are “fearfully” and “wonderfully” made or awesomely and marvelously created by God. David marveled and was astonished at God’s amazing power in creating him by the birth process.

Here is the important point. The Christian should accept himself as God created him and this lies at the heart of a sense of well-being and spiritual development. One man told his daughter that her birthmark was from God. He said, “She was kissed

by an angel.” Okay, the dad’s theology was off, but his heart was right. He wanted his daughter to know that God made her a certain way, that she could accept herself in the way God created here and find fulfillment in God’s plan and purpose.

In one sense, we are born with what someone has called “the unchangeables” or those features over which we have no control. This truth leads into our study on outward beauty.

Someone remarked:
“When you look at someone else’s life,
Thinking that it’s better than your own,
Just remember what God’s given you
Was designed for you alone.”

Certain basics were chosen for me by God, and I must accept them as being part of His wise providence and loving provision. We must learn to be content with the way God has created us. This not only is true of our sexual orientation but also the features of our body. Sex-change operations are an attack against the way God has uniquely created the human race.

Genesis 1:27

“So God created man (adam – humanity or mankind - the male headship title which would also generically designate both the male and female) in his own image (patterned after God’s likeness – morally, intellectually, spiritually, constitutionally – something that Adam and Eve equally shared), in the image of God created he him (the man who represents humanity); male and female created he them” (further describing what the term “man” means with the indication and understanding that both the man and woman would share in the image of God under the umbrella of the name man).

Here is the point. You don’t get to choose your gender or your looks. To change from one gender to another is a form of rebellion against God! Have you ever seen pictures of the Hollywood stars who have had seven makeovers? They begin to look deformed!. The push for cosmetic surgery today is mostly a vain motivation that stems from being at odds with the will and purpose of the Creator.

Real beauty is about being comfortable in your own skin. It's about knowing and accepting who you are through God's creative touch upon your life. Of course, this is not to say there is not a place and time for cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery is not inherently sinful. Doctors can improve certain deformities in children today. There is difference between people wanting a makeover to make themselves younger and more sexually provocative and surgeons reworking someone's facial features following a car accident or some other trauma.

An ad in the newspaper read: "Introducing the eyes you wish you had been born with!" The add suggests God has shortchanged some of us when He was handing out eyes! But if God would have wanted us to be born with different color eyes, He would have given them to us. We must accept God's role in creation as it pertains to our sex, but also in relation to our body and looks The features of our body were given to us by God. Our racial mix and the color of our skin was given to us by God. We should not reject our racial background. Furthermore, all the limitations, defects, and deformities we have ultimately come from God.

Exodus 4:11

"And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?"

Our limitations and handicaps also come from God; therefore, we must accept them as being part of His divine will and wise purpose. Of course, none of this means we cannot help those who were created with deformities to somehow improve their life.

The point is this. God has created us and called us to accept who we are and realize that whatever we have been given comes from an all-wise, loving God. One Christian man told me that "this is the hand that God dealt to him" but the way he said it seemed to suggest that he was at odds with His Creator. We should not strive with God or complain to Him about our looks and the way He has chosen to create and make us.

Isaiah 45:9

"Woe unto him that striveth (*complain, wrangle, debate*) with his Maker! *Let the potsherd (a piece of pottery) strive with the potsherds of the earth (the makers of*

pottery). Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?"

The point is obvious. The creature should not usurp authority over the Creator and His creative ways and purposes which include His specific design for men and women and the distinction among the sexes. We should accept who we are via God's creative act – divine fiat.

As we reflect on the way God created us, we must ask a relevant question. What about tattoos, extreme piercings (nose, lip, tongue, naval rings) and other things that people are doing with their bodies today? In the push for what some claim to be outward beauty people are going to extremes and reverting back to pagan practices.

I read about one man that had 135 piercings over his body! It used to be that only inmates and motorcycle gangs wore tattoos. They were a sign of sadistic and rebellious culture that refused to submit to God's creative design and ownership. This is why God condemned the practice of marking oneself in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:28). Today Christians embrace these types of things in the name of outward adornment or beauty but these extreme cultural practices, which revert back to heathenism, center upon pride, self, and they are designed to glorify people – not God.

Be careful that you do not fall into the trap which says, "Look at me" instead of "Look at God." To want others to look and dwell upon us is nothing less than prideful spirit. The tattoo and body piercing cultural craze of today is not based on inward beauty but the outward. It is the attempt to glorify oneself – not God.

1 John 2:16

"For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

Pride and self-centeredness are at the heart of many cultural expressions today. If we learn to accept who we are by creative design, we will not be prone to promote the signs of cultural rebellion against God and use our bodies to promote heathenism and excess to draw attention to ourselves. We need to rediscover the

security that comes from knowing God and submitting to His creative purpose and ownership of our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19).

Of course, accepting who we are by God's creative hand does not mean we should fail to maintain good hygiene and appearance before others. It's natural to care for our bodies (Eph. 5:29). It's important to also discipline our bodies, a discipline that stems from the inner work and power of God (1 Cor. 9:24-27). However, we must beware of falling into the cultural trap of not accepting who we are by God's creative hand and who we are in Christ. When we overemphasize outward beauty at the expense of inward beauty, we have taken the bait the modern culture offers to us. "You can change the way you look. You can have what you never had before. You can be young forever. You can look sexy. You can impress others. For three easy payments of 39.95 you can transform your figure and looks." It goes on and on!

1 Peter 3:3-5 addresses the importance of balance in the area of outward versus inward beauty when speaking to Christian women: "Whose adorning (*outward decoration and arrangement of the human body – we get our word cosmetics from this word*) let it not be that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair (*excessive arrangement of the hair in braids, the interweaving of the hair*), and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel (*showy and extravagant and ostentatious display of clothing which leads to excess and prideful display*); But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart (*our inner self or human spirit and heart from which we manifest spiritual traits and qualities*), in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit (the inner spiritual adornment of a humble, gentle disposition and tranquil, calm, non-temperamental spirit that flows forth from a heart that is in tune with God)*, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands."

Peter reminds us what society prizes and what God prizes. Society emphasizes the outward, but God emphasized the inward. The world prizes costly clothing and gold jewelry but a woman with a gentle and quiet spirit is precious to God. The old saying is true: "Beauty is more than skin deep." True beauty comes from within and not from without. If we are going to balance our Christian life in the area of outward adornment, we must remember this. It's much better to "wear" inside that which God sees as "expensive" than to wear outside what others see as "expensive." What

is precious to God is humility, Christian character, and spiritual graces that originate from the new nature within us which are then manifested through our daily living.

Don't misunderstand Peter's teaching. Peter did not state that women should not wear jewelry and nice clothes. He is not saying that a women should not attempt to make herself pretty for her husband. Read the Song of Solomon!

Song of Solomon 1:15

"Behold, thou *art* fair, my love; behold, thou *art* fair; thou *hast* doves' eyes."

In this day it was not false eyelashes that were important but that you possessed dove's eyes!

Song of Solomon 2:10

"My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."

Song of Solomon 4:1

"Behold, thou *art* fair, my love; behold, thou *art* fair; thou *hast* doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair *is* as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead."

Men, if I can put it in the vernacular of the 70's, "We should be flipped out over our wife!" This is what we see in the Song of Solomon. A healthy marriage recognizes the physical beauty in each partner. In fact, we should seek to keep ourselves attractive to our marriage partner. One failure in a marriage can be the failure to please our partner by maintaining a sense of beauty and dignity as it relates to the human body. Sometimes we can fail in this area. We become sloppy and do convey physical beauty and intimacy to one another.

There is nothing wrong with lipstick and makeup. Just don't overdo it.

In fact, one Christian lady said, "Inner beauty is great, but a little lipstick never hurts." This is what Peter is teaching.

Men go to the paint section to get touch up paint for their garage and barn. Ladies also go to another paint section in the department store to get their own type of

paint. There is nothing wrong with embracing and enhancing your beauty. But ladies, remember that this is not to be your focus in life.

Someone said:

“You inner beauty never needs makeup!”

Here is the point. Peter is not condemning beauty. He is simply teaching that Christian wives should not think of outer attire as the source of genuine beauty. This is because the true beauty is seen in the spirit and the marks of inner godliness which are evidenced in godly living.

We are called upon to not overdo it when it comes to our adornment, our dress and overall appearance with hair, jewelry, and such like. Our goal should not be to attract attention to ourselves by our outward appearance but to attract attention to God by our virtuous and godly living. In other words, don't strut around like a peacock attempting to be showy and extagant. Rather, concentrate on the important thing which is your inner beauty (your inner spiritual life) which will eventually be witnessed outwardly through godly virtues and spiritual living. You created true beauty with your spiritual demeanor, attitude, behavior, and your actions.



1 Timothy 2:9 speaks to the same issue of inner beauty versus outward beauty: “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel (*orderly arranged or respectful clothing – avoiding extravagant and ostentation clothing and appearance but also by extension sensual, lustful, and seductive dress*), with shamefacedness (reverence, in a becoming manner) and sobriety (*possessing self-control and discipline, curbing one's impulses and desires to show off the body*); not with broided (*braided or woven*) hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.”

What was happening in the local churches was that some of the women were attending the services wearing elaborate hairstyles, ornate jewelry, and extremely

expensive clothing. They wanted to draw attention to themselves and look better than some of the poorer women who could not afford the same kind of ostentatious and extravagant dress. They wanted to show off themselves before others. The services were becoming more like a beauty pageant than a Bible Church.

In this case, the immodest or lack of orderliness and decorum of the women had to do with their excess and exotic display of clothing and hairdos. Therefore, Paul states, “not with braided (braided or woven) hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.” In other words, don’t come to church to show off your expensive dress and extravagant appearance. Don’t overdo it. Dress in a modest fashion that does not attract attention to yourself.

Of course, overdressing is not the only way women can be immodest or disorderly in their attire. It can also apply to underdressing. They can dress in an immodest or irreverent manner to show off their female bodies. They can dress in a sensual and seductive manner designed to allure men. This seems to be a growing problem today not only in the culture outside the church but also within the church.

The Bible still teaches modesty (orderliness, reverence) in the area of dress. This would apply to both extravagance and seductive attire. Many Christian women have lost the “holy blush” of modesty. Instead of blushing at immodesty they seek to promote immodesty for the culture says being sexy is what counts. As a mother, you must set the example for your children and teach them about modesty. Much of the apparel for women today is either too high, too low, or too tight which is unbecoming to Biblical womanhood. A Christian woman should not ignore the godly discipline of her Christian life. Part of this godliness is modesty.

If a Christian possesses “sobriety” or self-control in the area of immodest apparel and ostentatious dress, they are applying moderation and balance to their lives. Paul is teaching the same thing as Peter. We are not to overdo it when it comes to dress and outward adornment. Excess, extravagance, and ostentatious show leads to imbalance in our Christian life. We become focused on the outward instead of the inward. God does not want us to be strutting around like peacocks, showing off ourselves! The world says, “look at me” but God says, “live a godly life.” Both Peter and Paul teach that true beauty lies in our inner qualities of godly fruit and virtues which will become evident in our daily living.

1 Samuel 16:7 gives us this enduring principle to live by:

“But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”

God gave us this statement in the context of choosing a right king. Saul was tall, dark, and handsome. Although David also was a handsome man (vs. 12) he looked or appeared to be too young for major service. However, to choose a king based on looks instead of character can be disastrous.

Unfortunately, the church today on a large scale, especially on television, has often emphasized, not spirituality, but superficial glamor. The result is that we have TV Christian idols that do not demonstrate true spiritual living before others. Glamor comes before godliness. Vainglory comes before virtues.

The principle of application of what the Bible is teaching here is important. The inward matters more than the outward. Character is more important than the cultural push for outward beauty. Of course, this verse is not denying the importance of possessing your body as a vessel that honors God in its outward living, dress, and overall adornment.

1 Thessalonians 4:4 declares:

“That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.”

Many times what we do with our bodies is a direct signal of what is going on in our hearts. In fact, if spiritual development is occurring inwardly it will eventually be expressed through our outward bodies and living. The Bible does not view stewardship of the outward body as being unimportant. What the Scriptures teach is that our outward should not replace or override our inward virtues of godliness and spirituality.

The world and culture of today emphasizes the outward at the expense of the inward. We need to balance our Christian life between the outward and inward, always making sure that our inner beauty far exceeds our outward beauty. We are not to overdo the outward. When we become involved in excess we begin to promote ourselves, glorify ourselves, and miss out on glorifying God and concentrating on the inner beauty and godliness that we are to possess before God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

To glorify God means we are bringing praise to God through our daily actions and living. We get our word doxology from the word “glory.” Glorifying God means that we are properly representing God by our life, body, and living and therefore bringing praise to God.



IMBALANCE: When we seek the attention of others and focus on too much outward beauty, we lose the real purpose for Christian living, which is to focus on inward beauty, the adornment of our inner heart that is controlled by the Holy Spirit and manifesting godly fruit.

BALANCE: We can dress nice, maintaining a sense of beauty and dignity related to the body God has created for us, while at the same time place our primary focus and attention upon our inner growth.

Being honest, someone wrote:

“A beautiful appearance will last a few decades, but a beautiful personality will last a lifetime.”

Blessed our the balanced!

XII. Giving and God

Introduction: One Sunday morning a 6-year-old son was busy getting dressed for Sunday school. When it was time for the family to leave, the little boy came out of his room carrying his entire stock of neckties. When the mother asked him why he was doing this, he eagerly replied, “Cause, Mom, Reverend Wyser told us to put our ties in the offering!”

There was a knock on the door of the hut occupied by a missionary in Africa. Answering, the missionary found one of the native boys holding a large fish in his hands. The boy said, "Reverend, you taught us what tithing is, so here--I've brought you my tithe." As the missionary gratefully took the fish, he questioned the young lad. "If this is your tithe, where are the other nine fish?" At this, the boy beamed and said, "Oh, they're still back in the river. I'm going back to catch them now."

This little boy had learned the most important lesson in giving. It really wasn't the lesson of tithing but the lesson of love and appreciation that was motivated by grace which was at work in his heart. This young lad was willing to give to the Lord because his heart was captured by God's goodness. This is what caused him to give.

Many people have asked me about tithing for New Testament believers. Some have an axe to grind when it comes to the subject of tithing. I always tell them the same thing. There is not one verse in the New Testament that speaks of tithing. There is no command given to the local churches by Paul or any other apostle that we must tithe or else lose God's blessing. The tithe was a method of giving designed to support the nation of Israel under the Mosaic Law. In fact, the giving under the Old Testament Law was more than just a tithe or ten percent. Actually, an Israelite gave over 23 percent of his total earnings to support the theocracy of Israel.

If preachers were honest, especially those who believe in dispensationalism (God has different ways of working throughout different economies and ages), they would conclude that the institution of tithing was specifically related to Israel. But most of them are scared that they will lose a lot of money in the offering plate if they don't pound their people to tithe their money. Honestly, many churches would suffer financially if people did not give generously and tithe their money. This part of our study is not a call for any of God's people to stop tithing but to do so motivated by grace and without the fear of God's reprisal.

Any Christian who does tithe, giving ten percent of their total earnings to the Lord's work is giving sacrificially. And this should be the desire and attitude of God's saints. We should want to give sacrificially to support God's work. In the end, whatever percent we end up giving to God's work (sometimes it might be more than ten percent!) it should always be sacrificial and from the heart. We should give generously out of a willing heart that has been touched by God's grace. For many it begins with 10 percent of their income. In a nutshell, this is how we balance out

our Christian life in the area of giving. We give from the heart, and we give sacrificially.

Even Abraham's gift to the priest Melchizedek (perhaps a preincarnate appearance of Christ), a ten percent offering, was given out of gratitude – not as a tax or requirement. Tithing in Abraham's day was not an institutional or a structured pattern for giving. Perhaps it was a custom. We don't know. Some things are scanty in the Old Testament. What we do know is that there were no "tithe police" in this day. Abraham simply gave this specified amount on his own personal initiative and out of appreciation to the priest. So, whatever we choose to give, it should be done with a grateful heart, and the more thankful we are to God, the more we will seek to give His work and cause.

As someone said, "You cannot out-give God." Abraham knew this. But do we believe this today? We must remember this truth when it comes to giving to the local church and missions. Our giving needs to be generous today but it must be balanced with love and joyful spirit.

The Christian financial expert, Larry Burkett, once said:

"The average Christian pays more in interest than he gives to the Lord's work. In a church of 100 families 37 will give nothing."

Yes, balancing the Christian life in the area of finance means that we are to give a portion of our earnings or money to God through the local church ministry, while at the same time meet our personal needs within home life. But there is more to giving than this. As mentioned above, much of our giving boils down to possessing a right attitude or spirit when we give and being properly motivated to give because of the grace of God working in our hearts.

How do we balance our Christian life in the area of money and giving to God's work?

1. We must remember that God gives us wealth.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18

"And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of *mine* hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for *it is* he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as *it is* this day."

God is responsible for His people's prosperity. If the people forgot God's mighty acts on their behalf and attributed their wealth to their own power and abilities, the Lord would eventually destroy them as He destroyed the Gentile nations in Canaan. The practical point of this cannot be underestimated. Remembering that God is the One who allows us to earn money is the start of balancing our life in the area of finances. You might say, "I earned this money. I put in my forty or fifty hours. I worked all my life and earned my retirement. Now I'm going to live and do as I please with my money."

A few questions must be asked at this point. Who gave you the life, health, and strength to earn the money? It was God! Who opens doors for us to get a job? It was God. Who gives us the talents to work in a specific field? It was God. Listen, our wealth comes into our lives because of God's blessing. This alone should cause us to want to use our money to honor the Lord in giving to His work and ministry. After all, our wealth is actually the Lord's, and He has given it to us to use as wise stewards.

Since God gave it to us we should be ready to give a portion in return to Him and His work. We need a right perspective on how we have received our wealth. And God's perspective is this – "I gave to you everything that you have." The truth and reality of this should cause our hearts to give out of appreciation and gratitude for all that God has given to us.

The story is told of a woman who had finished shopping and returned to her car. She found four men inside the car. She dropped her shopping bags, drew a handgun, and screamed, "I have a gun, and I know how to use it! Get out of the car!"

Those men did not wait for a second invitation; they got out and ran like crazy. The woman, somewhat shaken, loaded her shopping bags and then got into the car. But no matter how she tried, she could not get her key into the ignition. Then it dawned on her: her car was parked four or five spaces away!

She loaded her grocery bags into her own car and then drove to the police station to turn herself in. The desk sergeant to whom she told the story nearly fell off his chair laughing.

He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four men were reporting a carjacking by an old woman with thick glasses and curly white hair, less than five feet tall, and carrying a large handgun. No charges were filed.

Here is the lesson we learn. The woman thought it was her car, but it really belonged to someone else. In a similar way, we sometimes think our lives and our finances are our own, but they really belong to God. When we remember that the wealth we have is from the Lord and is the Lord's it will help us to maintain a balance in our giving. We will not hoard it but be ready to share with God's work and use it for His glory.

2. We must follow God's instruction for giving.



When we understand how God wants us to give, we will be able to balance out our Christian life in the area of financial giving. We will gain a better understanding on how to give and what to give in relation to our daily needs in life.

What is God's plan for New Testament giving? The New Testament teaches how we are to give.

➤ Systematically

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

In this verse we have a very strong indication that the early Christians no longer regarded the Sabbath or seventh day as an obligatory observance. They were meeting on Sunday – the first day of the week. The reason was because Jesus Christ had risen on the first day of the week, The disciples gathered together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). Now they were to lay something aside during the week for the poor saints of Jerusalem. We learn from this that that the early church had a time for giving within the local assembly life. They were to save

a certain amount of money to give to God's work. This suggests there was a systematic way to save and give which was according to apostolic instruction. The saints were not to spend all their money during the week but allocate a portion of money for God's work and service.

What every local church needs today is systematic giving from God's people. Without supplying the basic needs of a local church ministry, it cannot continue to function. Gifts were to be given by the people to the local church in a consistent and systematic fashion. Our money can quickly take wings and fly away from us, but we must remember the importance of systematic giving. The Christian should learn early on to set aside a gift that he or she can give to the Lord every Sunday.

An unknown person said:

"Some Christians give to the Lord's work weekly; others just give weakly."

When I give systematically I am balancing my Christian giving.

➤ Proportionately

We also see in this verse that the saints were to give proportionally ("as *God* hath prospered him" – 1 Cor. 16:2).

You cannot give more than God has blessed you with, but we are called upon to give a portion of God's financial blessing which He has given to us. This same principle of giving is seen elsewhere. 2 Corinthians 8:11 says we are to give "also out of what which ye have" (not what you don't have). The Bible gives us instruction that we are always to give to God's work on a proportionate basis. This means are giving might change in accordance with the amount of money we have earned. Some months we might be able to give more than other months. It depends on how God has blessed us financially.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke 1 out of every 6 verses deals with money. Of the 29 parables Christ told, 16 deal with a person and his money. So those who say money does not matter to God are only fooling themselves. They are trying to get away from the Lord's instruction on giving. Money does matter and we must learn to give systemically and proportionally in accordance with God's financial blessing upon our lives.

When I give proportionately I am balancing my Christian giving.

➤ Willingly

Free will giving has always been God's overall plan for giving. No matter what dispensation, God has always wanted His people to give willingly, which means with a free and open spirit based on one's thanksgiving to God. When a person gives willingly they are giving voluntarily. Their giving is seen as a free gift which they give to the local church without any demands, laws, or pressure hanging over their heads.

In both Old and New Testaments, we find that God's people were instructed to give an offering on a freewill basis, voluntarily, as a gift given to God's House. In the Old Testament the freewill offering that the people gave was separate from the required tithe and reflects God's design for all true giving.

Leviticus 22:18 speaks of "all his freewill offerings, which they will offer unto the Lord for a burnt offering." Numbers 15:3 mentions "a freewill offering" and Ezra 3:5 said that "every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord." This is how you get things done on the church today!

The Old Testament repeatedly indicates that God's people gave their freewill offerings before the Lord (Lev. 22:21, 23; 23:38; Numb. 15:3; 29:39; Duet. 12:6, 17; 16:10; 23:23; 2 Chron. 31:14; Ezra 1:4, 6). There was no percentage or exact requirement for freewill giving. It was just that – free will. This is the same manner that God instructs believers to give today during the Church Age. They are to give willingly and freely without any mandatory requirements hanging over their heads.

2 Corinthians 8:3

"For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves."

Here we see the importance of a willing heart. This is a heart that is free to give on a voluntary basis. It's a person who gives a gift of whatever amount of money the Lord lays on their heart.

2 Corinthians 8:11-12 goes on to say:

“Now therefore perform the doing *of it*; that as *there was* a readiness to will, so *there may be* a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to that a man hath, *and* not according to that he hath not.”

Once again, we see the importance of possessing an inward willingness or desire to share your finances with the local churches. Our giving must originate from within our hearts. It should be a voluntary gift that comes from our own desire and volition, a gift we want to give to help the local churches. This reminds us that whatever amount we give, we must do it with a willing heart.

2 Corinthians 9:7 adds:

“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart (*free will, free-spirited giving – without any demands and requirements*), so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

This also illustrates that our giving should be voluntary which originates from our own personal decision. It means we are to give freely as we please to help the local church ministry. Our giving should not be the result of coaxing, threatening, and other manipulative tactics.

1 Timothy 6:18 concludes:

“That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” (share with others).

Our giving should always be characterized by an inward willingness and deep desire to help the local church. It is a personal choice to reach out and help the local church financially with our voluntary gifts.

The universal law regarding giving, which God established prior to the Mosaic Law, during the time of the Mosaic Law, and after the Mosaic Law (Church age) is not tithing but freewill giving. This is the true manner of giving. When we give willingly, it means that we are giving our money as a gift to the local church, a gift that comes from one’s heart, a gift that is given without someone else deciding what we give.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:8, “freely ye have received, freely give.” This is the only true way to give! Our gifts to the Lord are to be given as a free will offering out of gratitude and thanksgiving for what we have received from the Lord. The practice of giving, by its very nature, must be a gift or freewill offering. When a person gives a gift to the Lord he does so without obligation. A gift is something given voluntarily. God’s plan for all true giving deals with freewill voluntary offerings. Of course, Paul does instruct the believers to give systematically and proportionately (1 Cor. 16:2) but he does not demand the people to give an exact percentage or amount from their income. They were to give to God’s work and ministry out of a willing heart.

An unknown person once said:

“All we can hold in our dead hands is what we have given away.”

Jesus taught in Acts 20:35:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

This familiar verse reminds us that greater blessing and joy comes into our lives when we give rather than receive. If you want to have a life of blessing and fullness, then you must learn to give to the work of the Lord. You must learn to sacrifice your money to God.

Winston Churchill used to say: “We make a living by what we get out of life, but we make a life by what we give.”

➤ Generously

2 Corinthians 8:2

“How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.”

“Liberality” means generosity that is free of any self-serving motive. This word “liberality” is derived from a word in the Greek language that means sincerity, mental honesty, or genuineness. It suggests giving without hypocrisy and without self-seeking spirit. It entails openness of heart or single-mindedness as one gives generously and bountifully to the Lord’s work. I have often said that the only thing a Christian should be liberal in is their giving!

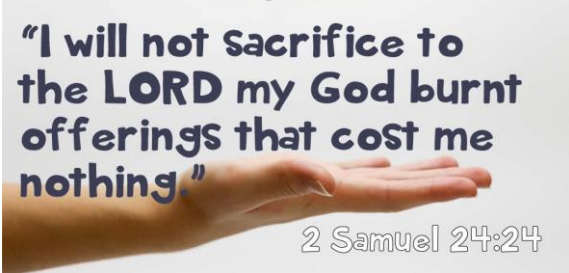
Liberal givers result in the church moving forward in God's plan and purpose. Liberal givers ignite church ministry. Liberal givers make a difference in God's work. So, be liberal in your giving!

When I give generously I am balancing my Christian giving.

➤ Sacrificially

I might give bountifully to God's work, but I must also practice giving sacrificially. When I give sacrificially, it means I sometimes give in a manner where it puts a bigger hole in my bank account. I can at certain times pour more of my earnings into God's work. This is called stretching our finances more than usual. It means we give extra finances for special times to help the work of God.

Sacrificial Giving



"I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing."

2 Samuel 24:24

David said in 2 Samuel 24:24: "neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing."

Someone said:

"Plenty of people are willing to give God credit, yet few are willing to give Him cash."

This was not the case with the poor Macedonian Christians.

2 Corinthians 8:2-3

"How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality (*generosity of bountifulness*). For to *their* power (*ability*), I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power (*ability*) *they were* willing of themselves."

When someone gives "beyond" their ability it means they are digging deep! They are sacrificing in their giving. It means that on special occasions they find a way to give more than they usually would give. The account of the widow's giving in Luke 21:1-4 illustrates the same type of sacrificial giving. She only gave two mites, which

was a very small amount of money. In that sense, she gave according to her ability. On the other hand, she could have kept one mite to herself, but she gave beyond her ability. She gave sacrificially. We need to open up our wallets and give to God's ministry sacrificially, with an overflowing heart of thanksgiving.

Someone said:

"It's not a matter of how much of my money I will give to God, but how much of God's money will I keep for myself."

On a rare occasion Spurgeon went to preach to a small gathering of believers. He had been promised reimbursement of his expenses, but someone had warned him they were a miserly crowd, and if his sermon struck too hard at their pet sins, they would withhold their gifts to show their displeasure. After delivering a powerful, soul-convicting message, he had to take the offering himself. Seeing no collection box, he took his hat from a nearby chair and passed it to the few disturbed-looking individuals. When it was returned, nothing had been contributed, but Spurgeon was equal to the occasion. Bowing his head, he said, "I thank Thee, Lord, that these skinflints have at least given me back my old hat!"

When I give generously I am balancing my Christian giving. And I won't shortchange God!

➤ Joyfully

2 Corinthians 8:2 reveals the joy of giving:

"How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (*bountifulness, generosity*).

2 Corinthians 9:7

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

We are not to give the Lord's money in a reluctant manner. To give "grudgingly" means to give out of sorrow, heaviness, sadness, or grief. We say as the offering plate goes by, "Well, there goes another 20 dollars." The word indicates an attitude of depression, regret, and reluctance. Nor are we to give "of necessity" which means "out of law" and duty. The word refers to external pressure which includes

coaxing and compulsion. This is the legalistic way to give; it's giving with form without heart. This kind of giving occurs when we are pressured to give, or else, and when we give only because we feel obligated to do so. This is not free will giving. It's not true giving.

True giving is when we give "cheerfully." The Greek word "hilaros" literally means to give hilariously. It speaks of giving in a merry or happy fashion, with overflowing joy. This is the true spirit of giving. It is giving without a gun pointed at your head, without external pressure, and without any regrets. We give in a joyous mood of overflowing happiness when contemplating what God has done for us.

A mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church. "Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did."

I think the little girl missed the point! She was not balanced in the area of her giving.

The Baptist preacher Dr. George W. Truett accepted an invitation from a church to preach the dedication sermon for their new building. He arrived at the church about ten minutes before the service started, and was told that the church needed to raise \$6,500 by the next day in order to finish paying for the building. The church officers told him that they were depending on him to raise the money.

Dr. Truett preached the sermon then said, "These men bid me to tell you that you must give \$6,500 in cash, which is all due tomorrow. Will you provide it?" After Dr. Truett's appeal, began the slowest, most reluctant, most Christ-shaming offering he had ever witnessed. After thirty minutes they had \$3,000—not even half of what they needed. Dr. Truett said, "What do you expect of me? I am your guest. I do not happen to have the other \$3,500. What do you expect of me?"

A little woman rose and addressed her husband who was at the front of the church recording what was given. With pity in her voice she said, "Charley, I have wondered if you would be willing for us to give our little cottage just paid out of debt. We were

offered \$3,500 in cash for it yesterday. We were told we could get it at the bank any time in ten days, if we chose to make the trade.

“Charley, I have wondered if you would be willing for us to give our little house to Christ, that His house may be free. When we remember, Charley, that Christ gave His life for us, I wonder if we ought not to give this little house to Him.” Charlie responded in the same spirit, “Jennie, dear, I was thinking of the same thing. We will give \$3,500.”

Silence reigned for a minute and then grown men began sobbing, and almost in a moment that \$3,500 was given by men and women who for the last half hour had either refused to give or had given grudgingly.

Many visitors had come for the special service, and before an invitation was given men and women came down every aisle in the church wanting to be saved. The gratefulness of that one couple for what the Lord had done for them and their desire to give to Him prompted others to give and many were saved as a result of it.

When I give joyfully I am balancing my Christian giving.

➤ Lovingly

2 Corinthians 8:8

“I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.’

All their giving was rooted in their sincere love for others, and above all else, for Jesus Christ. Stewardship begins with love - not giving. When we love God and others we won't have to be coaxed to give our money. We won't have to be pressured to give to God's work and ministry. It will automatically flow forth from our hearts and lives.

Amy Carmichael once said:

“You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.”

This is what we see happening in the hearts of the Macedonian Christians as they gave to the poor saints of Jerusalem. Their outpouring of love was witnessed by their generous giving. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love and our love will be known by our giving!

When I give lovingly I am balancing my Christian giving.

➤ Graciously

Giving graciously means to give out of kindness and grace as we are being motivated and moved by both the message and work of grace in our hearts. To keep our giving in balance, grace must be the motivating factor. When I speak of giving graciously, as it pertains to New Testament giving, I don't mean to merely give sacrificially, but to give out of gratitude for God's grace, without any specific demand or law. I must learn the secret of all New Testament giving which is to give while being motivated by the grace of God. The background is the collection of the money for the support of the poor saints in Jerusalem. The Macedonians were stirred to give as a result of God's work of grace upon their hearts. Now the Corinthians should also be motivated to give out of the same inner work of grace.

2 Corinthians 8:1

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit (make known and understand) of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia."

The context of this chapter is dealing with the subject and practice of grace giving which refers to being motivated by God's grace to give sacrificially to His cause and work. This grace is the spiritual work of God that enabled the Macedonians to give sacrificially. It was the impression of grace upon their hearts, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which resulted in them giving sacrificially to God's cause.

Since these Macedonian Christians gave out of their deep poverty Paul said that God's grace was bestowed upon them in a special way. What Paul was referring to was how the message of God's grace was operating in their hearts and lives in connection with their ministry of giving. In other words, the message and meaning of God's grace, regarding the sacrificial giving of Jesus Christ had so touched and inspired their hearts, that they were willing to reflect this same attitude and expression in their own giving.

2 Corinthians 8:9 reveals the greatest illustration of grace in giving:

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

If Jesus demonstrated grace and kindness to us, we can also demonstrate grace to others through giving. Grace giving means that as Christians we give being motivated by the message and example of God’s grace as seen in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

In a general way, grace giving is the result of the sanctifying work of God’s grace occurring in our hearts. It is the grace of sanctification and service taking place in our hearts so we can do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). The inner movement of God in our hearts stirs us to give sacrificially. More specifically, grace giving occurs when God in a special way is working in our hearts, reminding us of the grace bestowed upon us through Calvary’s cross (2 Cor. 8:9), while at the same time impressing upon our hearts and enabling us to give in a similar manner (out of kindness and sacrifice) to His work and cause. Grace giving is when we sacrificially give out of the kindness and benevolence of our own hearts. It’s the result of God’s inner movement and work in our spirit to give in the same gracious manner He gave to us (John 3:16; Gal. 2:20). The focus of grace should always be at the center of our giving. A heart in tune with grace will result in sacrificial giving. This is what grace giving is all about.

“Come Thou fount of every blessing
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.”

God also tunes our heart to give by grace as well! Dear friend, we need to allow grace to stir our hearts again! We need a fresh stirring in our hearts of God’s amazing grace! When this happens, we will learn the secret of giving out of grace, being moved by the message of God’s grace, and giving sacrificially.

2 Corinthians 8:6-7 speaks of this same kind of giving:

“Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also (*the grace related to giving*). Therefore, as ye abound in every *thing*, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also” (*the grace of giving*).

A grace gift refers to a financial gift that is given out of the kindness of person's heart, a heart that is motivated to give because of God's grace. Once again, grace giving is referring to being stirred and motivated to give to God's work because of the impression of grace upon one's heart. Our motivation for giving should not originate from external pressure but the internal working of grace. The "same grace also" and "this grace" refers to the spiritual movement or work of God in their hearts which focused on the message of God's grace. As a result, these Christians gave in the same manner and were said to be grace givers! The same should be true of us today.

Elsewhere Paul talks about "the exceeding grace of God in you" (2 Cor. 9:14) working in the hearts of God's people. New Testament giving is to be done out of a sense of gratitude for God's grace and with the motivation of God's grace at work in the heart. It should never be viewed as a mere obligation, law, tithe, or anything that pertains to external pressure.

When I give graciously, being motivated by grace, I am balancing my Christian giving.

➤ Submissively

2 Corinthians 8:5

"And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

When the Bible says "they first gave themselves to the Lord" it means that as believers, submission to the lordship of Christ was the underlying premise that prompted them to give. Everything begins with surrendering to the lordship of Jesus Christ over your life. I do not believe in the teaching of Lordship Salvation, but I absolutely believe in lordship Christian living!

If Jesus Christ is truly Lord over our lives, then we will give to God's work! We won't be stingy givers but sacrificial givers.

When I give submissively, in a surrendered fashion, I am balancing my Christian giving. The thing to remember is that when I am following God's guidelines and plan for giving, I can be sure that I remain balanced in my approach to financially giving

to God's work and service. I will stay on track and not become a miser or miss opportunities that God has for me to give.

➤ Secretly

Jesus taught in Matthew 6:3:

"But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

This statement on giving has puzzled many people over the years. It's obvious that Jesus was using a graphic figure of speech to remind everyone that our charitable giving should be done in secrecy – not in the open where we can gain notoriety. We should not give to be seen of others (Matt. 6:1,5).

To remain balanced in our giving, we should, as much as possible, give without others knowing about it. We can give in secrecy and the Father will know it and reward us openly someday.

Charles Spurgeon and his wife, according to a story in the Chaplain magazine, would sell, but refused to give away the eggs their chickens laid. Even close relatives were told, "You may have them if you pay for them." As a result, some people labeled the Spurgeons greedy and grasping.

They accepted the criticisms without defending themselves, and only after Mrs. Spurgeon died was the full story revealed. All the profits from the sale of eggs went to support two elderly widows. Because the Spurgeons were unwilling to let their left hand know what the right hand was doing (Matthew 6:3), which means they gave in secrecy, they endured the attacks in silence.

It's important to remain balanced in our giving to God's work. Giving systematically, proportionately, willingly, generously, sacrificially, joyfully, lovingly, graciously, submissively, and secretly will keep us balanced in our financial giving to God's ministry.

Blessed our the balanced!

In concluding this study, I pray that all of us can identify those areas where we need to find some balance in our Christian life. If we are honest, every one of us needs

to examine ourselves and make sure we are living a balanced Christian life. This means we will avoid extremes, focus on the biblical aspects of sanctification, maintain spiritual priorities in our life, and understand how we must properly fear, love, and serve God. We will discover the balance of remaining discerning without turning into saint critic. We can keep patriotic without compromising with the culture, possess a righteous indignation against sin without developing a revengeful spirit, maintain the true beauty of our inner godliness without overemphasizing physical beauty, and learn to give without grudging, when being motivated by God's amazing grace!

In general, when balancing the Christian life, we will enjoy our walk and relationship with the Lord (Phil. 4:4) as we come into a fuller and deeper understanding of who God is and how He views His children. We will develop a reverent relationship with a holy God while at the same time realize He is the closest Friend we have in life.

Remember that God does not exist for us; we exist for God. Therefore, we should seek to honor God with our lives on a daily basis. Blessed are the balanced!