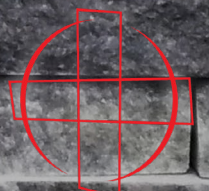


OVERCOME

APRIL 2021

ADULT
CONNECT CLASS
CURRICULUM



DONALD J. WILLS
SENIOR PASTOR

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

This month our topics are the foundation and building-blocks for truly discovering victory in our lives as overcomers. We must ask ourselves: Where does one go to find out how to overcome? Who is the source that enables us to overcome? What is the catalyst that prepares us to overcome? When we overcome how is it manifested in our lives as a believer? Often, to achieve success, we must go back to the basics of an issue to remind ourselves of their importance: We are saved by faith in Christ through His grace by turning from our sin! We cannot overcome apart from fully surrendering to Jesus and following God's holy Word.

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God's Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

Too often, we make what is simple into something very complex. For example, salvation is simple in that Christ has done everything to provide redemption; however, men over time have tried to attach a list of spiritual activities and qualifications in order for someone to attain salvation—creating a very complex religious order. But understanding how to overcome is relatively simple. Read the Bible, apply it in your life, pray, and stay fully surrendered to Christ!

-Blessings
Pastor Don



KAZ E.L.I.T.E.

== GRADES 1-6 ==

Activities for younger children are available to participants and volunteers in Wednesday ministries

Wednesdays • 6:30-8:00 pm

Info & Registration at kaz.fbcbfw.org - click Wednesdays



For Children's Ministry Information & Registration go to
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VBS 2021

AUGUST 1-5 • 6:00-8:30pm

for children 3 Years Old (potty-trained)
through completed 6th Grade

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KAZ Summer Fun Bring your Friends!



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July 15-17



3rd-6th Grade*
*grade completed

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*SAVE \$20—register and pay
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GROUND
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JULY 12 - 16
FOR THOSE COMPLETING GRADES 7-12

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TUESDAY TOPICS

EVERY 2ND TUESDAY, BEGINNING IN APRIL

A Biblical Perspective for a Confused World

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PURCHASE A BOXED LUNCH & DRINK FOR ONLY \$8

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Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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Easter • April 4, 2021

Overcome
through Scripture

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Overcome
through the Savior

[Revelation 12:1-12](#)

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April 18, 2021

Overcome
through Surrender

[Hebrews 10:5-10](#)

45



April 25, 2021

Overcome
through Service

[Romans 12:1-8](#)

April 4, 2021



Overcome through Scripture

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Focal Verse:

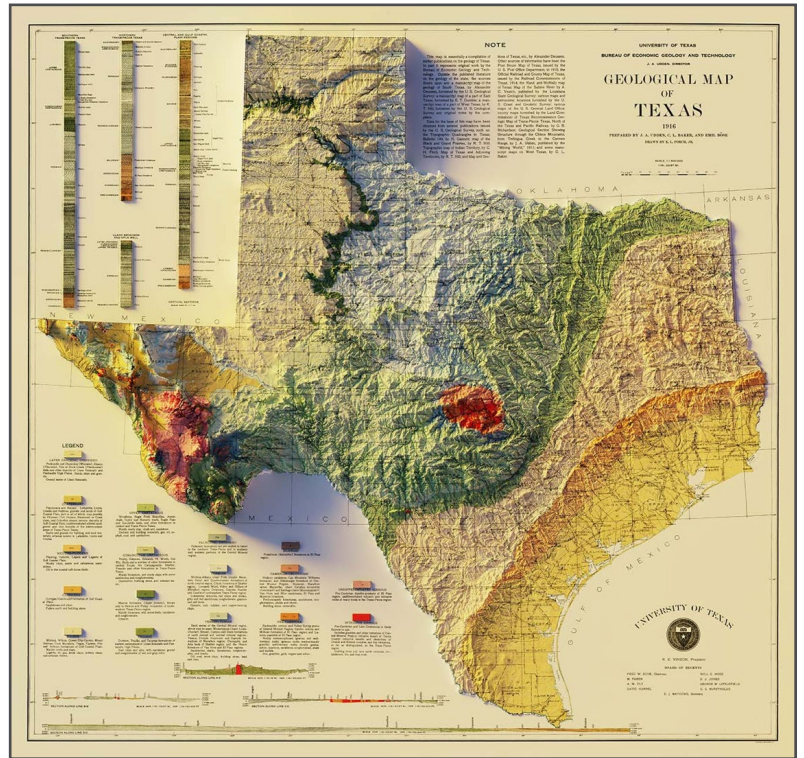
"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

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Introduce

Probably on more than one occasion in our lives, we have had to use a map to get our bearings and point us in the right way or we have had to stop and ask for directions. At other points, we may have regretted our failure to consult a map before embarking upon a journey or our stubbornness in resisting to stop and ask for directions because we strayed off course and found ourselves lost. Maps provide a wealth of information. Not only do they show us the right way to get to our destination, they also show us where we are currently which helps us to stay on track. Although some maps are more detailed than others, they all have the same purpose: to give us direction by detailing the route to our destination. Today, most of us likely enter an address in an App on our phones or use the GPS navigation in our cars rather than carrying a physical map, but it still serves the same purpose. It will alert us as to where we are and what will come next.



When hiking, for example, we should always carry a detailed topographical map and trail guide just in case we become disoriented and lost. We can read the map and look for key physical features which can help us determine where we are. On a topographical map, we can distinguish the different levels in elevation which can help us identify the highest point which we can use as a reference and guide. We can also see the locations of ridgelines, coves, and valleys as well as other natural features like creeks, rivers, and lakes which serve to point us in the right direction. Similarly, trail maps provide additional information, such as manmade structures, historical markers, and trail intersections. When we compare the map with our physical surroundings, we can determine where we are. The map gives us direction while nature offers the proof or evidence we're on the right path by corroborating the truth of the map. Many of us, however, may not hike and some may never use a map. But we've all either received or given verbal directions. Think about how you would give someone

Introduce

directions to your home. You'd likely start by giving them the street names along with what ways to turn. In addition, you'd probably also give them landmarks, such as churches, schools, and businesses, for which they would need to look. In fact, you'd probably say things like, "Turn at the second traffic light, but if you go to such and such street or see this landmark you've gone too far." Again, these verbal directions help people to recognize where they are and keep them on course so that they arrive safely at their destination.

God has given us directions in this same way. Scripture helps us determine where we are right now on life's journey; it keeps us on the right path and it shows us the way to arrive at our final destination. Unlike an earthly map, there is only one way to get to our destination of eternal life. And that way is through Christ alone via His death and resurrection. Scripture not only has foretold of God's plan in Christ through the prophets (Old Testament), but it also provides evidence from eyewitnesses to the events that attest to its truthfulness! God has offered proof that Jesus is His Son and the only way to attain salvation because the tomb remains empty and numerous people can testify to seeing Him physically and bodily after His resurrection. We have no excuse for not knowing the way! God has clearly given it to us through His Word.

Key
Question

To what evidence can you point in Scripture that Jesus is God in the flesh and that He rose from the grave on the third day?

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

THE PREACHING OF SALVATION:

To this point in his letter, Paul has dealt with the questions the Corinthians had, addressed their sinful attitudes and actions, and corrected their misguided beliefs. The Corinthians had become sidetracked, so engrossed in their own individual pursuits that they had forgotten the significance of **the gospel**. They had failed to grasp fully its power to save as well as transform. Because their worship services had become chaotic and self-serving rather than honoring to the Lord, Paul must now remind them about the content of **the gospel** (v. 1). The word translated **I declare** by the NKJV literally means “I make known,” but in this context it’s best translated as “I remind you.” This message isn’t something they’re hearing for the first time! They have **received** it and **stand** upon it. They knew the message cognitively or mentally, but they didn’t practice it. They didn’t live it even though they proclaimed they did! For the most part, the transformative power of **the gospel** was not evident in their daily lives.

We can all agree that telling a lie constitutes sin. After all, Scripture plainly identifies speaking anything other than the truth in way meant to mislead as wrong. We know this cognitively and even profess to believe it. Sometimes, however, we become so self-absorbed that we forget to practice it. Before the days of cell phones, caller ID, and the mass availability of answering machines, we had to answer the phone in order to find out who was calling! Sometimes, if we wanted to screen a call, we would have someone else answer on our behalf. If we didn’t want to talk, we would motion for them to say we were not there. But obviously that’s a lie! Not only have we become so wrapped up in our situation that we have forgotten what God has decreed, but we have also urged someone else to participate in our sinister scheme! Even now with our modern conveniences, we still take the same approach when making excuses for why



Instruct

we ignored a phone call or delayed significantly in responding to a voicemail. In this way, we haven't truly applied what we say we believe about Scripture. The Corinthians found themselves in this same position! They professed to believe in **the gospel**, but didn't apply it fully and consistently.

Paul now reiterates that salvation comes only through **the gospel** which he **preached to** them and will once again remind them of the content of that message beginning in [verse 3](#). Salvation, that is receiving the forgiveness of Christ accomplished on the cross, is a one-time event, but its life-changing effects are on-going. We must remind ourselves of that daily so that we don't revert back to our old, sinful habits! When we have a relationship with Christ, we must strive to live out our salvation by imitating His holiness and displaying His righteousness every day.

For this reason, Paul urges us to examine the genuineness of our beliefs by looking at our behavior. Paul's interjection "**if you hold fast**," therefore, doesn't call into question the power of **the gospel** to save, but it leads us to test the genuineness of our faith. Thus, evidence of our salvation should exist in how we now live according to **the gospel** in what we do, say, and think **unless** we have indeed **believed in vain**. Paul doesn't mean that we can lose our salvation. Rather, he reaffirms that if **the gospel** has not transformed us and there is no evidence of change or no conviction from the Holy Spirit when we sin then we have not **received the gospel** of Christ. In other words, we have no salvation because we never truly **believed** in the first place!

How would you evaluate the genuineness of your belief? What evidence is there that you have been transformed by the gospel?

Question
1

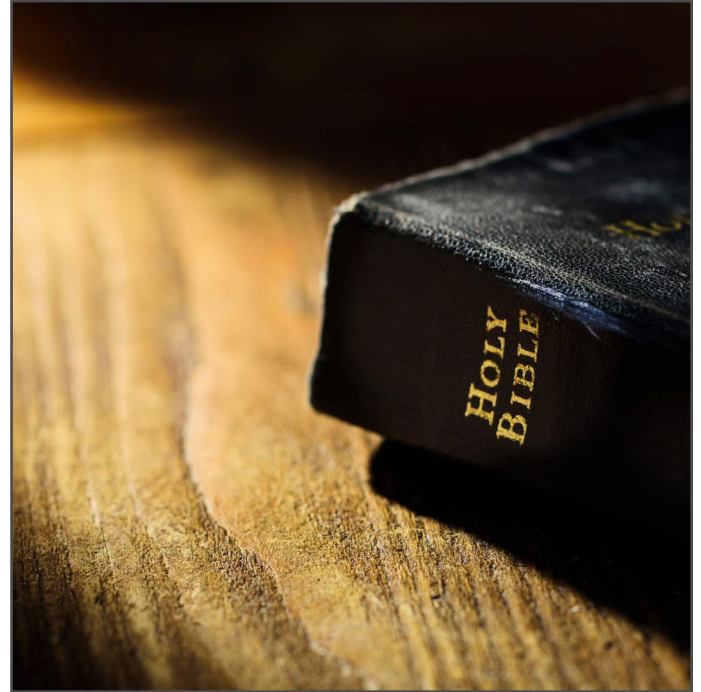
To help us illustrate this point, think of someone who has claimed to have taken a bath—perhaps your child. He will display clear evidence that he has indeed taken a bath. A parent can quickly discern the truthfulness of his statement! He will not have an overwhelming presence of dirt on his body, matted and greasy hair, and an unpleasant stench emanating from him. He will theoretically be completely clean although we as humans can miss a spot here and there. Christ, however, never misses a spot! He completely cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Just as when we take a bath, there will be evidence of His cleansing in our lives in how we act even though as humans we may get in the way at times and follow our own fleshly desires. Even so,

there will be a clear, overwhelming pattern through which we practice righteousness rather than continually live in sin if we truly have a relationship with Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

THE PROMISE IN SCRIPTURE:

Having reminded them about **the gospel** that was **preached** to them, Paul now relates how we find that promise of salvation in Scripture itself. Paul didn't concoct this story on his own. He **delivered** or passed on **that which** he **also received** (v. 3). He didn't receive this message from human tradition or philosophy. It's not simply the best guess of how he thinks things ought to be. What he **preached** came directly from the Lord through **the Scriptures**. Paul emphasizes this same point in Galatians 1:12: "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ." What we think and believe



should come from Scripture. Our opinions and preferences do not matter. If what we believe conflicts with what Scripture says, we stand in opposition to God! And we truly have no leg on which to stand. As our Creator and sovereign Ruler who reigns over the universe, God has the final say.

The message that Scripture contains has two parts fulfilled by one Person. First, it reveals that **Christ died for our sins**. The sacrificial system of animals described in Leviticus was only temporary and really imperfect because it had to be repeated annually and only served as a reminder of sin ([Heb 10:3-4](#)). This system always looked forward to the coming of one greater who could remove sin once-and-for-all ([Heb 10:10](#)). Indeed, the book of Isaiah foretells of the need for one to come through Israel in the lineage of David ([Isa 9:1-6; 11:1](#)) that could save not only Israel but the entire world. There is no greater picture of the Messiah who would bear the sins of the world and usher in salvation than [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#). Isaiah 53:5 asserts, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

In [53:7](#), Isaiah continues to describe Jesus "as a lamb [led] to the slaughter." John the

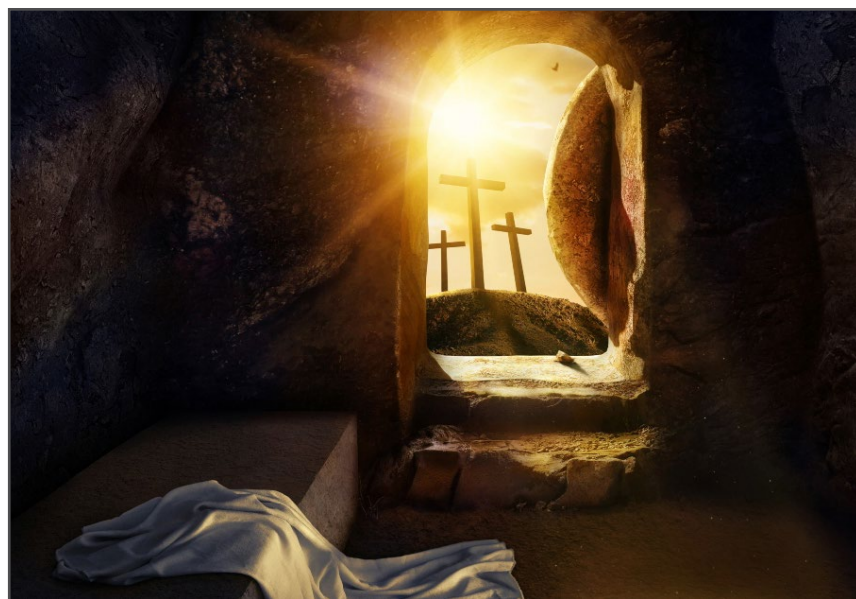
Instruct

Baptist recognized this unique role of Jesus when he saw Him and exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" ([John 1:29](#)). No other sacrifice would do; nothing else could remove the sin of the world and ensure eternal life with the Father in heaven. Christ Himself had to come to do the job! And Scripture has prophesied and foretold us about this single event from the beginning ([Gen 3:15; 15:7](#)). Jesus repeatedly conformed this purpose throughout His earthly ministry. He often warned the disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day" ([Luke 9:22](#)).

Where else in Scripture do we find the promise that Jesus, the Messiah, would die to take away the sins of the world?

Question
2

The story doesn't end in death. There would be no hope in that ([1 Cor 15:12-17](#)). Fortunately, Scripture tells of a second part. As famed radio broadcaster Paul Harvey would always say, "And now for the *rest* of the story." Scripture declares that Jesus **was**



buried and that He **rose again on the third day** (v. 4). No other sacrifice could ever have done this. No other person could have fulfilled this. Jesus is the first and only person to have resurrected from the dead and guarantees that He will do the same for us. To this day no one has been bodily resurrected from the dead to live forever and never die again. Jesus

certainly revived people from the dead like Lazarus ([John 11:43](#)), but they only lived a while longer and died again. Jesus' resurrection differed because it was permanent. Just as Scripture foretold of Jesus' death, it also foretold of His resurrection. Psalm 16:10, speaking of the Messiah, announces, "For You will not leave My soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." Jewish tradition recognized that the body would start to decompose after three days, but three days in the tomb would also

be more than enough evidence to prove that a person had actually died. There was no mistake. Jesus had truly died, but His body had not yet begun to decompose. On that third day, Jesus triumphantly rose from the dead just as He claimed He would! In a debate with Jewish leaders, Jesus declared, “Destroy this temple [His body] and in three days I will raise it up” ([John 2:19-20](#)). Jesus fulfilled the promise of Scripture and in so doing brought life to all those who would receive Him.

What other promises in Scripture have you seen the Lord fulfill in your life?

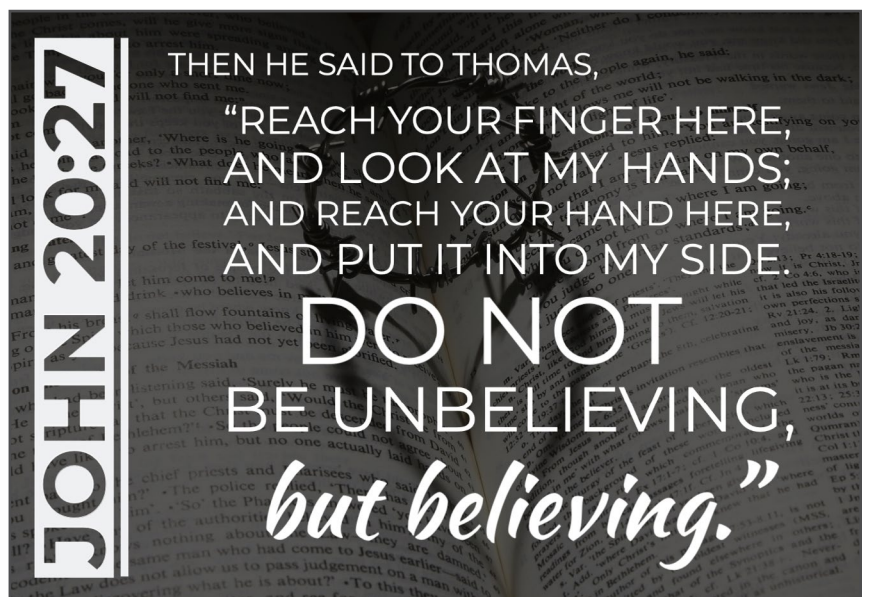
Question
3

1 Corinthians 15:5-8

THE PROOF ABOUT THE SAVIOR:

God not only pens His promises in Scripture, but He also offers proof or evidence that He has fulfilled them. In other words, God backs up His promises with tangible evidence to which we can clearly point! Jesus didn't secretly rise from the dead, only leaving an empty tomb for His followers and the world to wonder what had happened. He appeared to His followers numerous times over many days and in many locations to offer proof He was alive and had risen bodily from the dead! Paul lists a plethora of first-hand evidence. Jesus, for example, **was seen** by Peter (**Cephas**) and **the twelve** (v. 5). **Over five hundred** people saw Him **at once** and many **remain** alive and can testify even though some have already died (v. 6). **James**, His half-brother, saw Him as well as **all the apostles** (v. 7). And finally, Paul himself can testify to having seen the risen Jesus, presumably while on the road to Damascus (v. 8).

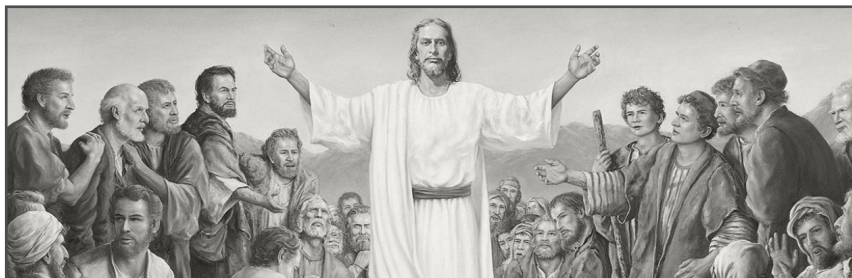
Evidence abounds to support Jesus' resurrection and confirm His identity as God ([Rom 1:1-4](#)). Nevertheless, a number of people still try to dismiss it. Some today will attempt to argue, unconvincingly, that Jesus' appearances were merely hallucinations. So we can give a reasonable defense of our faith, let's examine the reasons why we must reject these appearances as being labeled hallucinations. We will proceed from the “weakest”



argument to the “strongest” which cannot be disputed! First, Scripture clearly notes that Jesus had a physical, bodily presence. Although He could do things that we cannot do such as appear in the middle of a locked room full of people ([John 20:19](#)) or disappear suddenly while talking to two people ([Luke 24:31](#)), He still did ordinary physical things like eat ([Luke 24:30, 43](#)) and He could be touched. Jesus still bore the scars of His crucifixion on His hands, feet, and side, but all else had been healed. Those who doubted, like Thomas, could feel the imprint of the nails and sword ([John 20:24-27](#)). People could theoretically say that they interacted with a hallucination in such a way, but when they would awake from their dream-like state they would realize the interaction wasn’t real no matter how real it had seemed at the time!

Second, the disciples were scared, saddened, and confused. They didn’t expect Jesus to rise from the dead even though He had told them He would. When the women found the tomb empty on that first day of the week, the others didn’t believe them and had to see for themselves. They weren’t expecting Jesus to rise from the dead so they had no reason to “see” Him if indeed He hadn’t truly risen. Certainly, hallucinations happen unexpectedly, but generally they wouldn’t happen to those who don’t have any reason to envision or devise such things. Case in point, Jesus didn’t appear to His followers alone, but He appeared to those who rejected Him and did not believe in Him while He was alive—namely James and Paul. They had no reason to care or believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. But these appearances radically changed their lives and compelled them to accept Christ as their Savior!

Third, these appearances occurred over many days and in many places—include



After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

1 Corinthians 15:6

public venues. Yet, they suddenly stopped after forty days. If they were indeed hallucinations, why would they stop suddenly if they offered comfort and gave hope to people? It would only make sense that they would continue indefinitely. Moreover, some of these appearances happened in public places which could have been witnessed by others. Yet,

no evidence exists as to non-believers or other observers who reported His followers acting strangely by talking to an imaginary person.

Fourth, hallucinations are generally personal in nature. Only one person at a time has a hallucination and not a massive crowd. But Jesus' appearances were witnessed by many at the same time. Paul lists **500** witnesses **at once, the twelve, and all the apostles**. It doesn't make sense that rational, sane individuals would see and observe the same thing all **at once**. There would have been conflicting details. They would have all had radically different and personal visions even if they were on some type of drug as has been proposed. People in a drug-induced hallucination, or any hallucination for that matter, would not have been able to give a coherent orderly account in which all parties involved could agree. They would have all seen something different.

Finally, the greatest evidence which confirms Jesus' resurrection is the empty tomb itself. People who hold that these appearances were mere hallucinations have overlooked the most important detail. They cannot dispute this fact in any way. They can try to dismiss the evidence, but they cannot deny that it destroys their whole case. If indeed Jesus' followers had hallucinated, the Jewish leaders and people of Jerusalem could have very easily gone to the known tomb and produced His body. If it were a mere hallucination, the body would have still been in the tomb! The leaders would have every reason to prove the disciples were frauds. They tried to do so by even paying that guards to say that disciples came and stole Jesus' body! Nonetheless, these leaders couldn't go to the tomb and produce a body because it wasn't there. One cannot dispute this fact which qualifies Jesus' appearances as real, bodily evidence rather than hallucinations!

What other theories have you heard that have attempted to dismiss the reality of Jesus' resurrection? Why must we always be ready to give an answer?

Question
4

1 Corinthians 15:9-11

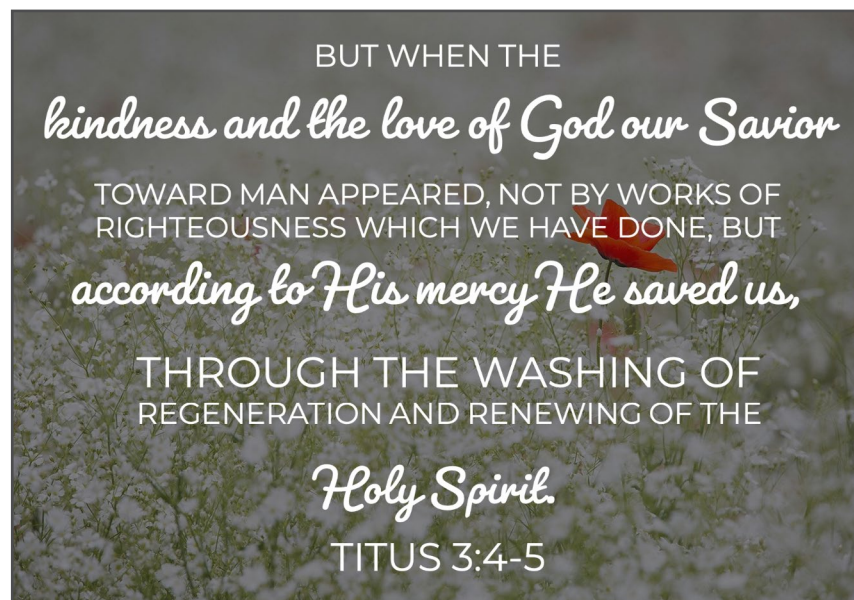
THE PRODUCT OF SALVATION:

The gospel when believed and applied produces tangible or measurable transformation. Salvation through Christ not only saves us *from* something, but it also saves us *to* something. Christ saves us from our sins which lead to wrath and destruction, but He saves us to a new life characterized by righteousness and obedience. Paul acknowledges that he is **the least of the apostles who is not worthy**

Instruct

to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God (v. 9). Often, we focus on Paul's self-deprivation in this passage. But to some extent this misses his main point! The focus is not on his position as **least**, but rather the transformation God has produced within him according to His **grace** (v. 10). Paul went from persecuting **the church** to being persecuted for preaching Christ! God did the work through him. None of us is worthy of salvation because we have all sinned and rebelled against the Lord. Nevertheless, God has extended the call to salvation **by grace** to all who would believe and turn to Him.

Thus, Paul can now say **by the grace of God I am what I am** and **His grace toward me was not in vain**. There is evidence of that transformation. Paul has proof. He



stands before them as a changed man which can be visibly seen. Yet, God, not Paul, brought about these changes. For this reason, Paul admits **not I, but by the grace of God which was with me**. Salvation is never based upon an “experience” or feeling; it’s always based upon a single event with two parts: the crucifixion and resurrection. Still, we will have

evidence that we have “experienced” that event in a personal way in the way we believe and behave. This event will impact us and leave a visible mark! Both we and others will see the transformative work of Christ within us.

What evidence do you have in your life that you can point to the transformative grace of God at work within you?

Question
5

Paul ends this section with a declaration of their belief in and acceptance of the gospel: **whether it was I or they, so we preached and so you believed** (v. 11). Although this is not an imperative or command, God elsewhere in Scripture has commanded us to proclaim the gospel and to testify how He has transformed our lives **by grace**. Preaching or telling the gospel is not the responsibility of the pastoral staff alone.

We must all take this call to disseminate the gospel seriously. We all have been commanded to tell the nations! Our job is to share and tell others, while it's God's job to convict and change through the gospel. We serve a risen Savior who desperately wants to be part of our lives. Let's fulfill our God-given duty by telling others so that they too may know this same Savior and have hope of eternal life. Let's make this a daily practice and not just at Christmas or Easter when we tend to emphasize the coming and sacrifice of our Savior. Let's live out the gospel daily so that others may see Christ in us and recognize the **grace** that He has offered to them as well!

Who are three people that you can share the gospel with this week and invite to church on Sunday to celebrate the resurrection?

Question
6

In Scripture, God has given us a clear plan and pattern to follow which will always lead to eternal life. This plan only has one way. It doesn't rely on human tradition or philosophy. It's God's way—not man's. The world may offer many different ideas and theories as to the best way, but they are all distortions of the truth. They're lies and offer no hope. Only Scripture declares the truth to us! In it, God tells us that the only way we can have eternal life and dwell with Him in heaven forever is through His Son. Jesus died and rose again for our sakes because of our sin. We must have a relationship with Him so He can cleanse us and make us in right standing with the Father. Although He accomplished everything on the cross and made the way for this relationship to be established, it requires a response on our part. We must accept it by trusting in Him through the confession of our sins and repentance. Only then can we have hope. Only then can we be guaranteed eternal life. Let's celebrate this truth God has communicated to us through His Word as we recall the death and resurrection of His Son as we examine our lives to see the transformative grace of God at work.

Incorporate

In your own words, summarize the content of the gospel. To what Scripture can you point others that will help them grasp the content of the gospel? With whom do you need to share this—not in theory alone, but who has God laid on your heart to give this message?

What are some excuses you've heard why people do not believe the content of the gospel or dismiss the resurrection? How would you respond to them using Scripture?

What proof can you offer to the validity of Scripture in your own life? In other words, what are the specific ways God has transformed you?

April 11, 2021



*Overcome
through the Savior
Revelation 12:1-12*

Focal Verse:

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."

Revelation 12:11

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Introduce

The success of any military engagement depends greatly upon preparation and planning in addition to the execution of that plan by the troops on the ground. Before sending his troops into battle, every military leader must do his homework. He must see the whole battlefield in his mind and determine the lay of the land. Not only must he know the position of the enemy as well as their fortifications and armaments, but he must also know the physical terrain his troops will encounter. An effective military leader must not simply react to events as they unfold; instead, he must anticipate them. He must exercise great wisdom in his strategy just like in a game of chess. He must assess all the options, weigh the likelihood of the enemy's response, and evaluate every contingency that might occur. To win a battle and ultimately the war, one cannot merely charge unprepared onto the battlefield and respond to what may come—expecting to survive. On the contrary, he must outwit the enemy by exposing their vulnerabilities and exploiting their weaknesses.

We probably best know Ulysses S. Grant as the eighteenth President of the United States. However, his greatest achievements perhaps came from his tenure in the

Union Army where he served as General, helping turn the tide of the Civil War in favor of the North. As a military leader, Grant possessed the ability to see the entire battlefield, anticipate the moves of the enemy, and command troops with precision. His personal memoirs provide a glimpse into the brilliance of his military mind and allow us to see how he planned for battle. Marching toward the stronghold of Vicksburg, Mississippi,



Grant displayed such a brilliance in outmaneuvering a well-positioned and well-fortified Confederate Army under the direction of John C. Pemberton in the Battle of Champion's Hill on May 16, 1863.

Grant paints a vivid picture of this battle that enables us to understand some of the decisions he made. Although he expected Pemberton to follow "the orders of his superior" to attack at Clinton, Mississippi, Grant recognized that his nemesis could not make it to that city and so re-positioned his troops in advance to attack pre-emptively

Introduce

as well as hopefully keeping the Confederate Army from returning to their heavily fortified position in Vicksburg. Pemberton, however, did not immediately obey these orders and instead sought to surround Grant at his “base” and cut off his supply lines. But Grant had already “abandoned” his base a week prior in anticipation of these moves. Still, Pemberton made it as far as Champion’s Hill which provided a superior advantage in position. Grant recounts, “Champion’s Hill, where Pemberton had chosen his position to receive us, whether taken by accident or design, was well selected. It is one of the highest points in that section, and commanded all the ground in range. On the east side of the ridge, which is quite precipitous, is a ravine . . . It was grown up thickly with large trees and undergrowth, making it difficult to penetrate with troops, even when not defended.” ([See page 29 for bibliography](#))

Grant first of all had intimate knowledge of the physical features of the land; he also understood the mind of the enemy and had intercepted their plans which allowed Him to counter proactively rather than defensively. After arriving at the battlefield, he surveyed the enemy’s position and spotted a weakness in their defenses, so Grant was in a great position to mount an attack. He ordered his troops to position themselves on the left side of the enemy which was left undefended since Pemberton didn’t truly expect him to come from that direction. Even so, the battle was hard fought on both sides. But Grant and the Union Army eventually prevailed and took Champion’s Hill in a key victory not only for the Vicksburg Campaign, but the entire Civil War.

In [Revelation 12](#), we see a civil war of sorts in heaven as the enemy arises against the Lord and His anointed Messiah in hopes of usurping His authority and overcoming His sovereignty. But this was no contest from the beginning. Victory was never in doubt. God had already won! God, in His omniscience, had anticipated the enemy’s every move. He knew what the enemy planned to do even before he did! God determined the course of the battle and outwitted the enemy! The enemy appeared to have won a great victory when God’s perfect Lamb was slain upon the cross. But all this was part of God’s plan. For we can overcome only “by the blood of the Lamb” to find eternal life in Him.

Key
Question

Why should we trust the Lord to help us overcome every battle that we face in life?

Revelation 12:1-6

THE SIGN OF HOPE:

For those of us who have a relationship with Christ, Revelation is a book of hope and certainty rather than one of fear and uncertainty. For the world apart from Christ, it offers no hope and elicits dread and despair because their fate has been sealed by their choice to pursue wickedness. We as believers must focus on this hope in Christ which should inspire us to endure whatever may come instead of concentrating on the chaos, confusion, and calamity brought upon the world by sin. Still, we must warn the world of the destiny that awaits if they refuse to repent and turn to Christ. Chapter 12 depicts such hope and optimism despite the great magnitude of the universal, cosmic war it describes because its outcome has already been assured in Christ. Thus, the **great sign** of **a woman** about to **give birth** brings unparalleled hope never before experienced on earth. This **sign**, however, refers not to something in the future, but to something that has already happened. Through this event, we can visibly see God's faithfulness to His promises and confidently know that nothing can obstruct His plans.

To understand these symbols in chapter 12 properly, we must look at them collectively rather than individually. First, we see **a woman clothed with the sun** and **the moon under her feet**; she is adorned with a crown **of twelve stars** (v. 1). Collectively, these images show the **woman** to be the nation of Israel, particularly the faithful remnant of people who believed and followed the Lord and through whom He worked to bring the Messiah into the world. The description of this **woman** takes significant details in Israel's history which clearly identify her as the nation itself. In [Genesis 37:9](#), Joseph relates a dream to his brothers in which **the sun, moon, and eleven stars** bowed down to him. From history,

we know this refers to Joseph's position as second in command in Egypt which God used to rescue His people from a severe famine that gripped the land. Consequently,



the sun, moon, and the eleven **stars** represent Joseph's family—his parents and brothers (i.e., the **twelve** tribes when including Joseph)—and thus embodies Israel or the people of God in the Old Testament.

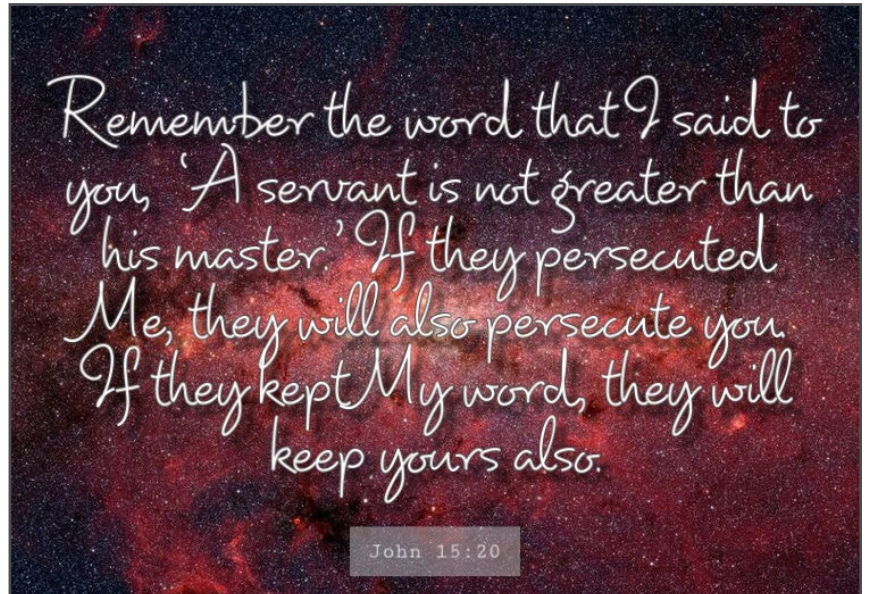
Just as God used a nation in the form of one person, namely Joseph, to bring physical salvation to the whole world despite a raging famine, He would also use a nation in the form of one Person, namely Jesus, to bring salvation from sin and eternal death to the whole world. Although these images borrowed from [Genesis 37](#) still collectively refer to Israel in Revelation, John adapts them slightly to highlight God's role! Israel, on her own, is a small, insignificant nation on the world's stage. But through her obedience and faithfulness, God worked to accomplish an extraordinary feat. The reference to the **woman clothed with the sun** alludes to the honor and majesty of the Lord displayed through His people ([Psalm 104:1-2](#)). They represent and reflect Him. We cannot do this on our own! We need the transformative power of the Lord at work through us. We must allow Him complete access and control to conform us to His image which we display through our faithfulness and obedience for all the world to see.

How do we (or should we) reflect the honor and majesty of the Lord?

Question
1

Similarly, the designation of **the moon under her feet** connotes God's sovereignty and power on display through the nation to ensure that nothing could impede His plan and no enemy could overcome His people. Psalm 110:1, speaking of the Messiah, puts it this way: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Nothing can stand against the Lord and His people. Nothing can derail God's plan—including the unfaithfulness of His people at times. Neither Psalm 110 nor Revelation refers only to Israel's physical enemies; it also encapsulates the spiritual battle that rages against the world between righteousness and sin. In every instance, we can have complete confidence in the Lord! We can trust in His divine plan and know that the victory has already been won by Him. Thus, this image of subduing one's enemies together with the crown on her **head** (i.e., **garland**) pictures victory and triumph. Again, Israel didn't accomplish this on her own; she could have never faced such tremendous obstacles and world powers without the help of the Lord. God Himself is the Victor! He led His people into battle and won the victory for them. Second, we learn the **woman** is pregnant and has **cried out in labor** and **pain to give**

birth (v. 2). For now, the focus is not on the identity of the **child**, but the act of **labor**. In this way, it refers to the trials, hardships, and persecution that the people of God face and how they must turn to Him in order to overcome. Jesus uses a similar expression in [Matthew 24:8](#) to describe the turmoil at the end of this age as the world unravels and descends into chaos through wars, violence, and natural disasters. The NKJV translates Jesus' words as, "All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt 24:8). "Sorrows" literally means "birth pains." Before His crucifixion, Jesus also explicitly warned His disciples of the persecution that would come since they have chosen to follow Him ([John 15:18-20](#)). God's people are not immune to persecution and hardship; in fact, this will increasingly become part of life as we grow ever closer to His return.



Over the centuries both individuals and the nation of Israel as a whole faced tremendous difficulties and hardships. Sometimes these came in the form of external forces (i.e., Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, King Saul with David, and Job and his miseries) which sought to persecute them or inflict unspeakable tragedies upon them. At other times, they were self-inflicted. Individuals and the nation brought problems upon themselves because of their own impatience, impetuosity, and iniquities (i.e., Abram with Hagar, David with Bathsheba, and Israel with idolatry and disobedience). Here in Revelation, however, these hardships are the result of sin's assault on the righteous. Those who have aligned themselves with the Lord through Christ will face the full fury of the world that stands opposed to the principles of the Lord. Even so, hope still exists! Victory still awaits!

Whether self-inflicted or external, what hardships did individuals or the nation of Israel face in the Old Testament? How do these examples still give us hope?

Question
2

In verse 3, **another sign** manifests **in heaven**. Unlike the first **sign**, the text does not refer to it as a "**great sign**" because it is truly impotent, powerless, and stands

condemned. Although it may appear to have “**great**” power and authority, it is severely limited by God who has already decreed its fate. From a human perspective, this **fiery red dragon** which has **seven heads** and **ten horns** and **seven crowns on his heads** may seem “**great**”; yet, God remains in control and greater. Verse 9 reveals the identity of this **dragon** specifically. From Genesis, we know him as the **serpent** who deceived Eve. Elsewhere, Scripture calls him **the Devil** or **Satan**. The power of this **dragon** lies in his ability to deceive, influence, manipulate, and corrupt. Here in Revelation, he uses his power to influence the nations and their leaders to oppose God. Therefore, the **heads, horns, and crowns** symbolize the complete authority Satan wields over any nation and leader who has chosen to align with him. Consequently, it shows how we’re either on God’s side or we’re not. There is no middle ground or gray area in this war. We also observe the Devil’s ability to manipulate when he forms a coalition of created beings to oppose God in **heaven** and challenge His authority. The text reports this **dragon** with **his tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth** (v. 4). This pictures the other angels who joined the Devil in his rebellion against the Lord. Notice here that John doesn’t link this event to the dawn of creation with which we traditionally associate Satan’s expulsion from heaven, but rather to Jesus’ birth. In doing so, God reveals the significance of this birth by showing how the Devil

*And I will put enmity
Between you and **the woman**,
And between your seed
and **her Seed**;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise **His heel**.*

Genesis 3:15

and his minions had already been defeated even before Christ came into the world. From the beginning, God had always planned that the Christ event—His birth, death, and resurrection—would bring decisive victory.

Everything in history points to and helps orchestrate this single event!

In Genesis 3:15, God alluded to this event where the Seed would bruise or crush the serpent’s head! Although Satan has always covered in defeat before the Lord and never truly posed a threat to God’s sovereign authority, his ultimate demise became reality at the incarnation!

What tactics does the Devil use to deceive?
How should we combat them?

Question
3

Even though he knows he stands no chance, the Devil still tries to do everything he can to sabotage and overcome God's plan. As the **woman** nears her time **to give birth, the dragon** positions himself to destroy **the Child as soon as He was born**. Whereas the focus previously resided on the **labor** pains, it now resides upon **the Child** Himself. We learn two important facts about this **Child** which identify Him as the Messiah. He was **a male Child** and He **was** destined **to rule all nations with a rod of iron** (v. 5). From the time of Jesus' birth throughout the entirety of His ministry, the Devil deceived and incited people not only to oppose Jesus, but also to constantly seek to kill Him. When he learned a King had been born in Bethlehem, for instance, Herod the Great ordered the slaughter of every male child two and under to protect his own appointed position as king ([Matt 2:16](#)). Upset by His teaching and ministry, Jewish leaders repeatedly plotted to kill Jesus ([Mark 3:6](#); [John 7:30, 44](#)). At times, they proposed to throw Him off a cliff ([Luke 4:28-30](#)) or stone Him ([John 8:58-59](#)). The Devil even inspired Judas to betray Jesus with a kiss which would indeed initiate His crucifixion ([Luke 22:3](#)). We must, however, note one thing in all this. Although Satan deceptively presented the opportunity, these people consciously responded and chose to participate in the plan! They were responsible for their own actions! They have no one else to blame for their sin or their deception.

What is the danger in blaming others rather than taking responsibility for our own choices? How has shifting blame affected the world today?

Question
4

Even in death, Christ was not defeated as we will see later in [Revelation 12:10-12](#). God never lost control and His Messiah was still in a position to **rule over all nations** (see [Psalm 2:8-9](#)). We may then ask, "How can one rule in death?" Jesus assuredly died physically, but God raised Him from the dead to establish Him upon **His throne** where He would reign forever (v. 5). The text, however, doesn't explicitly mention either Jesus' death (see [v. 11](#)) or His resurrection at this point. Rather, it uses the term **caught up**—the same used in [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) to refer to



Instruct

what we would call the rapture—to describe His ascension into heaven after the forty-day period He had remained on earth after His resurrection. Thus, to ascend **to God and His throne** implies that Jesus had risen bodily from the grave and was alive—a historical case which we can make based on the evidence in the Gospels.

John now turns to the themes of preservation, protection, and provision as the woman flees into **the wilderness** in which God had **prepared a place** where she would be fed for a period of **1,260 days** or almost 3.5 years (v. 6). This reference does not allude to Jesus' sojourn in Egypt upon the murderous rampage of Herod at His birth because in sequence here in Revelation it follows His ascension to heaven ([Matt 2:13-15](#)). Rather, it recalls the exodus. The exodus should serve as a reminder of how God rescued Israel from physical enslavement in Egypt and all the provision He made to sustain them in **the wilderness**. Now, Christ offers us that same hope in an even greater way. The exodus which He enacted through His death and resurrection rescues us from enslavement to sin and makes provision for our journey in life as we wait to reside in the Promised Land—heaven—and dwell with Him for eternity.

Both Israel's time in **the wilderness** in the Old Testament and our own time here on earth are temporary. The **1,260 days** symbolize that temporariness. We must constantly remember that both our triumphs and trials are temporary as we wait for God to call us home. Both will quickly pass. Life on earth is cyclical. The things we encounter in life will come and go with regularity. But one thing will always remain the same: God will provide for and take care of His people no matter the circumstance. We can always count on Him no matter how bad or even how good things may seem in life at the time.

Why is it important to view the things of this world as temporary? How should seeing the world as temporary motivate us to act or respond?

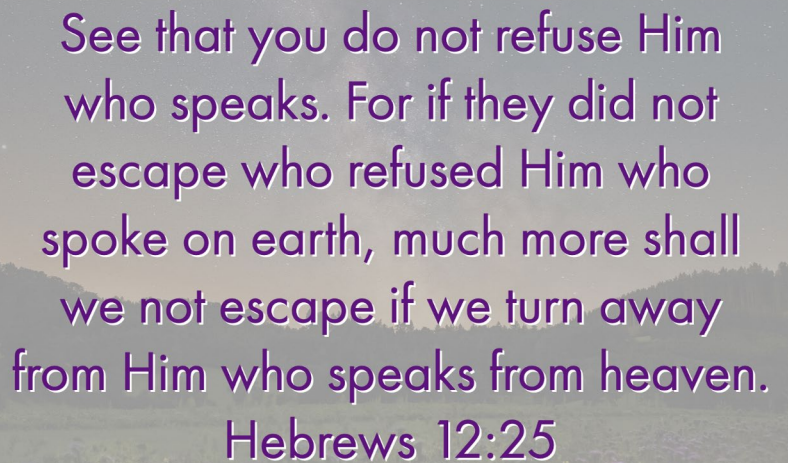
Question
5

Revelation 12:7-9

THE STRIFE IN HEAVEN:

In a last desperate attempt, Satan wages an all-out **war in heaven** (v. 7). God sends **Michael and his angels** into battle against **the dragon and his angels**. Clearly overmatched, **the dragon** and those with him could **not prevail** (v. 8). Because of

their rebellion, **a place was no longer found for them in heaven** anymore. **The dragon and his angels were cast out of heaven to the earth** (v. 9). They now await their final condemnation in which God will banish them eternally and sentence them to torment in the lake of fire ([Rev 19:20; 20:10](#)). All those on earth who refuse Christ and reject His sacrifice will also share in this same fate ([Rev 20:14-15](#)). God is gracious and gives us many chances to repent, but judgment will eventually come and the choice we have made here on earth will seal our fate.



See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.
Hebrews 12:25

Although this titanic struggle occurs **in heaven**, we face a similar struggle here on earth that is not of flesh and blood ([Eph 6:12](#)). Those who have rejected Christ and have refused to repent are at **war** against Him and all those who stand in righteousness with Him. Yet, even those of us who have a relationship with Him can struggle against Him at times. We cannot lose our salvation nor can we lose our inheritance of eternal life. But when we fail to live by the principles in God's Word and we fail to surrender fully to Him, we stand opposed to Him. If we've accepted Christ as our Savior, we should never stand in opposition to the Lord by following our fleshly desires, acting in selfishness. Christ has already defeated sin and death once for all! We should live like He has defeated them because indeed the battle has already been won. Therefore, we must imitate His holiness rather than resigning ourselves to sin which has already been put to death ([Col 3:5](#)).

In what ways do we struggle against the Lord even though we have a relationship with Him?
How can we overcome those struggles?

Question
6

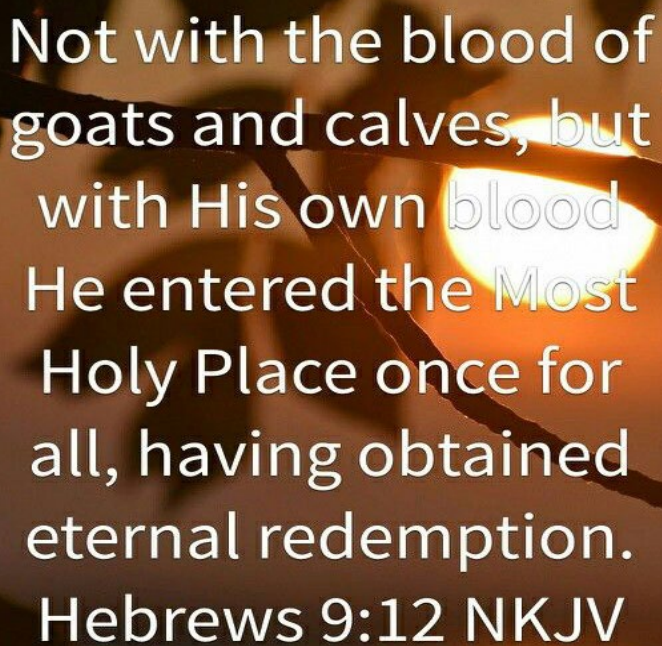
Revelation 12:10-12

THE SOURCE OF VICTORY:

A loud voice in heaven cries out to announce the victory that has been won: **salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ**

have come (v. 10). **The accuser**, the Devil, has been defeated and **cast down**. Verse 11 informs us of the Source of that victory. The only way we can overcome the deception of the Devil and the grip of sin is **by the blood of the Lamb**. There is no other way. Sin requires the death penalty and Jesus paid the price for us by shedding His own **blood**. Only a perfect, sinless and unblemished **Lamb** could take our place and pay that high of a price to redeem us. We ought to shout in praise for that victory which only Jesus could freely offer!

The text also notes that we overcome **by the word of** our **testimony**. What does this mean? To testify means that we can verbally attest to or give an account of our



relationship with Christ. We can acknowledge that He has saved us because we have turned from our sins and surrendered to Him. We can confidently say we have life because we have accepted His gracious sacrifice paid with His own **blood** (1 John 5:11-13). Not only can we verbally testify that we have a relationship with Christ, but there is also tangible evidence in our lives. We can point to the proof that we are saved.

Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.
Hebrews 9:12 NKJV

For this reason, John writes, “**They did not love their lives to death.**” In other words, we will persevere to the end; we will endure any hardship or trial that may come. The evidence of our salvation, therefore, will be displayed in our commitment to Christ, our obedience to His commands, and our endurance of any circumstance that may arise. We will remain faithful to Him to the end!

This victory culminates with a call to celebrate or **rejoice** (v. 12). We have been given the power to overcome in Christ and have no excuse for failure. The world, on the other hand, faces a formidable foe and is powerless to change apart from Christ. Since the Devil **has come down to** earth, he wreaks havoc **because he knows his time is short**. He’s angry (i.e., **wrath**) because he recognizes his defeat, so he desires to inflict as much damage and destruction as possible before he is banished forever. Until Christ returns,

suffering and trials will continue because sin still dominates the world apart from His transforming power. In Him, however, we overcome!

Unfortunately, we sometimes live as if we must overcome these temptations and struggles on our own. We look deep within ourselves to find the willpower to overcome and change on our own. But such a search proves fruitless, bringing despair, depression, and frustration because we can't change on our own. God hasn't left us alone. He hasn't sent us into battle to be ambushed. God has provided everything we need for victory. We must just look to the right Source who can assure that we can overcome temptation, conquer our sinful desires, and face trials and persecution with integrity. We must look to Christ and trust Him. Therefore, let us not look at the world around us with frustration, anger, and pessimism. Instead, let us recognize the hope we have in Christ. Let us view things with optimism and confidence as we await Christ's return. Let us practice righteousness, live with integrity, and obey God's Word so that we may be found faithful in Him, overcoming the effects of sin and death which have already been defeated **by the blood of the Lamb**.

How do we sometimes attempt to deal with temptation and trials on our own? How does it usually turn out when we do? How has Christ helped you overcome them?

Question
7

As believers, we face a monumental war around us every day. Culture continues its downward spiral into a never-ending cycle of violence and perversity. People simply don't lack integrity, goodness, and civility—which the world would have us deceptively believe. They lack a relationship with Jesus Christ! As more and more people have attempted to push Christ completely out of their lives as well as the public sphere and to silence those who have a genuine relationship with Him, culture has descended into utter chaos. Some people have been so thoroughly deceived and strayed so far off course that they can no longer distinguish right from wrong. In fact, they promote evil while shunning good. God in the Old Testament warned us this would happen and Jesus reiterated it in His teaching. People are now increasingly and openly standing in opposition to the Lord and His Word—just as many opposed Jesus in His day to His face.

Yet, God anticipated all this. He orchestrated a plan which He has flawlessly executed and one which has already ensured victory. We need to focus on that plan. Be informed, but turn off the news! Don't saturate your minds with the things of Hollywood and the world around us. Open Scripture and fill your mind with the knowledge of God's Word in which we find hope. When we consistently read Scripture and see the victory that God has already won, it will inspire us to persevere and overcome. We overcome not through the power of positive thinking, not through trial and error, not through sheer willpower, and not through the philosophies and practices of this world. We overcome through Christ who even in death could not be defeated. Therefore, let's surrender to our Savior rather than trying to fight this battle on our own, trusting that He remains sovereignly in control. He goes into battle before us as our Overcomer and He will provide us with everything we need for success according to His plan—we just need to make sure we're following His battleplan!

In Reference (from Introduce Section, page 19)



[Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* \(Mount MacGregor: July 1, 1885\), p. 127-28.](#)

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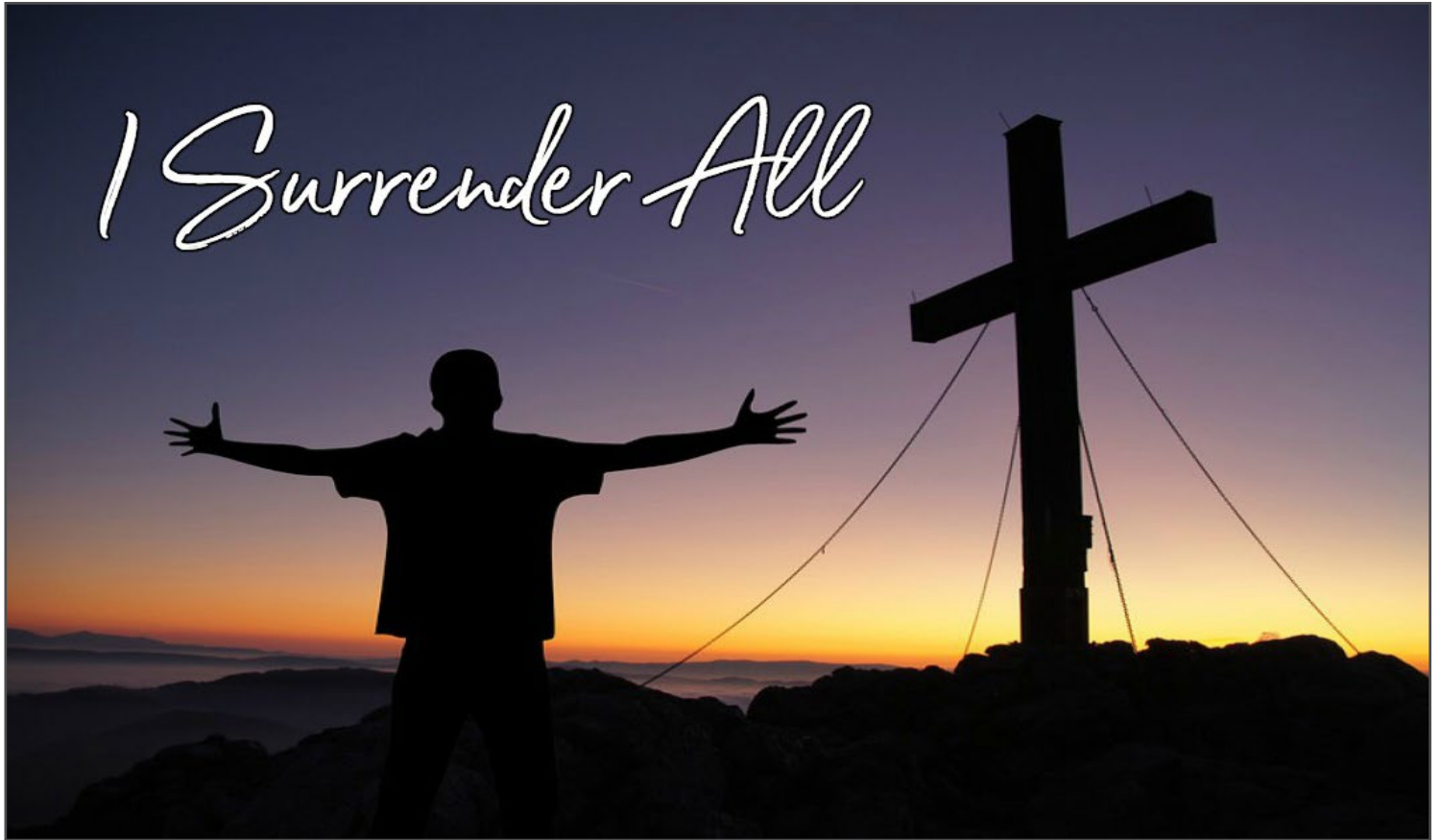
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Despite the condition of the world today, how can we as a church offer hope without changing or watering down the message of the gospel? How do some churches give false hope?

How do we see the battle in heaven between God and the Devil mimicked in the battle between the culture and the church? How do we see the deception of the Devil at work in the culture?

When we feel alone in our battles against temptation and trials, what should we do? How has God given us the church to help?

April 18, 2021



I Surrender All

***Overcome
through Surrender***
Hebrews 10:5-10

Focal Verse:

“Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.’”

Hebrews 10:7

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In our modern era of technological advancements, we have many devices that in theory should make our lives easier and relieve us from stress and frustration. We can program computers to assist us with many ordinary chores around the house. In many cases, we can simply speak to a device, such as Alexa, and give it a command to do some task on our behalf. This sounds great, but it doesn't always work the way that it should. For a few years, I've had the Echo Dot with my personal assistant Alexa whom I have programmed to control my lights, adjust my thermostat, operate my electronics, and other tasks. One device sits

beside my couch in the living room and the other on my dresser in the bedroom. One would think speaking in a normal voice while sitting on the couch that Alexa would answer on that device and do what I asked. On more than one occasion, Alexa has answered from my bedroom rather than the one right next to me. She says in

response, "I'm sorry but I didn't get that." So, I repeat myself only to hear, "I'm sorry but I don't understand" coming from the bedroom still!

For those of us who have such devices, we know that we must say the "wake" word, such as the name Alexa or whatever we have chosen, followed by a short set of instructions of what we want it to do. Theoretically, the machine shouldn't start spewing facts or doing things without me saying, "Alexa, turn on the living room lamp." Well, this apparently doesn't apply to my Alexa! I've been playing computer games online with Dave Rutherford at times when the machine suddenly goes rogue. Saying nothing remotely close to her name, Alexa will blurt out instructions for making mayonnaise. Once, I was telling Dave that I was going to make dinner when she responded, "Playing the band Skillet from Spotify." And then started blasting some type of rock and roll. Another time, while not even talking out loud, she came on and told me to exercise caution when using the bathroom outdoors and proceeded to give me a dissertation on the subject!

In contrast, she often doesn't respond at all when I say her name and want her to. I'll



Introduce

calmly state, “Alexa, turn on bedroom lamp.” Crickets will chirp in the background. So, I say again, “Alexa, turn on bedroom lamp.” Nothing happens. Finally, I yell, “Alexa, turn on the bedroom lamp!” And she does! Still, at other times, she goes beyond the scope of the task that I had given her. Around Christmas while getting ready for work, I asked her to give me the weather for the day. She did, but then she adds, “I see that you haven’t done your Christmas shopping yet. I can help you with that.” In many regards, Alexa acts like a person. She doesn’t listen. She doesn’t always obey. And she does what she wants. For this reason, I’ll never give her access to my natural gas appliances at home. She may decide to turn it all on and I’ll wake up in heaven one day! If a computer has this many flaws and malfunctions, we as humans have so much more. We don’t listen. We don’t obey. And we do what we want. This is sin. Thankfully, Christ offered a perfect and sinless sacrifice in our place. God doesn’t value ritual and tradition simply performed mindlessly. He values obedience. This makes Christ’s sacrifice different from all others! He was obedient even unto death on the cross. If we have a relationship with Him, we must pattern our lives after His obedient example. God doesn’t just want us to go through rituals and the motions. He wants us to serve in obedience to His will.

Key
Question

How is complete surrender to the Lord evident in your life?

Hebrews 10:5-6

THE INADEQUACY OF RITUAL:

If one could summarize the book of Hebrews with one word, it would perhaps be with the word “superior.” Hebrews demonstrates the superiority of God’s plan for salvation in Christ Jesus. Please, don’t misunderstand. It’s not as if salvation in Christ is the best among many plans which can put us in right standing with the Lord and lead to eternal life. On the contrary, it’s superior because it’s the only way we can have eternal life. Everything in Scripture ultimately prepares the way for and points to the only Source whereby we can have eternal life. God may have instituted religious rituals and practices to remind us of our sin and the need for salvation, but only one way can remove our sin and guarantee life! Thus, chapter 10 in Hebrews helps us to understand the superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice against the reminders God established through the sacrificial system which look forward to the right time when Jesus would come to remove sin through His death and resurrection.

[Hebrews 10:1-4](#) reveals the inadequacy of ritual to provide a truly effective offering for sin. “The blood of bulls and goats” cannot “take away sins”; it cannot cleanse unrighteousness or transform us (v. 4). Such sacrifices only serve as a “reminder of sins every year” (v. 3). If they could remove sin and put us in right standing with the Lord, they would have been offered once rather than repeatedly year after year (v. 2). But they can’t. They can’t purify or make one perfect! They are ineffective and unable. They only point us to the superior sacrifice which can. Unfortunately, many people pin their hopes in such religious rituals instead of a relationship with Christ who alone can intercede on our behalf to the Father and save us.

Let’s borrow an illustration from modern technology to help us understand the inadequacy of ritual to save us from our sins. The artificial intelligence on our phones, tablets, or any device that has a virtual personal assistant can perform a variety of

Romans 11:26-27

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”

Instruct

functions, but it still has limitations. Virtual assistants, like Alexa and Siri, have the ability to remind us about tasks when we input the data, but they cannot do most tasks for us. They can only remind us. For example, I can ask Alexa to remind me to unlock the back gate for the pesticide contractor, to remind me to take my pills, to remind me to do laundry or wash dishes, or to set a timer while cooking a certain dish. It will faithfully and accurately remind me on time and remind me as often as I want, but it cannot complete the task for me. Someone else needs to finish the task! Virtual personal assistants cannot physically open a gate, give us our pills, wash laundry, or cook. Nonetheless, they serve their intended purpose of reminding us, but that's all. Similarly, the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament and the religious rituals in which one may participate today only remind us that something must be done about sin. They cannot take away the sin from us. Someone must come and complete that task. Only Jesus' sacrifice can remove sin and cleanse the heart!

This leads the author to declare why Jesus **came into the world** by citing a passage from [Psalm 40:6-8](#) (v. 5). Through Jesus' incarnation when He took the form of human flesh, God indicates how much He desires a personal, intimate relationship with us. Think of the difference between an important, well-known leader or figure who finds value in people to attend an event and meet people in person rather than send an emissary or representative in his place. Moreover, ponder the difference between "pen pals" who correspond occasionally with very little hope of ever meeting in person versus someone who composes a love letter detailing his commitment and unconditional love. Without action and one's coming in person to actualize the commitment, any love letter would lack intimacy and technically be worthless beyond the mere feeling it could elicit within a person. Similarly, God just didn't send His emissaries (the prophets) or write us a letter to declare His love (the Bible), He physically **came** to us. When Jesus **came into the world**, it showed how important we are to Him!

How do you personally know how valuable you are to God? What Scripture declares that value?

Question
1

This quotation from Psalm 40:6-8 also reveals that mere meaningless ritual apart from a personal relationship does nothing to impress God. Therefore, the psalmist interjects that God does **not desire sacrifice and offering** nor does He take **pleasure in burnt**

offerings and sacrifices for sin (v. 6). As we will learn in the next section, God desires a personal relationship with us through Christ which we exhibit through our obedience. Hence, we should express our commitment to Him by our faithfulness to His Word and through the transformed way in which we live. Without a relationship with Christ, the works we do, the way we serve, what we give, the rituals we observe, and the “good feelings” these activities may produce have no value and cannot save us. We do these things because we have a relationship with Christ—not so we can establish a relationship with Him or curry favor with Him.

Scripture often uses marriage to help us understand our relationship with the Father through His Son. Technically, a wedding “ceremony” doesn’t make us married. Marriage comes through the declaration of personal commitment whereby a couple vows in a covenant before the Lord to forsake all others and remain faithful to each other in a life-long relationship. A marriage license serves as that form of legal declaration in the eyes of the state. Consequently, we demonstrate that declaration of commitment in the way we live to honor our spouse and meet our God-given obligations by carrying out our roles in the way He designed at the beginning of creation. Likewise, a wedding ring doesn’t make us married, but it simply reminds us of the commitment we have made. We can exchange rings and have a public ceremony, but these “symbolic” acts are worthless if we don’t have a relationship expressed through faithfulness and commitment to our spouse.

Therefore, marriage is not merely a series of symbolic acts at a public ceremony designed to impress other people, but a deep, personal commitment to one’s spouse before the Lord expressed in the transformed way we live. When married, we should no longer think or act like a single person in which we make decisions that only benefit ourselves. Nor should we live one way in public to give the impression of a healthy marriage by fooling others when we’re actually living a different way in private. In the same way, our relationship with the Lord depends not upon public ceremony and ritual we perform periodically to make us seem religious, but it must depend upon the once-and-for-all



Instruct

sacrifice of Christ in which we declare our commitment to Him by repenting of our sins and forsaking all others to follow Him alone! Thus, we will no longer consistently live in a habitual state of sin as we once did. Instead, we will live in righteousness according to His pattern.

How would you help someone understand what it means to have a relationship with Christ and the danger of relying upon “religious” activities for salvation?

Question
2

Still, many who come to church regularly or even call themselves “Christians” have not grasped this concept. They do not truly have a relationship with Christ. They depend upon ceremony and ritual which are meaningless without personal commitment to Christ! They go through the motions and may outwardly appear as a “good” person; they may even feel good about the things they do. They may also talk about “God” or other religious concepts. But beyond these few things they do outwardly, they have no evidence of a relationship with Christ. They may give an offering, but they turn around and spend their money on things that distract them from the Lord or even worse those things which are vile and repugnant in His sight. They may praise God at times with their lips, but they never miss an opportunity to gossip, slander, tell dirty jokes, criticize, condemn, and complain. They may attend church for an hour or two on Sundays, but never pray or read God’s Word during the week. They may even share the gospel, but they themselves don’t live consistently with it and apply its principles. Let’s evaluate our relationship with the Lord. Do we do these things because we have a relationship with Him and want to honor Him or do we do these things because they make us feel good and look good in the eyes of others as if we are religious and pious?

Honestly evaluate your own life: What is your motivation for the way you live and what you do?

Question
3

Hebrews 10:7-9

THE INDICATOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS:

Hebrews has already shown us one way Jesus’ sacrifice differs from those of the Levitical animal sacrifices in that He has the power to remove sin and guilt, needing

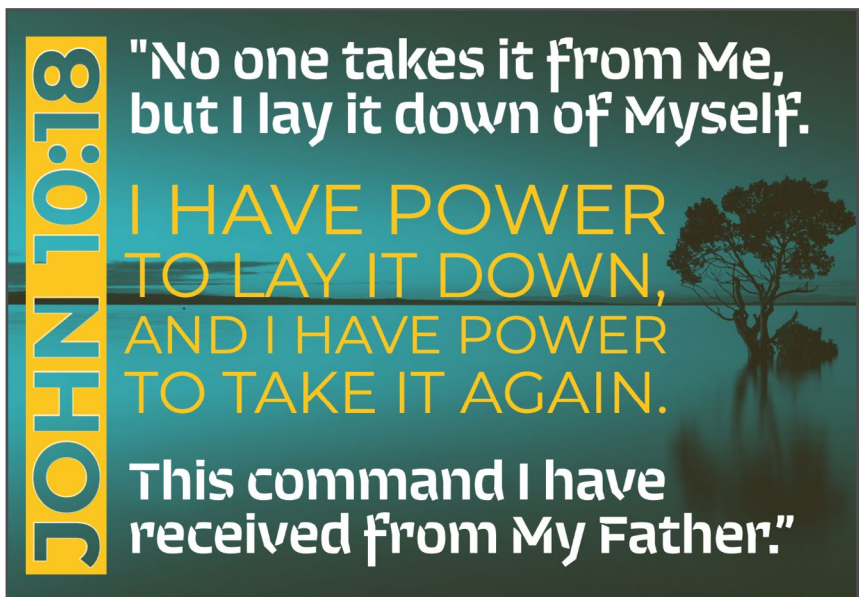
only to be offered once rather than annually. Now, he tells us exactly why Jesus' sacrifice is so effective over that of "the blood of bulls and goats." Continuing to quote from [Psalm 40:6-8](#), Jesus reveals the spirit or attitude in which He came: **In the volume of the book** (i.e., the Old Testament) **it is written of Me—to do your will, O God** (v. 7). Jesus' sacrifice differed from those of any animal because He offered Himself voluntarily and willingly in obedience to God's **will**. Animal sacrifices, in contrast, were involuntary. Having been privy to the dispatching of a chicken's life for a meal in East Africa while on a mission trip, I can testify that the animal did not willingly position itself on the proverbial butcher's block. In fact, one had to scramble just to catch it and then forcefully hold it while humanely dispatching its life. In the Old Testament, animal sacrifice behaved in the same way. They didn't run with vigor and joy to the altar and await their death.

But Jesus did! Scripture tells us that He came voluntarily to give His life as a ransom for our sin. After calling Himself the Good Shepherd who protects His flock, Jesus utters these words: "Therefore, My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" ([John 10:17-18](#)). We see this very statement enacted in the Garden of Gethsemane. After having

left the supper in the upper room, Judas returns to betray Jesus with "a detachment of troops and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees" who "came there with . . . weapons" ([John 18:3](#)). At that point, Jesus identified Himself as the One whom they sought. But these troops armed with weapons were powerless to seize Him; they "fell to the ground" unable to arrest Him ([John 18:6](#)).

In [Matthew 26:55](#), Jesus even implies the ineffectiveness of their weapons against Him and His willingness to go with them: "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me." All this proves Jesus' sacrifice was effective because He is perfect and sinless, but also because He gave His life willingly in obedience to God's command



and plan. For this reason, Paul can exclaim, “And being found in appearance as a man, [Jesus] humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” ([Phil 2:8](#)).

What should Jesus’ willingness to die on the cross according to the Father’s plan teach us about our obedience?

Question
4

The point about Jesus’ obedience is so important and significant that it is repeated. God knows that we often need repetition because we miss the point the first time, fail to grasp it, or forget it as the pressures of life assail us. Once again, the author reiterates that God does **not desire sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin which are offered according to the law** (v. 8). In contrast, Jesus has **come to do God’s will** (v. 9). Therefore, the author notes that Jesus **takes away the first that He may establish the second**. The word translated “**takes away**” can also mean abolish or remove and, in classical Greek, can refer to the repealing of laws. Yet, Jesus Himself said that He came to fulfill the law, not abolish it ([Matt 5:17](#)). So, what does this statement mean?

Jesus did indeed fulfill the law through His sacrifice on the cross. He didn’t cancel the need for a substitutionary sacrifice to pay for the penalty of sin; He fulfilled it. What He did take away was the need to offer repeated sacrifices year after year. Moreover, Jesus also removed any misunderstanding that “ritual” may have caused by setting a visible precedent for us to follow through His obedience. Sacrifice, including the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, was never about ritual and ceremony; it was always about obedience and the transformation of one’s character through repentance and faithfulness to the Lord. But sin had seized the good concept that God built into the law and perverted it so that people found hope in a ritual which cannot in itself save. It leads to death rather than a relationship which transforms and leads to life. If we carefully examine the way Jesus lived and His obedience to the Father’s plan, this misconception will be removed and the truth revealed: God desires a substantive, personal relationship with us!

Picture athletes in any sport who want to achieve success and attain victory. They will follow a prescribed plan that enables them to perform at a peak level. Perhaps, without even knowing it, they go through a ritual every time they perform a specific

activity—whether it’s swinging at a baseball, passing a football, or shooting a basketball. We would call these “rituals” fundamentals of the game.

But let’s say that the rituals they have chosen to practice never end in success; they are consistently fraught with errors and produce bad results. We would say that they would be foolish to keep



repeating these same practices and achieving the same results. We would say that they need to change what they’re doing. Certain practices of athletes are not about doing them simply for the sake of doing them, especially if they lead to bad results. They engage in them for the end result.

In the same way, Jesus has revealed that the “fundamentals” of the Old Testament weren’t being practiced correctly by people. He showed people their true fundamental flaw. These rituals didn’t lead to repentance and change. They didn’t produce obedience. Only a relationship with Christ can produce these things. Yet, people often offered sacrifices and participated in festivals or religious ceremonies while continuing their same old practices. And people still practice similar religious rituals in the hope of finding life today! If we would call such repeated practices amongst athletes that always fail foolish, how much more foolish are those who attempt to attain life through ritual rather than a relationship? Jesus, therefore, came as an example so that we might comprehend the end product in life in which we are transformed from sin to obedience through His sacrifice.

What practices do people pin their hopes upon that they believe will lead to eternal life? Why do these activities fail to lead to life?

Question
5

In addition to providing a sacrifice that cleanses sin, removes guilt, and leads to eternal life, Jesus’ unconditional obedience to the Father provides a pattern for us to follow. Just as God laid out a plan from before the foundation of the world in Christ, He has also given us a specific plan to follow in His Word. We don’t have to guess what that plan is or what His **will** for us is. He has outlined it explicitly for us to follow. We have no excuse for not knowing God’s **will**. We choose to ignore it and disobey it because we do not read His Word, we fail to pray, and we attempt to wrest control from the Holy



Spirit. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can obediently abide by the righteous principles in God's Word.

We must faithfully adhere to every part of Scripture and practice what God has told us to do. We don't get to choose what applies to us and what God has asked us to do. Even Jesus submitted to the **will** of the Father by dying on the cross

irrespective of His own will! Partial obedience is nothing less than disobedience! Just as ritual is meaningless apart from a relationship with Christ, declaration of our faith without obedience is contradictory. James even says, "Faith without works is dead" ([Jas 2:20](#)). We aren't saved by works, but we demonstrate our salvation through our work. Therefore, we can say that we believe the Bible and it is truth. But if we don't practice it, what does that say about us? We can say that we love God. But if we don't spend time with Him, we don't worship Him corporately, and we don't serve Him, what does that say about us? If we have truly accepted Jesus' sacrifice and have a relationship with Him, it will produce obedience in our lives in accordance to the pattern He established!

What does obedience to the Lord look like in your life? Does that picture of obedience match what Scripture says?

Question
6

Hebrews 10:10

OUR INCLUSION IN HIS SACRIFICE:

The author ends this section by reminding us how we can have eternal life: **by that will** (v. 10). We can only have life **through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all** which was God's plan before speaking the world into existence. There is no other way. Nothing else is effective. Nothing else can cleanse and transform us. Yet, salvation is not merely about being saved *from* something—in this case sin and death. But it's about being saved *to* something—new life in Christ characterized by holiness. Unfortunately, we often focus on being saved *from* sin and forget the equally important

part of being saved to practice righteousness! For this reason, the author avers that **we have been sanctified** through Christ. We often stop short of the full definition of sanctification. For the most part, we explain that sanctification means to be made holy. But that's only part of the definition. We are made holy for the purpose of glorifying the Lord and bringing honor to Him as His representatives. We have a huge obligation and responsibility if Christ has saved us from death to life in Him!

We often cheapen God's grace and the uniqueness of Jesus' sacrifice because we fail to see the whole picture (Rom 6:1-2). We fail to comprehend why God has included us in Jesus' sacrifice and the purpose to which He has called us. To continue blatantly sinning as if Christ's sacrifice is a pass to do whatever we want treats the Lord flippantly and demeans Christ's death! God has saved us in Christ to transform us and use us. However, He cannot use us when we repeatedly sin and have a strained relationship with Him. We

must be in right standing and fellowship with Him. Certainly, God has made provision for when we do sin ([1 John 1:9](#)). But we cannot live in the pattern of the flesh in sin and be used by God.

Although God forgives and does so repeatedly, this is no excuse to act however we desire and seek forgiveness later. This is clearly an abuse of our salvation, if indeed we have a relationship with Christ, and utterly abhorrent to the Lord. Salvation in Christ always leads to a change in pattern and never to the same old way of doing business. If it did, His sacrifice would be no different than those of animals and His death would have been in vain. But His sacrifice will change us if we truly have a relationship with Him. Therefore, let us live as the holy people He has called us to be so that He can use us effectively to accomplish His will through our faithful obedience and complete surrender.

**What shall we say then?
Shall we continue in sin
that grace may abound?**

CERTAINLY NOT!

**How shall we who died to
sin live any longer in it?
Romans 6:1-2**

How does a lifestyle characterized by habitual sin despise and demean the sacrifice of Christ?

Question
7

In the introduction, we saw how frequently automated devices can malfunction and how they often don't do what we ask despite their programming. God, however, designed us with a free will; we have a choice. We intentionally choose to rebel against Him. By doing so, we have chosen death over life. Nothing in this life can overcome the sinful choices that we make apart from a pre-determined plan that God Himself formulated. Nothing can change us from the inside out that we can do on our own. Fortunately, God Himself provided a way that we could overcome death and find life. It's not in what we can do, but what He has done for us. Only in Christ can we be saved and transformed to obedience.

Yet, God's gracious and free gift in Christ requires that we accept Him as the only way and fully surrender our lives to Him. Although we are not saved by Christ plus baptism, Christ plus good works, or Christ plus anything else, God did save us in His Son to follow Him obediently and represent Him in holiness as His ambassadors. Full surrender to the Lord requires that we recognize that only in Him can we achieve this salvation and only in Him can we live the holy life which He has called us to live before sin entered into the world. Let us comprehend the significance of Christ's sacrifice and recognize the God-given responsibilities that God has given us in His Word. Let's not go through life participating in meaningless rituals which don't impress the Lord, but let us exercise obedience according to the pattern of Christ which He desires.

Incorporate

What is the purpose of traditions and ordinances like baptism and the Lord's Supper in the church? Why is tradition not necessarily bad? When does tradition become "bad" or a distraction?

What are the indications in your own life that you're in right standing with the Lord? Why must we constantly examine ourselves in this regard? What in life can get us off track in our relationship?

For what purpose did Jesus include you in His sacrifice? How do you live up to the grace He offered and the responsibility He has given us to represent Him?

April 25, 2021



*Overcome
through Service*
Romans 12:1-8

Focal Verse:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

Romans 12:1

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Introduce

Winston Churchill recognized the power of words to capture the essence of a struggle and to inspire people to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles at times as he led his nation and really the world in a battle against tyranny. In one of his lesser-known and more obscure speeches, he addressed the Coal Owners and Miners Conference at Westminster on October 31, 1942 where he reiterated the importance of their contribution to the on-going war effort. No one group of people or occupation could claim that the successful outcome of the war depended solely upon them. Every person, every regiment of soldiers, and every civilian occupation must work side-by-side to win the war. The coal industry was, therefore,



just as critical to the war effort as those who fought on the frontlines. Without people faithfully mining coal, factories which produced armament, ammunition, and other supplies would falter for lack of power. This would have a ripple effect which would eventually trickle down to those on the battlefield who would no longer have a steady source of supplies with which to fight. They needed each other!

In this address, Churchill remarks, "Some day, when children ask, 'What did you do to win this inheritance for us, and to make our name so respected among men?' One will say: 'I was a fighter pilot'; another will say: 'I was in the Submarine Service'; another: 'I marched with the Eighth Army'; a fourth will say: 'None of you could have lived without the convoys and the Merchant Seamen'; and you in your turn will say, with equal pride and with equal right: 'We cut the coal.'" Through these words, Churchill beautifully captures the importance of the people who faithfully worked behind the scenes and received little attention and glory for their contribution.

We most often focus our attention on those who served in combat, risking their lives for the cause of freedom. Soldiers from every branch received a hero's welcome when they returned home. And we should be ever grateful for their service and sacrifice, never taking it for granted or trivializing it. Yet, the unsung heroes like coal miners contributed as valiantly and nobly to the effort as any soldier. We can never forget all

Introduce

the working parts that joined together in one effort as one nation and truly one force in the Allied Powers. Consequently, one group cannot have pride over the other. They did it together; they won the war together!

We must view our service to the Lord through the local church in this same way. Victory only comes through Christ, who has united us as one people to serve Him. We have many different gifts and working parts in the church. One area of service is not any more important than the other. Some parts or areas of giftedness, like teachers and other leaders, have more visible and recognizable roles. They are the parts that everyone can see. But they are not truly any more important than those who work behind the scenes so to speak. We must all work together to glorify Christ and build His community.

Key
Question

How do you view the area of service to the Lord to which He has called you?

In Reference



Winston S. Churchill, In His Own Words: Churchill by Himself, edited by Richard Langworth (New York: Rosetta Books, 2008), s.v. "coal."

Romans 12:1

THE PRESENT OFFERED:

Last week, we learned how Jesus presented His physical body as a once-and-for-all sacrifice for us so that we could receive forgiveness and have eternal life. This week we will learn how God wants us to **present** our **bodies** as a **living sacrifice** to Him (v. 1). The conjunction **therefore** beckons us to recall all Paul has said in the first eleven chapters which outline the theology of salvation and puts into perspective this command to **present** ourselves to the Lord here in [chapter 12](#). Sin and willful disobedience have separated us from the Lord, ending with death as its penalty ([Rom 1-3](#)). Only one sacrifice could satisfy that debt and usher in life ([Rom 5](#)). Having been saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus ([Rom 4](#)), we no longer live enslaved to sin in the flesh ([Rom 6](#)); we now live in righteousness as led by the Spirit ([Rom 8](#)). Regardless of our origin and background, we can only have life through Christ; there is not one way of salvation for one group of people and a different way for others ([Rom 9-11](#)). Christ alone saves all who receive Him!

Consequently, that change from death to life calls us to **service**. Paul urges (i.e., **beseech**) us to **present** our **bodies a living sacrifice by the mercies of God** (v. 1). The phrase **by the mercies of God** points to the work of Christ on the cross. It should remind us of everything God has done for us and the tremendous price He paid to

redeem us from our sin. A price that we could never afford because of our own imperfections and one we could never repay because of our weakness in sin. For this reason, we should never forget God's grace and mercy extended to us through Christ! Although we could never repay this act of mercy, it should nevertheless motivate us to serve Him faithfully with our

whole being—not out of a sense of duty or obligation, but because we are grateful and love Him.



Instruct

As humans, we often tend to forget and take for granted the things given to us—those things for which we didn't have to work. We may show appreciation and gratitude at first, but we can soon lose focus if we don't take steps to remind ourselves of the cost behind the gift and the sacrifice the giver made to purchase it for us. In working with the international service more than a decade ago now, one incident stands clearly apart from any other. The members constantly clamored for a personal copy of the Scripture in a language they could best read and understand. Knowing the importance of having access to Scripture, we used church funds to buy each one a Bible in various languages at a significant cost. Verbally, they expressed thanks. But their actions would soon indicate their gratitude was short-lived. I found most of the Bibles left in the church van in only a couple of weeks after they had received them. Their covers were tattered and torn, their pages crumpled, and dirt and dust encased them—not from use, but from abandonment and lack of care. They did not value the literal gift of God's Word and treated it carelessly.

As appalling as this may sound, we sometimes treat Jesus' sacrifice the same way. We forget the cost because He paid everything for us and gave it to us freely! So, we lose sight of its value in giving life and transforming us! We live in a self-serving and self-pleasing way, elevating our own desires. Such a lackadaisical and careless attitude can become easy in the world in which we live. We have a high standard of living and



people generally have more than just the basic needs of life. In such a culture, people can easily feel entitled and become self-centered so that they lose sight of a gift's value. Thus, complaints and criticism abound when people don't get what they expect. But we must remember that someone had to pay for that gift for us to have it in the first place! When we

realize the full value of Christ's sacrifice, it will inspire us to serve. **Service** won't simply become something that we do when we have time or when we think about it. It will become a priority and manifest itself through the way we live. Serving the Lord will

become a way of life! We will serve the Lord in every area of our lives: what we do, what we say, how we live or behave, what we believe, what we listen to, the attitudes we have, and so forth.

How often do you reflect on the cost of your salvation in terms of what Christ had to give? How does reflecting on that cost motivate you to live?

Question
1

To save us from our sin, Christ gave everything. He gave His life; He died. In return, we too ought to surrender everything to Him. We are to give our **bodies**—that is our entire selves to Him (see [2 Cor 8:5](#)). If Christ gave everything for us, we shouldn't only give part of ourselves to Him! We must grant Him access and control in every area. Imagine going to the store to purchase a piece of furniture—a dining room table—that requires assembly. At home, we open the box to discover only two legs and no fasteners or screws. We would complain about the missing pieces. We wouldn't accept it and return the item because it was incomplete. We could attempt to put it together and keep it, but it wouldn't be functional. We couldn't use it in the way it was intended! Thankfully, God doesn't "return" us! In order for God to use us as He desires, however, we must surrender our whole life under His control. If we as humans wouldn't accept an incomplete piece of furniture, why do we think giving only part of ourselves to the Lord would be satisfactory and **acceptable**? I'm reminded of that age-old hymn *It is Well with My Soul* in which the third stanza resounds: "My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought; my sin, not in part, but the whole; is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more; praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul." Christ paid the penalty for all our sin—not just part. Christ purchased all of us! If He hadn't, we would still be helplessly lost in our sins and headed on a path of destruction. Since Christ paid the utmost for us and gave everything He had so that we might have life in Him, we should give the same in return out of respect, honor, and gratitude. Let's make our entire self available for Him to use as He sees fit according to His divine plan.

What evidence exists in your life that you have truly given everything to the Lord and surrendered completely to Him?

Question
2

When we think about the term **sacrifice**, we tend to focus on death. But here Paul emphasizes that we are to be **a living sacrifice**. Certainly, giving ourselves to the Lord

as a **sacrifice** requires death. Scripture tells us that we must die to our old way of life ([Rom 6:6](#)) and put to death our members of sin ([Col 3:5](#)). Elsewhere, Paul even notes of himself, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” ([Gal 2:20](#)). Just as Jesus’ **sacrifice** did not ultimately end upon His death but looked forward to His bodily resurrection, so also our sacrifice ends not in death but looks forward to our resurrection in which we participate right now in the new life that He has given us.

So, if we must die to our old way of life, what does Paul mean by a **living sacrifice**? Christ doesn’t *just* save us from sin and leave us where we are. He transforms us. He calls and equips us to live **holy** and righteous lives as His representatives. In using

The Cross Shows Me How to Live

Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.
Romans 6:6

baptism as a metaphor for this new life in Christ, Paul writes, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). A **living sacrifice**, therefore, focuses on the transformed life that we now live before others as a testimony to the

work that Christ has done within us. We must live in righteousness and holiness with integrity at all times.

In what ways has Christ transformed us to be a living sacrifice?

Question
3

When we surrender our lives fully to the Lord and conduct ourselves in purity and holiness, God finds this **sacrifice acceptable** as our **reasonable service**. The phrase **reasonable service** is a difficult one to translate because of its rarity in the New Testament. Besides **reasonable service** ([KJV](#), [NKJV](#), and [NET](#)), other translations say true and proper worship ([NIV](#)), spiritual worship, ([ESV](#), [ASV](#), and [RSV](#)), spiritual service of worship ([NASB](#)), and true worship ([CSB](#)). The CSB perhaps best captures the sense

that Paul intended here: true worship. Worship, as we learned last week through the sacrifice of Christ, is not the performance of a series or rituals or religious acts; rather, it centers around our obedience. Therefore, true worship is not so much what we do as it is about who we are. As a result, who we are or have become in Christ now influences what we do. In this way, true worship reflects a lifestyle that we now live day in and day out. We worship Christ in the way we live in obedience to His holy standards, how we love one another, how we share the gospel, and how we meet the needs of others as God gives us ability.

Romans 12:2-3

THE PERSPECTIVE CHANGED:

In verse two, Paul explains exactly how we function as this **living sacrifice**. We are to have a different perspective. No longer do we follow the pattern of the **world**; we follow the pattern of Christ, particularly in how we think (v. 2) and how we view ourselves (v. 3). First, Paul demonstrates this changed perspective through our thinking in general. He commands us **not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind**. Control over our actions begins with the renewal of our minds. We don't generally do things without thinking at all. If we do, that would be utterly absurd and foolish. Instead, our actions originate in our minds. We think, no matter how long or how little, on a subject and then act. For example, we don't merely find ourselves in sin and caught up in the pattern of **this world**. We think about it. We entertain tempting thoughts which we do not purge from our minds and combat with principles from Scripture. Then, we willfully choose to participate in that sin. We don't "fall" into sin by accident; we've thought about it and then deliberately engage in it!

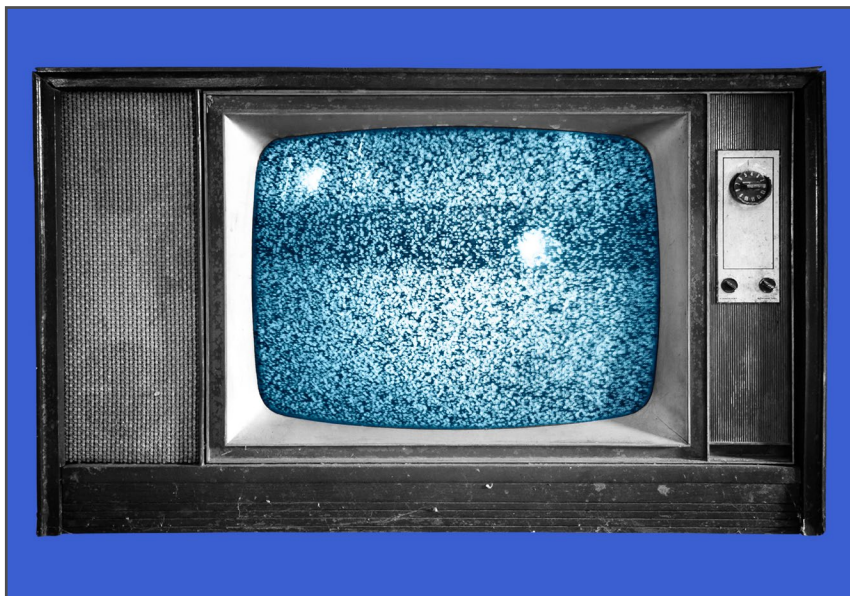
What do you do when you have a thought that tempts you or hear a conversation that is not honoring to the Lord?

Question
4

We are **not to be conformed to this world** which stands in opposition to the Lord. Instead, we are to **be conformed** to Christ and His righteousness. We cannot be conformed to Christ if we constantly ponder the things of **this world**. Paul has warned the Romans of this from the beginning of the letter. He interjects, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Rom 1:28). Further, Paul contrasts these two

Instruct

different mindsets: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit” ([Rom 8:5](#)). The difference between these two patterns couldn’t be greater: “The carnal mind is enmity against God” while the Spirit-filled mind “is life and peace” ([Rom 8:6](#)). Let’s evaluate the things which we consume on a daily basis and see how they can truly affect us in terms of the standard for living as communicated in Scripture which can at times push us further from the Lord rather than draw us closer to Him. In and of themselves, the things upon which we think may not be inherently sinful at times, but they can still produce actions that are when we don’t have the right perspective. If social media use, for example, becomes a platform to participate in gossip, spew lies and misinformation, attack or slander others, tolerate and support practices that clearly violate Scripture, and even celebrate sin, we shouldn’t participate! If watching the news, which is emotionally-drive like everything these days to increase ratings, causes us to become angry, hate those who disagree with us, cause contention in holding ungodly views, and consumes all our focus and conversation, we must cease watching. We must rid our lives of the things that distract us in the pursuit of godliness. If we retain these areas in our lives that misdirect our thoughts from the Lord, we will never be successful in renewing our minds and conforming to Him. I have specifically mentioned these two areas in the previous paragraph because they consume much of our time and thinking. Honestly compare the amount of time you spend engaged in social media and watching the news as compared to how much time you spend in



God’s Word each day and each week. Couple this with the amount of time we spend watching television, listening to music, surfing the Internet, and having conversations with other people and we will most likely see how much influence these things have on our thought-life and how little Scripture does. If we’re honest, we probably have a great imbalance in

our thought life. If we’re not careful, we can become disgruntled with God’s pattern for

our lives, desensitized to sin, and consumed with the way of the world.

What activities in which you engage convey the pattern of this world? What activities convey the pattern of Christ? How can you renew your mind to focus more on Christ?

Question
5

When we focus on the things of Christ, we can discern or **prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God**. The word translated **prove** actually means to approve or agree with. In other words, we are to apply what God has instructed; we are to live by the standards in His Word which reveal right from wrong. In English, the word **prove** carries with it the idea of testing or distinguishing. We are to test everything according to God's **perfect will**. In my tenure as a college professor, my students would always request a study guide for the test so that they could know how to prepare. God has given us a study guide so to speak. Scripture reveals His expectations and His **will** which prepares us for life's challenges.

Too often, however, we miss the obvious. We view God's **will** as an abstract concept which is difficult, if not impossible, to figure out. We always need to seek God in the specific direction that He will have us go in life. But we can know His **perfect will** with absolute certainty. God's **will** is not something difficult or magical that we must fret over determining. He's given it to us plainly in Scripture! God's **will** is simple. When we have a relationship with the Father through Christ, God expects us to obey His commands, practice righteousness, cultivate our relationship with Him, serve Him faithfully, and love others as He has loved us. Anything that departs from these tenets found in Scripture is not God's **will** and we should not think nor practice them!

What tests should we apply in order to know God's will in our lives?

Question
6

Second, our relationship with Christ transforms the way we think about ourselves. On account of the **grace** God has shown us, we should **not think of ourselves more highly than we ought** (v. 3). Rather, we should **think soberly** as God **has dealt each a measure of faith**. To **think soberly** requires that we have the mind of Christ which enables us to have the right perspective because we can see ourselves and the world through His eyes. It means that we must **not think** of ourselves too **highly** which results in pride, arrogance, and boastfulness or too lowly whereby we see ourselves as worthless, helpless, mediocre, and unequipped. Christ has transformed us through

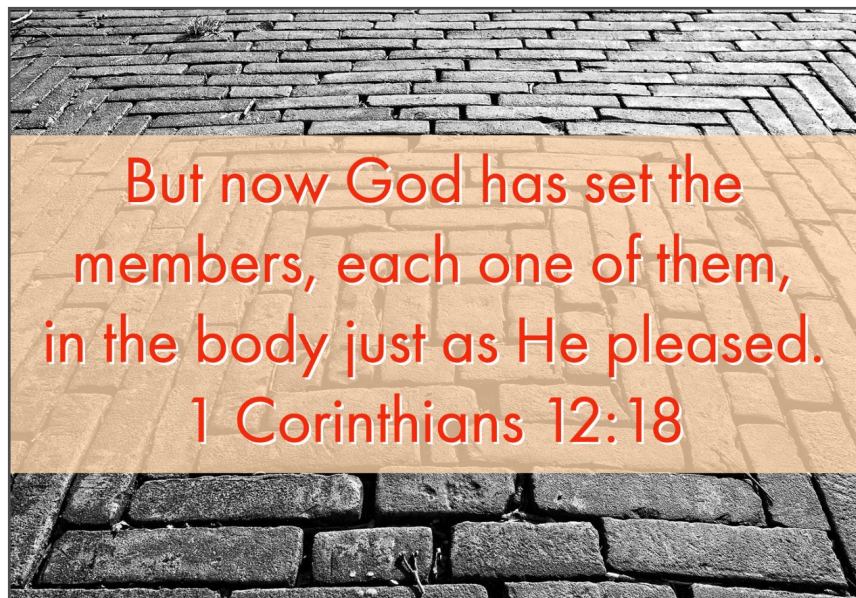
Instruct

His **grace** into a magnificent work ([Eph 2:10](#)) that He can use to bring glory to Himself. He cannot do that if we draw attention to ourselves rather than point others to Him or if we are unwilling to serve because we view ourselves as incompetent and unable. Christ has given us **a measure of faith**, not in the sense of belief in this context, but in the sense of exercising the giftedness which He has given to us in the Spirit (see [verse 6](#))—a subject to which He will turn in verse 4.

Romans 12:4-8

THE POSITION ACQUIRED:

When we **present** ourselves wholly unto the Lord, we acquire a new position in Him. We each have a place of service in the church! God has placed us **in one body** as



many members; we each have a different **function** in serving Him (v. 4). Paul stresses that even though we may be diverse in our backgrounds and giftedness we are to work together in unity (i.e., **members of one another**) in order to fulfill God's purpose for His people (v. 5). Therefore, we are to use the **grace** that God has given us to serve in the church

rather than being complacent and idle (v. 6). We are to participate not just in receiving discipleship, but in making disciples ([Matt 28:19-20](#)). Because of the limited scope of our discussion, however, we will focus on the **mind** that we should exhibit in serving rather than the individual **gifts**. Along with this passage here in Romans, you can find further detail in [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [Ephesians 4](#) which will offer additional insight into individual **gifts**.

A renewed **mind** compels us to serve actively—to find our niche in **the body** so that we can grow together in Christ, communicate the gospel, and disciple or mentor others in Scripture. Unfortunately, many in the church display a **mind conformed** to the pattern of the **world**. The **world** expects to be served and entertained. They view worship as a passive activity that people attend occasionally rather than the way they

live all the time. In fact, the pattern of the **world** says, "The church is here to serve me. I don't have to contribute anything. I'm here to get what I can."

The **world**, however, may be more deceptive in their language and try to sound spiritual in how they communicate this idea. They may even say, "The church is not feeding me. It isn't doing anything for me." The question I would ask them is this: "What are you doing about it? How are you contributing?" Growth is not the sole responsibility of the church! The church provides the setting, helps with accountability, and equips by pointing others to Christ through His Word. But you yourself must contribute! Such a statement about not being fed may sound spiritual, but it often lacks validity because it becomes self-centered when a people do not take responsibility for themselves to contribute!

It's one thing if a church does not preach and teach the undiluted truth of God's Word. Someone should not be a member or attender of that congregation. It's another thing if the church provides no opportunities for growth and service. Here at FBCFW we are able to say that we have no excuse because we can confidently say that we are standing upon God's Word and have numerous opportunities to serve and grow. The only reason we can't find a place of service or grow in our faith is because we have allowed the pattern of the **world** to be our guide. Let's, therefore, exhibit a renewed **mind** that conforms to Christ's expectation. It is His **perfect will** that we use our spiritual gifts for His glory in the church with the right perspective which points others to Him through the holy and righteous lives we now live in the Spirit.

How are you part of the outreach, discipleship, and service of the Lord here at FBCFW? How does your service reflect the mind of Christ rather than that of the world?

Question
7

To inspire his nation to victory during World War 2, Churchill ably describes the mindset every citizen must maintain and the duty they must fulfill in this battle against tyranny. Each person is personally responsible for his own contribution. He must serve faithfully regardless of the nature of his position. Each position is of the utmost importance! No one can look down on another whether an army general or a coal miner. And no one should underestimate his contribution to the fight. Everyone must see the bigger picture and work together in unity, adopting the same perspective to win the war. As believers, we are technically at war with the culture around us because it opposes God and has enmity with Him. God, in Christ, has given us a new perspective which allows us to stand against the godlessness of the culture. To exercise this new perspective properly, we need to present or surrender ourselves fully to Him. We can never successfully stand against culture if we're not completely aligned with God. We will always exhibit a worldly way of thinking. Christ has placed us in His body together as one unit so that we might remind each other of this new path to which He has called us to follow. This should lead us to serve obediently in every area of our lives. We are called to contribute and serve with the right perspective. We need each other in Christ. One area of service is not any more important than another, but God has called us to serve humbly together as His representatives which we point others to Him as we grow in our faith and likeness according to His character in the church together.

Incorporate

In what ways are we to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to the Lord?

What characteristics does a renewed mind display?

Based on [Romans 12:4-8](#), what are our responsibilities to Christ and to each other in the church? In what ways does our mindset and attitude affect our service?

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