

OVERCOME

OCTOBER 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,

Someone has cleverly said, “You don’t know what you don’t know.” One of the most important things to “know” is what God’s Word says about spiritual matters as well as the issues of life. We must be diligent in studying His Word and, as James says, not hearers only but doers of the Word. This is also why the Bible Study hour of our ministry is very important as we open the Word to study and learn not only what it says, but how to apply it—because you don’t know what you don’t know.

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.

Each week you have an opportunity to invite family and friends to hear the good news of Christ and to study His Word during the Bible Study hour. Let me encourage each of you to stop and make a list of the people in your sphere of influence and be intentional about inviting them to join you for Bible study and worship.

-Blessings
Pastor Don



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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Join us weekly for

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— 6:30-8:00 pm —

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JOIN US SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23

Going Beyond
SIMULCAST

PRISCILLA SHIRER



Doors open at 9:00am • \$40 per person

Ladies of all ages from our community are invited to attend!

*The cost of this event will include a light breakfast,
full catered lunch, & a simulcast ticket.*

Registration deadline is Sunday, October 17!

Register online at women.fbcfw.org

First Baptist Church of Fort Worth Women's Ministry
5001 NE Loop 820, Fort Worth, TX 76137
kathy@fbcfw.org • 817-485-7711 • women.fbcfw.org

October 3, 2021



Character Witness

*Overcome with
the Proper Defense*
1 Peter 3:13-22

Focal Verse:

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

1 Peter 3:15

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Introduce

Perhaps, some of us have been called upon in the past to fulfill our civic duty as a juror. We receive a summons in the mail with specific instructions of when and where to appear for jury selection along with an online registration link which sometimes contains a few additional details about the nature of the case. If selected to serve, trials take a typical format as the rules for the admission and assessment of evidence are presented to those arguing the case as well as those in the jury assessing the guilt of the defendant. To ensure a fair trial, every case has specific procedural rules about the presentation of evidence and the examination of witnesses which must be followed as overseen by a judge.

Under certain circumstances, character witnesses can sometimes provide admissible testimony in court as to the defendant's moral character and reputation which can assist a jury in determining

whether he had the propensity to engage in the alleged activity. By definition, character witnesses do not have first-hand knowledge of the alleged crime nor can they provide eyewitness testimony as those who witnessed the event, but they have a relationship with the defendant and intimate knowledge of his character which



can still shed light onto the case. Like any witness, character witnesses and those examining them must follow specific guidelines set forth by the State to establish the moral aptitude of a defendant.

The State of Texas has three general guidelines that govern the testimony of character witnesses. First, Texas allows character witnesses to testify "only if before the day of offense, the witness was familiar with the defendant's reputation or information that forms the basis of the witness's opinion."* In other words, they must have a relationship with the defendant and have visibly observed his character. Second, Texas dictates that "when a person's character or character trait is an essential element of charge, claim, or defense, the character or trait may also be proved by relevant specific instances of the person's conduct." The third area also deals with the same guidelines from the

Introduce

perspective of cross-examination. The State requires “inquiry” to “be made into relevant specific instances of the person’s conduct.” Thus, tangible, documentable evidence must be presented about the defendant’s specific acts of conduct. There must be proof to substantiate the “opinion!”

Why bring up all this boring legal discussion in a Bible study on 1 Peter? Peter reminds us that we are on trial before the world and we must give a reasonable defense through our character that we belong to Christ. Just like an earthly trial in the State of Texas in which a character witness must testify, we are called as believers to provide tangible evidence of our character by engaging in the righteousness outlined in Scripture. Others, therefore, should see evidence of our righteous character visibly displayed and be able to testify that we have a relationship with Christ based upon how we live. If we were put on trial and asked to give a reasonable defense of the hope within us, would there be enough evidence in the form of righteousness to establish beyond doubt that we belong to Christ? As we go through this week, let us examine our own lives and ask ourselves this very question so that we might show our relationship to Christ through our character.

Key
Question

To what evidence in your character can you specifically point in your life that you belong to Christ?

In Reference



For more information about character witnesses, visit www.txcourts.gov, specifically “[Texas Rules of Evidence](#).”

1 Peter 3:13-14

FEAR NOT SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS:

The key to overcoming suffering and difficulties in our lives is having the proper perspective and understanding which allow us to follow the pattern that Jesus Christ has established for us in Scripture. We can't avoid having problems in this life no matter how hard we may try. They will inevitably come no matter what steps we may take to circumvent them. Although we cannot control when, how intense, and how long our troubles may be, we do have control over how we respond. In the midst of suffering, we must above all remain righteous and continue to act with integrity rather than fearing the response of the unrighteous world around us.

For this reason, Peter begins this section with a rhetorical question in which he asks, **"And who is he that will harm you, if you become followers of what is good"** (v.

13)? Peter's question may allude to [Isaiah 50:9](#): "Surely the Lord God will help me; who is he who will condemn me?" From the perspective of Isaiah, those of the remnant of Israel who remain faithful to the Lord have nothing to fear from those who are unfaithful because God will reward and honor their obedience. Thus, with this question, Peter implies that

if we do **what is** right, we have no one or nothing to fear because God is the One who judges.

Although man may be able to pass temporary judgment and, in some cases, that judgment may be wrong, skewed, or biased, we will still ultimately be vindicated by the Lord when we practice **what is good**. Joseph, for example, was wrongly imprisoned upon the false accusations by Potiphar's wife, but in the end God vindicated His servant. Whether God rectifies the wrongs done to us while we yet live here on earth or we must wait until heaven, we know assuredly that when we do **what is good** God will honor our obedience. When Peter poses this question about **harm**, he likely



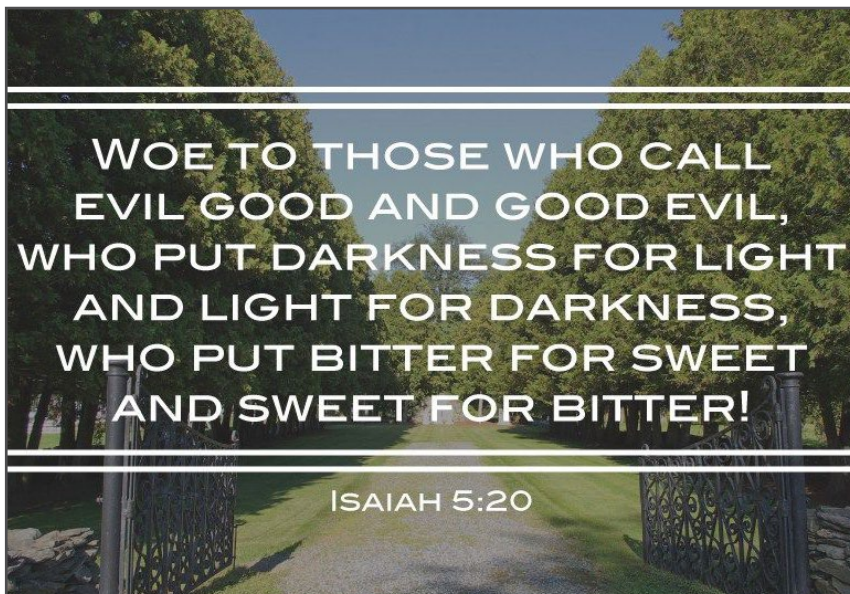
Instruct

has Jesus' teaching in mind where He sent the disciples into the world to proclaim the gospel. Jesus warns them that they will face opposition and persecution as they practice and proclaim the truth to a wicked and sinful world. Therefore, He compares it to sending sheep among the ravenous wolves of the world who will seek to destroy them ([Matt 10:16](#)). Even so, they must persist in their mission and continue to practice righteousness in the face of aggression. Consequently, Jesus then encourages His disciples with these words: "Do not fear them . . . And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" ([Matt 10:26, 28](#)).

How have you experienced opposition or persecution for doing what is right and good?

Question
1

The world will attack us for doing **good** and firmly standing upon the righteous principles of Scripture because they have a skewed idea of what constitutes good and evil ([Isa 5:20](#)). The world always attempts to pressure us to conform to its pattern, accepting and practicing the things which God finds detestable. We cannot bow to peer pressure, however; we must practice and stand for **what is good** without any



compromise whatsoever. Through Peter's question, we thus see Jesus' teaching implicitly applied: We need not fear man who is truly powerless to condemn, but God who has the power to condemn sin eternally. If translated more literally, Peter's question asks, "Who is the one who will do evil to you if you are eager to do that which is good?" Although it presupposes

that the world will attack us just as it did our Savior, the answer is actually a resounding "no one." No one can **harm** us or truly perpetrate evil against us because we are in God's hands from which no one can remove us ([John 10:28](#))! Therefore, we can have the confidence to persist in doing **good** no matter the circumstances or the response of the world!

Peter continues this line of thinking in verse 14 where he notes that **if we should suffer for righteousness' sake**, then we **are blessed**. We should consider ourselves **blessed** when we experience persecution because we are following the pattern God has set for us and Jesus perfectly demonstrated for us. Peter's principle here once again reflects Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount where He declares, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:10). "Happy," which some translations use to translate the word **blessed**, does not capture the meaning of the statement. We can, and should, have overwhelming joy in the midst of trouble because we have hope and confidence in Christ unlike the world. However, blessing here refers to the honor we receive from our obedience. The concept comes from the Old Testament when God outlines for Israel the consequences of their behavior. If they obey Him and follow His Word, they will be blessed ([Deut 28:1-14](#)). If they do not obey and live in rebellion, they will be cursed ([Deut 28:15-68](#)). We must remember that the context of 1 Peter focuses on how we should *act* during times of distress: Do we remain faithful and practice righteousness or do we turn to our own devices and follow the sinful pattern of the world? Only remaining obedient and practicing **what is good** will lead to blessing!

In the first two verses, Peter clearly wants us to be aware that we should expect suffering and persecution for doing the right thing. People are persecuted every day for affirming the truth of Scripture and practicing it. We see this on social media

where biblical principles are often mocked and sin celebrated. We see it through the suppression of truth where individuals and companies decide what can be posted or what must be censored. We see it through the pressure to conform or the retaliation against those who refuse to conform even to the belief of a minority. At times, we also see employees of



companies expose their evil and hypocritical practices; we call them whistleblowers. Although the United States has laws in theory which protect them, these individuals are often maligned and mistreated for their stance. Many times, the wrongs, though clearly documented, are never prosecuted or even addressed and the whistleblower

Instruct

suffers for doing **what is** right.

As believers, we function as whistleblowers in a sense because our lifestyle of “light” exposes the repugnance of sin ([John 3:19-21](#)). We shouldn’t necessarily go around looking for or pointing out the faults of others with a pompous attitude, but our lifestyle of righteousness in Christ should reveal to the world how evil their deeds truly are. At the same time, however, we must also speak the truth of Scripture in love when we see blatant evil around us ([Eph 4:15](#)). We cannot remain silent; we must proclaim the truth of the gospel boldly! Far too frequently in the past, the church has taken a hands-off approach and remained silent on issues that God’s Word clearly defines as sin. Some have the attitude that it’s none of my business or let them do what they want as long as they aren’t hurting others. Still, others have the attitude that remaining silent will avoid conflict, so let them practice what they want. We, as believers, are called both to practice righteousness and proclaim the truth of the gospel. To borrow Paul’s question: “And how shall they hear without a preacher” ([Rom 10:14](#))?

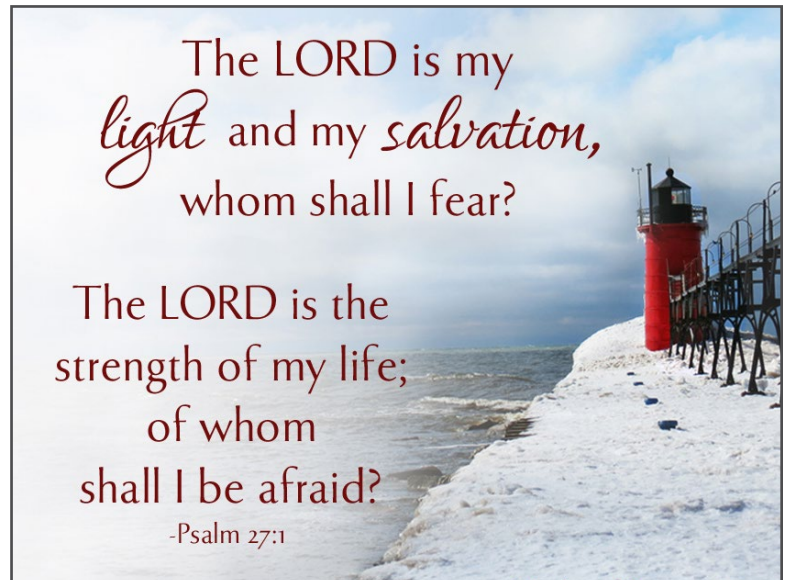
When have you been called upon to confront blatant wickedness or errant beliefs held by the world?

Question
2

Once again, Peter encourages us to continue doing **what is good** by quoting [Isaiah 8:12](#): **And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.** Not only **are** we **blessed** because we have a much greater reward in Christ than those on earth who have rejected Him, but we also have absolutely nothing to fear because God is our protector and advocate. Though the world may hurl insults against us, label us as “intolerant,” or even socially and physically retaliate against us for doing **what is good**, we should never fear nor compromise because the One who lives within us “is greater than he that is in the world” ([1 John 4:4](#)). We have every advantage to practice righteousness in any and every situation!

We shouldn’t conduct ourselves pompously and brashly in a way that invites persecution and trouble. Nor should we seek it as a badge of honor. Trouble will find us if we **are followers of what is good**. When trouble does find us, we should not shy away from it or fear it; we should face it with the full confidence of the Lord. In [Psalm 27:1-4](#), David shows us why. He announces that he has nothing to “fear” because the Lord is his “strength.” Because of David’s relationship with Him, the Lord will

serve as his defender. Who could ask for a better advocate? Yet, David's confidence is predicated upon his relationship expressed through his obedience. For he acknowledges, "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in His temple ([Psalm 27:4](#)). In other words, David desires to be in right standing and to fulfill the will of the Lord. Regardless of what may happen to us here on earth, may we have the same perspective. May we find our strength in the Lord to do His will and practice righteousness as we seek continual fellowship with Him!



When have you seen God act as your protector and defender?

Question
3

1 Peter 3:15-17

FAIL NOT IN SANCTIFYING THE LORD:

Although expressed in slightly different terms, Peter continues the same line of reasoning about how we should behave. He exhorts us to **sanctify the Lord God in our hearts and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us** (v. 15). The word **sanctify** in this context means to approach God as holy with all reverence and respect. We accomplish this by our deep-seated commitment to His holy principles as evidenced by our obedience and faithfulness. To **sanctify God in our hearts**, therefore, means that we must totally surrender to Him in every area which is outwardly expressed in our obedience to His Word at all times. We should never approach God casually or flippantly; such a cavalier attitude brings undo reproach upon Him. Instead, we must approach Him with meekness and reverence, ensuring that we are in right standing with Him because we have put His holy Word into practice.

What evidence in your life is there that you sanctify the Lord in your heart?

Question
4

Not only do we honor God by the holy way we behave, but we should also honor Him with our lips by always being **ready to give a verbal defense** of our actions and



APOLOGETICS - [APOL-O-GET-ICS]

Derived from the Greek word: apologia meaning
“speaking in defense”

offering **a reason for the hope that** lives within us. The word translated **defense** is from where we get our word apology—not in the sense of saying “sorry,” but as a **defense** of faith and belief. Many of you may have even heard of the disciplines “Apologetics” which refers to the study in defense of our faith. Typically, we use this verse to champion the scholastic

aspect of our faith where we engage in academic study to answer the claims of atheists, skeptics, and unbelievers. In fact, we used this verse as a clarion call for our Bible Institute many years ago where we equipped and disciplined ourselves with academic knowledge in hope of better defending our faith. We should be able to defend our belief in Scripture to anyone who has academic questions. This requires in-depth study and commitment to knowing God’s Word intimately.

But there is more to the context of this verse than purely an academic knowledge in which we focus on the history, content, and text of Scripture. The primary meaning of this passage is that we ought to be ready to give a defense of why we are living righteously in a world characterized by sin and degradation. In other words, when people ask, “Why are you different,” we need to be able to tell them! We need to share the gospel with them, explaining how Christ saved us and changed our lives. This requires that we visibly live holy lives that stand in stark contrast to the world. Others must see the difference within us to make them ask why we are so different than everyone else! Therefore, we must always be ready to give a **defense** of why we are living righteously as well as to answer tough questions which people may have about God and His Word.

Most of us have heard the old adage “our lives are the only Bible that some may ever read.” This applies perfectly to Peter’s instruction here. But it’s only a starting point. We absolutely must live righteously before all, but we must also **give a verbal defense**,

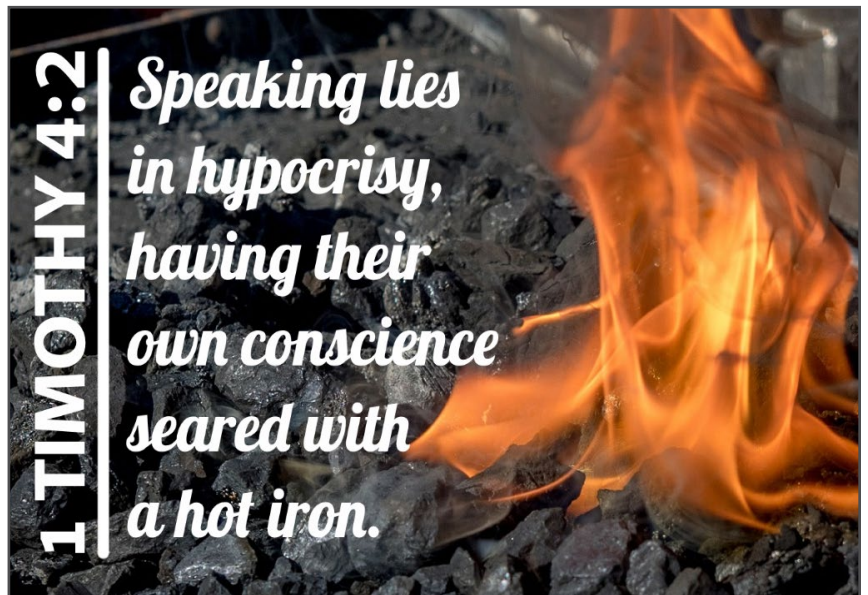
testifying to the validity of the gospel. Unfortunately, the adage has been abused over the years. It has caused people wrongly to believe that they don't need to say anything. They can just let their "actions" speak for them. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. We must do both. We must live righteously and verbally proclaim the gospel. Moreover, the phrase **a defense of the hope** refers to our salvation. We can have **hope** right now if we have a relationship with Christ because He has made us alive. Our **hope** also looks forward with assurance to the promise of eternal life. Thus, we can have confidence in Christ, knowing that He will fulfill His promises. But our **hope** remains somewhat future until Christ calls us home through death or He returns to collect the church. At that point, our faith and **hope** will become realized when we see our Savior face to face.

In what ways have you been called upon to defend your faith?

Question
5

As part of our **defense**, we must maintain an awareness of right so that we might not be accused or shamed among people, but bring glory to God. Peter urges us to have **a good conscience**, so that **when** others **defame us as evildoers, those who revile** our **good conduct in Christ may be ashamed**.

In Western thought, we view the conscience like a little voice where we debate doing right or wrong. To put it in less theological terms, we think of it like the cartoon Tom and Jerry when Tom has an ethical debate between an "angelic Tom" and a "devilish Tom." Eventually, one or the other wins the debate and Tom



acts accordingly. On the contrary, in the first century, **conscience** meant the awareness of the presence of sin not the debate that ensues over temptation. As a result, Peter is imploring us not to become desensitized to the presence of sin.

Unfortunately, many people have seared or cauterized their consciences today just as Paul warned in 1 Timothy 4:2. Cauterization deadens the nerves so that they cannot transmit pain or feeling. To do so with the **conscience** is extremely dangerous because

Instruct

people no longer feel guilt or remorse for their sins, engaging in them with impunity. We see blatant evidence of this on display in our society today. People parade sin without any guilt or sense of remorse. They engage in their sins openly. We don't need to name specific sins here and only focus on a few. But we must acknowledge that we live in a culture with a seared **conscience**. We cannot allow this to happen in the church! Yet, at times, people who attend church hold beliefs and participate in practices that go against God's Word. If we do these things that contradict Scripture, we are not in right standing with the Lord and we must repent. We cannot allow our consciences to become seared so that there is no difference between us and the world.

Instead, we must be an example to others. Even if others persecute us for doing right, Christ will reward our **good conduct**. On the day of judgment, therefore, He will reveal to all how we conducted ourselves righteously in accordance with His will. For those who rejected Him and **reviled** His saints, however, they will stand **ashamed** because they will now fully realize their error. For this reason, Peter closes this section with another admonition to do what is right in the face of opposition. He reminds us that **it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil** (v. 17). This again alludes to Jesus' teaching recorded in [Matthew 10](#) where He notes that we should fear the One who has the power to judge rather than man whose judgment is only temporary. Our love for Christ should compel us to honor Him with our obedience, but Peter wants us to be mindful of God's displeasure with all sin and the steps He will take against it. In all, let us continually strive to do **what is good** as a testimony to the world of the power of our Savior to transform.

1 Peter 3:18-22

FOLLOW THE SAVIOR'S EXAMPLE:

In this last section, Peter makes some of the most difficult remarks in the New Testament to understand. But we should not let this detract from the main point he wishes to make which we can assuredly know. As believers, we are to imitate Christ and follow the example He Himself has set for us. The preposition **for** serves as a marker which explains everything has previously said (v. 18). Just as we will suffer in this life, **Christ also suffered once for sins**—our **sins** not His. He, as the **just** One, died for us who are **unjust** so that He **might** reconcile us or make us in right standing with the

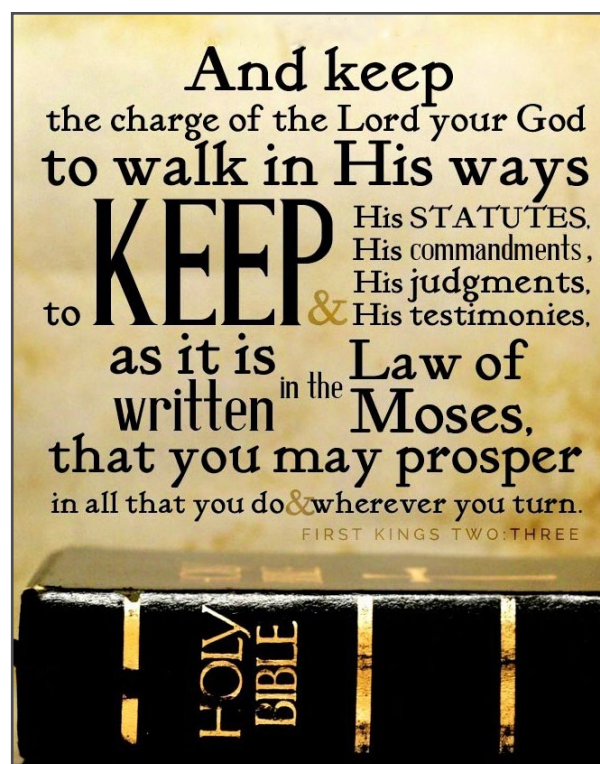
Father. Although He never once sinned, He was unjustly persecuted and put to **death** physically (i.e., **in the flesh**), but He was raised from the dead and **made alive by the Spirit**. Christ did not shun or fear death; He did not fear the reprisal of man for doing what is right. He obediently followed the will of the Father even unto **death** on the cross because He knew we could only have life through His perfect sacrifice. As His followers, we must do the same! We need not fear man, but obediently seek the will of the Lord.

These next verses are somewhat difficult to understand and many proposals have been made as how to best interpret them. We must have

some humility in our interpretation at this point as long as the interpretation does not conflict with other clear Scripture. We cannot deal with all the proposals here, so I will outline the conclusions I have drawn over the years in my studies. First, Peter notes that Jesus **went and preached to the spirits in prison** (v. 19). Unless the context clearly specifies, **spirits** in the New Testament generally refer to the fallen angels or demons—not human **spirits**. **Prison**, therefore, is somewhere God has confined them until He casts them into the lake of fire permanently at the close of this age upon Jesus' return. It really doesn't serve us to attempt to be more specific about the location of this **prison**.

When Jesus was raised from the dead, He was declared with victory to be the true Son of God ([Rom 1:1-4](#)). As such, the message He likely **preached to** those **spirits** was one of victory and judgment. Even though they had tried by putting Him to death, they could not thwart God's plan. With Christ's victory over **death** and the grave, it also sealed their fate along with anyone who had rejected or will reject Him. This verse, therefore, does not mean that those who previously died in former generations without Christ would have another chance to repent with the gospel. They had that chance while they lived on earth. Thus, Jesus' message showed them that their fate has been determined. They have been defeated once and for all!

Again, Peter appeals to a seminal Old Testament event to show their fate. Truly, from God's perspective, such rebellion and wickedness had been defeated from the very beginning. It stood no chance according to His divine plan. The events of Noah's day,



And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.
Revelation 20:12-13

therefore, serve to highlight that defeat which God had spoken before the dawn of creation. Although God is **longsuffering**, there will come a time that He will judge the earth—just as He did in Noah’s day. Only those, **eight souls**, who had a relationship with Him and obediently followed Him despite the pervasive wickedness

and violence of the culture would be **saved** (v. 20). The cross and subsequent resurrection, therefore, serve as that final instrument of salvation for those who repent but as judgment for those who do not.

Finally, Peter uses **baptism** as an illustration of the inner change in our character whereby Christ produces outward obedience visibly displayed through our actions. He explains that **there is** pattern (i.e., **antitype**) **which now saves us** (v. 21). However, he makes it clear that **baptism** does not save; it only provides the evidence that we are saved through our renewed character ([Rom 6:4](#)). Thus, he qualifies it by saying **baptism is not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God**. Just as the rest of the New Testament pronounces, we are not saved by good works or religious ritual; we are saved through a relationship with Christ which Peter specifies here by pointing to the **resurrection** of Christ and His subsequent exaltation in heaven at His ascension (v. 22). Because Christ has saved us, we will do good works in accordance with our **conscience** which lets us know of the presence of sin.

To summarize, we are to follow Christ’s example of obedience by doing the will of the Father. We must live righteously and strive for perfection by surrendering ourselves to Him and following the guidance of the Spirit. We cannot allow ourselves to become stained by the world; we cannot give in to peer pressure no matter how great it may be. We must follow Christ who expects and honors obedience, for one day judgment will come to all. As followers of Christ, we must still give an account for our actions just as those who rejected Him—yet our fates will be very different. Therefore, let us always strive to do good no matter what the world may do. Let us overcome sin and the world with the proper defense of a life lived pleasing to the Lord.

Inspire

In the introduction, we looked at the admissibility of character witnesses in a court of law in Texas. After having studied and prayed this week, use this time to ask the Lord for an honest evaluation. Let's not go through life with seared consciences, desensitized to sin. Rather, let us be aware of any sin and take steps to repent so that we might do good. The good we do should be visible to the world around us as a testimony to the power of Christ to change us. People may mock us and falsely accuse us, but let us continue to do good according to Scripture that we might honor the Lord. We can only overcome with the right defense if we have surrendered completely to the Lord. And we can only do good if we follow the guidelines of His Spirit who dwells within us giving us life.

Incorporate

What is your response when suffering or trouble comes into your life?

How do you deal with peer pressure or the pressure of the world to conform to its pattern? What specific steps do you take so that you do not compromise the truth of Scripture?

How aware are you of the presence of sin if it is in your life or even around you? What keeps us from becoming desensitized to sin and recognizing sin if we engage in it?

Journal: Document God's Work

October 10, 2021



Overcome Depravity

Romans 1:18-32

Focal Verse:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

Romans 1:18

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Introduce

If one war could quantify the depravity and sinfulness of man, World War 2, particularly the slaughter of the Jewish people who had settled in Europe, would foremost come to mind. The hatred of the Nazi Party toward Jews in general led to emigration policies in which many were deported and forced to live in squalid conditions in concentration work camps. There millions died whether from abuse, starvation, disease, or the gas chamber simply because of their physical lineage. Among the many who perpetrated and devised barbaric plans for ridding the German Reich of Jews, Adolf Eichmann played one of the most pivotal roles in designing and implementing the Holocaust. The unconscionable atrocities later committed by the Nazis started rather innocuously when they would round up Jews and simply force them to move to certain parts of German-controlled territory—specifically Poland and later Hungary. With the annexation of Austria in 1938, Eichmann himself stormed the Jewish Cultural Community offices and devised a plan for their expulsion. His plan worked so effectively that it became a model for the entire German Reich. Essentially, Eichmann became the chief architect for the Holocaust. Rising through the ranks because of his “success,” he received promotions which put him in charge of moving most Jews in Europe. He oversaw the transferal and deaths of at least 1.5 million Jews during the early 1940s, including those housed in Auschwitz.



Although captured by American forces at the end of the war, he escaped custody and fled Germany in 1946 with the help of several in the Catholic Church. He went to Argentina where he would live under pseudonyms until 1960 when special forces from Israel arrested him and brought him to Jerusalem to stand trial for his war crimes against humanity. At that trial, a survivor from Auschwitz, Yehiel Dinur, was called upon to testify. Upon entering the courtroom and seeing Adolf Eichmann face to face, Dinur burst into tears and collapsed on the floor. Twenty-three years later in a *60 Minutes* interview with Mike Wallace (Feb 6, 1983), Dinur describes what brought about

Introduce

such emotion. And what he says will likely surprise us! Dinur saw an ordinary man in Eichmann sitting there—not some fiend or monster; he was simply a man. Then, Dinur describes in his own words what made him cry and collapse: “I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable to do this exactly like he.”* Mike Wallace at that point concludes, “Was Eichmann a monster, a madman—or something even more terrifying—was he normal?”

The following remarks are in no way meant to trivialize the Holocaust and the depravity of the individuals involved. But we tend to personify evil with the faces of men like Hitler, Eichmann, Mussolini, and Stalin. Yet, as Yehiel Dinur discovered, these are ordinary people like you and me. All sin, whether we consider it great or small, is detestable before our holy Father. Just as God hates the murder of those during the Holocaust, He hates lying, stealing, sexual immorality in any form, gossip, covetousness, unloving, disobedience towards parents, and anything else the Bible classifies as sin. Apart from a relationship with Christ, all people, even those who consider themselves good when compared to people like Hitler and Eichmann, will face the wrath of God upon their sins—no matter how little or how much they have done wrong! We have a choice, however. We can remain in our sins fulfilling our fleshly desires and receive the penalty of God’s wrath. Or we can overcome our depravity and sin by turning to Christ and accepting His forgiveness.

Key
Question

How does the world quantify or classify types of sins? What does Scripture say about attempting to classify types of sins?

In Reference

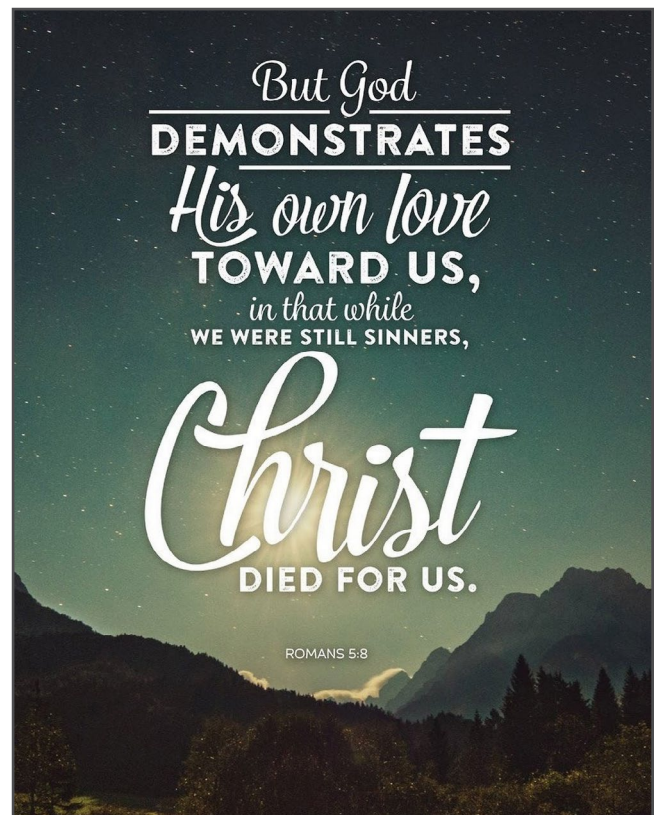


Cal Thomas, “[Musings on the Nature of Man and Evil Now News?](#)”
South Florida Sun-Sentinel (April 5, 1996).

Romans 1:18-23

THE DEBT ACCRUED FOR SIN:

Having described the gospel as “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” by faith ([Rom 1:16-17](#)), Paul now explains in verse 18 how it becomes a tool of judgment against sin, particularly among those who willfully reject it. He declares that **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness**. From this verse we can observe two important principles about God’s **wrath**. First, God directs His **wrath** toward sin and **unrighteousness** rather than people. But people invite His **wrath** upon themselves because they refuse to repent of their wickedness. Although God loves all people, based upon His holy nature and character, He must punish sin. Consequently, people choose for themselves to incur God’s **wrath** because they reject His gracious gift in Christ. Because the world wishes to **suppress the truth** to justify their sin and placate their conscience, they wrongly advocate that a “loving God would not send anyone to hell.” This statement is misleading! God does punish sin, but people choose to condemn themselves to hell because they refuse His plan in Jesus Christ ([John 3:17](#)). God displayed His love for all people in Christ. He gave us a way to overcome our sin which we could not have accomplished ourselves, but we must choose to accept it and follow Him! Second, God’s **wrath** comes against **all** sin whether the world considers them big or small. Breaking only one part of the law means that we are guilty of the whole and will incur God’s judgment lest we repent ([Jas 2:10](#)). The two terms **ungodliness** and **unrighteousness** broadly cover **all** types of sin, not just sexual immorality and, in particular, homosexuality. Many people focus on the abomination of homosexuality in this passage because Paul addresses it most prominently given its prevalence in first-century Rome. Yet, we often overlook the



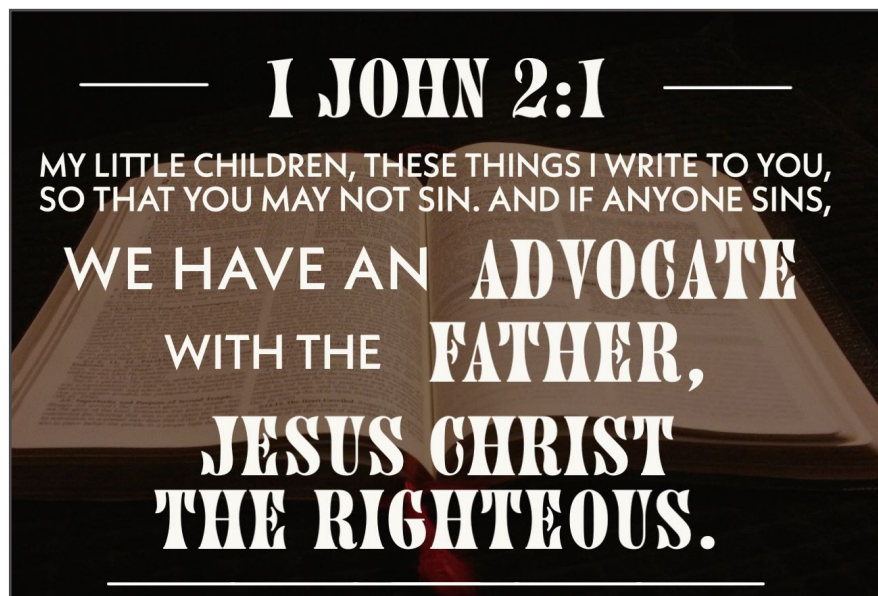
word **all** in this verse. God's wrath comes against **all** sin. In fact, Paul lists a whole host of different sins at the end of this passage (vv. 29-32). Any activity that violates God's Word where He instructs us how to live is sin and will receive His **wrath!**

Again, the world tries to **suppress the truth** by claiming certain sins are acceptable, such as lying in some instances or many kinds of sexual immorality and perversion—cohabitation, extramarital affairs, and homosexuality. They also wrongly contend that striving to be a morally good person can save us if our good works outweigh our bad. Nothing could be further from the truth! God punishes **all** sin and the only hope for salvation we have is in a relationship with Christ. Although we know God is merciful and patient desiring all to come to the knowledge of repentance ([2 Peter 3:9](#)), there will come a time when He will issue judgment against sin. How we have chosen to respond to Him here on earth will determine our eternal fate. The choice is ours. God has already provided the way for life. But will we choose sin and death over the life He has offered us?

When sharing the gospel, how would you help others to understand God's wrath properly?

Question
1

Although we often use this passage in reference to those who have refused Christ and not repented, we must remember Paul is writing to the church. Certainly, he wants to



arm us with the gospel so that we can share it effectively with others. But he also wants us to understand the heinous nature of sin and to keep ourselves unstained by it. If we sin, God will indeed convict us and discipline us. In such cases, we must repent and not continue to live in habitual sin ([1 John 1:9](#)). Therefore, it is important for us to

evaluate our lives thoroughly every day. We should pray and ask the Lord to reveal any specific area in our lives which is not pleasing to Him. We need to pray with specificity and respond accordingly rather than just a general prayer at bedtime to forgive our

sins. How can we correct something in our lives if we don't ask the Lord to show us specifically and only pray in generalities? Let us strive for righteousness and perfection in Christ, overcoming sin to honor the Lord.

In what ways do you pray specifically about temptation or sin?

Question
2

Paul now points out that we are susceptible to God's wrath when we sin because we have no **excuse** since He has made right and wrong plainly evident both through our conscience and His character revealed through nature. Thus, Paul explains that **what may be known of God is manifest in them** (i.e., their conscience) because He Himself **has shown it to them** (v. 19). Hence, no one can escape God's **wrath** against sin because He has explicitly warned them. For Israel, God made His holy standard for life clear through Scripture—particularly the law. For the Gentiles, God used their conscience, an awareness of sin, to help distinguish between right and wrong. Even apart from the law, therefore, people can generally know what is acceptable and detestable. Paul further explains this in Romans 2:14-15: "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them."

When people struggle with moral "dilemmas," debating right and wrong, the activity in which they are contemplating participating is most likely immoral. People do not have to debate whether something is right; rather, they debate either when they fail to do good or propose to do something wrong. Thus, people will struggle when what they are doing or thinking about doing conflicts with their God-given conscience which by its very nature is designed to expose sin. For this reason, God has not hidden His truth from the world, but plainly revealed it in multiple ways so that we have no **excuse**. Yet, people try to justify their sins either by comparing themselves to other imperfect people or by appealing to a consensus of society to make themselves feel better. Still, we have no **excuse** no matter how misguided and wicked society may be because we can discern God's truth through His Word, through His character evident in nature, and through the conscience He has instilled within us.

What moral dilemmas or conflicts can you identify that show the debates we have are most often immoral decisions rather than good?

Question
3

Instruct

In addition to our conscience, God has also made His holy character known through nature. Paul notes that **since the creation of the world God's invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal**

Thus says God the Lord, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it.

Isaiah 42:5

power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (v. 20). Nature has an order and cohesiveness which points to an Intelligent Designer as its origin. We can know assuredly God exists because the order and complexity of the universe necessitates a Designer and cannot sufficiently be explained by mere random chance. For this reason, we can see

God's divine **attributes** imprinted within nature. Although people have errantly begun to worship nature as a "god," it is not "god" but evidence for His eternal existence and a reflection of His character!

Since God is spirit ([John 4:24](#)) and no one has seen Him at any time ([John 1:18](#)), He remains invisible to the naked eye, but we still see evidence of His existence through nature. When teaching Nicodemus, Jesus uses a perfect illustration to describe God's presence. He compares Him to the wind. We cannot see the wind either from where it comes or where it goes, but we can see its effects. We can see it blow trees, blades of grass, flags, and much more. When we look at nature, we cannot visibly see God, but we can see evidence of His work and presence. For example, Jesus points out in Matthew 6 how He cares for the birds and provides for the lilies. God is intimately involved with every aspect of His creation, particularly mankind for whom He sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to become a sacrifice that would overcome sin ([Rom 8:3](#)).

What evidence of God do you see through creation as supported by Scripture?

Question
4

Paul reiterates that we will receive the penalty of God's wrath if we reject Him and His truth, turning to our own selfish desires. He laments that even though people can still

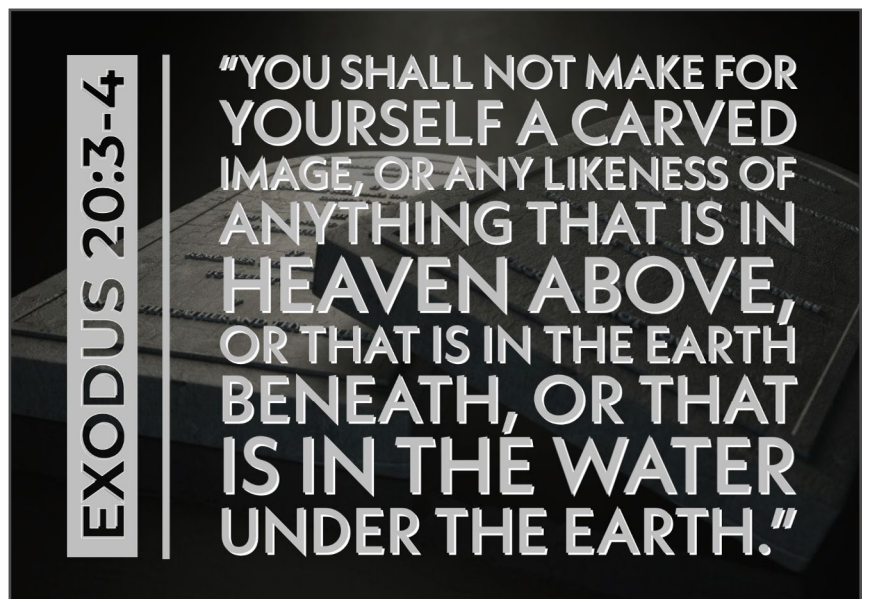
see His character and work through **creation** and **they know God** cognitively, **they did not glorify Him as God nor were they thankful**; instead, **they became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened** (v. 21). In other words, they **know God** exists, but they rejected Him in favor of participating in their fleshly desires. Many people may say they believe in God and many may claim to be “religious”; however, they truly do not **know** Him because they do not have a relationship with His Son the Christ. James points this out when he writes, “You believe there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble” ([Jas 2:19](#)). Knowing God requires more than intellectual knowledge; it requires a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul further describes their error as **professing to be wise**, when in actuality, **they became fools** (v. 22). As **fools**

who have rejected the Lord ([Psalm 14:1](#)), they have **changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things** (v. 23). Certainly, Paul is referring here to the first-century worship of inanimate idols designed after objects in

creation. And we too must exercise great care to place God first in everything and not allow other things to become our idols which distract in our worship—whether family, relationships, friendships, work, hobbies, or anything else that garners our attention above the worship of the Lord.

Yet, Paul makes another profound point that is highly applicable for our world today—and we may often overlook it. People change **the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man**. Beyond the physical implications of idolatry at the time, this verse addresses how man attempts to create God in his **image**. In other words, man changes God’s character and nature to fit his own views, his perspectives, and his desires. According to [Genesis 1:27](#), God created us in His **image** to have an intimate and holy relationship with Him. But man has reversed this and attempted to re-create God according to his own ideas and philosophies. Although God has given us Scripture and sent Jesus so that we might truly **know** Him, people have interjected their own errant beliefs about who He is. For instance, some treat God like a genie who



Instruct

stands ready to answer their beckon call whenever they want something. Furthermore, they regard Jesus merely as a good teacher who loves everyone and even tolerates sin at times rather than the One true God who died for their sins. Thus, the many religions and denominations of this world represent what and who man thinks God is. We can, however, only truly **know** God through what He Himself declared in His Word and a relationship with Jesus Christ.

How has the world changed God into their image?

Question
5

Romans 1:24-25

THE DENIAL OF THE TRUTH

In His sovereignty, God gave us a choice whether to follow the plan He devised or to follow our own fleshly desires in foolishness. Unfortunately, many people have chosen the second option and they have followed their own plan. As a result, God abandoned them to their own desires and allowed them to destroy themselves. **Therefore**, Paul explains that **God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies amongst themselves** (v. 24). The word translated **gave up** literally means to abandon or remove one's hand. The thought of God abandoning us to our lustful desires ought to frighten those who have rejected Him! Nothing in the world could be worse. God has left them to suffer the consequences of their actions on their own! They have no help and there is nothing they can do on their own to avert the penalty of their sin.

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Romans 2:5

The parable we call the "Prodigal Son" serves as a good picture of how God allows us to experience the consequences of our choices. The son found himself poor and destitute, eating pig slop after having blown through his entire inheritance. But he eventually came to his senses and repented, reconciling with

his father. However, many even in their misfortune and the depths of sin still do not choose reconciliation with the Lord. As long as we have breath, we always have that hope of reconciliation with Christ if we accept it. But there will come a time when we have hardened our hearts so much that God abandons us to our **lust** that leads to our destruction. In human terms, God says, “I’ve given you chance after chance. Do what your heart desires and suffer the consequences.” This may sound unloving and vengeful, but it is the path we ourselves have chosen if we reject Christ. Being left to our own devices and our own wisdom is the worst punishment one could ever receive because it will only end in complete destruction and eternal torment. When left to our own devices, we will almost always make the wrong choice; our choices will always be self-centered and “best” suited for our pleasure rather than seeking righteousness which honors the Lord. Our actions, when left unchecked, will always lead us away from God. For this reason, Paul notes that when we follow **the lusts of our hearts**, we **dishonor our bodies** because we do not seek and practice the holiness of God. All this leads us to **exchange the truth of God for a lie**. We believe the **lie** that we know what’s best for our own lives and we have all the information to make the best decisions on our own. As a result, we omit God from our decisions and seek what we consider wise and pleasurable for our own benefit. But our “wisdom” in God’s eyes is mere foolishness ([1 Cor 3:9](#)) and our temporary “pleasure” can lead to eternal condemnation if we don’t repent.

How do you seek to involve God in all your decisions? What happened when you didn’t involve Him? How does that contrast to when you did?

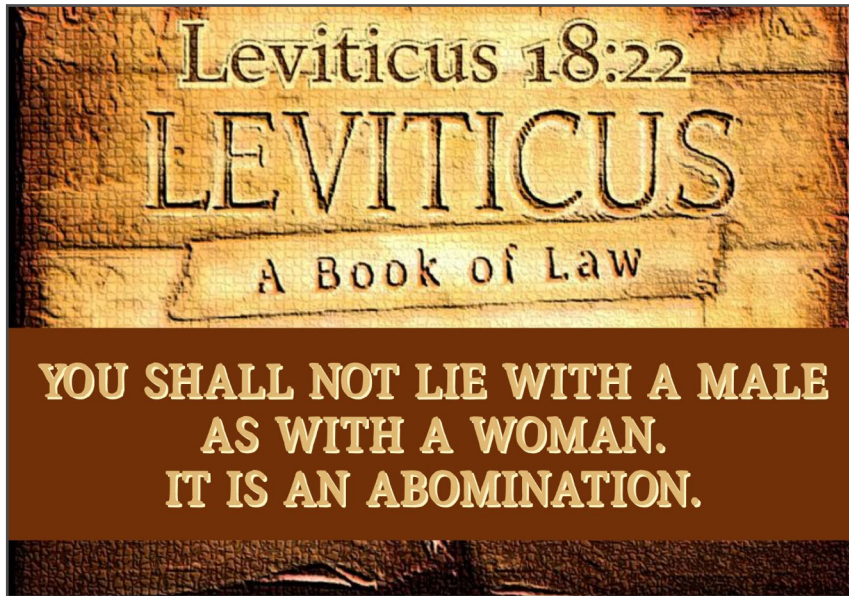
Question
6

Romans 1:26-27

THE DELIVERANCE TO DEPRAVITY

Paul now gives a specific example of how sin defiles the body by showing God’s displeasure with sexual immorality—here specifically homosexuality. Homosexuality was as prevalent in first-century Rome as in our own society today. It was a sin in the Old Testament ([Lev 18:22](#)), it was still sin in the first century according to Scripture ([Matt 5:18](#)), and it is a sin today no matter what society and people may believe. For this reason, Paul demonstrates how **God gave them up to vile passions** where **even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature** (v. 26). In addition, **men also left the natural use of the woman and burned in their lust**

for one another, committing shameful acts and receiving their penalty of their error which was due (v. 27). Although this passage focuses on homosexuality, we



must acknowledge that all sexual immorality of any kind is wrong: cohabitation, pre- or extra-marital, bisexuality, and the exploitation of individuals through pornography. Our society accepts most of these as normal expressions of life, but in God's eyes they all constitute sin. We cannot pick just one and focus on it; we must condemn all sexual sin in any form. God designed

sexual relationships to occur only in marriage with one man and one woman for life. Inherently, nature itself proves homosexuality is an aberration and sinful. Aside from the different ways God physically designed men and women, the primary purpose of these relationships within marriage was procreation ([Gen 1:28](#)). Two of the same gender have no *natural* ability to fulfill this God-designed function. Some heterosexual couples may choose not to have children and some may be unable to do so physically at times. But the potentiality and ability always exist (i.e., Abraham and Sarah). Therefore, those who attempt to argue otherwise have merely shown how much they have been deceived because the ability of only a man with a woman to procreate is evident within nature and supported by science!

Some also try to twist and distort Paul's words here. They wrongly claim that Paul is talking about unfaithfulness when he says **they burned in their lust**. Consequently, they believe homosexual relationships are sanctioned by God as long as they are monogamous and faithful. **Lust** can certainly mean impulse, but here it means one's wicked and sinful desires which propel them to act immorally against the way God created them. Both this passage and the rest of Scripture are clear that homosexuality, whether monogamous or not, is sin and it rebels against the way God created us. Therefore, we can learn two principles from this example. First, people are not created to engage in homosexuality as the world often claims; they were not born that way. Paul takes explicit measures to describe the act as **unnatural**. Second, participation in

homosexuality, like any other sin, is a choice. People willfully choose to explore their personal desires, ignoring what God has said in His Word and the obvious way in which He created them. Consequently, God has delivered these people over to this depraved way of thinking. No longer are they able to recognize the **truth**, which has become obvious in our society, and their warped minds cannot distinguish between what is **natural** and **unnatural**. By engaging in sin with impunity and even celebrating it in an attempt to normalize it, they have invited **the wrath of God** upon themselves.

In what other ways do we see how God has delivered our world over to its own lusts and desires?

Question
7

Romans 1:28-32

THE DEBAUCHERY OF A DEBASED MIND

Although Paul points to homosexuality as a specific example of the depraved thinking of man, he wants us to understand that all sin stems from a **debased mind** (v. 28). He reveals that **God gave them over to a debased mind to do those things which are not fitting because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge**. In verses 29-31, Paul includes a list of sinful actions in which people frequently engage to highlight the debauchery of a **mind** that has pushed the Lord aside. This by no means is a comprehensive list, but a representative sampling of what constitutes sin according to God's Word.

Unfortunately, we lack the time to study this list in-depth. But there are many items on this list which still find a place in the lives of believers at times—whether **covetousness, envy, strife** (i.e., contentions and fights), **deceit**, gossiping (i.e., **whisperers**), **proud, boasters, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, and unmerciful**. Many of us probably have not murdered someone, but at times we have likely harbored an unforgiving attitude against someone who has wronged us. Many of us probably



Instruct

don't sit around and invent ways to commit **evil**, but at times we have become envious or jealous of others. We who have a renewed **mind** in Christ should not give in to our old way of thinking. We must guard ourselves and stay focused on Christ so that we may live righteously.

How do you guard or protect your mind against the things of the world?

Question
8

Paul concludes this section with a statement about God's **judgment** against **all** sin. Those who commit sin, even if they have bought into the lies of this world, know **the righteous judgment of God** because He has made it patently obvious to them (v. 32). Those who practice **such things are deserving of death**. Still, they persist in their sins and also **approve of those who practice them**. We must love people just as God loves them, but we cannot ever condone sin or approve of the people who engage in sinful activities. We must point them to Christ and His Word, praying that they may not harden their hearts to His conviction and repent. We also need to keep ourselves unstained from committing such sin as well so that we might be effective witnesses to the world around us. Therefore, let us overcome depravity by putting aside our will and our desires to seek the will of the Lord and live according to His righteousness.

Inspire

As bad as the atrocities of the Holocaust were, Yehiel Dinu who survived Auschwitz had a profound and impactful revelation about the nature of sin. All sin is reprehensible before the Lord and every human being has the propensity to sin—and does sin. Sin is not the face of some evil monster, but the face of an ordinary man like Adolf Eichmann. Even Dinu, who had suffered much, realized his proclivity to be just as evil as Eichmann and do the same things. All sin ends in death; it receives the wrath of God. None of us is free from sin, but we all stand guilty whether an Eichmann or Dinu. Praise be to the Lord that we do not have to endure His wrath. He provided an escape; He provided a way to overcome depravity and be reconciled to Him through His Son. Let us, therefore, live as overcomers who in Christ have defeated sin and death. Let us live righteously and rid ourselves of any sin that may be in our lives.

Incorporate

How have you received the correction of the Lord when you have sinned? How did you respond? What did this teach you?

In what ways does the world deny the truth? How can you combat the deceit in the world? Why should we be faithful in proclaiming the truth even though the world may not listen?

In what ways have you seen God abandon or deliver people over to their own desires? If this has happened to you, how did He bring you back into right standing?

October 17, 2021



Overcome Division

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Focal Verse:

“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

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1 Corinthians 1:13

Introduce

We live in a world dominated by narcissism and self-centeredness as demonstrated through the importance we place upon the individual—especially in Western cultures. We see self-promotion and people clamoring to have it their way every day in every facet of life.

Whether or not people brashly and openly do it, they seek notoriety and fame—to make a name for themselves and draw attention to their exploits. People, however, then become so micro-focused on their own lives, their own desires, and their own problems that they



fail to see the bigger picture which Jesus has for the world, especially those who follow Him. By focusing on ourselves and our preferences and desires, we create arbitrary divisions which detract from the unity we can have in Christ when led by His Spirit. Perhaps, the clearest evidence for such individualistic focus appears in the realm of sports. Any sport, professional or amateur, is always designed to be played as a team. One individual cannot win a championship by himself no matter how talented he may be. Certainly, teams have and need “superstars,” but they must work cohesively with the entire team to be effective. Even though most are cognizant that it takes a team effort for victory, many still allow their personal ambitions and antics to overshadow the whole. This attitude not only detracts from the team’s goal, but it also creates division and strife amongst its personalities which further exacerbates the team’s problems. It can also cause fights in the clubhouse or locker room; it can subconsciously instill unhealthy rivalries amongst teammates jockeying for position and control.

Here in North Texas, we have seen athletes on both sides of the spectrum. We have seen those who have talent poison the disposition of a team with their off-the-field antics as well as their on-the-field display of individualism. Yet, we have also seen those superstars loaded with talent put aside their personal ambitions to elevate the team and cultivate an atmosphere of success. We need not name specific individuals in either category because it’s clear which ones worked as a team, even overcoming obstacles to win championships. Upon becoming Head Coach of the Kansas City

Introduce

Chiefs, Herman Edwards perhaps best summarized what it means to play for a team. In his interview upon accepting the position, he states, “The one thing I do know, the players that play on this team will play for the name on the side of the helmet and not the name on the back of the jersey.”*

As believers, we don’t live for our own name; we live for the name of the One who saved us and gave His life for us. After all, our names are only written in the Lamb’s Book of Life because of the blood He shed on our behalf. Therefore, let us put aside all our personal ambitions and desires, so that we may all seek His will which unites us through His Holy Spirit. Let us not seek to fulfill our preferences which can cause rifts and divisions within His body—the church. Instead, let us overcome division by having the same mind, the same outlook based upon Scripture, the same purpose, and the same goal in Him. May we focus on preaching the gospel and pointing the world to the only One who can save, heal spiritually, and unite through His blood.

Key
Question

How should we promote unity in the church without compromising the truth of Scripture as many have done today?

In Reference



Espn.com News Sources, “[Edwards Replaces Vermeil as Chiefs Coach](#)” (Jan 9, 2006), available from [espn.com](#).

1 Corinthians 1:10

PURSUE UNITY IN CHRIST:

After thanking God for how He has gifted the Corinthian church with every kind of spiritual gift for ministry and His faithfulness to those called into His fellowship, Paul immediately addresses the problem of **division** within the church. He begins by pleading with the Corinthians to be united **by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** (v. 10). He urges them **all to speak the same thing** and allow **no divisions** to exist among them, **but that they might be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment**. Paul wants them to focus on Christ and not on their personal preferences, their own perspectives, or the personalities of the leaders and other individuals within the church. They should concentrate on both living and proclaiming the truth of the gospel!

First, Paul implores them literally **to speak the same thing**; many modern translations will either shorten this phrase simply to “agree” ([ESV](#), [NASB](#), [RSV](#), and [NET](#)) or interpret it as “agree in what you say” ([NIV](#) and [HCSB](#)). The Corinthians in either case must adopt Christ’s perspective and see the world through His eyes rather than through their own selfish desires. They should not just look out for their own personal interests, but seek the

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. *Philippians 2:3-4*

will of the Lord which would have them look out for the interests of others and build a community that visibly displays its love for one another ([Phil 2:3-4](#)). A church can only accomplish this through Christ when every member is united in Him and adopts His same outlook.

Therefore, Paul qualifies this need for unity by highlighting the authority by which He speaks—**by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**. This also serves as their call to follow Christ’s example and imitate His character. For Christ Himself never displayed selfishness nor did He ever seek personal gain. He laid all these things aside to seek

Instruct

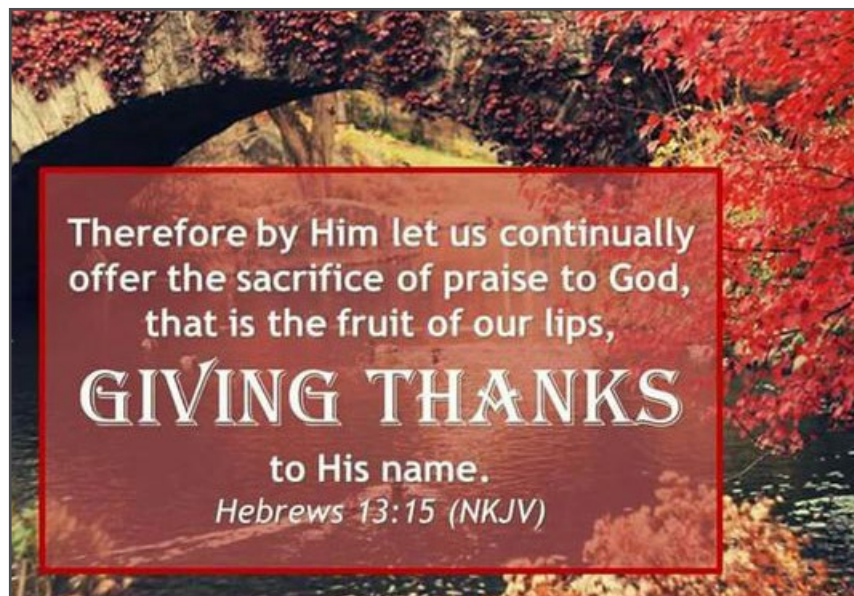
and fulfill the will of the Father—even though it cost Him greatly. In fact, He declares, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). This propelled Jesus to serve rather than be served and give His life on the cross—the epitome of selflessness ([Mark 10:45](#)).

How do you display the selflessness of Christ in your life? How do you look out for the interests of others and not just your own?

Question
1

Specifically, what does it mean to **speak the same thing**? In verse 5, Paul has already acknowledged that God has “enriched” them in “all utterance and knowledge.” The phrase “all utterance” literally means “in every word.” This refers to the gospel first and foremost—the testimony about Christ ([1 Cor 1:6](#)). They are to rely upon the Lord and proclaim His message about how to have eternal life. Therefore, they must preach Christ crucified and resurrected—the only source of life through faith! For this reason, Paul later reminds them, “And my speech (literally, word) and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but the power of God” ([1 Cor 2:4-5](#)). We ought to use our speech then primarily to point people to Christ and the wisdom of God found in Scripture.

In addition to sharing the gospel, the Bible exhorts us to use our speech in other ways as well. With our lips, we should give praise and direct our thanksgiving to the Lord,



testifying to His provision and protection ([Heb 13:15](#)). We should also encourage and build up others rather than curse, seek to tear down, and destroy ([Jas 3:10](#)). However, this does not mean that we cannot offer correction when needed or we cannot speak against obvious sin. On the contrary, Scripture commands us always to speak the truth in love

([Eph 4:15](#)). As a result, we must never engage in profane speech, whether cursing, dirty

jokes, gossip, or anything that may bring dishonor to the Lord. Instead, we should use our mouths to teach the way of the Lord and proclaim His holy Word ([Prov 16:23-24](#)). Although we could add many more points here, the main one is that we should **all speak** righteously at all times in a way that honors Christ ([Prov 10:31-32](#)).

How would you evaluate the way that you speak? Which of these principles from Scripture are easiest for you to apply and which are the hardest? Why?

Question
2

Second, Paul implores them to put aside all **divisions** and **be joined together in the same mind**. We'll address division much more in-depth in the next section. However, the term translated **divisions** is from where we get our word "schisms." It signifies the tearing of a garment by pulling it in two directions. The phrase **joined together** also comes from a word which literally means knit **together**—here in terms of sewing the tear in the garment back **together**. Only Christ can overcome division; only He can heal in such a way that He can take groups with diverse backgrounds and knit them **perfectly together** into one community! Therefore, Paul bids them to have **the same mind** or perspective. They should elevate the things they have in common in Christ while downplaying their personal interests and goals. They are to be on the "**same**" side rather than stand in opposition to one another—just like the concept of a good team as we established in the introduction.

To have **the same mind** then centers around one's attitude and lifestyle—both how we live and how we view life. In everything, we must think and live like Christ. [Philippians](#)

[2:5](#) instructs us to "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." "Mind" in this verse literally means way of thinking. Thus, we are to view the world through Christ's perspective which will transform the way that we relate to others and how we live in obedience to the Word of God. Even in 1 Corinthians 2:16, Paul reminds them that "For, 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.'"



Instruct

In other words, it is foolishness and pure folly to live our lives thinking that we know best and can tell God what we need. We don't instruct the Lord; He should be the One who instructs us. But many people attempt to do just that. They tell God what they want and demand that He gives it to them. This type of thinking is backwards! A mind controlled by the Lord seeks His will and desires what He desires.

How is Christ reflected in your thinking?

Question
3

Third, Paul exhorts them to have **the same judgment**. The word translated **judgment** is notoriously difficult to interpret. This isn't the typical Greek word for **judgment** in the sense of discernment, determining right from wrong, or hearing evidence in a case to determine innocence or guilt. Rather, it has more of the meaning of advice or purpose. Translations, as a result, vary widely: "In the same judgment" (NKJV and NAS), "perfectly united in mind and thought" (NIV), and "in the same purpose" (RSV). Most likely with Paul having urged them already to be **perfectly knit together**, he is exhorting them to have the **same** purpose or intention rather than pulling in different directions according to their own preferences. Therefore, they must put aside their self-ambitions and be united in Christ to fulfill His purpose to build the church and proclaim the gospel.

Consequently, they should do what is best for the group as Christ leads; they should not seek their own "rights or "privileges" and misuse the freedom that Christ has given them—which the Corinthians are indeed doing. In fact, Paul does challenge the church throughout the letter to remove such selfish ambitions in their lives and work cohesively together in Christ. They should not set their own agenda nor attempt to dictate their own path. Instead, they must look to the purpose Christ has established for them as individuals within the church! In [Romans 12:10](#), Paul explains it this way, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." Therefore, we should not view our decisions in isolation as if they have no effect on others; we must view ourselves in relation to the body. Certainly, Christ cares about us as individuals. But at the same time, we have collectively become members of His body if we have a relationship with Him. Hence, we must now think and act in terms of the righteousness of Christ and the effect we have on His body.

How do you fulfill the purpose of Christ both in the church and in the secular community?

Question
4

1 Corinthians 1:11-13

PUT ASIDE DIVISIONS:

Messengers from **Chloe's household**, perhaps where the church met in Corinth, brought Paul disturbing news about **contentions among** them (v. 11). These

contentions have caused **divisions** and rifts in the church which have distracted them from their primary pursuit of worshiping the Lord and sharing the gospel. Such **divisions** have caused them to look inwardly and focus on their own desires and their own preferences. The nature of the disputes primarily centered around their spirit of competition



and their personal preferences about the personality of the leader with whom they most associated—particularly the one who may have baptized them. This led groups to struggle for power, prestige, and position within the church. Although some in the church had problems with their theology whereby they abused their “freedom” in Christ to commit sinful acts (see [chapters 5-6](#)), the root of their division was competition to see who was the wisest and most spiritual.

We see this problem addressed by Paul throughout the letter. Instead of focusing on their own perceived knowledge and spirituality, they should preach Christ crucified and nothing else ([1 Cor 2:1-2](#)). They should not speak according to their own perceived wisdom which is “foolishness” to God; they are to follow His plan and live righteously which indicates true wisdom ([1 Cor 1:26-31](#)). Rather than comparing themselves to one another to see who is the wisest and most useful in the church, they must work together, surrendering completely to the Lord who alone is able to cause growth and help its members to mature spiritually ([1 Cor 3:5-7](#)). Unfortunately, the Corinthians evaluated themselves from an earthly perspective; in their eyes, they had already arrived at the top and displayed great maturity. Therefore, Paul derides them saying, “You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we might also reign with you” ([1 Cor 4:8](#)). The Corinthians regarded themselves as spiritually superior to others. Perhaps, this

sense of superiority made them later challenge Paul's God-given authority as an apostle (see [2 Corinthians](#)). Here, however, we see that superiority on display in the elevation of particular spiritual gifts and roles within the church (see [chapters 12-14](#)). Some abused the spiritual gifts which God had given to edify the church; they used these gifts, such as knowledge, prophecy, and speaking in tongues, to draw attention to themselves rather than honor Christ. Instead of using the gifts to impart the gospel as they were intended, individuals within the church competed for prominence, causing utter chaos in worship. Thus, the Corinthians divided themselves in terms of their perceived wisdom and knowledge, their wealth and social status from an earthly perspective, and their "spirituality" as evidenced in their abuse of some of the gifts—all to seek notoriety and power within the church at the expense of exalting and glorifying Christ.

How can we prevent such divisions in the church based on the feeling of superiority from a human perspective? What does the Bible say about humility?

Question
4

Now, Paul turns to address one specific area that has caused **divisions** among them. They have elevated their personal preferences and divided themselves into groups based on the personality of the leader. Some of them say, "**I am of Paul.**" While others say, "**I am of Apollos. I am of Cephas (Peter). I am of Christ**" (v. 12). Although a literal rendering of the Greek, these expressions in the context mean "I associate with" or "I follow" rather than a sense of possession that "I belong to." Thus, each group has exalted an earthly leader based on their own perspective saying, "I follow



Paul, Apollos, or Peter." Since Corinth was a wealthy, educated metropolitan area with much international travel and trade, it attracted itinerate teachers and preachers from all over the Roman empire who would compete for students and finances, attempting to establish a following for themselves. So, the Corinthians

likely adopted a familiar secular practice into the church and began following the particular leader who appealed most to them.

Unfortunately, many in the church today do the same thing; they find leaders who suit their personalities and preferences. They will follow leaders who will tell them what they want to hear. In many cases, they want to be entertained or hear a message of “hope” apart from the truth of Scripture. In many instances, they will blindly follow leaders with dynamic and charismatic personalities, but no substance to their message because they find their styles and gimmicks appealing. We need only look to the celebrity and influencer culture on social media to see this on full display. Many, but not all, have no substance or truth to their message, but only their personal opinions. Yet, some people value and listen to them for trivial reasons simply because they are popular, good-looking, humorous, have an attractive personality, or know how to appeal to a crowd. We cannot allow such thinking to infiltrate the church—but in many cases it already has, so we need to get rid of it. We must collectively work together to exalt Christ in obedience to His will, proclaiming His Word and ministering to others. Although many people do follow leaders who will tell them what they want to hear ([2 Tim 4:3](#)), **divisions** in the church can form for many other reasons and we may not even know they exist! Our modern term clique best describes the arbitrary **divisions** we can create in the church. People tend to gravitate to those who are like them—whether in personality, social background or status, intellect, shared hobbies, or much more. Even though there is nothing wrong with having close friends and spending time together doing the things we enjoy, a problem occurs, however, when we isolate ourselves and close our group.

This can prove detrimental to the church because people fail to see the bigger picture of ministry where all groups work together—regardless of age, stage in life, or their life experiences. Some people, however, tend to hang out with smaller groups and never get to know anyone else in the church as a result. Small groups are important to cultivate connection and create intimacy, but we must recognize the importance of working cohesively as an entire body to impact the world with the gospel and help the church to mature in Christ.

What do you do to cultivate relationships with others in the church outside of your closest friends?

Question
6

Instruct

In June of this year, I had the privilege of going with our church on a mission trip to Seattle. Billed as a church-wide mission trip, we had children, youth, young families, median adults, and legacy adults who went. As the Senior Adult Pastor, I don't often get to spend time with our children or youth. However, on this trip, I was able to get to know several members of our church outside my particular sphere of influence. I had the honor of seeing how God used them to interact with people in the Seattle area. It forced many of our introverts to go outside of their comfort zone and talk to strangers, trying to transition to a presentation of the gospel. But they boldly did it!

Besides ministry, I got to know many on a personal level through simple conversations about their interests, passions, and goals. This armed me not only with a way to pray for them, but also to see how God wants to incorporate them into ministry and service as well as a way to mentor them—for God has indeed instructed the older to teach



the younger ([Titus 2:1-10](#)). The trip gave us a connection that may not have otherwise been able to happen! God has designed His body to work together—every part of it in cohesion as one unit. We cannot segregate and separate ourselves into small groups without interaction as a whole. Therefore, we must seek to know those in our congregation,

so we can serve together most effectively in the way that God intended.

Paul asks a series of three rhetorical questions. The way they are written in the Greek indicates that they should be answered “no.” Paul inquires whether **Christ is divided**, if he (Paul) **was crucified for** them, and if **they were baptized in his name** (v. 13).

Paul hopes to reiterate that no one group, no matter how “spiritual” they may perceive themselves, can possess Christ in the sense of excluding others based on earthly categories and expectations. Anyone who has a relationship with Christ belongs to Him and should obediently follow Him. This offer of salvation, based on Christ's mercy, is extended to the whole world if only they would accept it. Christ does not discriminate; He does not divide people. He unites people through His blood by saving them from their sin and transforming them to live righteously. We all have that in

common because only Christ can save! As Christians who serve the same Lord—the one and only true God—we should lay aside all divisions and distinctions to work together as He has equipped His body!

In the last two of these questions, Paul uses himself as an example to highlight the absurdity of following a person rather than Christ. He did not die for the Corinthians (or the world). Even if he had, it would have been a useless sacrifice because of his own sin and imperfections ([1 Tim 1:15](#)). Only Christ can provide the perfect atoning sacrifice! Certainly, God has instilled leaders within the church to oversee it and keep it focused on Him. And we should listen to these leaders who seek the Lord, teach His Word, and keep the body unified in its focus of ministry. Yet, we all follow Christ and not the personality of the earthly leader, for He is the head of the body ([Eph 1:22](#)). The same applies to baptism. It does not matter who baptizes us from an earthly point of view, but in whose name we are baptized ([Matt 28:19](#); [Rom 6:2-11](#); [Col 2:12-15](#)). Only Christ can raise us to walk in the newness of life; only Christ can give us wisdom which leads to an abundant life when we obey Him.

1 Corinthians 1:14-17

PREACH THE GOSPEL:

To put the focus on Christ, Paul expresses thankfulness for baptizing only Crispus and Gaius (v. 14). Crispus is likely the leader of the local synagogue (Acts 18:8) and Gaius likely hosted Paul during his stay in the city ([Rom 16:23](#)). Paul is not downplaying the importance of baptism in obedience to the Lord's command as an outward symbol of the inner change in those who trust and follow Him, but he is merely thankful that many people could not mistakenly elevate him as the one who **baptized** them above Christ—**lest anyone should say that he had baptized in his own name** (v. 14). Thus, the focus should always be on Christ and not the one who baptizes! As John the Baptist rightly attests, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

How do you exalt Christ in your life and make sure the focus is on Him rather than you?

Question
7

As God brought to remembrance one other **household** whom Paul had **baptized**, that of **Stephanas**, he cannot recollect any other whom he had (v. 14). This leads Paul to conclude this section with reason why he is glad to have only **baptized** a few. In his remarks, he also reveals the most important aspect of his calling—**Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel** (v. 17). Even in this endeavor, Paul did not use

Instruct

human **words of wisdom**, but preached the cross undiluted as the means for salvation. In other words, Paul did not come with impressive words of rhetoric in an attempt to manipulate people and prey upon their emotions to gain a following (1 Cor 2:4); he allowed God to work, convict, and save through him. He rightly sees himself as God's tool which He uses to communicate. Therefore, like Paul, we must allow God to do His work in and through us, but we must also make ourselves available to be used by Him. Our focus, above all, must be on Christ rather than our preferences, perspectives, and personal desires. When our focus is on Christ, we will allow Him to use us in any way He sees fit according to His Word and we will **preach the gospel** to all people whom we meet. Let's not focus on human personalities or philosophies. Let us focus on the **gospel** which alone has the power to change. May we allow it to impact our lives in such a way that we always seek the Lord's will and we are always united without division, working together in His body to mature in Him and spread the **gospel** to the whole world!

Inspire

Although I don't know about Herman Edwards' personal relationship with Christ, he understands well what it means to be part of a team. A few years ago, our Children's Ministry performed a play on the "selfie world" in which we live. People are consumed with themselves. We live in a largely individualistic and self-centered world. People will do anything to get what they want. And if they don't, they will present themselves as "victims" to draw attention and garner pity. Although we see great heroism and sacrifice at times, generally every generation in some way has been "all about *me*." We cannot allow such an attitude to divide us in the church where we exalt our personal preferences and desires over Christ. We need to follow Him and the selfless example that He set. Our focus should be on maturing in Christ while at the same time we take the gospel into all the world wherever we go. The church is not about us—it's not truly about individuals even though God cares for each of us greatly. The church is about following Christ who allows us to overcome our petty differences and arbitrary distinctions to serve Him collectively. Therefore, let us overcome division by turning to Christ, obediently following Him daily, and proclaiming the gospel wherever we may go.

Incorporate

What kind of unbiblical schisms or divisions do you see in the church today? How do you prevent yourself from becoming subject to them? How do you pursue unity in Christ?

On what do you focus in the church and in your life in general? How do you use your gifts collectively in the church to serve Christ and collectively participate in the ministry of the gospel?

How do you point people to Christ with your life? How do you put the focus on Him (and the gospel) rather than yourself?

October 24, 2021



Overcome Distraction
Luke 9:51-62

Focal Verse:

“Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.”

Luke 9:51

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Introduce

Several years ago when I first purchased my home, I decided to embark upon a project that would make Aunt Polly from Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer proud. My fence needed painting. Unlike Tom who duped unsuspecting kids into whitewashing the fence for him, I took on the project myself. I did research into the durability and type of paint, selecting the one which was water resistant and had a ten-year warranty. One weekend, I began by power washing the fence to remove the old, flaking paint which left the slats of wood a dingy gray-stained color. Unable to finish it in one weekend, I had a plan to tackle the gargantuan project a little at a time. Even though I had closely matched the paint and was making substantial property improvements, I received a letter in the mail from my Homeowner's Association which chided me for making "unapproved landscape barrier modifications." After sending in all their required documents and receiving their "blessing," I was finally ready to paint. However, I had not yet purchased the items which I would need to complete the project, so early one Friday morning I went to the store with a list of everything I needed. I began by purchasing a large bucket of stain into which I had them mix the appropriate color. Then, I bought the pan into which to pour the paint so that I could apply it to the fence. As I walked up and down the aisles of the large home improvement center, I was overwhelmed by all the choices and tools that were at my disposal. I began placing many of the things that I thought I might need or that would make the job easier when they grabbed my attention. With a cart full of items, I proceeded to the checkout and then home to get started before it got unbearably hot. When I got home, I began setting up everything on the sidewalk near the longest part of fencing along the side of my house. I used the new screwdriver set that I had bought to open the paint which I then stirred and poured into the pan. I was ready to paint. But then I began looking through the mound of other tools and products that I had purchased. I dumped everything out of the sacks and riffled through each



Not My Actual Fence

Introduce

item separately, but there was no paint brush! I had gotten everything and even more than was actually on my list except the brush! While in the store, I had become so mesmerized by all the products that I had become distracted and lost focus. I had missed one of the most important items—a way to apply the paint!

Distractions can hamper our daily lives if we allow them. Every one of us has probably gone to the store at some point for a specific item and left without it. We see distracted drivers on roadways every day. We even fool ourselves into thinking that we can multitask efficiently, but we find ourselves distracted and making mistakes that we would not have if we had been concentrating and focused. Distractions can come in all shapes, sizes, and forms. They can come in the form of relationships, hobbies, work, trouble we face, and much more. Anything can become a distraction if we allow it. As believers, we must follow Jesus' example who did not allow anything in life to distract Him from the sole purpose for which He came—to die for our sins. In fact, He set His face resolutely toward this purpose and at the right time gave His life for us (Luke 9:51). In Luke, Jesus also teaches us to have the same focus in life, fulfilling the purpose to which the Father has called us. We aren't to let anything distract us—not the comforts of life we seek, the customs we practice, the ceremonies in which we participate, or even our past. We cannot afford to allow anything to distract us in our relationship with Christ. Let us overcome by eliminating any distraction in our lives and focus on Christ. As the author of Hebrews urges us, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking unto Jesus" ([Heb 12:1-2](#)).

Key
Question

How do you deal with or handle the potential distractions that you face in life?

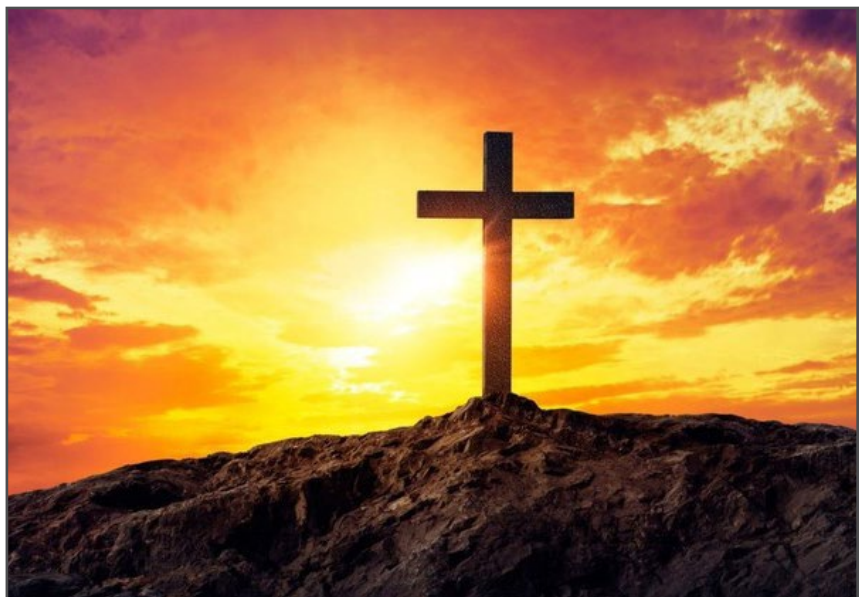
Luke 9:51-54

THE DETERMINATION OF THE SAVIOR:

At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus sent His disciples throughout the region to proclaim the gospel, so naturally He wanted them to be wholeheartedly focused on their mission and not distracted by any challenges they may encounter—such as rejection, hostility, or even their own physical needs ([Luke 9:1-6](#)). When the people who interacted with Jesus experienced potential distractions, such as physical ailments or needs, He often sought to remove them so that they might focus on His person and teaching. He healed the sick or commanded His disciples to do so ([Luke 9:2, 11, 37-42](#)) as well as fed the 5000 who had gathered to hear His teaching ([Luke 9:10-17](#)). But the gospel, not mere social ministry, always took precedent. Notice in [9:2](#) how Jesus instructed the disciples to “preach the kingdom of God” first and then “heal the sick.” Although not necessarily in “chronological” order, Jesus commenced with the primary purpose of their ministry.

Social “ministry” without a presentation of the gospel has little value because it’s only temporary and can never lead to life. The gospel, on the other hand, has eternal value because it leads to transformation and life in Christ. As the church we cannot become distracted in our primary endeavor to worship the Lord and proclaim the gospel to the entire world. We must follow the example Christ Himself set; He allowed nothing to distract Him from doing the will of the Father, even though He understood the great sacrifice that His obedience would require—death on the cross.

But many Christians and churches have and do become distracted by the everyday concerns of life and their personal ambitions. We see this in a “dispute” that ensues among the disciples about which one of them “would be greatest” in the kingdom. Their focus had shifted from Christ to their own personal ambitions, for which Jesus



quickly rebuked them ([Luke 9:46-48](#)). Yet, at other times, the disciples remained focused despite the potential for distraction. In testing their understanding of His person and purpose, Jesus asks them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” Then, Jesus inquired of them, “Who do you say that I am,” and Peter correctly responded, “The Christ of God” ([Luke 9:18-20](#)). Peter didn’t let the masses dictate what he believed or determine his perception of Christ; He listened to the Lord, for which Jesus commended Him in Matthew ([Matt 16:7](#)). Following Jesus requires great sacrifice and commitment; we must die to our old way of life—that is “take up [our] cross daily and follow” Him ([Luke 9:23-26](#)). This means that we must put aside our personal goals and desires and keep our eyes focused on Him, seeking Him above everything else!

When have you allowed the world to distract you? As a believer, how do you keep your eyes focused on Christ so that peer pressure doesn’t drive you off course?

Question
1

Having understood this background and observed some of the areas of life which can distract us, we can now turn to Jesus’ example and how He overcame distraction to focus on His purpose and calling given by the Father. As God clothed in the likeness of human flesh, Jesus clearly recognized His primary goal—to pay the penalty for our



sins through His perfect atoning sacrifice. He never lost sight of this goal throughout His ministry; He always kept it at the forefront of His mind. We can see this in the resolve which He had **to go to Jerusalem** for the sole purpose of being tried in courts and sentenced to death—death for the sins of the whole world. **When the time had come for Him to be**

received up as an offering for our sins, the Gospel of Luke notes that Jesus **steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem** (v. 51).

The phrase **steadfastly set His face** underscores an important point because the text repeats it three times in slightly varied forms: **sent His messengers before His face** (v.

52) and **His face was set for the journey** (v. 53). Literally translated from the Greek, the phrase **steadfastly set His face** means He “set His face like stone.” Today, we would say Jesus put His “game face on.” He was determined, focused, and committed—nothing could deter Him or distract Him. When it came **time** to fulfill His purpose on our behalf, Jesus was immovable; He wouldn’t budge or compromise!

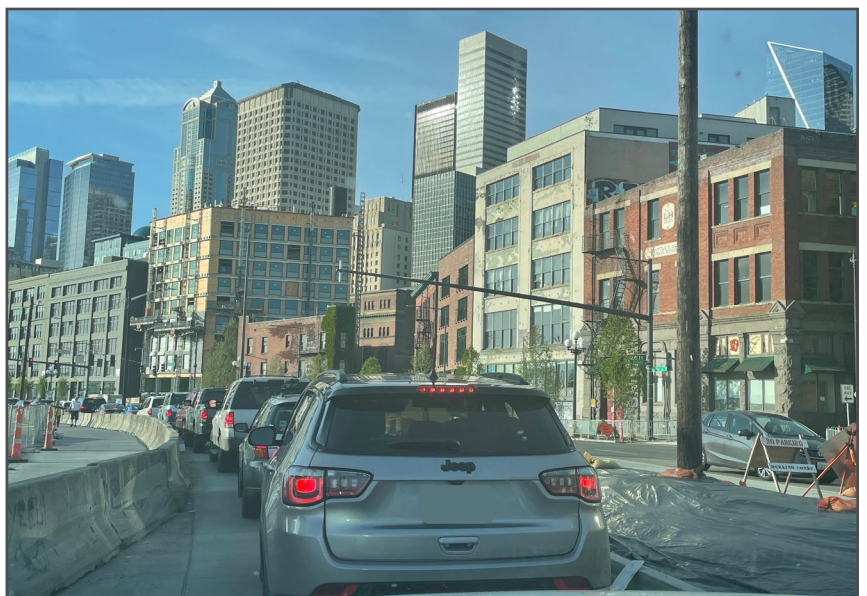
On what event or thing in life have you been the most determined? How does that compare in your determination to serve the Lord faithfully?

Question
2

Knowing the horrendous death He would die, Jesus was still determined **to go to Jerusalem** at any cost to fulfill the mission that the Father had given Him. He even attempted to prepare the disciples concerning the type of death He must die, but they often failed to grasp His words. Twice in this very chapter Jesus predicts that He must “suffer many things . . . and be killed,” but that He would victoriously “be raised on the third day” ([Luke 9:21-22, 43-45](#)). We know from Scripture that Jesus endured tremendous pain from beatings and whippings, ultimately being nailed to the cross where He died. Nothing we could ever face on this earth could compare to the suffering Jesus endured for us. A righteous Man, perfect in all His ways, died for the unrighteous world who had rebelled against Him. Still, He was determined to be that sacrificial Lamb who bore the sins of the world!

Whereas Jesus allowed nothing to distract Him from His mission, we seem to let trivial matters distract us at times—let alone the great hardships we may encounter

during our lives. While on mission in Seattle this summer, I had the privilege of chauffeuring some of our team members to various locations to undertake projects to share the gospel. Driving in Seattle, particularly downtown, had its challenges despite the navigational aids we now have on our phones. Bombarded with sensory overload, numerous distractions had the potential to consume one’s attention with disastrous



Instruct

consequences. Aside from the primary responsibility of watching other motorists and anticipating their moves, we had to contend with narrow lanes with bicycle and pedestrian paths abutted next to them as well as constant construction. And, unlike here, many people used these bicycle lanes which posed a great hazard of someone darting into your lane!

In addition to the multitude pedestrians right next to the lanes of traffic and frequently crossing in front of vehicles, street, warning, directional, and many other types of signs lined the streets while the painted lane markings were faded and difficult to see. So many signs dotted the roadways that it was difficult to distinguish turn lanes, one-way streets, and other restrictions! Coupled with trying to find a specific place or parking in crowded streets and lots, one could easily become overwhelmed and distracted. One had to pay careful attention to all these things at once to operate his vehicle safely in a bustling city. In general, life mirrors the chaos and busyness of driving in an unfamiliar area with a plethora of distractions. Although life may seem familiar and routine at times, we do not know the outcome of specific events; we don't know what's in store for us other than the certainty of the salvation we have in Christ.

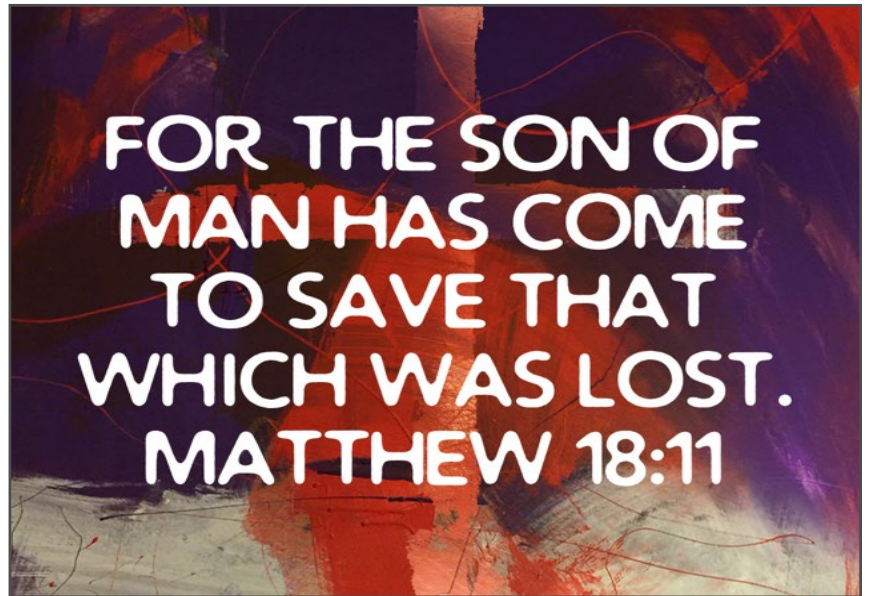
Indeed, life presents us with challenges every day. They may come in the form of unexpected problems with our health, delays in an answer to an issue that we desperately need and expect, business decisions that we must make as small business owners, employees or people under our management with whom we must deal, bills that we have for unexpected home or car repairs, the inability to grasp a concept while furthering our education or even the new technology and expectations that we face at work, relationships that consume our time, caring for a sick loved one, helping children with their homework or ferrying them to extracurricular activities, and the list could continue infinitely. We must ask ourselves how will we respond to these challenges that we face? Do we focus on Christ and have the determination to obey Him and make Him the priority or do we allow ourselves to become overwhelmed and distracted? Let us set our faces like stone, resolutely focusing our attention on Christ with all faithfulness and determination to serve Him above all. May we never deviate from this righteous path!

What has the potential to or does distract you most in life?

Question
3

THE DESIRE OF THE SAVIOR:

Although Jesus had **steadfastly set His face on** His mission, the disciples allowed their emotions to seize them and dictate the way they responded. They had become distracted by the response of those around them which momentarily caused them to forget their mission to preach the gospel and lose focus. But Jesus immediately redirected their thinking. He had **sent messengers** into a Samaritan **village before** Him **to prepare** for His arrival (v. 52). Perhaps, not surprisingly given the tension between the Jews



and **Samaritans**, they rejected Him and **did not receive Him** (v. 53). Yet, the text further describes the cause (i.e., **because**) as Jesus had **set His face for the journey to Jerusalem**. This served to show that no nation, group, or person could stop God's plan for salvation!

This rejection by the **Samaritans** also foreshadowed Jesus' rejection amongst all men which would directly result in His death. The people who hailed Him as Savior and shouted "hosanna" as He rode into **Jerusalem** would soon yell, "Crucify Him!" The Roman government—who could find no fault in Him and could have declared Him innocent—sought to placate the crowd and remove "responsibility" from themselves, so they handed Him over to be crucified. All His disciples abandoned Him in the Garden of Gethsemane after He was betrayed by Judas with a kiss and all, except John, watched the events unfold from afar for fear. Peter even denied knowing Jesus three times in a most adamant way. Even knowing all this before He set out for Jerusalem, Jesus still focused on His mission and acted obediently according to the Father's will! The disciples, on the other hand, frequently found themselves distracted whether by their own desires, fear, or emotions. The rejection of Jesus by the **Samaritans** angered James and John in particular. Perhaps giving little thought to their response and the words that proceeded from their mouth, they spoke hastily saying, "**Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah**

Instruct

did" (v. 54). Having been sent to proclaim a life-changing gospel which saves, James and John now want to condemn and destroy a whole **village**. Our society routinely acts in this same way; for the most part, many are driven by their emotions. They react without contemplating their actions which often makes the situation worse rather than de-escalating it.

How can emotions distract you and cause you to forget your purpose in Christ?

Question
4

Jesus promptly **rebuked them** and corrected their thinking. He confronted them saying, "**You do not know what manner of spirit you are of**" (v. 55). In more modern



language, Jesus is telling them that they don't know what they're saying or asking. They aren't intimately acquainted with the situation like Jesus or privy to all the details which caused them to make a snap judgment and forget the mission to which He had called them. Therefore, He reminded them that He **did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them** (v. 56). Knowing the road that lied ahead, Jesus could have easily worn His emotions on His

sleeve like James and John. But He didn't. He remembered His purpose because He had determined to obey the will of His Father regardless of what would happen.

Based on Scripture, what is your purpose in life? How do you visibly display your determination to accomplish that purpose to the world?

Question
5

When we have a relationship with Christ, His desires should become what we desire. We must look at the world through His selfless and sacrificial eyes. Too often, we allow our emotions to dictate the way we respond rather than the pattern Christ established. We allow hurt and rejection to throw us off course. We let our personal agenda and

goals guide us. We allow the busyness of life, which we create by our own choices, to overwhelm us. We let our physical needs distract us. And we allow our fleshly desires (sin) to consume our choices and influence our lives! We must follow the example Christ set and always remind ourselves of the purpose He has given us and the mission to which He has called us. We must always point people to Christ rather than act in a judgmental and condemning spirit. After all, Jesus did not come into the world to condemn it, but to **save** it. By their own choice in rejecting the salvation He offers, however, the world brings His wrath and condemnation upon themselves when they refuse the gracious gift of His Son.

Luke 9:57-62

THE DISTRACTIONS OF LIFE:

During their trek to **another village** after the rejection by the **Samaritans**, one of the disciples traveling with Jesus suddenly interjects, “**Lord, I will follow You wherever You go**” (v. 57). Although Jesus isn’t trying to dissuade this disciple from following Him, He wants him to realize the cost and commitment required along with some of the potential distractions that can occur in our relationship with Him. Jesus broadly lists three areas of our lives which present the most potential for distraction: our possessions (v. 58), our personal relationships (vv. 59-61), and our past (vv. 62). For each of these areas, we must make a conscious effort to put Christ first ([Matt 6:33-34](#)). We must surrender everything in our lives to His control and submit to the divine plan He has for us. Elevating even a single thing in these areas becomes a distraction and draws our attention away from Christ. If we truly desire to **follow** Christ **wherever** He goes, we must untether ourselves from these burdens and distractions, seeking His will above all else.

First, we must overcome the distraction of our possessions and the importance that we place on living comfortably. We need not lead lives of destitution and poverty, however; our comfort just should not be our primary focus! To **follow** Jesus, we must understand that at times we may not have all the “comforts” this world deems important even though He will always meet our most basic needs. Therefore, he asserts that **foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head** (v. 58). As an itinerate preacher, Jesus did not have a permanent place to call home. He often depended upon others for the basic necessities of food and lodging ([Luke 8:1-3](#)). Yet, He never lacked and always trusted the Father for His provisions. Jesus never placed a premium on acquiring possessions

nor did He demand the comforts of life that the world regards as important. His concern was for His ministry of providing life and salvation through His sacrifice. Unlike Jesus, our society emphasizes wealth and possessions. We all know phrases like “keeping up with the Joneses” which perfectly describes the covetousness in which many people engage and the lengths they will go to have the things the world values. Think of Christmas. The first thing that we usually ask someone when we see them after Christmas day is, “What did you get?” We emphasize receiving rather than giving. As a developed nation, we have come to rely heavily upon convenience and technology which in many cases has led to a spirit of entitlement. We demand instant information. When the Internet and cable go down, we have no idea what to do except complain! We want things to be ordered with the press of a button; we don’t want to work for them. We expect things to be delivered same-day or even next-day. In addition, people work to amass wealth so they can spend it on their hobbies. These are only a few examples of the emphasis our world places on comforts, conveniences, and possessions.

All these things can, and often do, distract from worship and service dedicated to the Lord. Some have even come to treat God contemptuously expecting Him to cater to their desires rather than conforming to His Word and will. Thus, they have distorted His Word into a name-it-and-claim-it approach. They wrongly believe God will give us anything we demand as long as we have enough faith to ask. This philosophy skews God’s Word and relegates Him to a role subject to us! Our focus should not be on our possessions, but on Christ. It should compel us to obey Him in every area, **follow** His example, and share the good news with the world as He has commanded us. Therefore, we should use all the possessions He has graciously given us for His glory and to minister to others in His name.

What is your most important or valuable possession in life? Why do you consider it most valuable? How do you use it to honor the Lord?

Question
6

Second, an overcomer should not become distracted by his or her personal relationships. Jesus exhorted one to **follow** Him, but he immediately gave an excuse. He begged Jesus to **let him first go and bury his father** (v. 59). Jesus, however, replies, **“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God”**

(v. 60). Jesus' response may seem cruel and calloused while the man may seem to have a legitimate excuse in our eyes. By no means does Jesus want him to neglect his relationships and dishonor his father which would violate the fifth commandment. To understand the phrase "**let the dead bury their own dead**" properly, we must examine first-century burial customs. Initially, a body would be embalmed, prepared with spices, and laid on a ledge or shelf in a family tomb—usually a cave. At that time, the family would hold a funeral service for the deceased. Approximately one year later after the flesh had decomposed and only the bones remained, the family would remove the bones from the shelf and place them in an ossuary to make room for other family members who had died. An ossuary is a rectangular box of stone about one-quarter the size of our modern coffins which held only the bones of the dead. At that time, the family would have another memorial service for the individual as they transferred their remains.



It was to this second ceremony which Jesus referred when He told the man to **let the dead bury their own dead**. Thus, Jesus is telling him to change his priority. No longer should he put his family first; if he truly desires to **follow** Christ, however, being His disciple should supersede all our human relationships. Only when we honor and glorify Christ can we have the right perspective to have healthy relationships here on earth. Sin and dysfunction enter the picture when we place our human relationships first; we tend to adopt a self-centered perspective in which we look merely for what we can get. Even if we don't become self-centered in our outlook, our relationships can consume our attention and we omit God in our decisions! This will inevitably happen when we focus on our spouse, children, friendships, or work relationships instead of Christ. They will become a distraction.

How do relationships have the potential to distract you from Christ if you have not consciously placed Him first in your life?

Question
7

Third, an overcomer does not allow his past to distract him from the Lord. After a man wishes to return to say **farewell to those in his home** (v. 61), Jesus reminds him that **no one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom**

of God (v. 62). The illustration serves as a transition. With it, Jesus reminds us not to become entangled with our human relationships and the expectations they frequently try to force upon us. But it also compels us not to live in the past. Consequently, we cannot live based on the accomplishments we have attained in the past nor can we live mired in guilt when we have confessed our sins, repented, and have been forgiven. Although we can celebrate our past in remembrance of what the Lord has done, we cannot rest on our laurels. We cannot seek to “re-create” days gone by, but rather we must seek new opportunities to fulfill the responsibilities the Lord has given us. As First Baptist Church, God has allowed us to accomplish many things during our 154-year history. We were the first to develop and implement the concept of Sunday



School, had one of the first radio ministries, had one of the first bus ministries, was one of the first to utilize an orchestra in worship, and so many more innovative ideas. As a church, we have a glorious past in Christ which we should remember and celebrate, but we cannot rely on what we have done purely from a

historical point of view. We must concentrate on what God has in store for us in the present while we look forward to the foundation which we will lay for the future. Rather than living in the past and attempting to re-create the glory days, many of us probably struggle more with the mistakes that we have made. We live in perpetual guilt, though Christ has forgiven us, which hinders what God desires to do through us now. We shouldn't regret the past continually become riddled with guilt; however, we must learn from our mistakes and move forward. We can't dwell on them, but at the same time we can't forget them lest we repeatedly make the same mistakes again. God will convict us when we sin, but He doesn't want us to live with guilt once He has forgiven us. However, let us not continually look to the past, but instead let us focus on what God expects of us in the present as we seek His will and we await the glorious future we have in Him.

We live in a world fraught with distractions. The world bombards us with information, pressures us to conform to its views, and presents us with choices daily whether to focus on Christ or cater to ourselves. With so many distractions, we can easily forget our primary purpose. To follow Christ, we must surrender everything and place Him first in our lives (Matt 6:34). After all, God created us to worship and serve Him; He also redeemed and reconciled us to Him so that we could be in right standing and have eternal life through His Son. When we are in right standing, we will seek His will; we will desire the things He desires. Therefore, let us be overcomers who are not distracted by the things of this world, but let us focus our eyes on Christ so that we might fulfill the purpose to which He has called us in Him.

Incorporate

How have you become distracted at times by your personal desires or ambitions? How did Christ help you to focus and overcome these distractions?

To what specific ways can you point in your life where Christ's desires have become your desire? Where do you struggle with your own desire?

Evaluate these three areas of your life: possessions, personal relationships, and your past. What is the thing that can distract you the most in each area? How has or will Christ help you to overcome these distractions?

Journal: Document God's Work

Introduce

Many of us may not have degrees in art or have truly studied art history in-depth, but most of us can recognize some of the names and works of the most acclaimed painters around the world. Names like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Vincent van Gough, Pablo Picasso, Norman Rockwell, and, of course, Bob Ross with his popular television series *The Joy of Painting* immediately conjure images of their styles and famed works. Even if we don't know the official titles of their works, such as the *Mona Lisa*, *Last Supper*, *Sistine Chapel*, or *Starry Night*, we would instantly recognize the paintings when we saw them. These original works of art are truly priceless national treasures, but have monetary values in the millions of dollars for the purpose of insurance. With art garnering so much money for one-of-a-kind pieces by celebrated artists, they have drawn the attention of forgers over the centuries who have attempted to copy and profit from such pieces.



Two of the most successful forgers of all time were a German couple, Wolfgang and Helene Beltracchi. According to an article in *Bbys Magazine*, the couple did not reproduce existing paintings as other forgers, but they “created new works in the style of artists” with renowned reputations.* By presenting their forgeries as genuine, undiscovered works of these artists, the couple spuriously made “over an estimated \$20 to \$50 million.” One of their greatest capers involved imitating the style of the famed painter Max Ernst. They called the foremost expert on Ernest, Werner Spies, to their home and showed him the painting which they had hung over their bed. They asked him to evaluate and authenticate this painting which Spies “pronounced . . . to be real right there and then.” Helene Beltracchi even told the story that Ernst’s wife had seen the painting and described it as “the most beautiful picture that Max Ernst had ever painted.”

So good were the Beltracchi’s forgeries, they even fooled the experts who had studied this artist for years. The German couple was only caught in 2008 when scientific

Introduce

analysis was conducted on a painting titled *Red Picture with Horses* which they claimed was from 1914. The analysis proved the painting a forgery because of the pigment “titanium white” which did not exist at the time. In addition to financial penalties, they received a sentence of “four and three years in prison each.” It can be very difficult at times to distinguish between forgeries and the real thing. Experts who have studied every brush stroke, technique, and style of a particular painter can generally differentiate between real and fake. But sometimes even these individuals find themselves fooled just like Werner Spies. If an expert can be fooled in the realm of art, how much easier could it be for someone to pass along a fake to us!

Jesus warns His disciples just before His crucifixion about those toward the end of time who would come and claim to be the “true” Messiah. He exhorts them, and us, “not to be deceived” (Luke 21:8). During the times immediately preceding Jesus’ return, we must be vigilant and cautious not to succumb to the philosophies of the world and those that present themselves as “saviors” of mankind. We can only recognize the difference if we study, know, and apply Scripture. But, even more important, we can only know the true Christ if we have a relationship with Him and His Spirit dwells within us to help us discern the truth. Otherwise, we can easily become like Werner Spies and declare something “to be real right there and then” when it’s actually a fake. Therefore, let us overcome deception by knowing and relating to the true Messiah, Jesus, found in Scripture.

Key
Question

What tests do you use to determine if something in life is authentically from Christ or an imitation proposed by the world?

In Reference



Sophie Bubmann, “The Five Most Notorious Art Forgers,”
Bbys Magazine (March 31, 2020).

Luke 21:7-8

DO NOT BE DECEIVED:

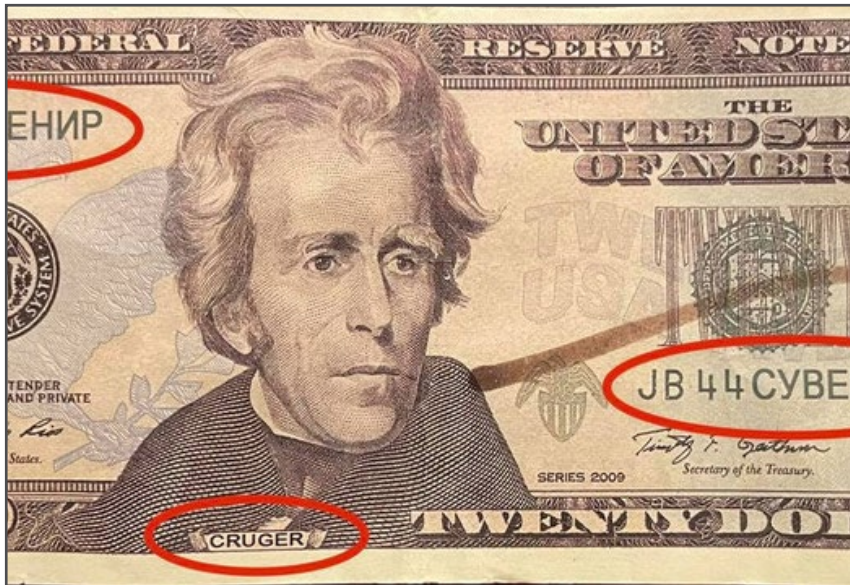
After commending a widow for sacrificially giving two mites from the little she had ([Luke 21:1-4](#)), Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple along with the city of Jerusalem in AD 70 at the hands of the Romans ([Luke 21:5-6](#)). As a result of Jesus' prediction, the disciples ask **when all these things shall be** and **what sign** will accompany them **when they are about to take place** (v. 7). This prediction about the terrifying times His disciples would soon face in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem leads to a longer discussion about the events and signs that would precede His return, signifying the conclusion to this age. The fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, therefore, serves as an example of the kind of things that will happen at the end of time which will conclude with a period of chaos, confusion, and conflict like the world has never seen. Before answering their questions specifically, Jesus warns them to pay attention (i.e., **take heed**) so that they may **not be deceived** (v. 8). This warning goes in tandem with what we studied last week about distraction. Deception can be very hard to discern if we're distracted and not paying close attention. For example, many of us have probably read an e-mail, report, sign, or some form of communication that we misunderstood because we did not read it carefully. We may have even thought we had grasped it, but we later learned that we really did not because we misapplied the information. In having taught undergraduate courses for eight years, I witnessed first-hand how some students failed to read test questions carefully. To help them, if I had a question that contained the word "not," I would type it in all caps, make it bold, and underline it. Even then, many students would gloss over that little negative particle and answer the question incorrectly. In everything we do as followers of the one and only true Christ, we must pay attention to His Word, reading it carefully and thoroughly. We must ensure that we rightly understand it and apply it in the way God intended. The worst thing we could do is to assume that we "know" and "understand" it when we don't, thereby increasing our chances of being deceived by the world and its philosophies.

What are some ways that God has made His Word plain to us? How can we ensure that we have understood and applied it as He intended?

Question
1

Instruct

Although deception can occur because small, almost imperceptible, differences with the truth exist, it more commonly occurs because we fail to pay attention. We neglect to compare the philosophies and ideas which influence us with the truth of Scripture because they simply sound good to us, so we don't investigate them any further. In addition, we allow our personal desires to guide us; we hear or seek to hear what we desire rather than seeking the truth of the Lord! Generally, if we look closely and



*Counterfeit \$20 bill confiscated by police
(Photo: Oneida City Police Department)*

compare everything we hear to what we know to be true (Scripture), the error in the world's line of thinking becomes blatantly evident. Recently, a town in New York has experienced the rise in the distribution of counterfeit twenty-dollar bills. To combat the problem, authorities implored retailers to "double-check" and citizens to "be aware and check" any cash they receive. According to the local NBC station, the police

department posted pictures of the counterfeit money on social media which had obvious "spelling errors and foreign characters."* Even though "small" differences in the grand scheme of things, they became obvious when one paid attention and looked carefully at the bill!

In Reference



Jeanne Tyler and Moodee Lockman, "[Onedia City Sees Rise in Counterfeit Bills, According to City Police](#)" (September 28, 2021), available from www.cnycentral.com.

When we closely examine the beliefs the world holds, we will quickly discern their errors when compared to Scripture. For example, the world misapplies the belief that God wants us to be "happy" which in their eyes gives them license to do whatever may feel good to them. God does want us to maintain joy regardless of our circumstances and to live an abundant life when we obediently follow His plan and seek His will ([Phil 4:12](#)). However, He doesn't just give us anything we "want" without qualification to

make us “happy.” On the contrary, He gives according to His omniscient will; therefore, our desires must conform to His will ([1 John 5:14](#)). As an emotion, happiness will fade, but our joy will not when we have confidence in the Lord. On one hand, happiness depends directly upon our circumstances whereas our joy depends upon God’s perfect plan which will never fail.

In the same vein, the world bids us to “follow our hearts.” The Bible, however, describes “the heart” as “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” ([Jer 17:9](#)). As such, the heart is selfish. But many have deceived themselves into thinking that they have “a good heart.” God is not fooled; He sees the heart, knows our desires, and discerns our motives ([1 Sam 16:7](#)). The Bible, consequently, bids us to follow the example of Christ and live in holiness rather than engage in the wickedness of our hearts ([1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1](#)). Only when we have a relationship with Christ and surrender completely to Him can we live as He has commanded.

This proposition to follow our hearts also exposes two other common lies the world would have us believe. The world, for instance, believes that man is essentially good. For this reason, they assert that our society has “evolved” and we have a better grasp of concepts like love and morality. They believe that we have liberated ourselves from an old, arcane way of thinking and now understand the truth—a better way to live. According to Scripture, man is wicked; none of us is righteous ([Rom 3:10](#)). He hasn’t liberated himself to attain a better way to live. On the contrary, he has rebelled against the Lord. The things he calls good and normal are an abomination to the Lord and clearly stand in contradiction to His Word ([Isa 5:20](#)). Furthermore, the world regards man as having all the answers and knowing best what he needs for his current situation. Because of this erroneous belief along with the philosophy of humanism, people place their hope in mankind—whether the government, other individuals, or even in themselves—to determine what is best. But only God can rightly and effectively serve in this role because He is holy, loving, and just. Although many more deceptions exist in the thinking of man, these shall suffice to underscore the need for paying careful attention to every philosophy and belief that we are presented.

What other lies does the world tell us? How closely do you pay attention to what you believe and what you practice?

Question
2

Jesus now explicitly explains the nature of the deception that His followers will encounter in the coming days. He warns that **many will come in His name** and even

Instruct

claim to be the Messiah (literally **saying I am he**). They will proclaim themselves to be the “savior” of the world who has all the answers to what ails us. But in reality, they are counterfeits; they are worthless. Although they may appear to have the right solutions, intelligence, power, and charisma, their ways will only lead to destruction and ultimately cause world-wide chaos and pandemonium. For this reason, Jesus instructs His disciples **not to go after them**. Therefore, we must not interject our own ideas and beliefs, attempting to create Jesus after our own image in a way that seems right unto us. We must carefully observe His character and commands in Scripture. We must hear Him speak and uphold the truth of His Word rather than chase the desires of our hearts which will deceive us and lead us astray.

Luke 21:9-11

KNOW THE SIGNS OF THE DENOUEMENT: :

Whereas the world and its individuals aim to deceive, Jesus wants us to know the truth, so He tells us what to expect as His return draws closer. For this reason, He outlines the chain of events that point to the climax of history (i.e., denouement) and will culminate this era, ending in judgment for those who have rejected Christ and celebration for those who have eternal life in Him. Before we discuss Jesus’ teaching here, we must issue two cautions. First, Jesus does not present a “roadmap”—that is



step-by-step directions or signs—for the specific events that will signal the **end**. He speaks in general about the types of things that will occur and the challenges we will experience. Consequently, we cannot look at specific modern events happening right now and say that they are to what Jesus is referring. Collectively, however, we can say that the frequency and intensity with which they occur do point to Jesus’ return as being near, so we should be ready for Him to return at any moment—which Scripture urges us to do ([Matt 25:1-30](#); [Luke 21:36](#))! Second, Scripture indicates that only the

Father knows the specific time when He will send His Son to gather His people and bring this age to a close ([Matt 24:36; 1 Thess 5:2](#)). Therefore, we can generally say that this moment is rapidly approaching based on the collective signs of a chaotic world facing increasingly complex challenges, but we cannot say that we know the specifics. Simply put, we must prepare now and be ready to receive Him whether it's today, tomorrow, or decades from now!

How prepared are you if Jesus were to return right now? How have you prepared yourself for that moment?

Question
3

Jesus reassures us that we should **not be terrified** even **when** we **hear** about **wars and commotions** because **these things must** happen **first** as a precursor to the **end**; however, **the end will not come immediately** (v. 9). Jesus also reveals that in the **end nation will rise against nation** and **kingdom against kingdom** (v. 10). Armed conflicts and wars certainly have continued around the globe; governments have even terrorized and intimidated their own citizens or territories—whether Afghanistan, North Korea, or China. And **nations** speak aggressively and threaten other **nations**, such as the on-going unrest in the Middle East which targets the state of Israel in which some of our own elected officials now participate! For us here in the United States, however, the word translated **commotions** has even more significance. It can mean “an unsettled state of affairs, disturbance, [or] tumult,” but it just as frequently refers to “opposition to established authority, disorder, [or] unruliness.”*

In Reference



See Frederick William Danker, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 35.

Although we have been engaged in many conflicts throughout our history as a country, never have we experienced the lawlessness and unruliness as we do now. We have seen riots in the name of justice where groups attempt to intimidate and provoke others or they simply destroy and loot neighborhoods. Some in our country disparage law enforcement and want to abolish it altogether, but this has led to a verifiable increase in violent crimes in major cities across the US. Lawlessness is rampant at our southern border where those enforcing the law have been vilified and portrayed as the enemy. A group of wayward citizens even stormed the capitol when we as a nation have always had a peaceful transition of power no matter who had won an election.

People are often no longer civil to one another and demand to get their way; we can observe this in the increase in violence and disorder on flights, at restaurants, in the store, and at hotels. Chaos, commotion, and lawlessness pervades our own society!

How should we as believers respond to the chaos and disorder in our society today?

Question
4

In addition to the problems man has created because of his sin, the world will experience natural disasters. Jesus notes that **there will be great earthquakes in various places, famines and pestilences, and fearful sights and great signs from heaven** (v. 11). Even though we cannot conclusively say that we've endured more **earthquakes** or that they have become more intense in recent years, we indeed have witnessed many strong and catastrophic ones over the last two decades: 2004 Indonesia (9.1 magnitude), 2010 Haiti (7.4), 2011 Japan (9.1), 2021 Haiti (7.0), and 2021 Acapulco, Mexico (7.0). Still, history has recorded significant earthquakes in first-century Sardis and Laodicea, in 1812 along the New Madrid fault in Missouri that created Reelfoot Lake in Tennessee and caused the Mississippi River temporarily to flow backwards, 1906 San Francisco (7.9), and 1964 Alaska (9.2).

Again, Jesus doesn't predicate His return and the **end** upon one singular type of event, but we must take them all collectively. When we take them collectively, we will undoubtedly recognize that His return is quite near! To **earthquakes**, Jesus



adds **famines and pestilences**. Currently, the Western United States is undergoing a multi-year drought that has not only caused an increase in devastating forest fires, but it has also threatened major water supplies like Lake Mead! Droughts, **famines**, and hunger present a formidable problem for many regions around the world. Perhaps, however, the

most glaring challenge that we currently face is pestilence—disease.

COVID has gripped our society with fear, impacted many families, and changed the

way of life as we know it. In some cases, businesses have shuttered, supply chains have collapsed causing rising prices and severe shortages of some products, and now people worry about mutations and new strains of the virus. Yet, we have encountered many other pandemics over the last twenty years with just as deadly consequences: SARS (2003), Bird Flu (2005), and the H1N1 virus (2009) to name a few of the more notable ones. We cannot say natural disasters of any kind or pandemics are God's judgment for specific sins, but we can say that they collectively along with the lawlessness and chaos of our current society point to the immanence of Jesus' return.

As believers, we need not cower in fear because God is sovereign over history and His plan for the course of the world will succeed no matter how bad things may get. Although we are not immune to suffering, persecution, or even physical death in this life, we can look forward to the eternal life we have in Christ. Therefore, we can have confidence in knowing that He has us securely in His hands. We should live wisely and take precautions as the Lord guides, but we do not have to be afraid! All these signs collectively point to Christ's return which grows ever closer, so we must prepare ourselves by watching and waiting expectantly. As Jesus emphasized, these things only precede the **end**, so we still have time to prepare! Thus, we must ask ourselves, "Are we ready to receive Him when He does return?"

Luke 21:12-13

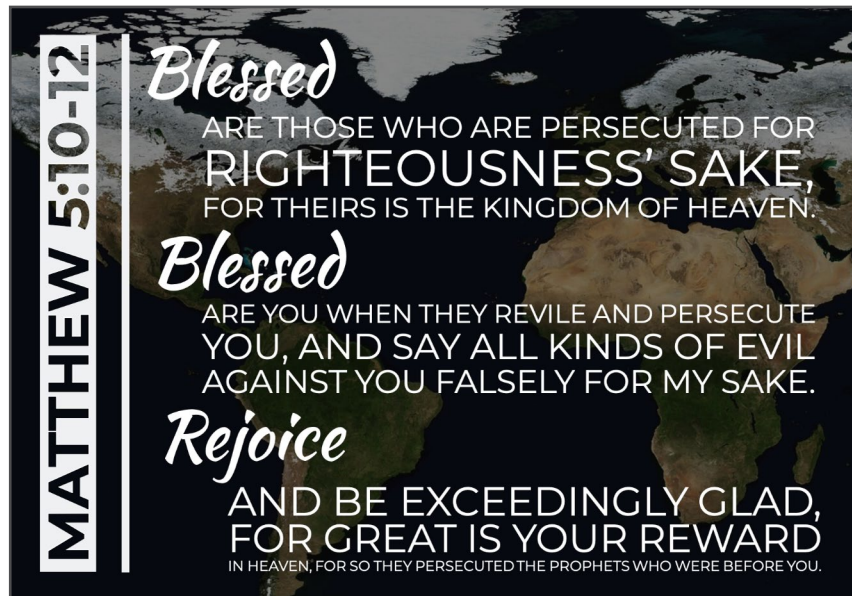
USE PERSECUTION TO DECLARE:

Aside from human conflicts and natural disasters, believers will also face increasing persecution. Even **before all these** other **things** occur which He has already mentioned, Jesus tells His disciples that people **will lay their hands on** them and **persecute them** (v. 12). They will bring them to the **synagogues** for trial and throw them into **prisons**; they **will be brought before kings and rulers** because they follow Him. Even though our country has guaranteed us the right to assemble and the freedom to worship, persecution against those of us who bear the **name** of Christ has exponentially increased in recent years.

Over the last year and a half, we have witnessed some churches targeted by the government and individuals. As businesses started reopening during the pandemic; some cities and state governments placed very harsh restrictions on churches while allowing businesses which contributed to the state's tax revenue to open more fully and operate more freely. In fact, the Supreme Court found the State of Nevada complicit in allowing casinos to re-open while unfairly restricting churches.

Instruct

In Kentucky, believers who had assembled lawfully to worship in a parking lot and remained in their vehicles were issued citations by the local police department. In



another incident in the same area, nails were placed at the entrance of the parking lot prior to an outdoor service at the time of Easter. Just a few months ago, believers who lawfully assembled outdoors in Portland, Oregon, to worship were invaded by a group of armed thugs. They hurled projectiles and incendiary devices at the congregation and even went

as far as assaulting the pastor. Despite the thugs having instigated the conflict, none was arrested!

Although it will not be easy and believers will experience tremendous opposition, persecution will have a positive outcome because **it will turn out for an occasion for testimony** (v. 13). Any persecution that we may face serves as a **testimony** in two ways. First, it demonstrates that we belong to Christ. As His followers, He protects us and provides us with the power to overcome any obstacle. Even though we may experience persecution to the point of death, Christ guarantees eternal life and will vindicate us as His followers in the end no matter what may happen to us here on earth. Second, we can also use it as a **testimony** about Christ. In other words, we can use it as an **occasion** to share the gospel. We ought to exemplify Christ in everything we do and this includes suffering for His **name's sake** just as He suffered and died for us ([Phil 3:10](#); [1 Peter 4:1](#)). Others should see Christ in the way that we handle suffering and persecution.

How do you use your experiences in life, whether good or bad, as a testimony about Christ?

Question
5

TURN TO JESUS FOR A DEFENSE:

Continuing the theme of testifying, Jesus urges the disciples to rely on Him for the words to say. He instructs them **not to meditate beforehand on what they will answer** because He **will give** them words of **wisdom** which their foes **will be** unable **to contradict or resist** (vv. 14-15). Jesus isn't telling them they need not study His Word and prepare for these encounters; He isn't telling them to speak off the cuff and blurt out the first thing that pops into their minds. Rather, He wants them to rely upon **wisdom** from Him. We find that **wisdom** in Scripture. At the moment we need it most, Christ will help us recall the Scripture we have studied and learned so that we can present a proper defense with which they cannot argue or dispute. We should not rely on our own philosophical wisdom or rhetoric, but on Christ. Too many times, however, people attempt to base their defense on their own wisdom and their own perception of the world. This will fail, but the wisdom which comes from the Lord will not!

How has the Lord given you wisdom from His Word in a situation in which conflict has occurred?

Question
6

Jesus concludes by showing the disciples just how bad things will get. Their own family members will betray them—**parents, brothers**, other **relatives**, and **friends** (v. 16). **They will** even **put some of them to death!** They **will be hated by all for Jesus' name** (v. 17). We see this today especially when members of another religion like Islam begin a relationship with Christ. Their family members at the very least will ostracize them, but often their very lives are endangered for the sake of Christ. Most of us here in the United States will not be harassed or killed by our families for choosing to have a relationship with Christ. But we can easily be pushed out of their close-knit circles. People may not want to have anything to do with us. They may still act cordially and civilly toward us, but the relationship is visibly strained on account of Christ. Yet, as Jesus has throughout this teaching, He gives us a reason why we don't have to fear these things. As bad as the persecution may be and as many hardships that we may encounter, we have the absolute guarantee of life in Christ. Jesus, therefore, reminds us that **not a hair on our head shall be lost** when we endure and persevere in Him because our soul shall live (vv. 18-19). We are not immune from physical harm or even death in this life. Jesus has already said that **some would be put to death** by their

Instruct

own families. Rather, we have a greater hope beyond this life. We don't have to fear judgment or a second death. We have eternal life in heaven with our Savior to which we can look forward. Therefore, as overcomers, let us be prepared to receive Christ when He comes again. May we rely upon His wisdom found in Scripture so that we do not become deceived. Instead, let us wait eagerly and expectantly as His return draws closer and this era concludes.

Inspire

Deception can be difficult to detect at times as Werner Spies learned. Although it may be difficult, it is not impossible when we arm ourselves with wisdom from God and authenticate everything through His inerrant Word. The key is that we must pay attention or take heed! Christ's return and the culmination of this age are rapidly approaching, so we as His followers must ready ourselves to receive Him. We will face great challenges which could result in physical harm coming upon us whether through natural disasters or persecution, but we have nothing to fear when we have a relationship with the Lord and trust in Him. Therefore, let us be overcomers who seek His will, trust in His wisdom, and heed His truth so that we don't find ourselves deceived by the philosophies of this world. Let us conduct ourselves according to the holy principles we find in Scripture so that we might be a testimony to Him.

Incorporate

What things about our current world cause fear, worry, or apprehension about its current trajectory? How has or does this passage help you to overcome those fears?

If Christ were to return today, how would He evaluate your life? What are you doing well and what changes do you need to make?

How have you relied upon Jesus for wisdom in responding to difficult situations? How did He use what you have learned from Scripture to guide you?

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