

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH

Introduction

This series of brief chapters entitled, "Essentials of or Faith" is designed to establish the simple qualities of "peace, hope, and rest" a Christian believer is supposed to have in his relationship with God. It begins with the foundation for our faith and goes on to deal with some of the "sticky" issues that have caused Christians confusion and discouragement over the years. Bob Stewart, the author, hopes this will bring excitement, hope and renewed confidence in God's grace and love to all who read it. Plus, there is the intention to clarify issues of interpretation and application of the scriptures so the believer can be put at ease but at the same time feel the energy of the Spirit to serve God with fervor and love.

Chapter One

The Resurrection

Over the years I have occasionally asked groups or congregations of believers the following question, "What is the single most important fact upon which our Christian faith stands and without which it would be an empty, foolish, religious waste of time and crumble into dust?"

I have received many answers such as, "Well the Bible is God's Word", "Jesus died on the cross for my sins", "I had a 'spiritual' experience", "I believe it to be true", and so on. Since first becoming a believer, I felt it was essential to know why we believe what we believe. Having a scientific background I felt that there needed to be sufficient and truthful evidence for what we believe and claim about our faith.

In the case of this question, all the answers one might give have value, but even the truth and value of those answers rests on one foundational fact that, if not true, makes all those answers invalid as well.

Paul underscores the importance of one single truth upon which it all rests and that is that Christ was raised from the dead! In no other religion has claims been made to this miraculous event for its "founder". In I Corinthians 15:13-20 Paul writes, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."

Christ's resurrection validates our faith, the Bible as God's word, our message and the fact that His death accomplished everything that message promises. Without it, there is no hope. It is the key memorial for us.

But did it really happen? There are numerous attacks on this critical truth. I have a brief but thorough study about this truth you are welcome to have by simply going to the "topical studies" section in this web-site under the title, "The Resurrection."

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Chapter Two

The Old and New Covenants

Simply put, believers are under the provisions of the New Covenant, period! As I have studied the Scriptures I have come to the conclusion that there is one key problem the historic church has stumbled over since the first century. This same problem still causes a great degree of confusion among believers even today. It is simply this; the church (principally its theology, preaching and teaching) does not understand the provisions and promises of the New Covenant as it stands in contrast to and fulfillment of the promises and provisions of the Old Covenant – (The Law-including the Ten Commandments). It seems “the church” also has no idea when the Old Covenant ended and when the New Covenant began. Yet all of this is crystal clear in the Bible due primarily to the writings of Paul.¹ Further, it is vitally important to the joy and peace of the believer in Christ. The coming of the New Covenant was foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and is alluded to in many other passages. This prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus at His death. He told His disciples, “And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me’. And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in My blood.’” (Luke 22:19-20)

This and other passages indicate that The New Covenant began at the cross when Jesus shed His blood, and it was validated at the resurrection. Prior to that, all of God’s redemptive history, scripture and teaching - and the application of that scripture and teaching fell under the Old Covenant, even the teachings of Jesus (Galatians 4:4). It takes careful discernment to know when Jesus’ teaching was an application of the Old Covenant to bring conviction to the self-righteous and when it looks ahead to the New Covenant. In most cases, His teaching was the former.

The New and Old Covenants are mutually exclusive. Both have different purposes. II Corinthians 3, for example points this out as does the entire book of Galatians. The error comes when the teachings of the Old are mixed into the New. When this is done, (and it is done with regularity in our churches) it throws the entire promises and provisions of the New totally into chaos. Christians become confused and find themselves caught in between bondage and freedom and do not know what to do about it. The reason for this is the different purposes each of the covenants has. The Old condemned sin, the New removed it in Christ. The Old was a tutor to bring us to Christ. The New transfers us to the leadership of the Spirit. The Old was a ministry of death, the New a ministry of life. And so on. Try mixing these together and you will see how confusing and discouraging one could become. It doesn't get much clearer than Paul's glorious words in Romans 8:1-4,

1: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2: For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3: For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4: so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

¹ See our commentary on the "Book of Galatians" in this web-site

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Chapter Three
The Old and New Covenants - Continued

So, the New and Old Covenants are mutually exclusive. Both have different purposes. II Corinthians 3, for example, points this out as does the entire book of Galatians. The error comes when the provisions of the Old are mixed into the New. It throws all the promises and provisions of the New totally into chaos. Christians become confused and find themselves caught in between bondage and freedom and do not know what to do about it. Paul spends a great deal of time in Romans and Galatians talking about this problem. The writer of Hebrews does the same.

These are the three major books in the New Testament dealing with the law and how believers are to relate to it. It was (and is) most difficult for those steeped in Judaism to adjust their view of the Law and its purpose. Most Christians also have a difficult time with this as well. Yet the Scripture is clear. The Law of God (also called the Old Covenant including the Ten Commandments) is the written expression of holiness, righteousness and goodness.¹ That becomes a problem for all who have violated it either in deed or in thought. “All have sinned” Paul made clear and “The wages of sin is death.”²

The Law stands in such contrast to us that by its very nature it condemns us and sentences us to death.³ Thus, all are in bondage under the law, in bondage to sin and death. So, the Law becomes the “tutor” to lead us to Christ and salvation from its provision of hopelessness and death.⁴

BUT, Jesus’ instituted the New Covenant in His blood. All who come to Him in recognition of their need, and place their trust, faith, heart and mind into His keeping - dismissing all their own efforts and righteousness as worthless, recognizing only the worth of His work and righteousness - are removed from the “kingdom and dominion of the Law” (if you will) under the Old Covenant provision, and transferred into His kingdom under the New Covenant provision, free from all condemnation – forever.⁵

Moreover, The Holy Spirit now takes over to transform the heart and guide the believer into a higher level of new and exciting truths. But then, what do we do with the Law? Next chapter. This is the hardest thing to grasp of all.

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1. Romans 7:12
 2. Romans 6:23
 3. Galatians 4:3-5; I John 3:4; Ezekiel 18:20
 4. Galatians 3:24-25
 5. Romans 8:1-5

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Chapter Four
The Old and New Covenants – Continued

Now that in Christ and under the New Covenant we are, “Set free from the Law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2), what do we do with the Law and how do we understand our relationship to it? Arguments over this issue have raged on for centuries. After all, the law is a principle part of God’s Word. "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." (Romans 7:12). It reflects God's righteousness. That's its glory, but also the key problem for those condemned by it since it mirrors the unrighteousness of all mankind.

So how can we just discard it as some do? Some teach that the Law is abolished. Others say we are obligated to some part of it or all of it. Still others try to honor the Law or the Commandments and keep them in front of our eyes much like “Uncle Sam” pointing his finger. How do we properly understand the believer’s relationship to the Law?

I. The Law is not “abolished” as some say. Jesus did not come to do so but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). In other words, He came to complete the purpose for which the Law was given. Paul explains this in Romans 8:1-4. What is abolished is "death" that came with the violation of the Law (or "sin")² for those of faith. Those of faith no longer have any relationship, bond or obligation to the Law. Further, the Law is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13)³. Then to what is the Christian tied now? In a moment.

II. To continue, the dominion and power of the Law is “set aside” for those who come to Christ in faith (Romans 3:28; Romans 5:20-6:11). It is “crucified”- that is dead to the believer (Colossians 2:13-14) and the believer is dead to the Law (Romans 7:4). It is impossible for any law to have effect or authority over a “dead” person. So we are dead in the “Old Man” but now alive in the new - in Christ - and under a New Covenant, (Romans 6). The “flesh”, especially as it relates to “works of the law” or even religious devotion, no longer effects one’s relationship to God by the stipulations of the Law, as the believer is not under the Law, but under grace. This is now a spiritual matter, a matter of faith and the work of The Holy Spirit. This does not mean that "the flesh" can do as it pleases. It is to be a tool of the Spirit and the temple that the Spirit inhabits.

III. The Christian is now in a bonded relationship with God in the Spirit who is now his/her guide. The righteousness the Law represents is now a living, spiritual matter of the heart and the desires about how to live are now in the process of developing for the right reasons and with the power to make it occur in cooperation with the mind and soul. No condemnation now, just desire to please God. The “want to's” are being changed. Those who oppose the fullness and complete power of grace do not understand the power it and the Spirit have to transform the desires of the heart. When one becomes a new creature in Christ, the heart's desires are now toward God, with an attitude of wanting to please Him. Failure to do so does not negate God's grace.⁴

IV. Finally, the Law is honored in terms of its purpose, truth, righteousness and ability to bring people to Christ because on the one hand it condemns sin, and on the other displays God’s promises in solving the impossible problem. Thus God is both just and righteous as well as loving.

² I Corinthians 15:26; II Timothy 1:10

³ Also: Hebrews 7:18-19

⁴ See this author's work on "Understanding the Grace of God."

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Chapter Five

Our Christian Walk⁵

There are, in my mind, two aspects to living as a Christian. Our "walk" with Christ involves basking in the beauty of the truth and peace of who we are now in Him and yet we still battle the fleshly drives, spiritual and worldly intrusions while we journey.

On the one hand, the first is of course, "walking in newness of life" as Paul so eloquently puts it.⁶ We "walk" (this means to conduct our lives) knowing that we are no longer subjects of this world, its nature and destiny, or its ways of doing and thinking. We are, "...no longer strangers and aliens, but are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."⁷ As such we are, "Seated with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus..." and are "fellow heirs with Christ" of all the riches and blessings of God – forever.⁸

On the other hand, we still struggle with inner ungodly drives and clutter as well as the misery and evil that is in the world. We battle "...against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."⁹ We, along with the world, groan as we await the day of full redemption.¹⁰ The latter is conquered by and in the name of Jesus and by putting on the full armor of God. It is His armor, not our own and that is why it works.

The former is not as so many teach, a struggle between "two natures", a carnal or sinful one and a spiritual/Christian one.¹¹ What is going on is that our physical nature with its drives and needs, plus the culture and influence of this world keeps nagging and pressing us to dwell in the "old man" or "old self"- as Paul puts it, or the drives of "the flesh". We frequently succumb to these in our weakness.

But our growth out of this influence is possible and does occur proving that it is not a matter of being held hostage or bound in helplessness to some "old nature". Otherwise the N.T. would not spend so much time counseling the believer on persevering and growing in Christ as well as teaching repeatedly that, "...if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ..." ¹² What are the keys to this "laying aside", overcoming and overpowering of the "old self"? Next chapter.

⁵ See also chapters seventeen and eighteen - "Walking in Newness of Life".

⁶ Romans 6:4; 7:6; II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24;

⁷ Ephesians 2:19-22)

⁸ Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 3:6; James 2:5

⁹ Ephesians 6:12

¹⁰ Romans 8:18-25

¹¹ Both the NIV and the NLT mistranslate the Greek word "flesh" as "sinful" or "carnal" nature. This is an attempt to define the word in jargon terms rather than let it stand as most all other legitimate translations do. This is a topic of considerable debate. The issue is discussed fully in my work in Galatians.

¹² Ephesians 4:21-22

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Chapter Six
Our Christian Walk - continued

Contrary to popular teaching, the Christian is not trapped between the drives of “The carnal nature” and the work of the Spirit in his growth in Christ. Christians are not held hostage or bound helplessly to an “old, sinful or carnal nature”. The Scripture and its translators¹³ never use such terms. If this were the case, then the mandate of the scripture to: “... lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit”, would be foolish. Our growth out of this influence is possible and does occur. This passage in Ephesians 4:22 (please read 4:1-32 in its entirety) also commands, “...and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” The fact that it can be done is proven by Paul’s comment in Colossians 3:9-10 where he says in part, “Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—...”¹⁴ (underline mine – again read 3:1-17). Note the past tense. They had done it.

What are the keys to this “laying aside”, or overcoming and overpowering the “old self” and putting on the new? First, the context of these passages is critical. We needn’t guess, or speculate or listen to preachers tell us what we must do to be a “holy person” in Christ. We already are “Holy Saints” because of Him. If we live inconsistently with who we actually are, (the reason was revealed in the last chapter), here’s what can be done about it.¹⁵

A. First is the need to believe the truth about who we are in Christ and how we got there and how we stay there. This is the “renewal of the mind”. Most flounder in this area because of bad teaching and reflection on one’s own fallibility instead of upon Christ’s power. Do a little work here. Read: Ephesians 4:14-24; Colossians 3:1-17; Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 4:8-9. Note the emphasis on “truth”, “understanding”, the “mind”, contrasted with “ignorance” and “hardening of the heart” and so on. Ephesians 1-4 are so helpful to the believer. They apply to us who are in Christ.

B. Since all we are and have in Christ is by faith, it cannot be by works. Works only emphasize the weakness of the flesh. Faith trusts in God and the work of the Spirit apart from our works to accomplish growth. Once we were trapped in the bondage of the flesh, now we are free in Christ and can begin to set aside the need to satisfy the flesh. We are being renewed and are able to walk in “newness of life”. This necessitates implementing “A” above on a regular basis.

C. We are told to set aside the old garbage consisting of both conduct and mindset (futility). Paul assures each believer that the Lord will be there to assist by His Spirit. The results may not be instantaneous, but there will be progress. This does not need to be a “work” but a conscious sensitivity and response to what the Spirit of God is doing in your life. (Galatians 5:13-25) More next chapter.

¹³ Other than those of the NIV and NLT who insert the words “carnal”, “sinful”, or “old nature” in place of the Greek word for “flesh”. This is an inaccurate and misleading paraphrase. See the last newsletter edition for what the issue really is.

¹⁴ See also: Romans 6:6; Ephesians 2:1-22; 4:14-32; Titus 3:3-7; Romans 12:1-2.

¹⁵ Ephesians 3 and 4 are the source for the following.

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Chapter Seven Our Christian Walk

“...for we walk by faith, not by sight--” II Corinthians 5:7¹⁶

This is a well known and quoted verse. But what does it mean? Encompassing many facets of meaning, this jewel is worthy of close examination. First, the verse is found in the midst of Paul’s teaching about our transfer from this mortal life into the presence of the Lord and the new “clothing” that will be provided. But the key verse above relates to our “walk” (or how we conduct our lives) and that it needs to be guided by what we do not see rather than by what we do see.

Hebrews notes the importance of what we do not see, yet affirms that what we do not see has more substance than what we do see (or sense) as physical “reality”. Note Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Then, Speaking of Jesus’ priesthood, Hebrews 8:4-5 notes, “Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things...”¹⁷ Paul writes in Colossians 2:16, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

Conducting one's-self by what “is not seen” presses us to look beyond ourselves, our works, the things of the flesh, our sins and our failings and so on, to things above - things we do not yet see. We are constantly reminded to, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:6-9 And... “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Colossians 3:1-2

After such counsel, the believer is instructed to lay aside and consider the members of the earthly body dead when it comes to sin. Nowhere in the New Testament is the believer told to focus on his sins. The goal of the Christian life is not to “stop sinning” as it were. The goal is to know Him and draw close to Him and His promise we “cannot yet see”. Note the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11:39-40. “And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.” They sought a future “country” they could not see and lived in the substance and reality, not of this world, but of what was to come by God’s promises.¹⁸ But there is more to “faith” than even this. It is not just simple belief. Next chapter.

¹⁶ See also: II Corinthians 4:16-18; Romans 8:24-25; I Corinthians 13:12; I Peter 1:6-9.

¹⁷ See also Hebrews 10:1

¹⁸ Notice especially Hebrews 11:27.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH
Chapter Eight
What Faith Really is...And Isn't

Faith is a “family affair”, plain and simple...
or is it?

In the last chapter, we concluded with the well known verse, “...for we walk by faith, not by sight—.”

There is such an abundance of teaching of the subject of faith that a simple, clear idea is hard for some to grasp. Blend in the guilt producers and the false teachers and you get convicting topics like: Whether or not one has “enough” faith; or that their faith ought to be demonstrated in one manner or another...mostly by giving money many greedy preachers demand; or that one’s lack of blessings, healing, financial resources, or any lack whatsoever is a direct result of one’s lack or misuse of faith. People point their fingers and say, “well if they just had enough faith...”.

Many basically teach that if you do use your “faith” just right you can manipulate God to your will.

I will declare that faith does not “operate” like this. Here is some other things faith and expressions of faith aren’t:

It is not “doing” - works of any kind; attending church regularly; living a moral life, being obedient to God; keeping the law or the commandments; observing the ordinances or sacraments; joining a church; praying meditating; being baptized, confirmed, circumcised; exercising self denial (asceticism); fasting; giving money or service; loving others, philanthropy, ministering to others in the name of Jesus, being a good citizen; enduring suffering, etc.

It is not “expressing” - formulas, chants, incantations, pronouncements in prayer or meditation; positive thinking; praises, expectations; word(s) of faith; confessions and creeds; etc.

And shockingly, it is not “believing” – in the sense of having a mental commitment to and an intellectual belief in God, Jesus, The Virgin Mary or any other divine being, saint, creed or confession. It is not even believing that “Jesus died for my sins” or that He rose from the dead, nor is it verbal expressions of these things. As James says so well, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” (2:19)

It is not “initiating” – acts, words, deeds, sacrifices, expressions of any kind in order to get God to respond. Faith should be thought of more as God initiating and people responding.

Now some of these things might lead to faith or accompany “faith” or even be an expression of faith, but none of them are really “faith” nor are they a substitute for faith. In fact, anyone can pretty much do the above list without any faith or religious convictions at all if they wanted to. Actors can easily portray these things in film. Hopefully I have eliminated everything except the simple fact to be noted soon. No doubt there are “buts” everywhere. Other things may be thought of that I missed, but if it involves doing, expressing, believing, or initiating it is really not the core of “faith”. That being said, what is it then?

It is “belonging”. We will clarify this in the next chapter.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH
Chapter Nine
What Faith Really is...And Isn't - Continued

Faith is a “family affair”, plain and simple...
or is it?

The last chapter closed with this thought. “Faith is neither ‘initiating’ – acts, words, deeds, sacrifices, nor expressions of any kind in order to get God to respond. Initially, faith should be thought of more as God initiating and people responding. Now some of these things might accompany ‘faith’ or even be an expression of faith, but none of them are really ‘faith’ nor are they a substitute for faith. And shockingly, it is not ‘believing’ – in the sense of having a mental commitment to and an intellectual belief in God, Jesus, The Virgin Mary or any other divine being, saint, creed or confession. It is not even believing that ‘Jesus died for my sins’ or that He rose from the dead, nor is it verbal expressions of these things. As James says so well, ‘You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder’, (2:19). That being said, what is it then? Very simply it is - ‘belonging’.”

A common saying that can apply to believers is, “It’s not what you know, but who you know that counts.” Quite true. Let’s postulate (for the sake of illustration) that there are two kinds of faith: 1. A basic human ability to evaluate a presented hypothesis, and make a choice and a commitment based on that choice for whatever reason or influence, 2. A “faith” comprising a relational link between a human and a spiritual being.

The first may or may not lead to the second. But without the second, the essential Biblical definition of “faith” between a person and God does not exist. The best illustrations as to why this is true are found in Matthew 7 and 25. In Matthew 7:21-23, we read, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you...'" In Matthew 7, we find in the parable of the ten virgins, “the foolish virgins” came to the Lord late and asked to be let into His wedding feast. His response was, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.” This is a serious matter!

Biblically, the word to “know” used in a relational context indicates an intimacy between two or more parties - a family if you will.¹⁹ It is more than acknowledgement. It is a result of a spiritual birth into a new spiritual family. One becomes a member of “God’s household”²⁰, with the witness of the Holy Spirit as to one’s relationship with God.²¹ Family terms are employed such as “born of the Spirit”, “Father” and “Abba Father”, “son”, “daughter”, “brother”, “sister” and so on with the most intimate being “bride” and “bridegroom”. But not only do we come to “know” the Lord, but such claims are futile unless, in turn, we are assured He “knows” us. In other words, we have assurance and the peace of mind, heart, and soul that we are secure in His family and household – forever - because he said so to us by His Spirit based in the truth of His word.²²

¹⁹ See also: Judges 2:10; I Samuel 2:12; Jeremiah 1:5; 2:8, 9:1-3, 31:34; John 5:37-47, 10:14

²⁰ John 3:1-12; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19; Hebrews 3:6

²¹ Romans 8:14-17; John 20:17

²² See this author's extensive work of "Faith" found in this web-site, under Bible Studies, Topical Studies.

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Chapter Ten

"Salvation"

“Salvation” or “being saved” are some common, jargon statements made by Christians. But what really do these mean and what is the proper Biblical definition?

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for “salvation” is “yeshuah”, the same root as the Hebrew name for Joshua and Jesus. It means to, “deliver”, “set free”, “rescue” “make safe” and the like depending on the context. In the New Testament the Greek word is “so-ter-ria” meaning exactly the same thing.

“Being saved” then, is the result of the act of one party rescuing or delivering another party from some pending tragedy. As the word would be used in general terms, a lifeguard, firefighter, soldier, law enforcement officer or other person brings a person, living creature or object to safety (“salvation”) often at the risk of his own life or safety. The key here is that the one (or the thing) needing rescue has no personal resources to accomplish such a thing and, without another’s intervention, he (it) would perish.

Christians most often use these terms in reference to the spiritual dimension. A soul is lost and doomed to perish unless rescued. The stakes are raised from the common, worldly and temporal to the uncommon, spiritual and eternal.

Uncommon because unlike the religions, philosophies and pronouncements of those who hope they will be fine on their own, the Scripture makes it crystal clear that there is no possible way, work, or wish that a person can activate that can rescue him from perishing forever.²³ Without a “rescuer” there is absolutely no hope.

Spiritual because the issue extends beyond this life into the next. Christ’s resurrection is the unique evidence of this reality, as well as the foundation stone of the truth of our faith and confidence. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”²⁴ This is a spiritual matter. Jesus spoke of this to Nicodemus in John 3:1-8.

Eternal because it transcends time, and can neither experience decay nor can it perish.²⁵ It goes on “forever”. Though the term “forever” is actually a “time reference” for our understanding, the actual existence is outside of time and not bound by it whatsoever.²⁶

There is another word that is essential to understanding all of this and how it comes about in the life of a person. The word is “redeemed” and the necessity of a “Redeemer”. This is a critical facet to the matter and we will get to it in the next chapter.

²³ Romans 3:20, 28; 4:2; 9:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; II Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:3-5; etc.

²⁴ I Corinthians 15:50; II Corinthians 5:1; II Peter 1:13-14.

²⁵ I Corinthians 15:53-54; II Corinthians 5:1; II Timothy 1:7-10; I John 5:13.

²⁶ For more on this, see my work entitled, “Something Must be Eternal”, EXCURSUS ON “TIME” VERSUS “ETERNITY” OR “INFINITY”, page 11, found on the website, www.bibleclassroom.org.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH

Chapter Eleven

Salvation" – continued

Last issue we presented the meaning of "salvation", a common jargon term in the church. Simply put, it is the rescue of a person, animal or object by another person assuming the responsibility to do so. Those needing rescue have no resources to help themselves and without the intervention of a "rescuer" or "savior" they would perish.

In case of our spiritual situation the rescue goes beyond the common, worldly and temporal. It transfers to the uncommon, spiritual and eternal. Further, the only rescuer or savior to ever provide for this is Jesus. His authority to do so is demonstrated by His resurrection from the dead, the only person to ever do so. This also demonstrates that only Jesus is divinely anointed to do so by God and proves who the true God really is. Thus His death rescues the world from the death dealing fact of sin. He "takes away the sin of the world" as John states. Though the, "Wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

So this gift of life is received on the basis of one turning to Christ alone in faith and trust. No other religion or philosophy can offer this gift, nor can they exhibit a demonstrable and provable fact that their "savior" has any authority, truth, or evidence to substantiate their claim. Further, everything they claim is based on the works of the devotee, it is not a gift at all. I often wonder how the works of sinful flesh can cleanse the sin of the flesh. Impossible, of course.

Even simple human logic and practice reveals the foolishness of this idea. For example, though a beach lifeguard may have rescued and saved dozens of people from drowning through the years, this "work" would not relieve him of the penalty of murdering someone. He can't say to the court, "Well, so I murdered a person. I also saved dozens. Therefore I should be set free and not arrested again until I have murdered more people than I have rescued." This wouldn't fly in a flawed human legal system, but somehow people think this kind of argument will fly when they stand before God.

Jesus is not only called the "Savior", but the "Redeemer". The terms "redeem", "redeemed", "redeemer" or "redemption" are found 150 times in the Bible. The idea is that a price must be paid to "buy back" or "ransom" someone from their possession by or slavery to another. In the case of mankind, since the price for our sin is ultimate, that is death, the ransom must also be ultimate, that is, death. But no individual can pay someone else's price for their sin, only for his or her own, and that payment does not result in any further hope or life. And mankind does, in the end, pay the ultimate price for his sin – unless he is redeemed and rescued.

Because a man named Jesus died on a cross does not constitute the price paid for all mankind, but because of who Jesus is makes the difference. The sacrifice paid by the eternal son of God covers an infinite number of "sinners" both past present and future. His sacrifice is ransom enough to save all who would turn to Him.

Oddly enough, this ransom is not just paid to clear the curse God put upon man due to man's sin, but also to Satan who holds "the death title" to sinful mankind.²⁷ How he got this title is another story. Nevertheless, the terrible suffering, bloodshed and painful death of the Son of God who gave Himself for us, was and is the only possible means whereby mankind has an opportunity for rescue and eternal life.

This is what the grace and love of God is all about.

²⁷ Hebrews 2:10-15

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH

Chapter Twelve

"Salvation" - continued

The last two chapters began looking at "salvation", what it is and how one comes to be saved. "Being saved" is the result of the act of one party rescuing or delivering another party from some pending tragedy. Christians most often use these terms in reference to the spiritual dimension. A soul is lost and doomed to perish unless rescued. The stakes are raised from the common, worldly and temporal to the uncommon, spiritual and eternal. Simply put, it is the rescue of a person, animal or object by another person assuming the responsibility to do so. Those needing rescue have no resources to help themselves and without the intervention of a "rescuer" or "savior" they would perish.

For mankind, Jesus is not only called the "Savior", but the "Redeemer". The idea is that a price must be paid to "buy back" or "ransom" someone from their possession by or slavery to another. In the case of mankind, since the price for our sin is ultimate - that is death - the ransom must also be ultimate, that is, death. But no individual can pay someone else's price for their sin, only for his or her own, and that payment does not result in any further hope or life. And mankind does, in the end, pay the ultimate price for his sin – unless he is redeemed and rescued.

Looking at the concept of "ransom" we find a great deal of information about this in the Bible. First, the English word "ransom" and the word "redeem" in the Old Testament are used interchangeably. Though there are two words in the Hebrew for this act, in both cases they mean essentially to pay a price to have something or someone released from one situation and delivered to another.

By way of interest, Psalm 49:7-9 speaks of the very wealthy yet notes,

"No man can by any means redeem *his* brother Or give to God a ransom for him-- For the redemption of his soul is costly, And he should cease *trying* forever-- That he should live on eternally, That he should not undergo decay."

But in the New Testament Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28; mark 10:45

And in I Timothy 2:5-6 Paul writes, "For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time."

In the Greek of the New Testament, the word "ransom" and the word "redeem" have essentially the same meaning, and like in the O.T., there are two words used as well.

Once someone turns to faith in Christ – his "redeemer" – his ransom takes effect. Then, he is not only moved out of bondage but an entire phenomenal transformation takes place. Next chapter. This will be exciting, I promise it.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH

Chapter Thirteen

"Salvation" - continued

Once someone turns to faith in Christ – his "redeemer" – the ransom price Christ provided on the cross for his redemption takes effect and his life is changed. At that moment and from then on it is amazing the things that come to pass. Here are some of them:

1. He moves from the death penalty for his sin to forgiveness and life. (Romans 8:1-4)
2. He is born again of the Spirit of God (John 3:1-7; Titus 3:4-7; I Peter 1:23)
3. He is transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son. (Colossians 1:13-14; Ephesians 5:8)
4. He becomes a child of God. (John 1:12-13; II Corinthians 6:17-18; Galatians 3:26, 4:6; I John 3:1)
5. Thus, he is with Christ, now a member of God's family and household. (Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:5, 2:19, 3:15; Galatians 3:26, 4:5, 6:10)
6. He sits in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 2:12-13, 3:1-3; Revelation 3:21)
7. He participates in the glory of God. (Romans 5:2; 8:17-18; II Timothy 2:10; I Peter 5:1,4; I Thessalonians 2:12).
8. He is endowed with eternal life. (John 3:15-16, 5:24; Romans 6:22-23; I John 2:25; 5:13)
9. As a child of God, he is now, with Christ an heir of God the Father and of all the promises God made to Abraham. (Galatians 3:29; 4:6-7; Ephesians 3:6; Romans 8:14-17; I Peter 1:3-4; Revelation 21:6-7)
10. His present identity is no longer that of a sinful, carnal man. (Romans 1:6-7; I Corinthians 1:2; II Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 2:19-20; Colossians 3:9-13; I Peter 1:14-23; 2:4-5)
11. He walks in the Spirit, in newness of life. (Romans 6:4; Romans 8:3-4; II Corinthians 5:15,10:3; Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 4:22-24, 5:8; I Thessalonians 2:11-12)
12. He lives under the provisions of the New Covenant, not under the condemnation of the Old. (Romans 8:1-4; II Corinthians 3; Galatians 3:15-29; Hebrews 9:15)
13. He no longer is penalized with death for "sins" but trained by grace. (John 10:28, 11:25-26; Romans 6:8-11, 21-23; Galatians 2:19-20; Ephesians 2:1-9; II Thessalonians 2:16-17; Titus 2:11-15, 3:5-7; Hebrews 4:15-16; I Peter 1:13; II Peter 3:17-18; Rev. 1:5)
14. He is blessed and rewarded. (I Corinthians 3:8-14; Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 3:23-24; II John 1:8)
15. He is invited to participate in the wedding feast of the Lamb. (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:7-9)
16. He will experience rejoicing and no more tears forever. (I Corinthians 15: 54-58; Philippians 4:4; I Peter 1:1-9, 4:12-13; Revelation 21:1-7)

These are just some of the incredible blessings we who trust in Christ receive because of His great love and sacrifice for us.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH

Chapter Fourteen

Only Family Members Are Considered Heirs

In recent chapters, I have talked about faith and salvation and what these concepts really are (and are not) in the Scripture.

Bottom line, it is by faith alone that one becomes saved (Ephesians 2:8-9). To become "saved" is dependent upon a Savior since, simply put, salvation" is the rescue of a person, animal or object by another person assuming the responsibility to do so. Those needing rescue have no resources to help themselves and without the intervention of a "rescuer" or "savior" they would perish.

This Savior for mankind regarding spiritual and eternal matters is Jesus. Once one responds by faith to God's gracious and loving gift of salvation and eternal life in Christ, the benefits and transformations are numerous²⁸(II Corinthians 5:17). Among them is the adoption of those once outside the family of God into His household. (Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:5, 2:19, 3:15; Galatians 3:26, 4:5, 6:10)

As members of His household we in Christ are now heirs of all the promises God made to Abraham and every generation afterward extending into Christ and into eternity. (Romans 8:16-18; Galatians 3:26-29) And we are to walk in a manner worthy and consistent with our new identity in Christ. (Colossians 1:9-14)

Every human being who does not know Christ assumes: 1. All people are God's children and thus, 2. Will be heirs of eternal life because, 3. God will evaluate them on the basis of works, so, 4. Since they are not as bad as others, 5. God will see that their good deeds are greater than their bad (sins) and so, 6. They will be okay. 7. So, they feel, based on their own theological hypothesis, they don't need Christ because they are going to be fine in themselves.

In one way or another, every religion in the world rests on this assumption. The more religious and devoted the person is, the greater assurance he has of his "reward". Their "sin" is of little or no consequence and quoting "God's love and mercy" is always popular, whichever god they choose, of course. The local cemeteries should be stark evidence enough that man has no ability within his own essence to grant himself eternal life, and apparently God has never honored ones' righteousness with this gift, except one, Jesus Christ. But on they press – to doom, ignoring the only One whom has been raised from the dead.

In the Bible it is made clear that there are two groups of people, those who are a part of God's family (His true children) and those who are not. Those who are of His family and household are also His heirs. Those who are not of His family and household are not. This policy is quite common among men. One would think people would get it when it comes to spiritual matters. Regardless of how wonderful a person is in his religious devotion, philanthropy, love and so on, if he or she is not a member of the family, he or she is not named in the will, and is not an heir. They will perish. Nothing awaits them but a terrifying realization that they ma

Some draw the erroneous conclusion that if one is a "Jew" he is a member of the "chosen". Paul puts this to rest when he says, "For they are not all Israel who are from Israel" (Romans 9:6)

²⁸ See the last chapter above.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH
Chapter Fifteen

Only Family Members Are Considered Heirs - Continued

So how does one know if they are indeed a part of God's family? This is a more important question than one might at first imagine. Many people, even in the church, assume they are a part of God's family because: 1. They have gone through some such required ritual such as Baptism, confirmation, communion, confession, and the like. 2. Others look to their faithfulness in praying, attending services, reading the scripture and so on. 3. Many think that by just belonging to or recognizing some attachment to a religion, denomination and so on is sufficient. 4. Many refer back to some decision or act made in the past they assume granted them entrance into God's family. This may or may not be the case. 5. Some claim they came to "know the Lord" at some time and thus are safe. 6. Some stand upon their "righteousness" as the key. And so on and so forth.

But the Scripture supports nothing of this sort as a means of attaining any standing before God. For example, here is a telling account from the mouth of Jesus:

Matthew 7:21-23; 21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. 22: "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23: "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'"

Other passages talking about "knowing" God contrasted with being "known by God" are many. Matthew 25:1-12; Romans 1 and Luke 13:26-30 present the negative while John 10:4; 25-28; 13:18; I Corinthians 8:3, 13:12; Galatians 4:9; II Timothy 2:9 and more make it clear that a person better be "known" by Christ and not just claim to "know" Christ.

The word "know" in this Biblical framework indicates an intimacy in a relationship and not just some intellectual or mental "knowledge", often consisting of false assumptions. So how does one know he or she is "known" by Christ and thus a part of God's family and an heir?

There are many indicators. Here are a few from the Scripture you can read: Romans 8:5-17; Galatians 4:4-7; I John 4:13. The Holy Spirit not only bears witness but changes and develops the believer in new ways. One indicator is that when a person is born anew, he or she no longer sees the world and life in quite the same way. The desires of the heart begin to change and a struggle with the drives of the flesh begins to occur. One becomes frustrated with oneself when one slips into disobedience to God or foolish living. Non believers don't have this same struggle. Note: Galatians 5:16-26; Colossians 3:5-10; II Corinthians 5:17. I Peter chapters 1-2 might help as well. It tells us of some good news. Ephesians 4:4-32 is good and there are many passages that help. But bottom line, one knows he or she is in the household of God if they are developing a sincere love for God and their brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoicing in their being a part of the family. Note I John 2:9-11, 3:10-14, 17-24, 4:1-21. Though John's style is poignant and difficult to grasp at first, just try to get the general idea. Remember he is confuting Gnostic influence. Are we perfect in this? Not yet, but progress should be evident.²⁹

²⁹ See the appendix to the Study of the Book of Hebrews published in this web site for more about this.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH
Chapter Sixteen
Walking in Newness of Life

The title phrase above comes from Romans 6:4, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." The children and heirs of God are described as those who walk in "newness of life". The obvious contrast is to the time one walked in the "oldness of death". The "newness" phrase refers to the spiritual, grace produced, freedom source for one's conduct and existence in contrast to that of the fleshly, works oriented bondage. This latter would describe the idea of "religion". The "former" describes the idea of "salvation". Paul spends a great deal of time on this in chapters six and seven of Romans. He concludes with, "But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." (7:6)

There are too many Christians who are discouraged and burdened down with their own "sins". Many can't seem to overcome the power and control of sin in their lives. The conclusion (and accusation of them) seems to be that these failures indicate a flaw in their relationship with God. This is not true. The only violation of God's grace would be an intentional trampling upon God's grace by deliberately continuing in sin (Romans 6:1) which is tantamount to walking in the "oldness of death". This does not remove a person from God's grace, but is an offense to it. For those attempting to be righteous by their own works, Paul calls that the "oldness of the letter", as opposed to the "newness of the Spirit".

On the one hand walking according to the "flesh" is the indulgence in immorality whether it be by thought, word or deed. On the other hand, walking according to the "flesh" is also defined as attempting to be found righteous and in a right relationship with God by the works of the "flesh" in obedience to the Law or any religious tradition. Both of these are completely covered by His grace in Christ (Romans 5:20-21).

Interestingly, as pointed out in Hebrews 9 and 10 the attempt to be clean and right before God by our works proves that this is indeed not the way to be so. Otherwise, once the works are completed, if they were effective, the individual would not have to do them again since they completed the job of making a person righteous. But they don't. Only the Spirit can accomplish this based on Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.

Thus we are to walk by the Spirit in newness of life and not by the works of the flesh. We have "died to sin" and are alive to God in Christ. Sin has no mastery over us at all and the only thing we do is make choices in terms of our relationship to it. But employing good "works" to offset "bad works" is not the answer either. If we could have a right standing before God this way, Christ would never have had to go to the cross. There would be no need of Him at all.

So, by being led by the Spirit, we offer our lives to God as a living sacrifice for God's use and service and resist all the things that would derail this. If this is our heart, headway will be made.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH

Chapter Seventeen

Walking in Newness of Life

Walking in "Newness of life" is simply conducting one's life by the leading of the Spirit of God rather than by the oldness of the flesh. The oldness of the flesh (Paul calls it "the old self"³⁰) is two-fold. First, it is living under the impulses of the flesh in terms of ungodliness or immorality. Second, it is also attempting to please God through religious works of the flesh in order to: 1. Avoid some sort of divine displeasure or, 2. To achieve some blessing or benefit or other, either now or eternally which is just a way to attempt to manipulate God. Both of these stem from legalism.

It would be impossible to live in newness of life by doing so under the power and auspices of the old self wouldn't it? So newness of life must come from outside of us, and so it does. The only thing that stifles this freshness is a continued reliance on our own old ways of thinking, doing, behaving, and giving into the drives of the physical flesh in ungodly or manipulative ways.

But breaking old ways and old thinking and unprofitable beliefs is very difficult for some. Think of the first century Jews (not to mention contemporary ones) who had the challenge to discard a considerable amount of things, they had been taught and believed with all their heart, in order to follow Jesus. But this is also difficult for many believers today. Someone once said that the seven last words of the church (or the Christian) are, "But we've (I've) never done it that way before."³¹ When this happens the believer(s) are caught up in confusion or apprehension. Can't give up the old things even though they don't work or aren't true. Caution is good, but not when it stands opposed to the leading of the Spirit or the truth of God's Word. By the way, the Spirit never leads outside of the true intention of God's word. Someone who says he is being led by the Spirit and then assassinates someone is not being led by the Spirit.

Dependence on the ways of bondage is bondage.

Thus, walking in "newness of life" under the leading of the Spirit is also walking in freedom. Free from worry about one's relationship with God; free from caring about the things of this world - even income, material possessions and "blessings"; free from worry over the whys of life, including hardship, suffering or even prosperity; free from the bondage to the flesh; free from condemnation, guilt, and fretting; and so on. As with the saints of old, we know we have an eternal kingdom awaiting those who are His. This overshadows the "momentary light afflictions" (as Paul put his own sufferings) of this age. We are free!

As we release the dependence on the ways of the old self, the fruit of the Spirit becomes more able to grow in our lives the: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" we all wish to bear.³²

³⁰ Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22

³¹ The title of several works, 1: A book by Ralph Neighbour, Jr.; 2; Comments on line by Mike Palmetto; 3. Article by D.E. Parkerson – online; etc.

³² Galatians 5:22-23.

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH VII - PART III

Chapter Eighteen

Walking in Newness of Life – Joy

What is "joy", where does it come from, and how does one experience the constancy of this Biblical reality? What causes "joy" to be missing from the Christian life?

"Joy" is derived from the New Testament Greek Word for "grace". They are, "Two sides of the same coin" so to speak. God's grace is the source of all good gifts from Him, and those good gifts are the reason for the joy. Joy is not something we generate from within ourselves. It comes as a gift from God and is based in His grace. So understanding "grace" and believing it applies to us who are in Christ is the key. Once we understand it and actually believe it, then the joy will come. The difficulty is that so few understand or believe in grace.

Grace is rooted in what God did for us out of His love when He sent Jesus to the cross on our behalf. He took away all things that would hinder our relationship with God – forever. But here is where the church has often messed this up and become a joy "stealer" rather than a joy "assurer". It is this. A lack of understanding the magnitude of what Christ did on the cross and imposing teachings that negate the effect of this incredible act, thus robbing believers of the joy they should experience. Let's try to grasp this.

One key truth of the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice is that when Jesus died on the cross, He took away our sins forever. This is extremely clear in the scriptures, yet churches of all types teach we must supplement what Christ did with devotional works, confessions, and personal obligations, and the like, so a believer can remain in "right standing" before God. If these things are not accomplished on a regular basis, they teach that a person loses his "right standing" before God. So all of this effort is to offset "sin" in the Christian life so one can muddle through his day without too much worry. But at the end of the day, most believers are a mess and confused about where they stand with God in spite of these efforts. Oh, the words are good, but the joy is gone. We say the right things, but inside we think we are not quite "there" with God! Our words and statements clash with our emotions and deep inner thoughts and we are joyless. Not only that, but peace, rest and all the good things associated with "joy" are lacking. Yet joy, peace and rest are supposed to be essential elements and results of our faith in Christ. Too often it is guilt, discouragement and worry. Somehow it becomes our effort rather than Christ's, and we fail.

To be burdened with the things Christ took away from us forever robs us of joy. Joy is the freedom and relief from ever being affected by these things again. The less we focus on them the less power they have. Rather we are to set our minds on things above as Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (3:1-3) And to the church at Philippi he wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (4:6-8) Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full. (John 15:11)

ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH Chapter Nineteen

Walking in Newness of Life- Bottom Line

The bottom line is simply this. The Spirit of God has (or must have) a greater presence in our lives than anything else. He gives us new life and we should conduct ourselves according to His leading and not according to the world, the Law or anything else. How does this come about? By setting our minds on the things of the Spirit - and the truth. Romans 7:6, 8:1-6 are great passages for this. Please read them now. May I suggest that all this ultimately comes down to what we believe (or choose to believe) in terms of what "truth" we allow to impact our minds (our heart, the core of our being). This is gauged by what we think when we "sin" or when we act in a way unbecoming to whom we are in Christ. Unfortunately, it is common that we come to a place of regret, guilt, condemnation, and the feeling that we have damaged our relationship with God. Maybe He is unhappy with us. Dan Holgate said it very well in a recent sermon on Sunday morning, "Nothing going on in your life today is a result of God being disappointed, or angry or upset with you." He is right. We are either free from condemnation or the Word of God is a lie. Which do you choose?

So we need to rid ourselves of these negative thoughts that are not true now that we are in Christ. The reason we think them is because we have been, and still are, inundated with the Law that lights up unrighteousness and sin like a billion power searchlight aimed right at us. But for us in Christ, that light is blocked because in Christ we are righteous and cleansed – continually and forever. But, sadly, we continue to see ourselves in the light of the Law's righteousness and feel miserable – which the Law is designed to do.³³ But we are not under the Law! So why do we keep beating ourselves up and doubting God's grace? How about we focus on the things of the Spirit, the things of God's love and infinite and marvelous grace? After all, this is what we are commanded to do. Feel compunction and sorrow when we err, sure. Talk it out with our Father? Sure. Let it cause us to stumble or destroy us? No.

For example Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." (Philippians 4:6-8) Or, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:1-2). There is no place in the New Testament where we are told to focus on our sin and be as miserable as possible in the process...as if this is what the Christian life is supposed to be all about. Quite the contrary. We are to have peace, joy, and hope in which we exult.

The New Testament says essentially to "lay aside", "cast aside", "put off" everything that would interfere or distract from the work of the Spirit (etc.) in our lives.³⁴ I think this must also include the teachings we hear and mostly believe that cause Christians to feel inadequate, guilty, discouraged and so on that impacts their thinking and simply blocks out the joy and truth of what Christ has done. It is hard to have people, "ignore that garbage, block it out and welcome this truth and be free." We're not bound to some sin nature as some teach. If so, we couldn't, "lay it aside" as Paul instructs. Live your life according to the Spirit, His truth and desire for your benefit (in Christ and under the New Covenant) and do not listen to or believe anything else. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full into His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

³³ II Corinthians 3

³⁴ Hebrews 12:1, Ephesians 4:20-24; Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:9, etc.

