

Walking With God

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Do you want to live a life that is pleasing to God? You can! Though the power of evil is very strong and you may personally feel very weak, the Bible teaches us that God will graciously give us everything we need to be able to live a life that pleases and honors Him (2 Peter 1:3-4).

This does not mean, of course, that we will never sin or do anything wrong. But it does mean that God will truly help us to live a life that honors Him, glorifies him, and pleases Him—if we genuinely and sincerely desire to live such a life and prayerfully seek to walk with Him every moment of every day.

Many Christians, however, continue to emphasize their weaknesses and failures and the power of evil in the world. What they say may be true, but when emphasizing the negative, they often neglect or minimize those many passages in the Bible which tell us of the grace of God and the power of God and the victory which He promises to give to those who humbly seek to serve and honor Him.

If we continue to emphasize the negative, we will probably not pray with the confidence that God will really help us live a life that is pleasing to Him. In fact, we may even get to the point where we actually *expect to fail!* And, after a while, we may not even be very concerned about our failures any more since we simply resign ourselves to the idea that “no one can ever please God anyway.”

Therefore, we begin with an emphasis on the positive teachings of the Bible concerning holiness and obedience. Though only Jesus perfectly and always did the will of His Father in heaven, we will find that there are many other people in the Bible who are commended for their lives of trust and obedience. And, in addition, we will find that the Bible provides us with many promises and some wonderful encouragement as we humbly and sincerely seek to **Walk With God!**

GOD CALLS US TO A LIFE OF HOLINESS AND OBEDIENCE

The Bible repeatedly calls us to live the way God wants us to live. Sometimes it emphasizes what the results will be if we choose **not** to trust and obey Him. But over and over we are called to be holy and obedient because God is holy and we are to be like Him . . . or because we are His representatives in a fallen and sinful world and we are to glorify Him . . . or because the unbelieving world must clearly understand the difference between living in the darkness and living in the light . . . or simply because the way of obedience is the way of blessing and joy. God does not give us laws and commandments to make our lives more burdensome or difficult but because He wants the very best for us. And there can be no lasting pleasure or delight when we choose to walk our own way rather than His way. And there can be no greater joy than when, by grace and by choice, we *do* walk with Him each moment of our lives.

Scripture References

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” 1 Peter 1:15-16

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” 1 Corinthians 3:16

“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”
2 Corinthians 7:1

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.” Ephesians 5:8-10

“Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. . . . Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 5:15-17, 19-20

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:9-11

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” Titus 2:11-13

“So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this [Christ’s return and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth], make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.” 2 Peter 3:14

“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” 1 John 3:3

A MAN WHO WALKED WITH GOD FOR THREE HUNDRED YEARS

Early in the book of Genesis (Genesis 5:21-24) we read about a man named **Enoch**. In many ways Enoch appeared to have been an “ordinary” man who lived just like everyone else. He married, had children and grandchildren, and went about his ordinary business day after day. But there was also something very special about him. According to verses 22 and 24, Enoch “walked with God.” This walk was so very special that Enoch was taken directly up to heaven without ever having to die.

We don’t know exactly what the Bible means when it says that “Enoch walked with God,” but it’s obvious that he was living in such a way that God was very pleased with him. Hebrews 11:5 tells us that before Enoch was taken to heaven, “he was commended as one who pleased God.” And this was not something that happened only once in a while. Genesis 5:22 says that “Enoch walked with God 300 years.” At the very least, therefore, it’s obvious that Enoch lived day after day and year after year in close and loving fellowship with his God. He was a marvelous example of someone who not only

knew God's will but who also faithfully and consistently did what God wanted him to do. It should be very encouraging to us to know that there was someone who was daily living a life that was pleasing to God when most of the people around him were not loving or serving God at all.

OTHERS WHO WALKED WITH GOD

If Enoch were the only person in the Bible who was commended as someone who pleased God, we might feel that we couldn't really learn anything from him. But he is *not* the only one. He may be the most exceptional one since we never read anything negative about him, but he certainly is not the only person who pleased God in his life. Consider, for example, the following.

“**Noah** was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.” Genesis 6:9

“The Lord then said to **Noah**, ‘Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation.’” Genesis 7:1

“In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was **Job**. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.” Job 1:1 See also Job 1:8.

God said about **David**, “I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.” Acts 13:22 See also 1 Samuel 13:14 and 1 Kings 3:6.

David wrote, “Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin. . . . My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped.” Psalm 17:3, 5

“I will be careful to lead a blameless life—I will walk in my house with blameless heart., . . . I will set before my eyes no vile thing.” Words of David in Psalm 101:2, 3.

“**Joseph**, [Mary's] husband, was a righteous man” Matthew 1:19

“Herod feared **John** [the Baptist] and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man.” Mark 6:20

“Both of them [**Zechariah** and **Elizabeth**, parents of John the Baptist] were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.” Luke 1:6

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called **Simeon**, who was righteous and devout.” Luke 2:25.

“We have come from **Cornelius** the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man.” Acts 10:22. See also Acts 10:2.

“By faith Abel . . . was commended as a righteous man.” Hebrews 11:4

These passages certainly do not teach that the people mentioned here lived without failure or sin. Only Jesus was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15, 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). However, the passages do teach that these people sincerely sought to observe God's laws, to obey Him and trust Him, and to walk in His ways. Though they were not perfect in their motives and sometimes fell into serious sins (consider, for example, the significant failures of Noah and David), and though they did not perfectly love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, they did seek to please Him and they did enjoy fellowship with Him as they walked with Him in their daily lives.

All of these people were known for their integrity and their commitment to the Lord. They consciously sought to honor God and obey Him, matching their actions with their words. Their lives were filled with positive desires and sincere intentions as they earnestly sought to do the will of God. And God approved of them and blessed them.

Such people are a great encouragement to us. Enoch and Noah and Job, as well as others, loved and served God even when most others didn't. Their lives clearly show that it is possible to walk with God even when others don't. They help us see and believe that God truly does bless those who genuinely love and trust Him. We should never despair, therefore, when most of the people around us seem to live without any desire to trust or obey the Lord. And we should never conclude that holiness and obedience are absolutely impossible for us in an environment of unbelief and disobedience. God is forever faithful to His promises. He will never fail those who love and obey Him.

SOME OLD TESTAMENT PROMISES OF BLESSING ON THE RIGHTEOUS

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. . . . For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Psalm 1:1-3, 6

Psalm 5:12 “For surely, O Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.”

Psalm 112:1, 4 “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. . . . Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.”

Psalm 119:1-3 “Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.”

Psalm 128:1 “Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways.”

Proverbs 11:20 “The Lord . . . delights in those whose ways are blameless.”

Proverbs 20:7 “The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.”

Ezekiel 18:5, 9 “‘Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. . . . He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live,’ declares the Sovereign Lord.”

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON WALKING WITH GOD

We all know that temptation is very real and that the devil is very strong (1 Peter 5:8). We also know that even some of the strongest believers sometimes fall into sin. However, it’s important that we do not focus primarily on those passages which describe the strength of our enemy or the failures of God’s people. Rather, if we truly seek to walk with God, we must focus primarily on who we are “in Christ.”

When we focus on ourselves, it is easy to become overwhelmed with a sense of weakness and with the realization that we are completely unable to overcome or resist the powers of evil in our own strength. However, when we focus on who we are *in Christ*, we realize that we have much more power than those who wish to destroy us or lead us away from the Savior we love. As the Apostle John reminds us, though our enemy is very strong, “the One who is in [us] is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

We must remember that Christ not only saved us when we first believed in Him but that He also continues to help us overcome sin and the devil through the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Just as we were *saved* through faith in Christ, we must live our daily lives through faith in Him and with faith in His promises to help us in our time of need. And if we do fail at times to live as God wants us to, we must never despair or give up but immediately confess our sin to God, trust Him for forgiveness, and then get back in step with our Lord.

If we did not truly believe that God wants us to live a life that is pleasing to Him and enables us to do so, we would continually be frustrated and discouraged whenever we studied the Bible. The more we learned about God’s will for our lives, the less joy we would have and the greater would be our sense of hopelessness and despair. But when we focus on God’s promises rather than on our weaknesses, we may begin to live a life of trust and obedience which leads to increasing humility, thanksgiving, fellowship, and joy.

And when we do so live, we will gratefully acknowledge that everything we accomplish and every victory we enjoy are possible only because of His mercy and His grace. And, as a result, all glory and praise will be given to Him and not to ourselves.

Scripture References

Jesus said, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. . . . If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:3-5

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him [Christ] so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” Romans 6:6-7

“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” Romans 8:9

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Galatians 5:16

“It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Philippians 2:13

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Galatians 5:24-25

After presenting a lengthy list of the kind of people who will not enter the Kingdom of God because of their sinful ways, Paul wrote, “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:11

“Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:14

“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit . . . so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.” Titus 3:3-8

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” James 4:7b-8

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” 2 Peter 1:3-4

“No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. . . . No one who is born of God will continue to sin because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” 1 John 3:6, 9

“May the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Hebrews 13:20-21

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.” Jude 24-25

AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

Although we are focusing primarily on our Walk with God, it is very important to remember that there is no way in which we can earn or merit salvation by our holiness or obedience. We are not saved from the penalty and the power of sin through our own merits but only through God’s mercy and grace. No one is without sin, and no one can even begin to save himself from the just judgment of God. Every person who comes into the world is born under the curse of sin (Ephesians 2:3) and every person is by nature an object of God’s wrath and subject to the penalty of eternal death (John 3 :36). Eternal and perfect righteousness can be ours **only** through faith in Jesus Christ who mercifully took our sin on Himself whose perfect righteousness is imputed to us (Romans 3:23-26; Romans 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

However, when Christ saves us, He not only removes the penalty of sin, but He also gives us the ability to fight against the power of sin and overcome it (1 Corinthians 10:13). As an old Christian hymn puts it, through Christ we have a “double cure.” He saves us from wrath and He also makes us pure.

The focus of this study is not on coming to God for salvation bur rather on **walking** with God in obedience and gratitude **after** we have been saved. If you have not yet taken the first step of trusting Christ for salvation, then it will be totally impossible for you to **walk** with God! But if you are a true believer and sincerely desire to live for God in your daily life, you may confidently expect that God will enable you to walk with Him in obedience and joy.

BIBLE PASSAGES THAT EMPHASIZE HUMAN SIN AND FAILURE

Up to this point, we have emphasized the importance and the possibility of walking with God in this life. We have seen that there were several people in the Bible who were described as “righteous” or “blameless” or “upright” before the Lord. They earnestly desired to walk with God and live a life that was pleasing to Him. These people were not completely free from failure and sin, but they did seek to please the Lord, to keep His laws, and to trust and obey Him. And if, at times, they fell into sin, they sincerely repented of those sins and again sought to walk in step with the Lord.

However, some passages in the Bible may seem to teach that it is impossible for us to walk faithfully and consistently with God in this life, such passages as Psalm 53:3; Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:10; Romans 7:15, and 1 Peter 5:8. Many people believe that these other texts teach that it is not possible for us to live a life that is pleasing to God. Since these other texts are often referred to when discussing the Christian life, we will take a careful look at them before going on to study other teachings on how God wants us to live. If we sincerely believe that it is impossible for us to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God, then there would be little value in studying further what the

Bible teaches about walking with God. In fact, the more we studied, the more discouraged and frustrated we would become! Therefore, we will seek to understand some of the so-called “negative” texts to see what they really teach us.

Text Number One: PSALM 53:3.

“There is no one who does good, not even one.”

This passage is quoted also in Psalm 14:1 and again in the New Testament in Romans 3:12. Further, Romans 3:10 says, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.” And Ecclesiastes 7:20 teaches that “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.”

There are several things which should be noted concerning these passages.

- (1) It is certainly true that *every* person on earth is by nature sinful and inclined to sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). That is what is meant by the doctrine of “original sin.” This truth is also affirmed in Romans 3:23 where we read, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Truly, there is no one who is born without a sinful nature and no one who lives without sin. We must honestly and humbly recognize that. We must also recognize that the only way for us to walk with God and live a life that is pleasing to Him is first of all to receive new life from the Holy Spirit. Receiving this new life is referred to as being “born again” or “regeneration.”
- (2) David is referred to as the author of this Psalm. Though David was certainly far from being sin-free in his life, in his other writings he wrote clearly about his own fervent desire to serve and please the Lord. For example, in Psalm 101:2-3 he wrote that he desired to lead “a blameless life” and to walk in his house “with blameless heart.” David did not live without sin, but he did live in such a way that God regarded him as a man “after His own heart.” It’s obvious, therefore, that David did not mean in Psalm 53:3 that no one ever does anything that pleases God!
- (3) If Psalm 53:3 and parallel passages are understood to refer to every person on the face of the earth, then it would mean that nothing really changes in a person’s life when he is born again. There would then be no significant difference between the lives of those who are said to be “righteous” or “blameless” before the Lord and those who are described as wicked, sinful, and evil. And if this were true, it would mean that the powerful work of God in a believer’s life (referred to in such passages as Philippians 2:13, Colossians 1:29 and Ephesians 1:19-20) really accomplishes nothing as far as Christian living is concerned. And this obviously is not true. Psalm 53:3, therefore, cannot mean that no one anywhere ever does anything that is considered “good” and “right” before the Lord.
- (4) The question must be raised, therefore, whether Psalm 53:3 describes the life of every person on earth, whether that person is born again or still an unbeliever. The obvious answer is that this text does not refer to the lives of believers who have been born again by the Holy Spirit. The basic reason for

this conclusion is that there are so many passages in the Bible which refer to the “good works” of people who know and trust and obey the Lord. These “good works” are never described in the Bible as “sinful” works or “bad works” or “polluted works” but always referred to as “good.” See such passages as Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; 1 Timothy 2:10; 1 Timothy 5:10, 25; Titus 3:1, 8, 14 and various others. Even though the good works of believers may not be perfect in every way, they certainly are much different from the works of unbelievers. And God Himself refers to them in Scripture as “good” works.

Text Number Two: Isaiah 64:6.

**“All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”**

- (1) Many of the observations made above concerning Psalm 53:3 would also be relevant here. Anyone who is not born again cannot live a life that is pleasing to God. Even the very best human efforts will not be acceptable to God. These efforts are not motivated by true love for God, they are not done for God’s glory, and they do not proceed from a truly pure or born-again heart.
- (2) However, after a person is born again and receives new life through the Holy Spirit, this person *does* begin to live a life that is pleasing to God. One of the oldest Protestant confessions of faith puts it this way: Question: “What is the coming-to-life of the new self?” Answer: “It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 33)..
- (3) Though Psalm 53:3 and Isaiah 64:6 have some things in common, there is also a significant difference between the two passages. Psalm 53 begins with a reference to the fool who says in his heart that there is no God. In Isaiah 64:6 we hear the cry of people who believe in God and even know what He requires of them. However, they had apparently substituted *external* observance of God’s laws for true, heartfelt obedience. They were doing some of the things God had commanded them to do, but their motives were impure and their hearts had not been changed. They were like the people described in Isaiah 1:10-17 and Isaiah 29:13 about whom God said, “These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.” Isaiah 64:6, therefore, refers to people who may be doing some “right” things but are doing them for the “wrong” reasons and in the wrong way.
- (4) The people described in Isaiah 64:6 were definitely not right with God—and they knew it (see verses 5 and 7.) The people described in verse 6 are clearly different from the people referred to in verse 5 who “gladly do what is right.” There is here a significant contrast, therefore, between those who are living for God and doing His will and those who aren’t. Verse 5 indicates that it is *possible* to do what is right and pleasing to God and that there *were* people who were doing so.

- (5) Isaiah 64:6, therefore, should not be understood as a description of people who are truly serving the Lord in humility and gratitude and who are doing the works which God prepared for them to do (Ephesians 2:10). There are no passages anywhere in the New Testament which would permit us to call God-prepared, Christ-honoring, Spirit-driven works as being like filthy rags in His sight. To call them such is not only discouraging to the people who do them but also dishonoring to the Lord who makes them possible.

Text Number Three: Romans 7:15

“For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”

This passage is somewhat puzzling for a number of reasons. Commentators have often disagreed whether this passage describes Paul *before* or *after* his conversion.

- (1) If Paul is here referring to his life *before* his conversion, he would then be describing what life was like for him when he was still living as a proud and self-righteous Pharisee. He *wanted* to serve God, but he simply didn't have the spiritual power to do obey Him with pure motives and a clean heart.

When he was younger, Paul was very careful to obey the law *externally*. He never knowingly or intentionally violated any of God's laws as far as external obedience was concerned. In that regard, he considered himself “faultless” (Philippians 3:4-6). He had a “righteousness” of his own and felt that he was doing whatever the law required of him. At that stage in his life, he knew nothing of the perfect righteousness that could be his through faith in Jesus.

If Paul is indeed describing his “old life” in Romans 7:14-15, he then refers to the spiritual victory that he gained over his old way of life through his faith in Jesus (Romans 7:25-26). He also goes on to describe the wonderful freedom from the burden of the law which he experienced through the work of the Holy Spirit in his life (See Romans 8:2-4).

- (2) If Paul is here (Romans 7:14-15) describing his life *after* his conversion, he then acknowledges that he still struggled with the power of sin in his life even after he became a believer. Holiness and obedience were not “automatic” for him. The new life of the Holy Spirit in his heart had to contend with the continuing power of his old sin nature. And this struggle continued even after his conversion.

Many believers who struggle with the power of sin and temptation in their lives are grateful to know that Paul also shared some of the same struggles which they have. Though they genuinely and eagerly desire to please the Lord in their lives, they acknowledge, to their regret, that they sometimes fail to do what God wants them to do.

- (3) Paul also reminds us here how utterly impossible it is for us to live a life that is pleasing to God if we depend on our own power and good intentions. As he wrote in Romans 7:18 and 20, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. . . . Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” By writing in this way, Paul is not

making excuses for anything he might do wrong. Rather, he is simply acknowledging that the power of sin within him continues to be very strong—even after he has become a believer and even after he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

- (4) At the same time, however, he indicates that it is *possible* to win a victory over sin in His life through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within Him. And it is this VICTORY that he wants to emphasize here and not the power of sin or the strength of his sinful human nature. Though the power of sin may be very strong, the power of the Holy Spirit is far greater. (See the passages already referred to in Romans 7:25 and Romans 8).
- (5) There are several reasons why we can state all this with confidence. In almost every other passage in which Paul refers to the Christian life and the importance of living a Christian life, he writes with boldness and confidence. He even calls his readers to imitate him and to follow his example. If he felt he was not living a life that was pleasing to the Lord, he definitely would not urge others to follow his example! Consider, for example, the following passages.
- (a) “I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. . . . Timothy, my son, . . . will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.” 1 Corinthians 4:14-17.
- (b) “Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially in our relationships with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace.” 2 Corinthians 1:12
- (c) “You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.” 1 Thessalonians 2:10
- (d) “I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience . . .” 2 Timothy 1:3
- (e) “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 11:1

Text Number Four : 1 Peter 5:8

**“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion
looking for someone to devour.”**

Many believers recognize the power of Satan in the world and feel that they are absolutely no match for his craftiness, power, or persistence. If Satan was clever enough and strong enough to get sinless Adam and Eve to listen to him (Genesis 3:1-7), how can we expect to be able to resist him ourselves? Satan was also able to cause Peter to challenge Jesus right after he had made a resounding confession of faith in

Him (Matthew 16:21-23). Later, Satan led Peter to deny that he even knew Jesus at the very time when everyone else was also forsaking Him (Luke 22:31, 54-62). Satan was also able to get Judas, one of Jesus' chosen disciples, to betray Jesus in a way that led to His death (Luke 22: 3ff). And in the early church Satan tempted Ananias and Sapphira to lie publicly to the Holy Spirit, bringing shame and dishonor to the early believers (Acts 5:3-11).

Already in the Old Testament Satan was also active in tempting, luring, and leading some of the strongest believers into folly, sin, and shame (See, for example, the failures of David in 2 Samuel 11:1-27 and 2 Samuel 24:1-17) and those of Solomon in 1 Kings 11:1-13.) And when an angelic messenger was sent by God to Daniel, one of Satan's fallen angels was able to delay this messenger for a total of 21 days (Daniel 10:12-13).

Since Satan is so strong and we are often so weak, it may seem that Satan is able to keep us from walking with the Lord or living a life that is pleasing to Him. And what is worse, we may feel that there is nothing we can do about it. But this is absolutely not true!

It is true, of course, that Satan can tempt us to disobey or distrust God. And it is also true that he and his fellow demons will try to make us sin and fall. But he definitely cannot make us disobey God or live contrary to His will.

Consider thoughtfully the following passages.

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” 1 Corinthians 10:13

“Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. . . . You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” 1 John 4:3-4

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. . . . so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. . . . In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. . . . And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Ephesians 6:10-18

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

2 Peter 1:3-4

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” 1 John 3:9

“We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.” 1 John 5:18

These passages do not teach that believers will never fall into sin, but they do clearly teach that victory over sin and Satan is always possible if we sincerely and humbly seek the Lord’s power to resist temptation and earnestly desire to do His will. Satan would like to have us believe otherwise. He would be pleased if he could get us to believe that it is impossible for us to resist him or to win a victory over temptation. God, however, has given us abundant reason to believe that victory is possible. And he has also promised that walking with Him and living for Him will always bring us greater joy and blessing than any sin could ever provide.

Some people may also refer to other passages in the Bible which may at first seem to teach that we can never be victorious over sin and evil. However, all such passages should be interpreted and understood in the light of the many positive passages which assure us that God *wants* us to walk with Him and *enables* us to do so.

LEARNING WHAT GOD TELLS US TO DO OR NOT TO DO

God, in His mercy and grace, enables us to live our lives in fellowship with Him. The more we trust Him and obey Him, the more we will delight in knowing and doing His will. He helps us to walk in the light and stay away from the darkness. He gives us a thankful heart so that we want to please Him in all that we do. He also enables us to love others and to serve them in His name.

However, as we walk with God there will often be things we will have to fight against and there will be many temptations we will have to overcome. There may even be times when we will struggle to be all that we want to be or all that God wants us to be. Doing what is good and right is not automatic--and it is not always easy. However, though Satan is strong and temptations are many, the One who is in us is greater than he that is in the world. As we put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6), God enables us to win victory after victory.

To help us walk faithfully and joyfully with the Lord, God has given us many warnings in the Bible, teaching us always to be vigilant and wise, being careful not to wander away from Him and careful not to displease or dishonor Him. In future articles, we will look carefully at some of those warnings and prohibitions.

Before looking at the things we should *avoid*, however, we will first focus on some of the things God wants us to *do*.

By concentrating on the things we *should* do, we will be strengthened and encouraged to stay away from the things we should *not* do. By sincerely pursuing what pleases the Lord, we will have less time, less energy and less desire to pursue those things which do not please Him. The opposite, of course, is also true. If we spend a lot of time and energy pursuing things which do not please God, we will have less time or desire or energy to pursue the things which do please Him.

THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment of all, He replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38).

Those who truly love God as He commanded will enjoy a fruitful, meaningful, and joyful walk with the Lord. Those who fail to love God in this way will soon wander away from Him and get involved in all kinds of things which break their fellowship with Him. Even if they stay away from some specific things which are clearly displeasing to Him (such as lying, stealing, killing, adultery), they will still not enjoy a fruitful and joyful walk with God if they do not continually put Him in first place in their lives and truly love Him with all their heart and soul and mind.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized the blessedness and importance of putting God first in our lives when He said: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these [other] things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33. No matter what we may choose to do or choose not to do, if we don’t put God first in our lives and seek to honor and please Him in everything we do, our lives will never be all they could be or should be.

Jesus also taught that when we live a life of holiness and good works, we not only please God directly, but we also cause others to praise Him as well. He said, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16.

And in the Old Testament, we read of the joy and delight faithful believers bring to Almighty God when they love and serve and obey Him. The prophet Zephaniah wrote, “The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.” (Zephaniah 3:17)

Several years after Jesus returned to His Father in heaven, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christian believers in the city of Corinth. Most of the Christians in Corinth had come out of a very pagan and sinful background and often found it difficult to live the holy and obedient life that God requires. When Paul wrote to them, he reminded them of the importance of always seeking to live for the Lord—no matter what they were doing. He wrote, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Later Paul wrote to the church in Colosse, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17). If we sincerely desire to walk with the Lord, there is absolutely no place and no time when we can simply forget about God and go our own way—putting our personal desires before our love for God.

If we do not deliberately choose to keep God in first place in our lives, it will be very difficult to keep in step with Him. And if we are out of step with God, we will lose the joy and blessing we could personally have and we will also forfeit the blessing we

could be to others. Nothing is more important in our walk with God than making a diligent and faithful effort to please and honor Him in everything we do or say or think (See 2 Peter 1:5-11).

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT

Jesus closely tied together our love for God with the love we should have for others. After referring to the first and greatest commandment, He said, “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:39-40

When Jesus said we should love others, He was not referring to our feelings or emotions concerning other people but rather to our *attitude* to them or our *will* concerning them. It may not always be possible for us to *like* everyone. But no matter what our personal feelings may be toward others, when we genuinely love them, we will always seek what is truly best for them, never hold grudges against them, and never seek to repay evil for evil. (Read Romans 12:9-21.) True Christian love for others is not “natural,” nor is it something we can manufacture or develop on our own. But when God’s love fills our own hearts, that love can flow through us to others—even if they are not very lovely or “lovable.” Throughout history there have been many marvelous examples of people who showed Christ-like love to very unlovable people—all of which demonstrate not the goodness of man but rather the reality and power of the love of GOD.

Scripture References

Jesus said, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7:12

Jesus said, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. . . . Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. . . . Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Luke 6:27-28, 35-36

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” 1 John 3:16-18

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” 1 John 4:11-12

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 4:32, Ephesians 5:1-2

“The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Galatians 5:14

The Old Testament View

Already in the Old Testament God made it very clear that those who did not have a genuine love for Him AND for others were not pleasing to Him. This was true even when people *seemed* to be obedient to the Lord. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God said, “These people . . . honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Isaiah 29:13). They were saying the right things and even doing many of the things God had commanded, but they did not truly love Him with all their heart. And they certainly were not showing love to their neighbors.

In the very first chapter of Isaiah, God took note of the formal and external obedience of the people as they offered their prayers and presented their sacrifices to Him. However, He was extremely displeased with their wrong attitude and lack of true love for others. He said, “Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.” (Isaiah 1: 16-17)

Later in the book, we again read of God’s great displeasure with many of the people. They were giving external obedience to His teachings on fasting, but their hearts were not right and their motives were wrong. They were not showing true love either to God or to their neighbors. So God responded with these words: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” Isaiah 58:6-7

If the people would learn to obey and love God with all their hearts and if they would love others as themselves, then their lives would be radically changed. In the words of Isaiah, “Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. . . .you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land. . . . The mouth of the Lord has spoken” Isaiah 58:10b-11, 14.

In a beautiful but simple summary of what it means to love God and love others, Micah, speaking for God, wrote these words: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). God did not mean that all of His other commandments were insignificant or unimportant. But He wanted His people to focus on the inward attitude of love, mercy, justice, and humility. Without these, all external obedience would be as nothing in His sight.

In summary, walking with God will be a source of joy and blessing for us if we always remember to keep God in first place in every area of our lives and if we truly seek to love others as we love ourselves.

GOALS AND GUIDELINES FOR OUR WALK WITH GOD

As believers, our primary goal in life will be much different from the goals of non-believers. We will not seek first of all to achieve personal fame, wealth, honor or pleasure for ourselves. Rather, the primary goal of our lives will be to bring honor and glory to God.

It certainly is not wrong for us to achieve wealth or fame in this life if we do so honestly, fairly and in a way that pleases God. Nor is it wrong to delight in the many wonderful pleasures that God permits us to enjoy. The Bible itself promised that if we truly delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4). However, gaining material wealth or enjoying earthly pleasures should never be our **primary** goal.

Besides, the pursuit of earthly and temporal goals *can* easily lead us away from maintaining a close and joyful fellowship with the Lord. It's so important, therefore, to make very sure that our desire for earthly or temporal blessings does not in any way interfere with our sincere desire and intention to honor and glorify the Lord in all that we do.

Read the following Scripture passages.

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”
Colossians 3:1-4

“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2

“When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness . . . But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life.” Romans 6:20, 22

“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.” 1 Timothy 6:6-9

“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:14

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.” Luke 13:24

“We instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.” 1 Thessalonians 4:1

“Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.” Romans 16:19

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:8-9

WHY DO WE STILL NEED RULES AND COMMANDS AS BELIEVERS?

The Bible not only gives us some **general** goals or guidelines; it also gives us many **specific** commands or teachings concerning God’s will for our lives. Among those commands are the Ten Commandments, given first of all to God’s people in the Old Testament (Exodus 20). God also gave the people many other laws and commandments concerning almost every area of life. The New Testament also has many prohibitions and commands which Christians are called to observe. God not only wants us to stay away from certain things; He also wants us to live positively and joyfully in every area of our lives.

When we get to heaven, we will no longer need rules or commands of any kind. It will then no longer even be possible for us to sin. We will be fully free from every trace or effect of sin, and the powers of evil that now tempt us will be completely destroyed.

In this life, however, we still have to deal with our old sinful nature. And, as Paul reminds us, there is nothing good in our old sinful nature (Romans 7:18). Besides, we constantly have to be on guard against Satan and all the powers of evil in the world which are determined to defeat us (1 Peter 5:8). In addition, we are continually surrounded by evil examples, peer pressure, sinful traditions, and by people who try to draw us away from God.

It’s very important for us, therefore, to have the “warning” signs which God provides in His rules and commands. These warnings are not in any way intended to take away our joy in life, but rather to help us avoid those things which would lead us into sin and break our joyful fellowship with the Lord. We **NEED** the warnings. Without them, we would easily go astray and find ourselves walking **away** from God rather than **with** Him. It’s truly a great blessing to have God’s laws and commands. The people of Israel considered themselves especially favored to have them (Psalm 147:19-20 and Romans 3:1-2). And so are we!

WHAT ABOUT OUR CONSCIENCE?

Our conscience is our personal sense or belief concerning what is right and what is wrong. It can often serve as a very helpful guide for us when we are faced with making

moral choices. This does not mean, of course, that it is always right to follow our conscience! Our conscience may be helpful, but it is not always “right.” If our conscience is not formed according to God’s Word and His will, our conscience will often lead us in the wrong direction! Conscience isn’t even a safe guide for people who truly want to serve the Lord in their lives. The apostle Paul, for example, carefully followed what his conscience led him to do (Acts 26:4-5, 1 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Timothy 1:13), but his life was not always pleasing to the Lord (Acts 9:1-4).

It’s also possible to have what the Bible calls a “seared” conscience (1 Timothy 4:2; see also Titus 1:15 and Hebrews 9:14). That is a conscience which has been influenced over time according to standards and activities that are not in harmony with the Bible. It’s quite possible for a person to do something so often and for such a long time that he no longer considers it wrong—even though it clearly is contrary to God’s Word and even though at one time he himself acknowledged that it was wrong.

Though our conscience does not always lead us to do what is “right,” no one should ever do anything which clearly violates his conscience-- no matter what the situation is. If someone truly believes something is displeasing to God, he should *never* do it! If he does, he is doing something which he sincerely believes is displeasing to God--and that is sin. (Romans 14:23).

WHICH LAWS IN THE BIBLE MUST WE STILL OBSERVE TODAY?

Since there are many laws and commands in the Bible, we may wonder whether Christians are required to obey each one of those laws today. If not, we will want to know which laws were intended only for people who lived in the past and which ones are still valid for us today.

To answer that question, it’s important to begin by looking at the laws in the Old Testament. Most of these laws fall into three general categories: civil laws, ceremonial laws, and moral laws. The **civil** laws had to do primarily with the political or national life of the people of Israel. They included laws regarding government structure and leadership, the organization of society, business, property, the military, the justice system, etc. The **ceremonial** laws governed the worship and cultic life of the people such as offerings, sacrifices, worship at the temple or tabernacle, the duties and responsibilities of priests and other spiritual leaders, and related matters. The **moral** laws covered all matters related specifically to personal holiness and to people’s relationship to God and to one another. The “moral” laws included the Ten Commandments and many other rules or regulations regarding personal morality, honesty, integrity, business, every day living and personal relationships.

Many of the Old Testament civil laws were intended specifically for the people of Israel in Old Testament times. The Israelites were a unique people different from all other nations in the world. They had God as their Ruler, Judge, and Lawgiver. He was the ultimate authority in every area and in every situation. Those who served as leaders among the people (whether as judges, kings, or lawgivers) served in His name and as His representatives. All authority belonged to God.

Since believers no longer live in nations where Jehovah (Yahweh) God is recognized as King and Lord, they are not expected or required to obey all the civil laws of the Old

Testament. At the same time, believers should recognize the importance and significance of those laws as guidelines for their own situations. For example, the civil laws of the Old Testament required justice, fairness, honesty, integrity, concern for the poor and others who were not able to defend or support themselves. So, even though we are no longer bound to observe all the specific civic laws of the Old Testament, we should never violate the fundamental principles which lie behind them.

Further, Christians should always seek to love God and others in *every* area of life—including the political arena. The “Two Great Commandments” discussed earlier in this Lesson are still valid always and everywhere! The way in which these commandments are observed may differ from one situation to another, but these commandments are never to be violated.

The **ceremonial** laws of the Old Testament were also intended specifically for the people of Israel and are no longer binding on us today. God was present in the Temple in a very special way and it was there where He was to be worshiped and where the sacrifices were to be brought. Today there is no longer a central place of worship (the temple or tabernacle) where sacrifices can be offered and where gifts can be brought. And, even more important, most of the ceremonial laws pointed forward to the coming and work of Jesus. When He came to earth, died for our sins, and rose from the dead, the old system of sacrifices and worship was no longer necessary or appropriate. (See, for example, the book of Hebrews.)

The **moral** laws of the Old Testament were also given specifically to God’s people in the Old Testament, but these laws are generally not restricted to one time or place or one group of people. Most of those laws are therefore re-emphasized and repeated in the N.T. and are considered valid for all people at all times. The specific **application** of those laws may sometimes differ from one time or one place to another, but the fundamental requirements of these laws remain the same. We shall look more carefully at the application of some of these laws in the next Lessons.

Most laws and commands given in the New Testament are still valid for us today since they are not limited to one time or to one situation. At times, however, a command was directed to a very special or unique situation and is therefore not necessarily applicable today. (See, for example, Luke 18:22.) Also, Jesus sometimes gave a command which was not intended to be taken literally. (See, for example, Matthew 18:8-9.) Most of the time it is quite clear whether a New Testament command is still valid today, though there are times when Christians may reasonably disagree on certain things. In general, however, the major problem believers have is not **knowing** what is right but in **doing** what is right!

AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

When reading or studying the laws of the Bible, it is always important to remember that no one can ever be made right with God by observing these laws (Romans 3:20). Only Jesus, who perfectly kept God’s laws Himself and who made a perfect sacrifice for our sins, can make us right with God (Matthew 5:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 1 Peter 1:18-19). It’s also true, however, that those who sincerely desire to walk with God will find joy and blessing in observing His laws and will also be a blessing to others.

Read the following Scripture passages.

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Romans 3:21-22

““Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” Galatians 3:23-25

“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” Romans 7:6

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.” Hebrews 8:10

Summary and Conclusion

Believers no longer live under the burden of all the laws of the Old Testament. However, because of our sinful nature, the power of Satan, and the sinful world around us, we still need laws to guide us in our daily lives. God graciously provides these laws for us so that we may more clearly know His will, do that which pleases Him, and stay away from that which does not please Him. Our conscience, though very important and often helpful, is not an absolutely reliable guide for us. We need God’s written Word to sharpen our conscience and to guide our thoughts and actions.

Though God expects us and enables us to live in a way that does please Him, we should always remember that we can never earn salvation or merit God’s favor through a life of obedience. Salvation is always a gift of God’s grace.

The two greatest commandments that God has given have never changed and never will. Those commands are (1) to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and (2) to love our neighbors as ourselves. The specific application of these laws may depend on the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but the laws themselves are absolute. In that regard, God’s standards never change.