



Christian Perfection by Grace and Works

Philip B. Brown

**Practical Application of
The New Wine System**

www.newwine.org

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For my parents, Brevard and Doris Brown,
who have been so supportive of
me in the writing of this book.

Introduction

During the last couple of decades, there has been an ongoing debate known as Lordship salvation vs. free grace salvation. Advocates of Lordship salvation say there must be a noticeable change in the life of a believer if he is really to be saved. Thus, these advocates believe there could be millions of church-goers who think they are saved but are not. Lordship salvation advocates put emphasis on the words of Jesus which seem to be completely intolerant of any sin with regards to inheriting the kingdom.

On the other hand, free grace advocates place emphasis on the words of Paul and say that salvation is a free gift. There would be some "fruit of the Spirit" in the life of any believer. But the amount of fruit could be completely unnoticeable.

It's been assumed that all who are saved will inherit the kingdom. But a study of verses about inheriting the kingdom alongside verses involving salvation seem to indicate that salvation is about faith whereas inheriting the kingdom is always about holiness. Carnal Christians will be saved but will not inherit the kingdom.

The New Wine System takes this approach. Not all believers will inherit the kingdom. Those who overcome all their sinful habits before Christ returns will inherit the kingdom and reign with Christ during the millennium. Everyone else, including the carnal Christians, will live in the nations here on the earth. Jesus tells his disciples to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. So you can be saved and yet not inherit the kingdom.

The separation of simple salvation from inheriting the kingdom makes it clear that holiness is eternally important.

Without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:15). Carnal Christians will be surprised at being excluded from the wedding banquet. The five foolish virgins will be saved, but they will be surprised that they must still overcome sin in order to inherit eternal life.

We must become completely sanctified in order to inherit the kingdom. That means we must overcome all our sinful habits. But failure to do so before death or before Christ returns does not mean we go to hell or purgatory. This elevates Christian perfection to be more than something which Christians think they should do, but they don't think is really all that necessary. Christian perfection is the practical application of the New Wine System.

The letter of 1 John focuses heavily the need to completely stop sinning. Seven times John refers to his audience as "little children" (1 John 2:1, 2:12, 2:28, 3:7, 3:18, 4:4, and the last verse of the letter, 5:21). How much sin do we need to overcome in order to be considered mature and wise? How much does it take to be a saint? Is anybody perfect? What does it mean to be completely sanctified (1 Thessalonians 5:23) and inherit the kingdom and eternal life?

1 John 3:2-9 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. (3) Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. (4) Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. (5) You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. (6) Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him. (7) Little children, let no one lead you astray. He

who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. (8) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (9) Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, because his seed remains in him; and he can't sin, because he is born of God.

The Reformed view of theology says that nobody can completely stop sinning. This would be the view of Luther and Calvin. Thus, even John would have been still sinning just a little when he wrote these words. And yet John says, "Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him." Thus, if you believe that John was still sinning when he wrote these words, you have to go to great lengths to explain what John means.

At the same time, if you take John's words at face value, it would seem that only those who become mature and completely stop sinning can be saved. After all, if you are continuing to sin, according to John, you don't know Christ. And if you don't know Christ, you are not saved. This would mean that very few people are saved. We are saved by grace, and through faith, that no man can boast (Romans 4:2-3, Ephesians 2:8-10). So how can John say, "Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him?"

The New Wine System is all about forgetting the traditional interpretations of the New Testament. Instead, we must put ourselves into the shoes of the ancient Jews whose Bible was the Old Testament. We must interpret the New Testament in the context of the Old Testament. When this is done, we begin to understand that both the Old Testament and the New Testament teaches there are three types of people in the grave. The wise are those who have completely overcome all their sinful habits through a

personal discipleship (Lordship) relationship with Jesus Christ. The foolish are those who still have some faith in God, even God the Creator, but they still have sinful habits. And the wicked are those who deliberately and knowingly reject Jesus Christ.

Thus, the foolish (carnal) can still be saved through faith. Salvation is a gift so that nobody can boast. At the same time, only those who stop sinning know Christ. Only those who have a discipleship relationship with Christ are mature and wise. That's why John addresses his audience as "little children." John was speaking as one who had completely overcome all his old sinful habits. This is why John can say, "Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him." John has experienced the truth that when you live in the light of Christ, you don't sin. When in darkness, you are not living with Christ. From darkness, you have neither seen Him nor known Him. Foolish Christians go back and forth between the light and darkness.

To be ready for Christ to return involves the overcoming of all sinful habits. It involves living in the light all the time. These habits are reoccurring sins that are still happening. I don't think that means you have repented of each and every past sin. When we first confess our faith in Christ and become a believer, our sins are forgiven, by the blood of Christ. All of them. Period.

However, we must overcome all our sinful habits. If the Holy Spirit brings some past sins to mind, then perhaps you still have a tendency to sin in that area. If you have wronged someone in the past, it's best to ask them to forgive you. Otherwise, you will still carry the harm that the sin caused you to receive. When temptation comes, it will be harder to resist if you have not asked for forgiveness when you should. And asking forgiveness can only help heal the

relationship. Asking forgiveness brings release from the sin. It will release you from the guilt of sin. And it helps you be sure that you won't do the sin anymore.

That's because sin must be brought into the light. You can't just say "I won't do it anymore." We were slaves to sin. The bondage of sin is too strong for us to overcome it in secret, which is darkness. If you just tell yourself and God that you won't do it anymore, then when temptation comes, you will tend to say, "Well I can just ask God to forgive me again." And so you fall to the temptation again. But when you truly seek the forgiveness of others, the change goes very deep. When temptation comes, you will know that you have put yourself on the line with the person from which you have asked forgiveness.

Let's compare it with being drunk. Perhaps someone is an alcoholic. And in being an alcoholic, the alcohol-addicted person causes hurt in other people around them. Part of the process of overcoming alcoholism is to ask forgiveness of the people that were hurt. The purpose here is to stop drinking. (Or stop sinning.) But there could have been many people that were hurt by the alcoholic that do not even come to mind as the alcoholic begins his or her recovery. So one would not have to figure out every possible person and ask forgiveness of them all. But the Holy Spirit and circumstances will bring to mind the ones that count, whose relationships need to be healed.

It's very much the same as confessing your sins one-to-another. It forces you to be accountable to someone else regarding your sinful habits. That's why Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) can work. Very few alcoholics can overcome their addiction by simply asking God to forgive them. The drunk believes he or she can stop at any time. But they can't. However, when they become accountable to

others in the group, and to the people they have harmed because of the alcoholism, then it becomes possible for them to completely stop drinking.

So how do you know when you are ready for Christ to return? It's when the Holy Spirit gives you peace. It's entering God's rest (Psalm 95:11, Hebrews 3:11, 4:3, 4:5.) Your sins are all forgiven. That was Christ's work on the cross. But it's the Holy Spirit's work in you to help you overcome the sinful habits. Ask God to not give you rest until all your sinful habits have been overcome. And always be open to the possibility that the Holy Spirit may show you something later on that was hidden to you in the past.

The first thing we must all do, every day, is to pray for holiness. Ask God to give you a day of holiness. Ask God to not lead you into temptation. Holiness comes one day at a time. Every day must be a new day for which you depend upon the Holy Spirit to keep you from falling back into darkness that day. That's why the alcoholic counts days. We live one day at a time with God. Stay in the light. Don't fall off the bandwagon. Start each day in prayer.

The alcoholic never says that he is no longer an alcoholic. The alcoholic knows that he or she can still be tempted, and could very easily fall off the bandwagon. Likewise, I never say that no sinful habits will crop up again. But I can and do have a peace that as far as I know, I'm ready for Christ to return. As long as you have peace from the Holy Spirit, that all your sinful habits have been overcome, you can be confident that you are ready for Christ to return. And you can be confident that the Holy Spirit will complete this work in your life as long as you truly seek God's rest through Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6 ESV And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

What about examples in the Scripture? Paul believed he had finished the race, before he died:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. (25) Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (26) Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. (27) No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

And then later in his life, he wrote:

2 Timothy 4:7-8 NIV I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (8) Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Also, Jesus told his disciples, after about three years of discipleship, that they were all clean (all but Judas.)

John 13:10-11 Jesus said to him, "Someone who has bathed only needs to have his feet washed, but is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you." (11) For he knew him who would betray him, therefore he said, "You are not all clean."

John 15:1-4 ESV "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. (2) Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (3) Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. (4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

Our cups must be clean on the inside as well as the outside. When you are clean (without sin) on the inside, you will be clean (without sin) on the outside. The inside of the cup is one's thought life. Once we overcome all our habits of sinful thoughts, we won't be sinning on the outside. You won't commit adultery if you are not lusting. You won't commit murder or lash out in a rage of anger if you are not angry against someone on the inside. But how do you overcome sins of the mind? Recognize the things that trigger your thoughts. Avoid the triggers. And most importantly, pray for God's help and focus on the cross.

You become clean by being Christ's disciple, and by seeking his righteousness. Being Christ's disciple is more than just learning. It's all about doing what Christ is doing in you. That's what Paul meant when he said that he no longer lives, but Christ lives in him (Galatians 2:20). You can't do it by just fighting sin. You do it by finding Christ's purpose for your life. As you do the Father's work, your purpose in Christ becomes more important in your life than anything else. That purpose winds up taking the place of the sinful habits.

In other words, all sin is about self. We find Christ's purpose for us that is never about self. As we work in Christ's purpose, sin disappears, because self becomes less

and less important. That's what it means to take up your cross and follow Christ (Matthew 10:38, 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23). Even your very life is of no importance as compared with the purpose of following Christ, which is to do the things that Christ would do if he were in your shoes.

1 John 2:3-6 NIV We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. (4) The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (5) But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: (6) Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

The point here is that Jesus obeyed the Father's commands and walked without sin. We overcome sin by grace because it's impossible to completely overcome sin without the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We overcome sin by works because as we do the works that Christ commands us to do, the Holy Spirit fills us, enabling us to do the will of the Father. When God has filled us, we cannot sin because God is in us and God cannot sin. When God has filled us, we remain in the light. But we still can respond to temptations because all sins are habitual. We can still fall into darkness.

The Holy Spirit backs off if we fall into temptations. But we can repent and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us again. The Holy Spirit can bring us back into the light. So we must again focus on the works the Father has commanded us to do and again be filled with the Holy Spirit. As we get immersed in the works of God, sin no longer has control over us, and we can become completely sanctified, overcoming all our sinful habits. Let's read 1 John 3:2-9 again:

1 John 3:2-9 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. (3) Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. (4) Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. (5) You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. (6) Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him. (7) Little children, let no one lead you astray. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. (8) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (9) Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, because his seed remains in him; and he can't sin, because he is born of God.

People read, "Whoever remains in him doesn't sin," and "whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him," and then immediately become confused. Every Christian believes that they know him. And every Christian struggles with sin. So the passage is dismissed in some way. Often the reader simply assumes the passage is talking about really bad sins. There is always some class of sins that are perceived as being worse than the ones we struggle with. But John treats sin as being either in darkness or light. There is no middle ground. There is no gray area. John is comparing the absence of sin that is expected of us with the absence of sin in Jesus Christ.

Some take the following verse out of context in order to argue that you can't completely overcome sin.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But let's look at the verse in context. John makes an obvious point that God is in the light, and in him there is no darkness. Then he says we must walk in the light just as God is in the light. There is no gray between the light and the darkness. You are either in darkness or you are in the light. And if you are in the light, it's just like God being in the light. Therefore, verse 8 cannot be saying that everyone continues to sin. Verse 8 must be saying the same thing as verse 10, which is that all have sinned in the past, and therefore all of us need the blood of Christ to forgive us of our sins. Verse 8 cannot be used to say we cannot completely overcome all our sinful habits.

1 John 1:5-10 This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (6) If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and don't tell the truth. (7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Most Reformed theologians will concede that verse 10 is talking about past sins. But they insist that verse 8 is talking about present sins. In the Greek, verse 1:10 uses a verb for "sinned". And of course that verb is in the past tense (indicative, perfect, active). But in verse 1:8, a noun is used for "sin" instead of a verb. In this translation, as well as the ESV/KJV translations, the word "no" modifies the noun

"sin." But the Greek word for "no" is an adverb. Therefore, it should modify the verb and not the noun.

1 John 1:8 ESV/KJV/NKJV/WEB If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The verb means "to have", or "to hold." So literally speaking, it could be translated as: "If we say we do not hold sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." If we don't translate it like this, we have an adverb modifying a noun. Having sin, or holding sin, can easily be talking about having or holding the guilt of sins that were committed in the past. So what do Reformed theologians say to this? Obviously they are not going to change their opinion. Here an email response to me from one person who is working on his doctorate in theology.

I appreciate that you're looking at the Greek text to gain some clarity on these interpretive matters. You are right to point out that the phrasing in 1:10 and 1:8 are slightly different, but the general trend of each is preserved in most English translations. 1:10 is the perfect tense ("have not sinned"), and 1:8 is a simple present ("have no sin"). They look similar in English, but are quite different in the Greek (as you noticed).

The word for "have" can reasonably be translated as "hold," and is in other contexts. And while your interpretation may be a plausible one, it's a bit of a strain on the actual usage and not one that is offered as a natural reading of the verse. That doesn't mean it's necessarily wrong, but it's significant that no one in church history has it read like this. A good rule of thumb is to give deference to those who knew the

language and context of Scripture if we come up with a unique interpretation.

He agrees that technically I'm correct. But he falls back on tradition. Most theologians don't generally consider this verse to be translated in this way. So it's assumed not be true. But look at the amount of explaining that is done in order to make 1 John say something besides the fact that we must completely stop sinning. Generally, they say things like there is more than one type of sin. There are really bad sins that we can stop. And then there are not-so bad sins that we can't stop doing. And they rely heavily on this one verse to make that case. I just don't see John as saying that you can't stop sinning. In overcall context, he is writing these things to teach us that in Christ we can stop sinning. You are either in light, as Jesus is in the light, or you are in darkness, according to John.

To really understand what John is saying, these verses should be examined in context. And we will do so in chapter 2, titled "The Christian Perfection of John." For now, just understand that when the Holy Spirit is in us we are in the light. When we are in the light we cannot sin because God is in us and God does not sin. When we fall to temptations, we move into the darkness and the Holy Spirit leaves. We must repent and the Holy Spirit fills us again. As we do the works of the Father, we are filled with the Holy Spirit more and more often. As we become consumed with doing the Father's commands (works), we are no longer sinning on a more continual basis. Thus, we can remain in the light.

When arguing against Christian perfection, another verse that is often taken out of context is the verse in James that has been used to argue "sins of omission." Actually, many Christians who bring up "sins of omission" don't know exactly where it's taught in Scripture. But that phrase

"sins of omission" has been used so often that everyone assumes that it's taught by Scripture.

The assumption is that everyone is always sinning because there is always something else that could be done for the Father. Perhaps I could have had the opportunity to go over and talk with a stranger about getting saved. The thought occurred to me, but I was nervous about doing so, and so didn't do it. Thus, it's believed, I've sinned. It matters not if one has overcome all their sinful habits. They are still sinning because of the ever-present "sins of omission." There is always something else that could have been done. So all Christians become continuous sinners for not doing enough. The verse that is taken out of context is the last verse in James chapter 4.

James 4:17 NIV Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

But in context, it's not talking about moment-to-moment missed opportunities. James is talking about the general direction one takes in life. We must seek the calling God has for us and don't neglect that calling. Here is the verse in context.

James 4:13-17 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow let's go into this city, and spend a year there, trade, and make a profit." (14) Whereas you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. (15) For you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will both live, and do this or that." (16) But now you glory in your boasting. All such boasting is evil. (17) To him therefore who knows to do good, and doesn't do it, to him it is sin.

Does James really teach against Christian perfection? Chapter 2 of this booklet is titled "The Christian Perfection of James." As we will see, the first three chapters of James argue very much in favor of Christian perfection.

For those who argue against Christian perfection with "sins of omission," consider these words of Jesus:

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus also taught us to completely overcome sin. The theme of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is to be "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Jesus compares this perfection that is expected of us with the perfection of the Father. This is done in order to prevent his meaning from being understated.

Compare this perfection with John's teaching about being in the light or the darkness, with no gray in between. In this sermon, Jesus teaches us to be perfect by storing our treasures in heaven. The narrow gate that few find is only found by those who do the works of the Father (Matthew 7:13-23). We will examine the Sermon on the Mount in more detail in chapter 1 of this booklet. The chapter is titled, "Christian Perfection According to Jesus."

The gospel of Jesus is often seen as being quite different from the gospel of Paul. Some even claim that the gospel of Jesus was for an old dispensation and that it changed at the cross. One dispensational pastor, who is a friend of mine, says he interprets the words of Jesus "through the lenses of Paul." In other words, he reinterprets the words of Jesus

using his interpretation of the words of Paul. A better approach is to interpret Paul in the context of the words of Jesus.

It's true that Paul spoke a lot about his own struggle with sin. For this reason, Paul's words are often used to argue that you can't overcome sin. In chapter 3 of this booklet, we will examine Paul's struggle in overcoming sin.

Some people have used Paul's struggle with sin as an argument that you can't completely overcome sin.

Romans 7:18-20 For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I don't find it doing that which is good. (19) For the good which I desire, I don't do; but the evil which I don't desire, that I practice. (20) But if what I don't desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me.

But when we read the overall context, we can see that through Christ Jesus, we can have victory over sin. That means we can completely stop sinning. Paul was talking about his struggles with sin. He was not saying that sin cannot be overcome.

In chapter 3 of this booklet, we will see that Paul expected us to be completely sanctified before Christ returns. Paul struggled with sin. But Paul did in fact overcome sin before he died. We will see this in chapter 3 of this booklet. The title of the chapter is, "The Christian Perfection of Paul."

Many people respond to the teaching of overcoming sin by saying things like, "I've never known anyone who has done it." Or if they meet someone who believes they have overcome sin, they just roll their eyes in mockery and disbelief. There are two problems involved. The first is that

if we are taught that you can't overcome sin, then there is no strong motivation to overcome sin. The second problem is that mistakes and shortcomings are mistakenly thought to be sins. Sin is moving into the darkness and disobeying what you know to be the Father's commands. When you are in the light, in obedience, you are not sinning.

You are in the light if you have nothing to hide, even if people could read your mind. In other words, if people could read your every thought, would you have things to be embarrassed about? Would you be embarrassed about an honest mistake? When we receive our spiritual bodies, will we be able to read each other's thoughts? If so, then we must overcome all our sinful thought habits before we can inherit eternal life. We have to learn to stay in the light all the time. Suppose you said something to someone that hurt their feelings. But you had no intension of hurting their feelings. You say you are sorry, that you didn't understand. Did you sin? Or did you just make a mistake?

Can you define the difference between art that contains nudity and pornography? It's not something that you can precisely define. But you know pornography when you see it. Pornography degrades the woman, and it degrades God's beautiful gift of sex between a married man and woman. It's the same with sin and mistakes. With the Holy Spirit within you, you know the difference. With sin you want to hide it. You are in the darkness. With mistakes, you just apologize and grin with embarrassment. But you don't feel like you need to hide it. You are still in the light. Of course those who have not been taught righteousness by Holy Spirit will often sin in the open and be proud of it. That's the open rejection of God. They are in a very dark place.

All sins are habit-forming. Habits can be overcome. Honest mistakes will happen. Yes, you learn from your

mistakes. But with mistakes, you are not disobeying what you know God desires and commands. It's all about obedience. If we are to be truly obedient to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we must learn to remain in the light, just as Christ Jesus is in the light. We have been justified without our own works. Only the work of Christ on the cross has saved us. But in our journey of salvation, we must learn Christian perfection, through both grace and works, if we expect to inherit the Kingdom when Christ returns.

Chapter 1

Christian Perfection According to Jesus

John the Baptist preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). This can be thought of as, “Overcome sin, for the kingdom of Jesus Christ is coming soon.” It was also the first message preached by Jesus (Matthew 4:17).

From the time of John the Baptist, until the events of Matthew 12, the kingdom of heaven was forcefully advancing.

Matthew 11:11-13 NIV I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (12) From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. (13) For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

John preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus began his preaching with the same message (Matthew 4:17). Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, which is all about holiness. The kingdom of heaven must have holy men to rule in it. The kingdom cannot come until enough of those who will reign with Christ have repented and have overcome all their sinful habits.

A pastor and good friend of mine once told me that the message of Jesus, preached in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the parables, changed at the cross. He believed that Christ’s message was for the older dispensation, or the old covenant, and that everything changed at the cross. That’s

because he understood that the gospel of Jesus requires personal holiness but the gospel of Paul does not. Books have been written about the apparent discrepancy between the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of Paul. But Christ's sermons and his parables are not about salvation. They are about holiness and about the forceful advancement of the kingdom of heaven. The cross, on the other hand, is about salvation. Christ's gospel has not changed.

Jesus performed many miracles so that the people would listen to his gospel of the kingdom. The miracles also testified that Jesus was the Son of God, but Jesus downplayed this. He didn't want this to get in the way of his message of holiness. Jesus needs disciples who are committed to holiness, disciples who will reign with Christ, before the kingdom can literally come here on the earth.

As people repented, the kingdom was forcefully advancing. It was not that they were "getting saved." They were repenting of their sins. They were becoming holy, but many people simply wanted to see more miracles and were not responding to the message of the kingdom.

Jesus said that from John's preaching until "now," the kingdom has been forcefully advancing. But "then, Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent" (Matthew 11:20). He said the cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom would rise up to condemn the cities that had seen the miracles, but did not repent. In other words, these people of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom will be raised up in the millennium. Christ has died for them so they can be resurrected.

At first, Jesus did not speak in parables about the kingdom. It was a message of holiness, in preparation for

the kingdom of heaven to come. The Sermon on the Mount is a good example. It is clear-cut language. It begins with the beatitudes.

1.1) The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-16)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Literally, in the Greek, it says "blessed are the spiritual beggars." Those who beg for spiritual holiness will receive the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). By context, this verse is talking about those who mourn over their own sins. When we repent of our sins, God comforts us.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5 ESV). Does this verse say the meek inherit heaven or the earth? Those who are spiritual beggars, and who mourn over their own sins, are the meek. Pride stands in the way of holiness. Those who are meek will inherit the earth. They will be kings and priests in the earthly kingdom that's coming. Those who are prideful, even prideful Christians who believe in Christ Jesus as Savior, will not inherit the earth.

Look at this from the Jewish perspective. Remember that Jesus was preaching to the Jews of that day. They believed the when the Messiah comes, Israel will rule the world. It's not ruling in heaven. It's ruling in a natural way, here on earth. It's a real kingdom. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, the Jews would have understood this to be the Messianic reign when Israel will rule the world, as is prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus is saying the meek will rule the nations of the earth. The first will be last, and the last will be first.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). The meek, who beg for spiritual holiness, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, will find righteousness. They will overcome sin. True spiritual beggars do all they can do to overcome sin. But they still need God’s help. Those who are prideful, however, see themselves as already being right with God. They don’t beg. And they don’t overcome their sinful nature. They have this religion that says their sins have been atoned for, and so the overcoming of sins is not important for them. For them, sin blinds them so they don’t even know they are “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17 ESV). Those who do not hunger and thirst for righteousness will not inherit the kingdom. They will be saved by the blood of Christ. But they won’t inherit the kingdom. Those who will inherit the earth are the truly meek and thus overcome their sinful habits through a discipleship (Lordship) relationship with Jesus Christ.

After you overcome the sin of pride, and begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness, you begin to look at God and at your neighbors with love. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy” (verse 7). Those who love their neighbors, and show them mercy, will be given righteousness by God. One of the best ways to overcome sin is to be active in a ministry that helps your neighbor. As we build God’s house, and as we build the kingdom of heaven, He will build our spiritual house. (This is not the prosperity doctrine. He builds up our soul, not our possessions.)

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (verse 8). Hebrews 12:14 NIV says, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Those who are pure in heart are

holy. When we are literally born again into spiritual bodies we will be able to see God. However, those resurrected into natural bodies will not at that time be able to see the Lord.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Those who are peacemakers today certainly have a godly quality. It's when we get our spiritual bodies, however, that we will literally be sons of God. When we are literally born again, into spiritual bodies, those bodies will be from the Holy Spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). When we are literally born again, with spiritual bodies, we will literally be sons of God. The sons of God, during the millennium, are the peacemakers. Christ will rule as the prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6). We will then rule with Christ. It will be an age of peace, in the kingdom of heaven, under the rule of the sons of God, who will have overcome sin (Revelation 2:26-27).

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). During this present age, those who obtain righteousness will be persecuted. It will be turned upside down in the age to come. Those who are persecuted in this age will inherit the kingdom, and will rule over the persecutors. God loves even those who persecute us. The purpose of that rule will be for us to bring righteousness to the persecutors in God's love.

"Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:11). Our reward is in heaven. We will be kings and priests in the kingdom of heaven. The beatitudes commence with being a spiritual beggar, and have now progressed up to making comparisons with Old Testament prophets, in verses 11 and 12. It's all about holiness.

Verses 13-16 are all about being the light of the world. Just as the life of Jesus is our example for holiness, our lives of holiness are examples for the world. This is especially true when considering the age to come. In this age, people persecute the holy ones. In the age to come, those same people will remember our examples. Of course, we also hope that people in this age will see our examples of holiness and will strive to become holy themselves before they reach the grave. They too will then inherit the earth.

1.2) The Purpose of Christ's Reign on Earth (Matthew 5:17-18)

In verses 17-18, Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. The heavens and the earth eventually disappear, but nothing from the law will disappear until everything is accomplished. Many view the cross as the time where everything is accomplished. The cross, however, only provided reconciliation for everyone. It did not immediately bring everyone into justification that is credited with righteousness. It did not bring everyone into holiness through sanctification. This will not be accomplished until the heavens and the earth disappears, after the messianic reign of Christ.

From this verse we can see that the millennium is vital and included in all that will be accomplished. The high majority of all who will accept Christ's reign over their lives will do so in the millennium. But many will remain lost. At the end of the millennium, a countless number will march against Jerusalem when Satan is released again to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:7-9). Surprisingly, even then, many will reject Christ even after living under Christ's reign.

1.3) What We Think is Who We Are (Matthew 5: 19-37)

Verse 19 affirms the commandments. Anyone who breaks the least of the commandments, or teaches others do so, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and keeps the commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. By the context of verses 21-22, and 27-28, we can see that Jesus was primarily talking about the Ten Commandments. Jesus is bringing them to a deeper level. Anger is like murder. Lust is like adultery.

It's all about holiness. We must be clean on the inside as well as the outside. In verse 20, Jesus says that if our holiness does not surpass the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Does this mean that salvation is determined by holiness? No, salvation is only by God's grace and through faith. The work of salvation was completed on the cross. Nothing that we do can earn our salvation. But to enter the kingdom of heaven requires holiness. And that requires obeying God's commandments. It requires works.

Many people read this verse and dismiss it by saying we have Christ and the Pharisees did not. Therefore, Christ's holiness is imputed upon us by the cross. They think even if we still hide a lot of sin on the inside, we are forgiven because of the cross, and thus we will enter (or inherit) the kingdom. Satan always has tricks for dismissing Christ's words. Jesus said unless your holiness surpasses the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will not enter the kingdom.

The trick that Satan uses is to equate salvation with inheriting the kingdom. Unless you reject Christ's salvation, you will be resurrected when Christ returns. But you won't

inherit the kingdom. And you won't have eternal life. You won't reign with him over the nations. Only the truly meek will inherit the earth. Only the true spiritual beggars will inherit the earth. Only Christ's true disciples, who take Christ's words to heart and act upon them, will inherit the kingdom.

“Do not murder” (verse 21). Jesus brings this to a deeper level. “Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (verse 22 NIV). Of course anger could lead to murder. Anger is on the inside of the cup. Murder is on the outside. Being subject to judgment does not necessarily mean you go to hell. It means you are not resurrected with eternal life. It's a resurrection of judgment. This type of anger grows and consumes us on the inside. It's an anger that is not released. It's an anger that has no forgiveness. And it eats us up on the inside.

Matthew 23:25-26 ESV "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. (26) You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

If our cup is clean on the inside, what we do on the outside will be clean. Anger is on the inside. Murder is on the outside of the cup. We believe that if we are good on the outside, then we tend to believe we are clean before God. But God sees what we are like on the inside. God knows our thoughts. We can have filthy-sinful thought habits. These habits can be overcome through Christ's blood. I believe that when we inherit eternal life and spiritual bodies, everybody will know and see what we are like on the inside. We will not be able to hide. We must become clean on the inside before we can inherit spiritual bodies, and before we

will be completely clean so that we can reign with Christ over the nations.

“Anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (verse 22 NIV). Often our mouth reflects what we are like on the inside.

Matthew 12:34 ESV You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Matthew 15:11 NIV What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'

Matthew 15:17-18 NIV "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? (18) But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.'

If our thoughts and our minds are pure (clean), then what we say will be pure (clean). Don't think of your mouth as being a filter between what you think and what other people believe you think. Have nothing to hide. Change your heart so that if people could read your thoughts, instead of just hearing your words, you would have nothing to hide.

Jesus tells us to reconcile things with our brother (that's anyone) before giving an offering at the altar (verses 23-24). The emphasis here is that God knows our hearts. We must cleanse our hearts before each other before we can expect to cleanse our hearts before God.

Verses 25 and 26 are about the same thing. If we have financial disputes with others then they must be settled. We must be pure before others as well as God.

If we have lust in our hearts, it's like adultery (verses 27-28). God sees that lust. Men must not have thoughts and emotions in our hearts that would be a problem if women could read the minds of the men. Lust can be very difficult to overcome. But I can testify that it can be overcome.

Lust causes us to lead double lives. We go to church on Sunday, but during the week we allow the temptation of Internet porn sites to overtake us. Again, if we had spiritual bodies, and if everyone else in our community could see every thought we had, would the sin of lust be a problem? If your spouse could see the lust in your heart, would it be a problem? We must be pure and clean in our hearts. Nothing can be hidden. Only then are we in the light. We must have hearts that would be of no embarrassment to other men and women of God, even if they could know our every thought. This means we must completely overcome lustful sexual fantasies if we are to inherit spiritual bodies and rule the world with Christ.

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away (verses 29-30). This is hyperbole, which is a rhetorical exaggeration to make a point. Literally cutting out your eye or cutting off your hand would not make you stop sinning. The problem is in the heart. It's in the way we think. Jesus is placing emphasis on just how important this is. This is especially true in the Jewish culture, even today, that believes sin involves only actions and not thoughts.

Let your 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no' be 'no' (verses 34-37). We must have hearts, minds, and thoughts such that truth is our only nature. People who know us should have absolutely no doubt that anything we say is the truth to the best of our knowledge. As we become pure on the inside, people will start seeing us as honest and truthful. There should never be a need for giving an oath. Giving an oath

is only done when people may doubt what we say because of our character. Our hearts must be pure for everyone to see.

Divorce is adultery (verses 31-32). Don't take this verse out of context. In some situations divorce is necessary. But this is only after a sinful heart has caused the marriage to become unrecoverable. If both hearts of a marriage can be cleansed, then the marriage can be cleansed. Your spouse, more than anyone, knows the true nature of your heart. An impure heart and thought life can lead to divorce. We must have a heart, and thoughts, that would offer no embarrassment if our spouse could read our every thought and know our every secret.

1.4) Love Your Enemies (Matthew 5:38-47)

The Father "makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (verse 45). We pray for our enemies so that we may become the sons of the Father in heaven (verse 44). Right now we are sons of our earthly parents, with our natural bodies, because our parents gave birth to us. We will literally be sons of God when we have spiritual bodies. This will be done so that during the millennium we can lead to righteousness those who persecute us in this present age. We will be leading our enemies to God, because God loves our enemies. In order to do that, we must also love our enemies.

1.5) Be Perfect as the Heavenly Father is Perfect (Matthew 5:48)

Everything that has been said so far in this sermon is about overcoming sin, so that we will be perfect. Can we really be perfect? Even after we have our spiritual bodies,

we will continue to make mistakes. But we can get to the point where our thoughts are clean. Jesus told the disciples that they were clean because of his words (John 13:10, 15:3). (Of course Judas was an exception.) So we can be clean in our thoughts. This is being perfect like the Father is perfect.

Does this mean you must be perfect in order to be saved? The Sermon on the Mount is not about salvation. It's about holiness. It's about inheriting the kingdom. The meek will inherit the earth. You must become a kingdom seeker, working your way through the beatitudes, in order to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, and thus become part of the Bride of Christ.

The beatitudes is a progression that we must all take towards holiness. It's a progression towards becoming "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect." We begin with spiritual begging. Later we become peacemakers. As we continue to be a disciple of Jesus, we become clean because of Christ's words. We become clean because we take the teaching of Christ seriously and his words become the most important thing in our lives. We become clean by daily looking to the cross and daily praying for holiness. We become clean by confessing our sins one to another. But there will be times when we have to go back to being a spiritual beggar.

There is one other place in Scripture where Jesus talks about being perfect.

Matthew 19:16 Behold, one came to him and said, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

At first, Jesus simply tells the rich young ruler to keep the commandments. But take careful note that Jesus didn't say

this would give him "eternal life." Jesus only said this would allow the ruler to "enter into life."

Matthew 19:17 He said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

But the rich young ruler persisted and said, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Matthew 19:18-20 He said to him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder.' 'You shall not commit adultery.' 'You shall not steal.' 'You shall not offer false testimony.' (19) 'Honor your father and mother.' And, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' " (20) The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Jesus responds by telling him how to be "perfect." In other words, you can simply "enter life" by keeping the commandments. But in order to be perfect, you must devote your life exclusively to being a disciple of Christ.

Matthew 19:21-22 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (22) But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions.

The rich young ruler was given the option to become poor in this age and have treasures in heaven in the age to come. The topic of having treasures in heaven comes up next, in Matthew 6, in the Sermon on the Mount. We will cover that below. But first, we need to closely examine what Jesus taught us about discipleship through this encounter with the

rich young ruler. What does it take to be "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect?"

Matthew 19:23-25 Jesus said to his disciples, "Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. (24) Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." (25) When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

Why are the disciples astonished? The basic Jewish culture, as taught by the Old Testament, is to simply obey the commandments. But the disciples have now been told that to receive "eternal life" you must undergo a very intense discipleship training with Jesus Christ. And there can be nothing else in your life, such as possessions, to get in the way. At that time, relatively very few people were following Christ to be his disciple. Was Jesus saying that everyone else, including the rich young ruler, would not be saved?

No, the rich young ruler will be saved. Jesus had already told him you can "enter life" by obeying the commandments. The disciples were confused because they did not as yet understand that Jesus had to die on the cross in order to fulfill salvation even in the Old Testament. At that time, they didn't understand that it is "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Because the disciples didn't as yet understand about the cross, they didn't understand the difference between simply "entering life" and "inheriting eternal life." The blood of Jesus Christ reconciles us so that we will "enter life" if we don't reject Christ or God. But we must become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect in order to inherit the kingdom and eternal life.

Nobody can obey all the commandments perfectly for their entire lifetime. All have sinned, and one sin causes you to go to hell. In other words, they basically invalidate what Jesus told the rich young ruler, that he could "enter life" by continuing to obey the commandments in the same way that he had done all his life. Some conservative evangelicals argue that Jesus left out covetousness and any rich person will covet. But was Jesus really giving the man a trick answer? Any reasonable person of the time who heard Jesus' answer would not have understood Jesus as saying the rich young ruler is bound for hell.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. There is no way to the Father except through a discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved. The rich young ruler will be resurrected. But he will not have eternal life. He simply "enters life" in the age to come, at the time of the resurrection. Jesus will literally be King over all the nations of the earth. The government will be on his shoulders. At that time, the rich young ruler will no longer have his possessions. So his possessions will no longer be in the way of him becoming a disciple of Christ, to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. If he is willing to do so at that time, he can inherit eternal life.

If today a rich man were to knock on the door of a conservative evangelical and ask him how he can inherit eternal life, what would be his answer? Would the evangelical tell the rich man to sell all his possessions? Or would the evangelical tell the rich man to simply say the sinner's prayer, believe in Jesus, and start coming to church? The rich man would do so, and would then continue his life focused on his possessions.

Matthew 19:26-30 Looking at them, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (27) Then Peter answered, "Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?" (28) Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (29) Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life. (30) But many will be last who are first; and first who are last.

Read verse 30 carefully. The rich young ruler was among the first in that day. Jesus is saying he will be last in the age to come. Those who have sacrificed everything to follow Jesus will be first. That's because in sacrificing everything, they are doing the works of the Father. The Holy Spirit comes and helps them in doing the works. As they live for Christ, and do the things that Christ would do, the teachings of Christ cause them to become clean. The things of this world are pushed out. They no longer have lustful thoughts. They no longer have consuming anger. They love their neighbors and they love the Father. In doing so, they become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

Those who do not become perfect will still be saved. They will be resurrected to live in the nations. Christ and his Bride will reign over the nations, teaching others who are willing to come to this same level of righteousness. Eventually everyone must become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect in order to inherit eternal life. Those who

refuse this teaching will eventually die the second death (Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, 21:8).

Revelation 2:26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.

1.6) Seek Treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6)

Think about all that Jesus said in light of a literal kingdom here on earth with the righteous being the kings and priests of that kingdom. What does it mean to store treasures in heaven? Does it mean that we will receive rewards when we get to heaven for our good deeds done here on earth? That's not the way the ancient Jew would have understood what Jesus was saying.

Their focus was on the resurrection. They didn't believe they would go to heaven right after they died. They believed that after they died they would await the resurrection when the Messiah comes. Then they would rule the world with the Messiah. To store treasures in heaven is to do things that that will be of value here on earth in the age to come. In other words, in the age to come the Messiah will reward those who do good deeds during this present age. The entire message of this sermon is to seek holiness and to store treasures in heaven. We do so in order to have riches in the age to come.

This is not just metaphorical riches. We are talking about literal wealth in a literal kingdom to come. Those who rule in the age to come will have literal riches in the eternal kingdom of God that far outshines the wealth of the nations.

What is the converse of storing treasures in heaven? It would be storing treasures in this present age. People who build up wealth in this present age will not be able to keep it

in the age to come. And this present age is only temporary. Jesus said the last will be first, and the first will be last. The rich people of this age are first in this age. They will be last the age to come. So all their possessions and wealth in this present age will be destroyed in the age to come.

Does this mean you shouldn't work to earn a living? Of course not. Even people in full-time ministry are working to earn a living. Full-time ministers might or might not be storing treasures in heaven. The best way to store treasures in heaven is to be directly involved in a ministry. We must all be doing the works the Father has for us. Find time outside your normal work to be involved in a ministry. We can give up TV, sports, computer games, or even hobbies. Find a ministry that excites you and make it your passionate hobby.

We are kingdom seekers. We seek holiness. We further the kingdom by spreading the gospel, leading people to the Lord, and helping the needy. Christ will remember and will reward us when the kingdom of heaven comes. These rewards involve literal positions as rulers and priests in the kingdom to come. Our treasures are thereby stored in heaven (Mat 6:19-20).

What other places in Scripture does Jesus talk about storing treasures in heaven? Other than the Sermon on the Mount, the only recorded time that Jesus mentions treasure in heaven is with the rich young ruler, as discussed in the previous section. (There are, however, other places that speak of rewards in heaven.) Matthew 19:21, Mark 10:21, and Luke 18:22 all record this encounter with the rich young ruler. All three accounts record Jesus saying he could store treasure in heaven by selling all his possessions, giving everything to the poor, and following Jesus. Only Matthew's account says this would make him perfect. Mark's account

and Luke's account both say "one thing you lack" instead of "if you want to be perfect."

Also, Matthew is the only gospel that records the Sermon on the Mount including, "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Perhaps this is because Matthew, being one of the disciples, was present when Jesus preached this long sermon. Mark and Luke recorded events using other sources. They were not part of the original twelve disciples. I think Matthew, being a tax collector, uniquely understood the relationship between storing your treasures in heaven and becoming perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. Becoming perfect involves both striving to overcome sin and doing the works of the Father.

In Matthew 6, Jesus tells us not to do acts of righteousness so that people will notice us (Mat. 6:1). When we give to the needy, it's to be done quietly (6:2). When we pray, it's to be done in closed rooms (6:6). We are not to pray with ongoing words, as through continuous repeating will help (6:7). Spending time with God and furthering the kingdom in secret builds holiness. However, doing these things for show only builds pride. Such pride stands in the way of holiness.

We are not to worry about money. Nobody can serve two masters (6:24). If we devote ourselves to getting money all the time, or to the love of money, then that becomes our master. Where our treasure is, our heart will be also (6:21). We can build up treasures in heaven for the age to come, by focusing on holiness. Or, we can focus on building treasures in this age by focusing on money. You can't do both. You can't serve two masters. The wise will seek treasures for the age to come because those treasures are far greater and will last forever.

People will say they strive to earn money so that they can donate some of it to worthy causes. But this is only an excuse for the love of money. We must be directly involved in the purposes of our lives.

As we become holy our faith builds. We worry less about the things of this world, such as money. Our Father feeds the birds of the air that do not sow or reap (6:26). Our Father clothes the lilies of the field who neither labor nor spin, and they are better clothed than Solomon (6:28-29).

The eye is the lamp of the body (6:22). This verse is in the middle of all the verses about treasures in heaven and money (6:19-34). So it must be interpreted in that context. The eye represents our interest. The eye looks at the desires of our heart. If our heart is for treasures in this present age, then our whole body is full of darkness (6:23). But if your heart is for holiness, then our whole body becomes full of light (6:22). We become the light of the world in this age and even more so in the age to come. Being in the light is living without sin. Those who seek holiness in this age will shine like the brightness of the sky above and will turn many to righteousness in the age to come.

Daniel 12:3 ESV And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

The entire Sermon on the Mount is all about holiness. We seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We spend time with God to become holy. We focus on the kingdom in order to become holy. We do the Father's works in order to become holy. The kingdom to come must be far more important to us than the world of this age. As we become holy, we store treasures in heaven.

All this sums up the law and the prophets (7:12). In other words, the law and the prophets focused on being holy. Being holy requires loving both God and neighbor. As we learn to love God and our neighbor, we become better kings and priests to rule during the millennium. We are then in the position to teach love, holiness, and salvation through Jesus Christ to all the nations.

1.7) Judging Others (Matthew 7:1-12)

“Don't judge, so that you won't be judged” (7:1). Will we ever officially judge others? We must first take the log out of our own eye before we can see clearly enough to take the speck out of our brother's eye (7:3-5). We will never judge others from the perspective of determining everlasting life or eternal condemnation. But those who overcome sin will rule the nations (Revelation 2:26-27). We will be kings and priests over the nations (Revelation 5:10, 20:6). Our purpose in being judges is to lead the nations into righteousness.

During ancient times, a king was also a judge. The kings who ruled the world acted as judges. Ideally, it was the purpose of the priests to teach righteousness. Ideally, it was the purpose of the kings to enforce righteousness. During the millennium, those living in the nations will be living under the judgment of Christ, and by His authority, under the judgment of the Bride of Christ. The point being made here is that we must become holy before we are qualified to judge the nations. We must remove the log from our eyes before we can shine like the brightness of the stars and lead the nations to righteousness.

1.8) The Narrow Gate (Matthew 7:13-23)

Holiness is the narrow gate (7:13) into the age to come. Few will find it. Of course, people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9) will find it during the coming Great Tribulation. But that's still few as compared with all people in all nations through all times. The narrow gate is not about salvation. Few find perfection and holiness in this age, but that does not mean that few will ever find salvation.

Of course to receive eternal life requires holiness through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Those who enter the age to come through the narrow gate will receive spiritual bodies and eternal life. Therefore, the narrow gate definitely leads to eternal life (7:14).

The wide gate leads to destruction (7:13). If people stay on that path throughout the age to come, they will be eternally condemned. Sin can also be destructive in this age. Sins separate us from God. Due to the blood of Christ, however, only the rejection of Christ will ultimately lead to eternal condemnation.

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, is the destruction of the wide gate referring to the destruction of the soul? Or is it talking about the destruction of possessions and wealth? Jesus has just spent lots of time teaching us to seek holiness instead of money, so that we will have treasures in heaven. Those who primarily seek treasures in this age enter the age to come through the wide gate. Their treasures of this age will be destroyed. But it's not a gate into hell. It's a gate into the Messianic age to come. The wide gate is a gate of destruction simply because all the personal wealth of this age will be destroyed.

We are saved by grace and through faith, and not judged by our good and evil deeds. To interpret the wide and narrow gates as being about salvation would be to say salvation is about good and evil deeds. That's because the issue of good and evil deeds is the context of the entire sermon. The wide and narrow gates are not about salvation. The narrow gate is about entering the kingdom of heaven. The wide gate is about just entering the age to come as part of the nations.

Again, we must interpret the wide and narrow gate in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. The wide gate is all about seeking treasures in this present age instead of seeking treasures in heaven. Jesus is saying treasures obtained in this present age will be destroyed. So the wide gate leads to destruction. As Jesus told the rich young ruler, you can continue obeying the commandments and being a good person. Your cup is clean on the outside, but not on the inside. Those going through the wide gate continue to sin on the inside with sins like lust and consuming anger. You can "enter life" through the wide gate. But you will not inherit eternal life. And if you continue down this path in the age to come, you will eventually die the second death and wake up in the lake of fire.

The narrow gate, on the other hand, is for those who seek treasures in heaven and in doing so become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. As Jesus told the rich young ruler, if you want to be perfect, you must forsake your earthly possessions and follow Jesus. You must become a true disciple of Christ so that your cup is clean on the inside as well as the outside. This means that you don't sin even in your heart and mind. If others could read your mind, you would still be in the light, having nothing to hide. The narrow gate leads to eternal life.

Of course this doctrine is a bit different from the traditional interpretation of the wide and narrow gates. The narrow gate is traditionally interpreted as finding salvation, even though the Sermon on the Mount is not about salvation. With traditional interpretation, the narrow gate is easy to find. All you need to do is confess that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. But that's only the beginning of what it takes to be a disciple of Christ. That's only the beginning of what it takes to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. That's only the beginning of what it takes to find the narrow gate. Yet most preachers would simply tell the rich young ruler exactly what they tell everyone else. They say to find the narrow gate by confessing Christ, and then that's all there is to it. The overcoming of sin becomes a good thing, but not really necessary in order to enter the narrow gate. The very next verse is about false prophets. Read it in the same context.

Matthew 7:15-20 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. (16) By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? (17) Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. (18) A good tree can't produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. (19) Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. (20) Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, what is good and bad fruit? What is a wolf in sheep's clothing? Verse 15 starts out warning against false prophets. A prophet is anyone who proclaims the word of God. In this context, a prophet is any preacher, Sunday-school teacher, or even a

small group leader. In this context, anyone who teaches the Bible is a prophet. False prophets usually don't know they teach false doctrine. False prophets have themselves been taught by false prophets. So they can be very honest people. But they unknowingly teach false doctrine, passing it on from generation to generation. Think of false prophets simply as false teachers. They don't know or believe they are teaching false doctrine.

Jesus is saying we will know false teachers not by their doctrine, but by their fruit. In other words, we don't have to judge their doctrine. We know their doctrine is false if their disciples are not becoming holy and perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. The disciples of Jesus became "clean" because of his words (John 13:10, 15:3). But today there is very little difference in holiness between people who go to church every Sunday and the rest of the world.

Most pastors avoid the topics of sin, holiness, and money. Yet these are the primary topics of the Sermon on the Mount. These are the primary topics that Jesus taught throughout his ministry. Again, I'm sure most pastors are honest and good people. But if they are not producing perfect and holy people, they are not producing good fruit.

Most pastors say that nobody is perfect. If you ask them about being perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, or if you ask them about becoming perfect by selling your possessions and following Christ, they will probably say that Jesus didn't really mean perfection, or that it was simply an unreachable goal. They often say that they have never met anyone who is perfect, and thus their claim that nobody is perfect is used to invalidate this interpretation of Jesus' words. The problem is that when this becomes accepted doctrine, then even people who are clean on the inside will continue to think they are sinning. And this doctrine tends

to prevent people from overcoming sin when temptations come. Christian perfection does not mean that you never make mistakes. It means that you are in the light and have nothing to hide, even if people could read your mind.

There are many ways to interpret Scripture. I think Satan tries to distort our understanding of Scripture by finding ways to make the topics of holiness, overcoming sin, and storing our treasures in heaven become less important.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' (23) Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

These ministers truly believe they are preaching for Christ. In this context, these ministers are the false prophets and the wolves in sheep clothing (7:16-20). They actually believe that Christ knows them. They actually believe they are serving the Lord. Surely, they believe that Christ rose from the dead. Surely they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord. So they are saved. They will be very surprised when Christ says he doesn't know them.

By their fruits we can know who they are (7:20). This is not a fruit of many followers. It's not a fruit of numbers because Jesus explicitly says it's good fruit or bad fruit. Good fruit comes from a good tree and bad fruit comes from a bad tree. Therefore, good fruit must be church-goers who overcome sin and bad fruit must church-goers who are like the rest of the world. Does the preacher lead others to

Christ's holiness? Or do they say that salvation is all that is necessary?

Compare this verse in Matthew 7:22-23 to a similar verse in Matthew 25:11-13.

Matthew 7:22-23 Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' (23) 'Then I will tell them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

Matthew 25:11-13 Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' (12) But he answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you.' (13) Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

The only difference between the wise virgins and the foolish virgins is the amount of oil they have. Both are asleep when the Master comes. Both are waiting for the Bridegroom. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that he was raised from the dead and you will be saved. The foolish virgins say "Lord, Lord." Certainly they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord. And since they are waiting on the bridegroom to return, they certainly believe he was raised from the dead. But Jesus says, "I never knew you" because they have not had a discipleship relationship with Christ.

At the Last Supper, when Jesus went around the table to wash the disciple's feet, Peter said "You will never wash my feet" (John 13:8). Jesus said that if I don't wash your feet, you cannot be my disciple. ("If I don't wash you, you have no part with me.") Why did Jesus say this? He

explained it when he said, “No servant is greater than his master.”

John 13:14-17 If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (16) Most certainly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his lord, neither one who is sent greater than he who sent him. (17) If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

If we don't serve others, we cannot be Jesus' disciple. We are still saved because he is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe (1 Timothy 4:10). But we have to do more than just believe in order to be a disciple of Christ. We have to do the works that the Father has given us to do. And as we love our neighbor, serving others because we love Jesus, walking as Jesus walked, we overcome sin. When Jesus says, “I never knew you”, he is saying the person did not become his disciple. Jesus is a servant. No servant is greater than his master. So we must be servants in order to be disciples. Servants do work.

Those who say “Lord, Lord” but don't do the works of the Father are not really his disciples. They are saved, because salvation is not about works. You cannot earn salvation. But without works, you cannot be his disciple because no servant is greater than his Master. There is nothing you can do to earn salvation. But inheriting the kingdom requires a lot of work.

Are these ministers condemned to hell? Are the foolish virgins condemned to hell? No, because they have not committed the unpardonable sin. They have not hardened their hearts against Christ. Nevertheless, they are still sinful.

They enter through the wide gate. Consequently, Jesus will not give them the reward of ruling during the millennium. When Christ says he never knew them, it means they have not matured in a discipleship relationship with Him. They have not become a true disciple. It does not mean they are condemned to hell.

1.9) Build Your House on the Rock (Matthew 7:24-29)

The wise man builds his house on the Rock. The foolish man (or foolish virgin), builds his house on the sand. (In the Old Testament, the Rock is Christ.) The wise are those who will rule in the millennium. The foolish are the middle group, which will be saved, but are not a part of the Bride of Christ. The wicked will not be raised. They no longer hear Christ's voice. They do not have a gate to enter into the age to come, because Christ is the gate (John 10:1-18).

Whether they are lost sheep or believers, Christ's sheep hear his voice (Psalm 95:7, John 10). But the wicked, who do not have eyes to see or ears to hear, can no longer hear his voice. They see the miracles of God but attribute them to Satan. Or they explain them away by other means. At the resurrection all who hear Christ's voice (Christ's sheep) will be raised (John 5:28-29). The wise, who enter through the narrow gate, have a resurrection of eternal life. For them, there is no longer a judgment (John 5:24). They will have spiritual bodies that do not die. But for the foolish who enter through the wide gate, and are still doing evil, it's a resurrection that's still under judgment (John 5:29). Their bodies will be natural bodies that could eventually die again.

The wise put all their focus on Christ. They build their houses and treasures in heaven. They enter through the narrow gate. The foolish build their treasures in this age.

They focus on the present age. They enter through the wide gate. When the rains come, the things of this world come crashing down. When the rains come, the treasures of those entering through the wide gate will be destroyed. But the foolish are still Christ's sheep.

The Sermon on the Mount commences with the beatitudes, and concludes with this parable of building your house on Christ. The beatitudes are about holiness. Building your house on Christ is about discipleship. But neither holiness nor discipleship is required for salvation. How much holiness would you need to be saved? How much discipleship would you need to be saved? The sermon is not about salvation. It's about inheriting the kingdom of heaven.

We must not allow this sermon to be watered down by confusing it with salvation. We must not lower the bar of holiness by mistaking it for the free gift of salvation. We must build our houses, our whole lives, upon the Rock of Jesus Christ. To seek the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness, we must build our houses on the Rock, no matter the cost.

Chapter 2

The Christian Perfection of John

The first letter of John is the most comprehensive letter in the New Testament dealing with Christian perfection. Sin is darkness. Living without sin is living in the light. There is no gray. You are either in the light or in darkness. The light is Christian perfection. Christians, however, move back and forth between the light and the darkness. When filled with the Holy Spirit, you are in the light.

This letter uses the word "perfect" with regard to love. We are perfect, living without sin, living in the light, when we have perfect love. John associates abiding in Christ with living without sin. John says whoever is born of God cannot sin. So even being born of God is something that one can move in and out of as one is filled with the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit withdraws. The Holy Spirit withdraws if we choose to sin and move back into the darkness.

John also talks about the spirit of antichrist in this letter. This is very much related to the Gnostics of that day. But it's also very insightful in understanding the final antichrist and the one-world religion that is coming.

2.1) John's Authority as One Who Lived With Christ (1 John 1:1-4)

John begins by reminding us that John himself was physically with Christ. John was a disciple. This means that John physically abided (lived) with Christ. Jesus was with the Father and brings eternal life. In order to receive eternal life we must also abide with Christ in much the same way

that John was a disciple of Christ. But we need to understand what John said at the start of chapter 2.

John said, "And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." Christ's death atoned for not only the sins of his disciples, but also for the sins of the whole world. The whole world does not keep Christ's commandments. Only Christ's disciples keep his commandments.

This same verse, at the start of chapter 2, says that only those who keep his commandments actually know, or dwell with, Christ. Only those who keep his commandments are his true disciples. Thus, salvation is not only for the disciples of Christ. Salvation is for the whole world. But eternal life is only available for those who become a disciple of Christ, and obey his commandments. With this in mind, what does John mean by the "Word of life"?

1 John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life (2) (and the life was revealed, and we have seen, and testify, and declare to you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was revealed to us); (3) that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (4) And we write these things to you, that our joy may be fulfilled.

2.2) Qualifications for Those Who Know Christ (1 John 1:5 – 2:17)

After qualifying himself as one who saw, touched, lived with, and was personally taught by Christ, John gets into a major point that continues throughout the letter. We must live without sin. We must remain in the light. John uses light and darkness as a metaphor for living in sin or living without sin. John compares the light of God with the light that we must have if we expect to have fellowship with Christ. John is saying this comes from the teaching of Christ himself. In other words, John just pointed out that he was a personal witness to everything Christ had said. And the first thing that John testifies to us about what Christ said is that we must also live in the light, which is to live without sin.

1 John 1:5-10 This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (6) If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and don't tell the truth. (7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

The Reformed view is that you can't completely stop sinning. To make this case, verse 8 is often taken out of context. But John is talking about past sins. Verse 10 says the same thing. Verse 9 says we need to be forgiven. So

verse 8 is simply saying that we have sinned in the past and thus need to be forgiven. It's not saying we can't completely stop sinning. This is undeniable when you consider that John has just stated that we must walk in the light just as God is in the light. In God there is no darkness at all. Likewise, we must walk with no darkness at all. As we progress through John's letter, the sinless walk is stated over and over. So taking verse 8 out of context is to also take it out of context for the entire letter. There is no gray between the light and the dark.

As mentioned in the introduction, most Reformed theologians will concede that verse 10 is talking about past sins. But they insist that verse 8 is talking about present sins. In the Greek, verse 1:10 uses a verb for "sinned". And of course that verb is in the past tense (indicative, perfect, active). But in verse 1:8, a noun is used for "sin" instead of a verb. In this translation, the word "no" is modifying the noun "sin." But in this verse, the Greek word for "no" is an adverb. Therefore, it should modify the verb, not the noun.

The verb means "to have", or "to hold." So literally speaking, it could be translated as: "If we say we do not hold sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." If we don't translate it like this, we have an adverb modifying a noun. Having sin, or holding sin, can easily be talking about having or holding the guilt of sins that were committed in the past. It would be like an alcoholic saying he or she "holds" alcoholism but might or might not be currently acting upon it.

So why do Reformed theologians insist on this traditional translation where an adverb modifies a noun? Why do Reformed theologians insist that John is not teaching that you cannot completely stop sinning? It's because they are working under the Greek-like paradigm

that everyone goes to heaven or hell when they die. If the only way to go to heaven is to overcome all sinful habits during this age, then very few people will be saved. Very few would find this narrow gate. But if the wide gate does not lead directly to hell, then we can interpret John literally and avoid clinging to a traditional mistranslation of a single verse, which tends to be used to change the meaning of the entire epistle.

1 John 2:1-6 My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. (2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. (3) This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commandments. (4) One who says, "I know him," and doesn't keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth isn't in him. (5) But whoever keeps his word, God's love has most certainly been perfected in him. This is how we know that we are in him: (6) he who says he remains in him ought himself also to walk just like he walked.

Again, John is treating sin as something that you either are doing, or you are not doing. If you sin, you can repent. Jesus forgives us. Jesus speaks to the Father on our behalf. Then John talks about keeping the Father's commandments. This is like Matthew 7:21, in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus talks about those who will say "Lord, Lord" when Christ returns. They don't do the will of the Father.

These commandments are instructions for doing the works of the Father. As we do the good things the Father has for us, God's perfect love is perfected in us and we do not sin. This is Christian perfection. The only way to stop sinning is to walk as Jesus walked. This means we must walk

without sin, as Jesus walked without sin. But more importantly, in this context, it's a walk of obeying God's commandments. It's a walk of doing the works the Father has for us. We know Christ only if we keep his commandments and do his works.

The secret to understanding how to overcome all our sinful habits is to understand this relationship between doing the works of the Father and remaining in the light. We remain in the light when our thoughts are pure. We remain in the light when we don't have lust, anger, or covetousness popping up in our hearts. We remain in the light when we love the Father and love our neighbors. This happens only by obeying the commandments of the Father. This means doing the good works that the Father has for us. As we do the good works of the Father, the Holy Spirit fills us and we don't sin. We become consumed with doing works, and sin no longer has a place in our lives. The sinful habits simply disappear as we become consumed with doing the Father's works.

1 John 2:7-17 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. (8) Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. (9) Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. (10) Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. (11) But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. (12) I write to you, dear children, because your

sins have been forgiven on account of his name. (13) I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. (14) I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (15) Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. (17) The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

These verses also bring us back to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus speaks of lust and anger as being adultery and murder. Sandwiched between Jesus' teaching about anger and lust is a teaching that is often skipped over. We must come to terms quickly with an accuser that is bringing you to court (Matthew 5:25-26). The issue here is about money and possessions. The commandment involved in this issue is covetousness. This is another sin that can consume us on the inside while we appear to be clean on the outside.

We can appear clean on the outside, but on the inside we have not defeated the evil one. This is darkness because we hide what is on the inside. When our thoughts are clean, we are truly in the light. When our thoughts are clean, we have nothing to hide. John relates these temptations to the things of the world. Lust of the eyes certainly includes sexual temptation that can manifest in our thoughts without

necessarily leading to physical sex outside of marriage. The lust of the eyes also includes covetousness. This is living in darkness. But if our thoughts are clean, we are living in the light.

2.3) Qualifications for Antichrists (Gnostics of that Day) (1 John 2:18–25)

1 John 2:18-25 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. (19) They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. (20) But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. (21) I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. (22) Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. (23) No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. (24) See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. (25) And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.

Those who left John's followers were probably the Gnostics of that day. They taught that the spirit of Christ came upon Jesus at the time of his baptism. They taught that the man Jesus became possessed by a spirit which is Christ. And that spirit left him before the crucifixion. From this one would conclude that Jesus himself is not really the Son of God. The

spirit of antichrist will always allow for a certain amount of truth, but will distort the truth in such a way that it denies that Jesus is the Christ. The spirit of antichrist also denies that Christ died for our sins.

The "many antichrists" that have come were probably the Gnostics of that day. But John also understands that "the antichrist is coming." The final world ruler, the antichrist, will come when Christ returns. The man who denies that Jesus is the Christ is the antichrist. The Gnostics of that day were moving in the spirit of the antichrist. This made John believe he was living in "the last hour." In other words, John most likely believed that Christ would return in his lifetime. Paul believed the same thing when he included himself in those who would be caught up in the clouds. Paul said, "We who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). Every generation is taught to believe that Christ will return in their lifetime.

The implication here is that in the end times there will be another false religion that has this same characteristic of denying that Jesus is the Christ or that Jesus is the Son of God. In Revelation John gives us more about this false religion.

Revelation 17:9-11 Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits. (10) They are seven kings. Five have fallen, the one is, the other has not yet come. When he comes, he must continue a little while. (11) The beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goes to destruction.

The empire that controlled Jerusalem at the time of John was the Roman Empire. The five empires which controlled Jerusalem prior to John were the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and the Greek empires. The empire which would control Jerusalem after John is the Islamic Caliphate. Thus, at the time of John, five had fallen, one was, and another had not yet come. The empire of the antichrist is an eighth empire. He belongs to at least one of the seven and goes to his destruction. Since the eighth belongs to one of the seven, there are still seven heads. As the following verse shows, one of the heads has a fatal wound which is healed. Thus, the eighth belongs to the seventh. The seventh has the fatal wound and is healed, giving rise to the eighth.

Revelation 13:3 One of his heads looked like it had been wounded fatally. His fatal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled at the beast.

Thus, the Islamic Caliphate will be healed and Islam will become the one-world religion of the end times. In other words, the Islamic Caliphate will be reformed.

We seem to be seeing the start of that head being healed today. The Arab Spring that we see happening today is removing all the dictators and kings in the Muslim world. This is making room for a revived caliphate.

Many, if not most, of the Muslims do not consider most of the dictators and kings of the Islamic countries to be truly Islamic. A truly Islamic nation is ruled only by sharia law and is governed only by a single caliphate.

The caliphate is the single governmental ruling body of Islam. In some ways, it's like the Vatican and the pope. But with sharia law, you can't separate church and state. The caliphate goes all the way back to Mohammed. It was

abolished in 1924. Revelation 13:3 would seem to indicate that this fatal head wound will be healed. The caliphate will be reformed and Islam will become the global religion of the one-world government, ruled over by the antichrist.

How does Islam fit the antichrist empire that is coming? John says the antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ. The antichrist also denies that Jesus is the Son of God. The greatest sin in Islam is to believe that God has a Son, or that God would die for our sins. Islam states that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). But they don't consider the word Messiah to mean the same thing. In Islam, Jesus is a prophet. But he is not the greatest of all prophets. Muhammad is considered to be a greater prophet than Jesus. The true meaning of the Messiah, however, is that of the highest king. Jesus Christ is the King of all Kings and the Lord of all Lords. This makes Jesus the Prophet of all Prophets. So Islam really does deny that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). And Islam denies that Jesus is the Son of God.

The third common characteristic that Islam holds with the old Gnostic religion is that they both deny Jesus died for our sins. The Gnostics believed the spirit of Christ left Jesus before Jesus died on the cross. Thus they do not believe Christ (the Messiah) died for us. In a similar fashion, Islam believes that someone else died on the cross instead of Jesus. John will revisit the subject of the antichrist in 1 John 4:3. He also comes against Gnostic beliefs again in chapter 5.

2.4) Hope of Christ's Return; Purifying Ourselves as a Response (1 John 2:26 – 3:9)

1 John 2:26-29 These things I have written to you concerning those who would lead you astray. (27) As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you don't need for anyone

to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, you will remain in him. (28) Now, little children, remain in him, that when he appears, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. (29) If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of him.

What is the "anointing"? In the Old Testament, kings were anointed by pouring oil over them. The word "Messiah" means the "Anointed One." The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. This is why the "anointing teaches [us] concerning all things." When Jesus left, he promised the Holy Spirit would come. He said, "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you" (John 14:26).

In verse 2:29, John compares the righteousness of Christ with the righteousness that is expected of us. This is very similar to the comparison of the light of God. In God there is no darkness. We are expected to live in the same light. Right after saying Jesus is righteous, John says, "Everyone who practices righteousness is born of him." So everyone who does not practice righteousness is not born of Christ. There is no middle ground. John continues with the topic of being born of God in chapter 3.

1 John 3:1-2 Behold, how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! For this cause the world doesn't know us, because it didn't know him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is.

What does it mean to be "born of Him?" What does it mean to be "children of God?" The difference between being literally born again and being spiritually or figuratively born again is a new concept for many Christians. But this distinction is important in understanding the next verses in John's letter. In other words, 1 John 3:9 (several pages below) says, "Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, ... and he can't sin, because he is born of God." Most Christians interpret the term "born again" as a one-time event that begins their Christian journey. Is John really saying that those who profess faith in Christ will never sin again after they profess Jesus Christ as Savior for the first time?

This can be confusing for those who don't understand the distinction between being literally born again and being figuratively born again. Because of this confusion, many simply water-down what John is saying and take the Reformed view that you can't completely stop sinning. For this reason, we must take a short detour into John's gospel. We must see what John said that Jesus really taught about being born again.

John 3:4-8 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (5) Jesus answered, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God! (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Don't marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' (8) The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Notice the parallelism between being born of water and being born of flesh. Just before babies are born, the mother's water breaks. We come into this world as born of flesh. In the next life, we hope to be born from the Holy Spirit. We will have a new spiritual body that is made by the Holy Spirit. We will literally become a child of God instead of being a child of our parents. Those who have spiritual bodies can appear in the middle of locked rooms like Jesus did after the resurrection. So we can "come and go like the wind." But this doesn't mean that the spiritual body is just a spirit. It simply means the body was made by the Spirit.

We refer to ourselves as being saved if we have the promise of the resurrection. The resurrection saves us from the grave. So we figuratively refer to ourselves as past-tense saved if in the future we will literally be saved from the grave. Likewise, we can refer to ourselves as figuratively born again if in the future we will literally get a new spiritual body. We don't have to enter our mother's womb. But we really do get a new body. This is what it means to be born again. To literally be born again is not something that happens at the start of our journey with Christ; it happens at the completion of the journey.

Why do New Testament writers use past-tense verbs to refer to future-tense events? It's from Old Testament or the Hebrew way of writing. Paul writes, "God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). In that very same verse Paul quotes Genesis 17:5, which says, "I have made you a father of many nations."

This was said and written long before it was fulfilled in Abraham. But it's stated in the past tense. God uses a past-tense verb in speaking of the future. In Hebrew thinking, the past is clear to see. The future cannot be clearly seen.

When God speaks about the future using a past-tense verb, God is saying that it's as certain as past-tense events. In the New Testament, the future events of being saved from the grave and being born again into a new spiritual body are referred to with the same absolute certainty. Thus, past-tense verbs are used. In the New Testament, we can read verses that say we are past-tense "saved." But we are still on a journey of salvation that has not yet been completed. Here are more Old Testament examples of past-tense verbs being used for future events.

Isaiah 9:6 YLT For a Child hath been born to us, A Son hath been given to us, And the princely power is on his shoulder, And He doth call his name Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed.

So now we can return to John's letter. What does it mean to be "born of Him?" What does it mean to be "children of God?" Spiritually, or figuratively, it's a promise of that which will come. When it comes, we will be like Christ. He has a spiritual body. His body was born of the Holy Spirit. Of course Christ's biological father was the Holy Spirit. So he was always the Son of God. But when Christ returns, we will be like Him. We will literally be born of the Spirit. We will literally be born into new spiritual bodies. And thus, in the future, we will be called children of God just as Jesus is the Son of God. Of course Jesus is God. We will not be God. So what does it take to literally become born of God?

1 John 3:3-9 Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. (4) Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. (5) You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. (6) Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him. (7) Little children, let no one lead you astray. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. (8) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (9) Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, because his seed remains in him; and he can't sin, because he is born of God.

Verse 9 says, "Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, ... and he can't sin, because he is born of God." Most Christians interpret the term "born again" as a one-time event that begins their Christian journey. But literally speaking, it's a future event. Figuratively speaking, we are "born of God" when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a promise of becoming a literal child of God. If we sin, the Holy Spirit withdraws. But if the Holy Spirit is in us, we cannot sin because the seed (beginning) of that spiritual birth is within us.

The phrase "everyone who has this hope" connects us back to verses 3:1-2, where John says, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is." So we are figuratively "now ... children of God." But in the future we will be "revealed" as literal children of God. In order to become literally born again, to obtain a spiritual body, to obtain eternal life, one

must "purify himself, even as he is pure." There is no room for compromise.

"Whoever remains in him doesn't sin." How can there be a gray area of just a little sin in this bold statement? We are in Christ when the Holy Spirit is in us.

"Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him." This brings us back to John's initial statement, that John himself spent time with Christ. John literally and physically abided with Christ. John literally and physically got to know him personally. When Christ physically left, he promised the Holy Spirit to take over this role of Counselor, Teacher, and Helper. When the Holy Spirit abides in us, we know Christ. In the Holy Spirit there is no sin. Whoever remains in the Holy Spirit does not sin. There is no gray between light and darkness. We are either in the light, or in darkness. We are either filled with the Holy Spirit, or we are not. When the Holy Spirit fills us, we cannot sin because the God cannot sin.

When we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, and when we fall back into sin, we are "of the devil". This means we belong to the devil. Belonging to the devil means you won't be reconciled with the Father. But Christ came to "destroy the works of the devil." Through faith in Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit, we can live without sin. Until the time when we literally have a new spiritual body, it's possible for us to fall back into sin. During those times, we are not in the light. During those times, we want to hide in the darkness. So we do not know Christ. When we are in darkness, we are not figuratively born again. We are not filled with the Holy Spirit. So we must purify ourselves even as Christ is pure if we expect to be literally born again when Christ returns.

The Holy Spirit is not going to give us a spiritual body until we have completely purified ourselves to the point where the Holy Spirit is no longer pushed out because of sin. All the sinful habits that cause us to move into darkness can be overcome. Always be mindful of whether we are in the light or the darkness. Always remain in the light. This is Christian perfection.

2.5) Purity Comes as We Love One Another (1 John 3:10 – 3:24)

1 John 3:10-17 In this the children of God are revealed, and the children of the devil. Whoever doesn't do righteousness is not of God, neither is he who doesn't love his brother. (11) For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; (12) unlike Cain, who was of the evil one, and killed his brother. Why did he kill him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous. (13) Don't be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. (14) We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He who doesn't love his brother remains in death. (15) Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. (16) By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (17) But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart of compassion against him, how does the love of God remain in him?

These verses again bring us back to the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. This also brings us back to the words of Jesus spoken to Peter about feeding his sheep.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us that false prophets would come. They are like wolves in sheep clothing. We can know them by their fruits. We know these false prophets by observing the righteousness of their followers. John is saying the same thing. We know the children of God by the fact that they do works of righteousness. We know the children of the devil by the fact that they do works of unrighteousness. In other words, a good tree bears good fruit. The good church leader will have followers who walk in the light. The good church leader will teach against sin, and their followers will for the most part walk in the light. Those who do not accept this teaching will leave.

Jesus also spoke about anger towards one's brother. Consuming anger is the same as murder. John is saying the same thing by relating it back to Cain who murdered his brother Abel. John states that the works of Cain were evil and the works of his brother Abel were righteous. When we do the works of the Father it will result in walking in the light, which is righteousness. When we do the works of the devil we are walking in darkness, which is unrighteousness.

Works of righteousness come only out of love for our Father in heaven, and love for our neighbors. The ultimate love is being willing to lay down one's life for another. But short of that, works of love is seeing a brother in need, and having compassion for him. If we have some of the goods of this world we share them with a brother in need. This is love of our neighbor.

Peter thought he loved Jesus, but not to the point where he was able to lay down his life. Instead, Peter denied Christ three times. After the resurrection, Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. Peter responded honestly by simply saying he had affection for Christ. So Jesus simply said, "Feed my sheep." In other words, we do the righteous works of the Father in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit all the time. This lets us live in the light all the time. After walking as Jesus walked for some time, our affection for Christ turns into true Godly love, and we will be willing to lay down our lives for Christ. This is what Jesus meant when he said that we must take up our cross and follow Him if we are to be his disciple (Luke 14:27). This is the only way to get to the point where we are really ready for Christ to return, so that we will no longer be moving into the darkness, and so that the Holy Spirit will give us spiritual born-again bodies when Christ returns.

This is not to say that works are required for salvation. Jesus paid the price for not only our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. No amount of work can earn salvation. You can't buy your resurrection. Everyone who has not deliberately and knowingly rejected Jesus will be resurrected. So they will be saved from sin and death. But that doesn't mean they will all inherit the kingdom. That doesn't mean they will all be revealed as children of God. Only those who learn to walk as Jesus walked, in the light, filled with the Holy Spirit all the time will be resurrected with a spiritual body. Instead, they will get a new natural body.

1 John 3:18-24 My little children, let's not love in word only, neither with the tongue only, but in deed and truth. (19) And by this we know that we are of the truth, and persuade our hearts before him, (20) because if our heart condemns us, God is greater

than our heart, and knows all things. (21) Beloved, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have boldness toward God; (22) and whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. (23) This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he commanded. (24) He who keeps his commandments remains in him, and he in him. By this we know that he remains in us, by the Spirit which he gave us.

We know that we are in Christ when we know that the Holy Spirit is in us. When the Holy Spirit is in us, we are in the light. We know when we have a pure heart. We know when our minds have pure thoughts, without lust, anger, or covetousness. We know when our motives for all that we do is solely out of love for the Father and for our neighbors. When we know this, we have a boldness toward God. And God is pleased to give us all that we ask.

Entire sanctification is reaching that point, and staying at the point, where Christ is truly the only real thing that matters in this world. Christ is everything. When Christ is everything to us, we are naturally obedient to everything the Holy Spirit tells us. When all our sinful habits have been overcome, we naturally hear Christ's voice more clearly and we naturally take joy in doing what we know the Father wants us to do.

We learn to know when we are in darkness and when we are in the light. When we are in the light, the Holy Spirit remains in us. When we are in the light all the time, we are at peace with the Father. We are in God's Rest.

2.6) Tests for False Prophets (1 John 4:1 – 4:6)

1 John 4:1-6 Beloved, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, (3) and every spirit who doesn't confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of the Antichrist, of whom you have heard that it comes. Now it is in the world already. (4) You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. (5) They are of the world. Therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them. (6) We are of God. He who knows God listens to us. He who is not of God doesn't listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

John now returns back to the spirit of antichrist. Specifically he is referring to the false prophets of his day, which were the Gnostics. There can be spirits or demons involved. But we recognize it as religious leaders who, in very deceptive ways, speak against Christ. That's what the word "antichrist" means. It means "against Christ." And the antichrist teachers are usually unaware that what they teach is false. They honestly believe what they teach. Those who personally know them will see their honesty. But they are deceived.

The Gnostics of that day taught that the spirit of the Messiah had come upon the man named Jesus when he was baptized. So they did not believe that Christ had really come as a man in the flesh. They taught that Christ, as a spirit, came and temporarily filled the man Jesus. In other words,

Christ himself is portrayed as being a spirit. They did not confess that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. The world is quick to believe the spirit of antichrist. But the Holy Spirit in us is greater than the spirit of antichrist which is in the world.

John makes the point that he and those who followed him are of God. As he pointed out from at the start, he was physically and literally with Jesus when Jesus was here teaching. So he testifies about God first-hand. Therefore, those who know God are those who listen to John. Those who listen to the spirit of antichrist do not listen to John. They listen to the spirit of error. This means they are willing to be deceived because they have a love for the things of this world. So they become deceived by the spirit of antichrist and then they wind up passing on that false teaching without knowing that it's false.

2.7) Tests for False Prophets (1 John 4:7 – 4:21)

1 John 4:7-14 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God. (8) He who doesn't love doesn't know God, for God is love. (9) By this God's love was revealed in us, that God has sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (11) Beloved, if God loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another. (12) No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love has been perfected in us. (13) By this we know that we remain in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. (14) We have seen and testify that

the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world.

Jesus gave his life for us. That is God's ultimate love. Everyone who accepts this love must in turn love one another in the same way. Everyone who does so will be born of God and will inherit eternal life. But Christ's atoning sacrifice is not only for those who will be revealed as children of God. Christ's atoning sacrifice is for the whole world. The Son is the Savior of the world. Those who are perfected in love find Christian perfection. Christ is the Anointed One. When he returns, he will be the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He will reign over all the world. And we who are perfected through God's love will reign with Christ over all the nations. Then righteousness will go out to all the nations.

1 John 4:15-21 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and he in God. (16) We know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. (17) In this love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, even so are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love. (19) We love him, because he first loved us. (20) If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (21) This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should also love his brother.

2.8) Those with Faith in Christ to Overcome Sin are not Antichrists (1 John 5:1-11)

The confession that John speaks of in verse 15, in this context, is a confession against the spirit of antichrist which denies that Jesus is the Son of God. This confession is a continual confession. As long as we continue this confession, God remains in us. This means the Holy Spirit remains in us. Perfect love is the love of those perfected by the Holy Spirit. Perfect love casts out fear because those with perfect love are willing to give up their lives just as Christ gave his life in perfect love for us.

1 John 5:1-5 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. Whoever loves the Father also loves the child who is born of him. (2) By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. His commandments are not grievous. (4) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. (5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

By context, the above verses about overcoming the world are talking about the spirit of antichrist that is in the world. John is talking about the Gnostics of his day. And by extension, John is talking about the continued spirit of antichrist that has existed ever since Christ came. The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that goes against Jesus as being the Messiah who will rule the world.

The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that says we don't have to obey Christ's commandments. The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that says we do not have to have

God's love in us for our brothers. The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that says Jesus is not the Son of God. The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that says we do not have to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect in order to inherit eternal life. But those who do not listen to the world, who instead listen to the Holy Spirit, will overcome the spirit of antichrist that is in the world.

We know that John was talking about the spirit of antichrist in verses 1-5 above. That's because the verses below go back to the topic of the Gnostics, which were the antichrists of John's day.

1 John 5:6-11 This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. (7) For there are three who testify: (8) the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three agree as one. (9) If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is God's testimony which he has testified concerning his Son. (10) He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who doesn't believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. (11) The testimony is this, that God gave to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Remember that the Gnostics of John's day taught that a spirit of Christ came into Jesus at the time of his baptism. And that spirit left Christ before the crucifixion. This is why John says Jesus "came by water and blood." The Holy Spirit testified at the baptism of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit testifies to us as we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The water refers to the baptism of Christ and the blood refers to the crucifixion of Christ. John states that "He who believes in

the Son of God has the testimony in himself." This is the Holy Spirit in us that testifies. By faith, we know that we have eternal life, strictly by the Son, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

2.9) The Wise, the Foolish, and the Wicked (1 John 5:12-21)

1 John 5:12-15 He who has the Son has the life. He who doesn't have God's Son doesn't have the life. (13) These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (14) This is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he listens to us. (15) And if we know that he listens to us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him.

Why is John concerned that we may not continue to believe? It's because the spirit of antichrist has gone out into the world. Those who know Christ, but then deny Christ, are committing the unpardonable sin.

1 John 5:16-18 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for those who sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I don't say that he should make a request concerning this. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death. (18) We know that whoever is born of God doesn't sin, but he who was born of God keeps himself, and the evil one doesn't touch him.

John speaks of three types of people in these two verses. The wise are those who don't sin. They will inherit the kingdom and reign with Christ over the nations. They will inherit eternal life. The foolish continue to sin, but not the sin that leads to death. The wicked are those who commit the sin that leads to death.

The Wise: The wise are those who overcome the evil one. John says, "Whoever is born of God doesn't sin." They keep themselves pure. "The evil one doesn't touch him." Jesus calls these people the wise. They will be born of God and will inherit eternal life. They will inherit the kingdom and rule with Christ over the nations.

The Foolish: The sins that do not lead to death are sins not involving the deliberate and knowledgeable rejection of Christ. John says that, "God will give him life." Some will repent and turn to Christ. But many are still sinning when they go to their graves. This includes those who profess Christ as Savior but are still sinning. God will "give them life." They will be resurrected. But they will not inherit the kingdom. They will not have eternal life. They will live in the nations. Jesus calls these people the foolish.

The Wicked: The sin that leads to death is having really known Jesus, perhaps through the power of the Holy Spirit, and then rejecting Jesus. It's the same as those who saw the miracles of Jesus, and thus knew that Jesus is the Messiah, but they still rejected Jesus and said the miracles of the Holy Spirit were from Beelzebub. These would include the Gnostics of John's day and those who take the mark of the beast (antichrist) when Christ appears.

Matthew 12:30-32 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. (31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and

blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. (32) Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.

Hebrews 6:4-6 ESV For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Jesus died for everyone. But those who reject Christ in this way forfeit their salvation. They will not be resurrected. During the great tribulation, those who take the mark of the beast are committing this unpardonable sin. This is a "sin that leads to death." They will not be resurrected. For those who commit this sin during Christ's millennial reign, there is the second death, of which John speaks about in Revelation.

The primary goal of the spirit of antichrist is to get people to deny Christ. Even the word "antichrist" means 'against Christ.' For those who teach Gnostic or Islamic teachings, there is the danger of committing the unpardonable sin. But God turns sinners over to the blindness of their sins. Their sins are not the unpardonable sin leading to death. So we should pray for them. But if Christ is rejected by people who really know the truth, the sin is unpardonable. That sin leads to death. This is the goal of the evil one.

1 John 5:19-21 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

(20) We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

(21) Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

"The whole world lies in the power of the evil one." This will be especially true when Islam becomes the religion of the end-time one-world government, ruled by the antichrist. Islam denies that Jesus is the Son of God. Islam denies that Christ died for our sins. In Islam, belief in either of these truths is the greatest of all sins. After Christ returns at the start of the seven years, those who embrace these lies will take the mark of the beast, and will forfeit their salvation.

In Revelation 13:14-18, John tells us the world will make an image of the beast, and that the image will have the breath to speak. All the world will be forced to worship this idol or be killed. Perhaps this is why John concludes his letter with "Little children, keep yourself from idols."

Chapter 3

The Christian Perfection of Paul

John was probably a teenager during Christ's ministry. When John wrote Revelation, he was an old man, perhaps in his nineties. When 1 John was written, John considered himself to be spiritually mature. Seven times he refers to his audience as "little children." (1 John 2:1, 2:12, 2:28, 3:7, 3:18, 4:4, and the last verse of the letter, 5:21) John was writing from the authority of one of the twelve disciples, and as one who had matured to Christian perfection.

Paul, on the other hand, wrote as one who continued to struggle with sin during most of his ministry. Paul was considered to be an apostle. But he had not actually lived with Christ and matured under his discipleship. Also, Paul was martyred. So Paul's ministry was much shorter than John's. His ministry probably lasted about 30 years from his conversion around 34 AD until his martyrdom around 64 AD.

3.1) Paul's Race to Perfection; the Prize of Inheriting the Kingdom

Paul used the metaphor of the race in reference to his journey to Christian perfection. Towards the end of his life, Paul states that he had completed the journey. It's very informative to take a survey of all the times Paul used this metaphor. The meaning of the race is often debated. Some may see the race as involving holiness. But the Reformed position does not recognize Christian perfection. Thus, they do not generally associate the race with holiness unless it's a race that is never completed until after death. For this

reason, let's begin with Philippians to get a good idea of what Paul means by the race and its prize.

Philippians 3:10-16 that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death; (11) if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (12) Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, if it is so that I may take hold of that for which also I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus. (13) Brothers, I don't regard myself as yet having taken hold, but one thing I do. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (15) Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, think this way. If in anything you think otherwise, God will also reveal that to you. (16) Nevertheless, to the extent that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule. Let us be of the same mind.

Paul states that he has not as yet obtained Christian perfection (verses 12, 13). But Paul is not saying that none are perfect. He says, "As many as are perfect, think this way" (verse 15). Even if you are perfect, you should continue to "press on." Some may be mistaken. It's possible that the Holy Spirit still has some work to do in you regarding a sinful habit that you are unaware. Verse 15 goes on to say, "if ... you think otherwise, God will also reveal that to you." In other words, God will reveal to us when we have been made perfect, and when we have not been made perfect. But we should usually keep it to ourselves. We should not boast. In verse 16, Paul concludes with "Let us be all of the same

mind." We should all "press on" even after God has revealed to us that we have reached Christian perfection.

We should note that in these verses (above) Paul uses the metaphor of the goal and the prize. He does not explicitly refer to a race. But it's strongly implied.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul uses the metaphor of a race to portray the Christian life. He speaks of a strict training, which would be compared to the training and self-discipline required to overcome sin. If we are successful in running the race, we obtain the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. (25) Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (26) Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. (27) No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Is this prize salvation itself? If this is true, then why does Paul fear being disqualified for this prize? Paul says he beats his body, and makes it his slave, so that he will not be disqualified for this prize. He considers the possibility that others to whom he has preached the gospel could achieve the prize but that he himself could be disqualified. Beating one's body to make it his slave is not consistent with salvation. We don't have to beat our bodies to get saved.

Many theologians argue that the prize is heavenly rewards for works of service in building the kingdom. Beating of one's body, however, is not consistent with a

prize of rewards for furthering the kingdom. No amount of beating one's body will further the kingdom. However, the beating of one's body is consistent with the overcoming of sin. Also, heavenly rewards would most likely be plural. It would be different rewards for various services in building the kingdom. Paul, however, seems to be referring to a single goal and a single prize.

Some would argue that the beating of the body is not to be considered literal. The beating of the body simply expresses motivation in furthering the kingdom. In this case, however, there is no reason that Paul would be fearful of failing to obtain the prize, when others to whom he preaches would have been successful. Would God reward only those who have accomplished a certain high level preaching? No, if there are to be rewards given in heaven for works that are done in this life, then everyone will receive rewards for their works. Nobody will be disqualified because someone else did more.

Paul says the prize is a crown. Those who overcome their sinful habits will rule the nations (Revelation 2:26-27). They will inherit the kingdom. The prize is the reward of becoming priests and kings. The prize is not salvation. We don't go into "strict training" to earn the free gift of salvation. The prize is a reward that comes from beating our bodies to make it our slaves, and free from sin. The wise are those who beat their bodies to overcome sin. The foolish are those who allow sin to remain, thinking that sin cannot be overcome. Both are saved. But only the wise will reign with Christ. Only the wise will inherit the kingdom. Only the wise will inherit eternal life. Only the wise will no longer be under judgment, because they will have overcome all their sinful habits.

Some will argue that Paul mixes this metaphor. In some places, they argue, the race can be about holiness, and in other places the race can be about furthering the kingdom. Actually, there is some truth to this. But what if Paul does not distinguish the two? What if Paul understands that you overcome sin by doing the works of the Father? Since this is the teaching of both Jesus and John, it would make sense. When we do the works of the Father, the Holy Spirit fills us, and we overcome sin. God becomes a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29). We no longer have room in our lives for sin when we are focused on doing the Father's works. So the race is for both good works and the overcoming of sinful habits. It's all part of the same journey of salvation.

Acts 20:22-24 Now, behold, I go bound by the Spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there; (23) except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions wait for me. (24) But these things don't count; nor do I hold my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to fully testify to the Good News of the grace of God.

Galatians 2:1-2 Then after a period of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. (2) I went up by revelation, and I laid before them the Good News which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately before those who were respected, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

Galatians 5:6-7 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision amounts to anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love. (7)

You were running well! Who interfered with you that you should not obey the truth?

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, (2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In the following, Paul speaks about the end of his life, having run a good race. Paul expects to receive that crown. This is entire sanctification. This should be a challenge to the Reformed view that righteousness is never perfected in this life. Paul seems to believe that he has successfully run the race. He therefore expects to receive the prize.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure has come. (7) I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. (8) From now on, there is stored up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing.

If we are successful in running the race, we receive the prize. The prize cannot be just heavenly rewards, because Paul was fearful of being disqualified, and you don't beat your body for heavenly prizes. The race includes doing the Father's works. But the race must also be associated with the overcoming of all sinful habits. It is, therefore, entire sanctification. Paul says the prize is a crown. Those who overcome sinful habits will rule the nations (Revelation 2:26-27). By implication, the prize is the reward of becoming priests and kings in the millennium.

Entire sanctification does not mean perfection without mistakes. You can still make mistakes. But you can overcome all your sinful habits.

1 Thess. 5:23-24 ESV Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Theologians all seem to agree that sanctification is the long-term process of our being changed to make us more and more like Christ. As we overcome sin, we are being sanctified. But the Reformed view is that this process cannot be completed until the time of the resurrection, or until Christ returns. That's because they believe you can't completely overcome all sinful habits.

Therefore, Reformed theologians will tend to read this verse as saying our sanctification will be completed when Christ returns. But the verse does not say we are sanctified completely at the coming of Christ. We are "kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, we can be completely sanctified so that we are ready for Christ to return. We can be "kept blameless" until Christ returns.

We are not ready for Christ to return until we have overcome all our sinful habits for complete sanctification.

In many respects, this short letter of Paul covers many aspects of eschatology. The coming of Christ in the clouds to gather his people is at the end of chapter 4. Now, at the end of chapter 5, Paul seems to be concluding that we should become completely sanctified in order to be ready for Christ to come in the clouds and for us to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

3.2) Confirmation in Old Testament Eschatology

To understand Paul better, let's go to the Old Testament and see the same thing. In other words, let's take a look at it in Paul's Bible. Daniel 9 is about a prayer that Daniel prayed. Daniel knew that Israel had been dispersed to Babylon because of sin. Daniel also knew that God had promised the dispersion would end in 70 years. Thus, Daniel prayed to ask God to forgive the sins of Israel. And Daniel prayed for the desolation of Jerusalem to come to an end, according to what God had promised.

The answer to the prayer was given in a vision. Daniel was also told in this vision that after the command to rebuild Jerusalem, Daniel's people would have seventy weeks of years to completely stop sinning before the Messiah (Christ) would come.

Daniel 9:23-24 As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision: (24) "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting

righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

This is not something that Christ (the Messiah) would do at the cross, as many have argued. This is something that "your people and your holy city" must do before the Messiah (Christ) would come.

Think about it from the perspective of Old Testament Jewish eschatology. When the Messiah comes, Israel will rule the nations with the Messiah. Righteousness will go out to all the nations as a result of that rule. But in order for righteousness to be brought out to all the nations, Israel must first become righteous. So Israel must become righteous before the Messiah can set up his kingdom.

When Christ came the first time, Israel was not ready. Israel was still sinning. So Christ will come a second time. When the last seven weeks are finished, Christ will come again. We must be completely sanctified before Christ comes. Today, the Church is not ready for Christ to return. The true Church (Bride of Christ), which is Israel, must completely stop sinning before Christ can set up the kingdom of heaven here on the earth.

Chapter 4

The Christian Perfection of James

Most Protestants tend to associate James as being about faith and works. For the Protestant, the verses that say, "Faith without works is dead" come to mind when thinking about James (2:17, 2:20, and 2:26). But the primary theme of James is actually that of Christian perfection. As we will see, James is all about maturing in Christ to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. And the primary way to mature in Christ is through works.

James 1:1-4 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are in the Dispersion: Greetings. (2) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James starts out by stating his purpose in writing his letter. James is writing to the Church. He is writing to all believers, both Jewish and Gentile. And he addresses them as the "twelve tribes which are [scattered among the nations]." In other words, he addresses the Church as Israel. (Gentile believers are grafted into Israel.) Then he speaks about us becoming "perfect and complete."

The true Israel is all those who become perfect and complete, through a discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ, before Christ returns. According to verse 1, Israel is currently in the dispersion, or among the nations. Being among the nations, we are experiencing "various temptations" to sin. This "testing of your faith produces

endurance." As we learn to resist temptations, we become "perfect and complete." This is Christian perfection. This is walking as Jesus walked. This is living without sin. The entire letter of James should be interpreted in the context of this introduction. The primary theme of James is Christian perfection.

James 1:5-8 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. (7) For let that man not think that he will receive anything from the Lord. (8) He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

In the Old Testament, the word for wisdom also means teacher. It means maturity. In this context, James is speaking about the maturity that comes with the overcoming of sin. Knowledge is involved in this wisdom. But it's primarily the wisdom of having been discipled (taught) by Jesus Christ, through the filling of the Holy Spirit.

James is saying that if anyone lacks wisdom with regard to resisting temptations and endurance, that he should ask God. The Father will fill us with the Holy Spirit, who is our Teacher, Helper, and Counselor. With regard to asking God for this help, James speaks about having faith and not doubting. The waves of the sea and being tossed by the wind is an allusion back to Peter's experience of walking on the water. As long as you keep your eyes on Jesus you don't sink into the water. Faith is an important aspect of maturing to Christian perfection. And faith is an important aspect of what James says in this letter.

James 1:9-11 But let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his high position; (10) and the rich, in that he is made humble, because like the flower in the grass, he will pass away. (11) For the sun arises with the scorching wind, and withers the grass, and the flower in it falls, and the beauty of its appearance perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in his pursuits.

This is an allusion to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus uses the clothing of flowers as an illustration of faith. Jesus also talks about storing treasures in heaven. Spend your time, money, and energy doing the works of the Father.

4.1) The Crown of Life is Given to Those Who Endure Temptation

In the very next verse, James gets back to the topic of enduring temptation and Christian perfection. Has James wandered off into another subject and then returned to Christian perfection? No, because it's through faith and doing the Father's works that Christian perfection is obtained. Faith (asking for wisdom) and doing the works of the Father are both closely tied to the topic of maturity.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him.

To endure temptation is to become "perfect and complete" (verses 2-4 above). Only those who become "perfect and complete" will receive the "crown of life." A crown is a reward. The "crown of life" simply means to be rewarded with eternal life. The crown itself is also an allusion to the

fact that Israel (those who overcome sin) will reign with Christ over the nations.

This happens "when he has been approved." The Lord promised this to all "those who love him." But it's directly promised to "the man who endures temptation." It can be argued that all believers love Christ, so all believers will receive the crown of life, regardless of whether they "endure temptation." But think back to the story of Peter being asked three times if he loved Jesus. Two different Greek words were being used for love.

Agape love is unconditional love. Philos love is brotherly love. When Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me," these two types of love were being used in the conversation. In this translation, "affection" is used for philos love and "love" for agape love. With this distinction being made in the translation, you can get the idea of what was really being said.

John 21:14-17 This is now the third time that Jesus was revealed to his disciples, after he had risen from the dead. (15) So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." (16) He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." (17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?" Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that

I have **affection** for you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Peter knew that he had failed the test. He had denied Christ three times because he was afraid for his life. To Peter's credit, he displayed honesty in his conversation with Christ. His love for Jesus was not unconditional, and this realization pained him greatly. Peter's grief over Jesus' repetition of the question was a completely different type of emotion than it would appear when read in a translation that does not distinguish these two different types of love.

Jesus' remedy for the situation is to "feed my sheep." This means doing the works the Father has for us. As we do the Father's works, the Holy Spirit fills us and we overcome all our sinful habits. As we go from brotherly love to an agape love, we become willing and ready to die for Christ. Those who have an agape love for Christ are those who will "receive the crown of life." We get there by enduring temptation until we are "perfect and complete."

James 1:13-16 Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," for God can't be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. (14) But each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. (15) Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. (16) Don't be deceived, my beloved brothers.

James has been saying that as we endure temptations we become "perfect and complete." It would be a deception, however, to conclude that God tempts us to sin. We are tempted when we are "drawn away by [our] own lusts."

James 1:17-18 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of

lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow. (18) Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James is not changing the subject. When we ask for wisdom to endure temptations, we are asking for God's good and perfect gift. We are asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This echoes Paul's words that salvation is a gift so that no man can boast. The Holy Spirit changes us as we do the works of the Father. Those changes are good and perfect gifts from the Father. Of course the crucifixion was an all-important gift from Christ. Without the crucifixion, the Holy Spirit would not have come because our sins would not be forgiven. It's all part of God's plan.

The "Father of lights" and not "turning shadow" reminds us that Christ is the light of the world, and in Him there is no darkness. The "perfect" gift from God does not allow for any sin. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we cannot sin because God is in us and God cannot sin.

4.2) The Church (Israel) are Firstfruits of the Harvest

James says, "We should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." It's important to understand what is meant by "firstfruits." Paul spoke of the resurrection of Christ as being "firstfruits."

1 Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the firstfruits of those who are asleep.

The Jewish feast of firstfruits is one of the seven feasts given to Moses on Mount Sinai. This feast is during Passover week. It's on the day after the Sabbath. During the Passover week of Christ's crucifixion, the feast of firstfruits would

have been on Sunday. Christ's resurrection occurred on the feast of firstfruits.

Paul recognizes this and relates the resurrection of Christ as the "firstfruits of those who are asleep." Christ was not the first to be brought back from the dead. Lazarus was brought back from the dead. But Christ was the first to be resurrected with a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44). Christ was given a body that does not age and die. He was the first to be given a body that has eternal life. But Christ is not the only one who will be raised as "firstfruits."

Romans 8:23 Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 ESV But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

So this verse in James is saying the same thing:

James 1:18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The idea that the Church, which is Israel, is the firstfruits of the harvest comes from the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 2:3a ESV Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest.

When we are resurrected, or caught up in the rapture, we will also be "firstfruits." Relate this back to the feast of firstfruits. The first of the harvest was given to God as being holy. Then, the rest of the crop was harvested. The

resurrection of Christ is the "firstfruits." Next, the Church (which is Israel) is resurrected as "firstfruits." So there must be a final harvest after the resurrection of the Church. Just as the "firstfruits" of the harvest is holy, we are a holy nation. We are elected (or chosen) to bring this righteousness to the nations after the Messiah comes.

1 Peter 2:9 NIV But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Exodus 19:5-6 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine; (6) and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

And now, let's get back to James 1:18. We, as a holy nation, are brought forth by "his own will" (James 1:18). God chooses those who are made "perfect and complete" in this present age. But we, the "perfect and complete" in this present age, are only the "firstfruits" (James 1:18) of the harvest. God chooses (elects) those who will be priests and kings in the age to come. Those who overcome sin in this age will reign with Christ over the nations in the age to come. This is so the nations can also be taught to become "perfect and complete." Those who become "perfect and complete" during the age to come will also inherit eternal life. That's why we are "firstfruits."

James 1:19-21 So, then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; (20) for the anger of man doesn't produce

the righteousness of God. (21) Therefore, putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with humility the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

The word of God is "implanted" in us. It's the teaching of the Holy Spirit to overcome all the sinful habits in our lives. To this end, we must be humble. We must be "swift to hear" and "slow to speak" so that we can be taught by the Holy Spirit. Getting angry about being taught will not bring about the complete righteousness of Christian perfection.

4.3) Don't be Talkers of the Word; be Dowers of the Word

As we will see in the next chapter, salvation is a journey. We must complete that journey in order to inherit eternal life. We must complete that journey to eternally save our souls. But if the journey is not completed in this age, it can be completed after the "resurrection of the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15). The unjust, who have not yet become "perfect and complete" will have the continued opportunity to do so under Christ's millennial reign.

James 1:22-25 But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror; (24) for he sees himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. (25) But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Again, the "word" being spoken of is the word God "implanted" in us. It's the teaching of the Holy Spirit to

endure against temptation and to overcome all the sinful habits in our lives. But the only way for this teaching to stick is to do the works of the Father. If we don't become doers of the word, it's like seeing yourself in the mirror and then forgetting what you look like. It's like continuing to sin and yet forgetting what kind of sinner we are, because sin is blinding.

This brings us back to what Jesus told Peter. We must "feed his sheep" in order to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. As we do the Father's works, the Holy Spirit fills us. Our eyes must remain focused on Christ instead of the things of this world. To be "hearers of the word" is to believe in Christ, but to not act upon that belief. To be "doers of the word" is the only way to find Christian perfection.

James 1:26-27 If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he doesn't bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man's religion is worthless. (27) Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

People can easily become talkers of the word and not doers of the word. This is a form of religion, but it's worthless. It will not bring about salvation. To visit the fatherless and widows is an example of doing the Father's works.

James 2:1-8 My brothers, don't hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with partiality. (2) For if a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, comes into your synagogue, and a poor man in filthy clothing also comes in; (3) and you pay special attention to him who wears the fine clothing, and say, "Sit here

in a good place;" and you tell the poor man, "Stand there," or "Sit by my footstool;" (4) haven't you shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (5) Listen, my beloved brothers. Didn't God choose those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which he promised to those who love him? (6) But you have dishonored the poor man. Don't the rich oppress you, and personally drag you before the courts? (7) Don't they blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called? (8) However, if you fulfill the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well.

James echoes the teaching of Jesus about showing favoritism in the synagogue. We are also seeing additional allusions to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus teaches us to store our treasures in heaven. The rich have a huge obstacle standing in their way, as Jesus taught about the rich young ruler. The poor do not have money to get in the way of developing a true agape love for Christ. What rich person would be willing to give up everything they have, including their life, for Christ? But those whom God chooses (elects) to become "perfect and complete" will be "heirs of the Kingdom." They will reign with Christ over the nations. Those in the nations can still be saved during the millennium.

James 2:9-13 But if you show partiality, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. (10) For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (11) For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not

commit adultery, but murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (12) So speak, and so do, as men who are to be judged by a law of freedom. (13) For judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James is talking about living under grace instead of living under the law. But he is not changing the subject. To be filled with the Holy Spirit, and thus do the works of the Father, is living under grace. That's living "by a law of freedom." In so doing, you become "perfect and complete."

So you are not sinning even through you are not keeping all the Old Testament laws of Moses. However, if you show partiality to the rich, you are not acting as one who is filled with the Holy Spirit, because God would not show partiality or favoritism. You then become guilty of the whole law.

4.4) Faith Without Works is Dead

The only way to stay filled with the Holy Spirit is to be doers of the word (of the Holy Spirit) and not simply hearers of the word. Faith without works is dead.

James 2:14-20 What good is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can faith save him? (15) And if a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food, (16) and one of you tells them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled;" and yet you didn't give them the things the body needs, what good is it? (17) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. (18) Yes, a man will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith. (19) You believe that God is one. You do well. The

demons also believe, and shudder. (20) But do you want to know, vain man, that faith apart from works is dead?

This letter of James is the one book that Martin Luther had problems in trying to make it fit his doctrine. People have said that we are saved by faith and not works, but that works is the evidence that we have faith.

But the truth is that we do the works because of our faith, and as we do the works, the Holy Spirit fills us. We are not earning salvation by paying for sins. We are saved (sanctified) by the filling of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit backs off if we yield to temptation. We yield to temptation because we are weak and self-oriented. The works helps us get away from self and the temptations of this world as we become excited about doing the Father's work. This in turn brings the Holy Spirit to help us do our works. Faith is the desire to please a God that cannot be seen. We do the will of the Father as a result of that desire. Over time, this desire becomes true agape love. The only way to become "perfect and complete" is to do the works of the Father. That's why salvation is a journey.

Read (below) what Paul says in Romans about Abraham being justified by faith and not by works. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 to make his point. Then, read what James says about Abraham being justified by works as well as faith. James quotes the exact same verse to make his point.

Romans 4:1-5 What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, has found according to the flesh? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not toward God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for

righteousness." (4) Now to him who works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as debt. (5) But to him who doesn't work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

James 2:21-26 Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? (22) You see that faith worked with his works, and by works faith was perfected; (23) and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness;" and he was called the friend of God. (24) You see then that by works, a man is justified, and not only by faith. (25) In like manner wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way? (26) For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.

In a preface to James, Martin Luther wrote that it "contradicts Paul by teaching justification by works." I think the reason Luther could not reconcile James and Paul is that Luther started to view salvation as a decision, and not as a journey. If salvation is a one-time decision, then how can works be involved?

Paul was addressing works involved in following the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses included many sacrifices in payment of sin. But in the age of grace, the sacrifice of Christ is the only payment for sin that is possible. James was addressing works involved in following Christ. The works James speaks of are good works that are done out of love. The Holy Spirit performs works of sanctification as we are filled. But without works of love, there is very little filling of the Holy Spirit.

4.5) Teachers Receive a Heavier Judgment

James 3:1-2 Let not many of you be teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive heavier judgment. (2) For in many things we all stumble. If anyone doesn't stumble in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.

The entire third chapter of James is about the use of the tongue, which involves teaching, preaching, and speaking. Ideally only those who are "perfect and complete" should teach. The "perfect man" is one who does not stumble in the word of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit cannot make mistakes about what they say or teach. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you cannot sin. Mistakes, however, are not sins. What one says, while filled with the Spirit, does not come from self-oriented motivations.

For example, a preacher can easily become fearful about preaching against sin if he thinks doing so could cause church members to leave. He can rationalize that the church members who might leave could instead benefit from his less controversial teachings. It's easy for such a preacher to believe that the Scripture does not teach Christian perfection. Over time, the preacher is less and less filled with the Holy Spirit because pastors who do not make a difference with regard to continued sin are really wolves in sheep clothing. And they don't realize it.

The "word" being spoken of here is the same as previously in this letter of James. The "word" is the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to overcome sin. Likewise, we can teach others to overcome sin. Of course this teaching can also include many other doctrinal aspects about God, as learned from the Scriptures. But the

primary purpose of Scripture is salvation, which is a journey of righteousness through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In other words, the "perfect man" teaches the "word" of the Holy Spirit, which is to overcome sin. The "perfect man" teaches Christian perfection. That's because the "perfect man" is "able to bridle [steer] his whole body."

James 3:3-5a Indeed, we put bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, and we guide their whole body. (4) Behold, the ships also, though they are so big and are driven by fierce winds, are yet guided by a very small rudder, wherever the pilot desires. (5) So the tongue is also a little member, and boasts great things.

The "perfect man" is able to "bridle [steer] the whole body" away from sin. James considers our tongues to steer our whole body in refraining from sin. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we say and teach things from the Holy Spirit. But when we speak out of self-oriented motivations, we steer our body and others into sin.

James 3:5b-6 See how a small fire can spread to a large forest! (6) And the tongue is a fire. The world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna.

What we say, when not filled with the Spirit, can corrupt us. James uses the fire of hell as a metaphor for a fire that comes from what we say. What we say is very consuming. When a thought remains in the heart, the Holy Spirit can change it if it's not from God. But when a thought is spoken, it becomes decided upon. It has a dramatic effect on the one speaking as well as those who hear.

James 3:7-12 For every kind of animal, bird, creeping thing, and thing in the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by mankind. (8) But nobody can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (9) With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the image of God. (10) Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. (11) Does a spring send out from the same opening fresh and bitter water? (12) Can a fig tree, my brothers, yield olives, or a vine figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh water.

James uses allegories to show there is no middle ground between someone speaking things which are from God, and someone speaking things which are from selfish motivations or Gehenna (hell). When one is filled with the Holy Spirit, the things being taught have the motivations of God. When one is not filled with the Holy Spirit, one should refrain from teaching.

In the following verses, I've replaced the word "wisdom" with "teaching." In the Old Testament, the word for wisdom means teacher. James is continuing to talk about the tongue and the dangers of teaching without Christian perfection.

James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good conduct that his deeds are done in gentleness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and don't lie against the truth. (15) This [teaching] is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish

ambition are, there is confusion and every evil deed. (17) But the [teaching] that is from above is first pure, then peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. (18) Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

We have now covered the first three chapters of James. Chapters 4 and 5 are less about the need for Christian perfection and more about the way we should live in order to get there. You might want to read these last two chapters of James with Christian perfection in mind.

Chapter 5

Christian Perfection by Grace

When we follow Christ, no matter the cost, our eyes are only on Christ. When we take our eyes off Christ, and we begin to look at the waves around us, and we begin to sink.

Matthew 14:28-31 Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters." (29) He said, "Come!" Peter stepped down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus. (30) But when he saw that the wind was strong, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" (31) Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

This is how we overcome sin. We keep our eyes on Jesus. We don't worry whether or not we have as yet overcome sin. We overcome sin by faith. We have faith that the Holy Spirit in us will complete the work that he began.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

This verse above is saying two things. First is that the Holy Spirit is doing a work in us that will be completed. Secondly, there is a deadline. The work must be completed by the time Christ returns. Paul always wrote with the assumption that Christ could return in his lifetime. As it turns out, that was not the case. If we die before Christ returns, we can have faith that the Holy Spirit will complete the work before we

die. This work must be completed before Christ returns if we are to reign with Christ over the nations when he returns.

Revelation 2:25-26 Nevertheless, hold that which you have firmly until I come. (26) He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.

The work of the Holy Spirit is a process called sanctification. Protestants tend to see sanctification as something that is separate and distinct from salvation. Many Protestants see salvation as a "born again" event that starts our journey of sanctification. But literally speaking, to be "born again" is to be literally born with a new spiritual body. Thus, we are born again at the end of the journey. And salvation is that journey.

John 3:5-7 ESV Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Catholics view salvation as a journey. If it's a journey, one must ask, when does the journey begin? The Catholic answer is at infant baptism. They simply state, without evidence, that being born of water is baptism. But notice the parallelism between being born of flesh and being born of the Spirit. If you follow the parallelism, to be born of water is to be born of the flesh. The mother's water breaks just before the infant is born. The traditional Catholics view is that you must be baptized into the Catholic Church in order to enter the kingdom. Protestants would say that if salvation is really a journey, then it begins when we first put our faith in Jesus Christ.

If salvation is a journey, one must also ask what happens if one does not complete the journey before death. The Catholic answer to this question is that you will have to spend some time in purgatory. The New Wine System, on the other hand, is like a free-grace alternative to purgatory. It's all about interpreting the New Testament in the context of the Old Testament. It's just like the Jews believed based on Old Testament Scripture. The dead are asleep and await the resurrection of both the just and the unjust. The unjust continue their journey during the millennial reign of Christ. The wicked, on the other hand, who deliberately and knowingly reject Jesus Christ, are not resurrected.

Acts 24:15 having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

Protestants reject the idea of purgatory. And of course, the Protestants who believe in infant baptism do not believe sprinkling switches the infant from eternal hell to temporary purgatory. The Protestant solution is to avoid thinking of salvation as a journey. Salvation becomes a one-time decision for Christ. However, there is much more Scriptural evidence for salvation being a journey than a one-time decision for Christ.

Philippians 2:12-13 So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (13) For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.

If we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, then salvation must be a journey. But we have assurance that God will complete the work that he is doing

in us (Philippians 1:6, quoted above). So we have an assurance of salvation. Yet we must do our part. We must have the desire (will) to overcome sin, and to do the works of the Father. If our faith in God moves us in that direction, God will work in us to bring about his "will and work," which is to desire and do the works of the Father. So it's a process. It's a journey. It's a journey that we must undertake for ourselves. Yet as we take that journey, God does the greater work.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-24 Test all things, and hold firmly that which is good. (22) Abstain from every form of evil. (23) May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) He who calls you is faithful, who will also do it.

It must be understood that salvation is a journey of righteousness to entire (complete) sanctification. Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). In addition, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Greek word used for "way" means road. Thus, the verse can better be translated as, "I am the [road], the truth, and the life. No one [journeys] to the Father except through me." Salvation is a journey of righteousness; a path that we must take.

Most Christians believe in Jesus but they don't take the journey seriously. They don't think they can really overcome all their sinful habits. They are told, "Nobody is perfect." So they die without completing the journey. But they are still saved. They will be resurrected. They won't reign with Christ because they don't overcome sin. For those who die

before they complete the journey, the journey can continue into the millennium. But until the journey is completed, there is no eternal life.

Through the Holy Spirit, we are being conformed into the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:5). The journey ends with the glorification of our bodies (1 Cor. 15:50). We were saved by hope in the promise (Romans 8:24). We are being saved by God's power in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:18). And we will be saved because we have been reconciled by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:10).

Romans 8:24 For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for that which he sees?

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Romans 5:10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life.

Salvation must include reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and finally the glorification of our bodies. Reconciliation means Christ paid the price for everyone's sins at the cross. This allows everyone to be resurrected. When we become a believer we are justified. Justification means to be declared righteous. Our sins are forgiven when we are justified. Abraham was saved by faith. God credited (NIV), reckoned (WEB), counted (ESV), or imputed (KJV) Abraham with righteousness because of his faith (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, 4:22-23, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23). This does not mean that Abraham had already achieved righteousness. It simply means that Abraham had begun a

journey that would lead to righteousness. God calls things that are not as though they are (Romans 4:17). God knows the future, and speaks of the future as if it's already past. God calls the man of faith righteous because God knows he will be righteous. This can only be understood if salvation is a journey.

Abraham was credited with righteousness when he acted on his faith. God told Abraham to leave his home and all he knew, and to go to a promised land. This journey to the Promised Land is symbolic of the journey to righteousness. It's a journey to holiness. It's a journey to Christian perfection.

When we understand that salvation is a journey to holiness, we understand that faith is not just belief that Jesus is the Messiah. It is faith, hope, and a genuine desire that God will work in us, through the Holy Spirit, to make us righteous. It's faith that God will make us "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect." It's a faith to become like Jesus, which is to walk without sin. It's a faith that brings about Christian perfection. And it's a faith that we ourselves participate in and act upon. We sincerely and fearfully work towards Christian perfection and believe that God will do the greater work in us.

Sanctification is the journey towards that righteousness. For those who are mature in Christ, the glorification of their bodies will happen when Christ returns. Many however, have a belief in Christ but not a faith for Christian perfection. For many, the glorification of their bodies must wait until they are entirely sanctified during the millennium.

What is grace? What does it mean to be saved by grace? A well-known definition for grace is the unmerited favor of God. The Greek word for grace means favor. Grace and

favor is the same Greek word. When God decides (or elects) to favor us, it's unmerited. When we read verses about grace, you can substitute "unmerited favor."

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by [unmerited favor] you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, that no one would boast.

When salvation is incorrectly understood to be a decision and not a journey, unmerited favor is perceived to simply be an election for salvation. Calvinists believe that God chooses, by unmerited favor, who will be saved and who will go to hell. But when salvation is understood to be a journey, then unmerited favor means that God elects whom He will fill with the Holy Spirit to completely overcome all sinful habits in this age. God chooses who will be made perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect during this age, so that we can reign with Christ during the age to come. But it doesn't happen overnight. It's a journey.

Romans 6:21-23 What fruit then did you have at that time in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. (22) But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life. (23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Those whom God does not elect to become perfect in this age are simply resurrected to continue their journey when Christ returns. The elect are chosen to be firstfruits of the harvest.

1 Corinthians 15:20 ESV But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Romans 8:23 NIV Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

James 1:18 NIV He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

The elect are those chosen by God to reign with Christ over the nations. The elect is the Bride of Christ. Grace is unmerited favor, which is election. The elect are those who complete their journey of salvation, through unmerited favor, to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, before Christ returns.

The elect are the firstfruits of the harvest. The rest of the harvest happens during Christ's millennial reign. At the resurrection of the just and the unjust, the elect are the just. The unjust still have an opportunity to continue their journey of salvation during Christ's millennial reign.

The rest of the harvest, however, will not be saved by grace and through faith. They are still justified by the blood of Christ. But their journey of salvation is not that of election. So it will not be by unmerited favor. They are not saved by faith because faith is hope in that which is not seen. Christ will have returned, so everyone will see him. Every knee will bow and worship Christ. So the journey of salvation during the millennium will not be by grace and through faith.

Instead, salvation during the millennium will be by the Law of Christ, similar to the Law of Moses. The Law of

Moses was a theocracy and foreshadowed the theocracy and Law of Christ. Instead of being taught by the Holy Spirit, the nations will be taught by the Bride of Christ. Those who overcome sin in this age will reign over the nations as priests and kings in the age to come (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). Satan will be locked up for the thousand years. And the world will not be filled with pornography, prostitution, and every other form of open sin wherever you turn. Those who do not reject Christ's reign will overcome all their sinful habits, and will also become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

Chapter 6

Christian Perfection by Works

We are saved by grace (favor/election), through faith, and not of works, that no one should boast. But at the same time, grace comes as we do the works of the Father. We love the Father and we love our neighbor. But what is love without works? What is faith without works? Can there be grace without works?

Ephesians 2:4-9 But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; (8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, that no one would boast.

This verse is often quoted to emphasize that works is not involved in salvation. It's not something that we do. It's only something that God does. But what about the very next verse?

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The works expected of us were "prepared beforehand." This sounds very much like election. We were elected to be saved in this age, the firstfruits of the harvest. We were elected to be saved so that we can do the works that God

has prepared for us to do. With salvation being a journey, if we are not involved in doing the works that were prepared for us, can we complete the journey?

I'm not saying that missing an opportunity to serve Christ is a "sin of omission." I'm saying that doing the works for the Father is a consuming fire. It becomes exciting. It becomes the major part of one's life. And if we are not being consumed by the fire of doing the Father's works, then we should question whether or not we are on the path of salvation that will bring about Christian perfection. Until we reach Christian perfection, we can't inherit eternal life.

Deuteronomy 4:24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Hebrews 12:29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Every true Christian was elected by God to do good works. Every Christian was "created in Christ Jesus for good works." We must all earn a living. But what consumes us when we are not earning a living? What is our consuming fire? Is it sports? Is it TV? Is it socializing? Is it computer games? Perhaps it's a consuming hobby such as amateur radio. Or is it doing the works that God prepared for us? In other words, when we are not earning a living, does the fire that consumes us primarily benefit ourselves, or does it benefit our neighbors and further the kingdom of God? "God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

My parents had three sons and no daughters. All three of us have consuming-fire ministries for which we are not paid.

My brother, Keith Brown, has three consuming-fire ministries which pay him no money. So he must also earn a living to support his wife and two children. Keith is a scout

master. He has a tremendous impact on the lives of many teenage boys.

Keith is also chairman of the board for Camp Living Water. (www.camplivingwater.com) This is a children's Bible camp which was founded by our grandfather in 1947. In addition to his responsibilities on the board, Keith is heavily involved in fund-raising efforts for some new buildings being built on the property. This is a Bible camp in the mountains of North Carolina, which is a four and a half hour drive from where Keith lives.

Keith is also heavily involved in fund-raising efforts for the Mukhanyo Christian Academy in South Africa. (<http://www.friendsofmukhanyo.com>) Here is a website quote:

Mukhanyo Christian Academy is a faith-based K-12 private school serving AIDS orphans and vulnerable children in Mpumalanga, a poor region near Pretoria, South Africa. The academy offers free schooling, foster homes, daily meals, and healthcare and other services to some of South Africa's most vulnerable children.

Keith has taken his entire family to South Africa so they could also experience the burden of the need, and the excitement of doing something about it. I have witnessed a huge impact in my brother's walk with God as he has learned the true meaning of living by faith, and doing the works that the Father prepared beforehand for him to do. At first Keith wondered why God had him doing some of the things he was doing. Much if it didn't seem to fit his specific talents. Now, he is beginning to see more clearly how it all fits together. He is seeing how all his life-long ambitions are

coming together in the works that God prepared beforehand for him. For him, God is a consuming fire.

My other brother is Vance Brown. Vance is a licensed attorney and has extensive business and entrepreneurial experience. He is Chairman and CEO of Cherwell Software (www.cherwell.com). Vance is a co-founder of the company. The company employs over fifty people and is without debt or venture capital. Vance has a wife and three children, two of which are in college.

Most people would think that any successful entrepreneur would be completely consumed by his business. But that's not the case with Vance. He has a consuming-fire ministry that he started called Band of Brothers (www.bandofbrothers.org). Also see (www.beartrapranch.org). The following quote was taken from the Amazon page for his recently published book titled, "No matter the Cost."

Vance Brown is chairman and CEO of Band of Brothers ministry, which helps men "fight the good fight." The ministry offers church conferences, small-group materials, and online community forums for men.

His church conferences are all-day events involving seventy to several hundred men. I've been to one of his church conferences and was amazed at how well my little brother can preach. The other men attending would comment that they had not expected how intense the conference would be. Afterwards, these men tended to form band-of-brothers small groups that had a big impact on their lives for years to come. For Vance, this ministry is God's consuming fire.

It's not just my brothers. Several of my friends have consuming-fire ministries. Eddie has been a close friend of

mine since the eighth grade. (We are both now over fifty-five years old.) Eddie enjoys teaching classes in association with Crown Financial Ministries (www.crown.org).

Another friend of mine does volunteer work for the TLC Pharmacy (www.tlcpharmacy.org). This organization runs entirely with non-paid volunteer workers. They operate from an old bank branch building in downtown Colorado Springs. It was started by a pastor whose faith brought the money needed to buy the bank. With today's health system, many people literally have to choose between buying food or prescription drugs. The organization provides free prescription drugs to low-income people who do not have health insurance.

Working for the TLC Pharmacy had such a big impact on my friend that she decided to quit her job as a computer programmer and go back to school to become a social worker. Unfortunately, she had a rude awakening about the social worker school. It was way too liberal for her. As a Christian she could not tolerate the things being taught. So she decided to go back to computer programming. Being a full-time social worker was not God's plan for her.

There are some situations where God leads people into a full-time ministry. But for most of us, God has a consuming-fire ministry without earning money. These ministries have the biggest impact on our lives. No money is earned. This is what it means to store our treasures in heaven. Pastors and other full-time paid ministers can certainly be doing work for the Father. But full-time ministry can easily become self-oriented. The pastor who earns his living from his church tends to refrain from preaching against sin if he thinks doing so might cause members to leave. Full-time missionaries and evangelists might be driven to preach a gospel of simple faith that does

not count the cost of true discipleship. Then people believe they are walking the Christian life; but they are not.

Luke 14:26-33 "If anyone comes to me, and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be my disciple. (27) Whoever doesn't bear his own cross, and come after me, can't be my disciple. (28) For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and count the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? (29) Or perhaps, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, everyone who sees begins to mock him, (30) saying, 'This man began to build, and wasn't able to finish.' (31) Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? (32) Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an envoy, and asks for conditions of peace. (33) So therefore whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple.

Full-time pastors should consider finding a consuming-fire ministry that is unrelated to their own church. Then, they would be able to set the example and preach the need to do likewise. Thus, they can preach against sin, but at the same time put their emphasis on doing the works of the Father as a means of changing lives and overcoming sin. This in turn leads the church to Christian perfection.

(1) **Revelation 2:2-5** "I know your works, and your toil and perseverance, and that you can't tolerate evil men, and have tested those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and found them false. (3) You have perseverance and have endured for my

name's sake, and have not grown weary. (4) But I have this against you, that you left your first love. (5) Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I am coming to you swiftly, and will move your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.

(2) **Revelation 2:9** "I know your works, oppression, and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

(3) **Revelation 2:13** "I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. You hold firmly to my name, and didn't deny my faith in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

(4) **Revelation 2:19** "I know your works, your love, faith, service, patient endurance, and that your last works are more than the first.

(5) **Revelation 3:2-3** Wake up, and keep the things that remain, which you were about to throw away, for I have found no works of yours perfected before my God. (3) Remember therefore how you have received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If therefore you won't watch, I will come as a thief, and you won't know what hour I will come upon you.

(6) **Revelation 3:8** "I know your works (behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one can shut), that you have a little power, and kept my word, and didn't deny my name.

(7) **Revelation 3:15-17** "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. (16) So, because you are lukewarm, and neither

hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth. (17) Because you say, 'I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing;' and don't know that you are the wretched one, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;

Each of the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation have three things in common. (1) They all start out speaking about works. The churches are judged by their works. (2) They all end with speaking about overcoming sin. (3) They all end with something like, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." What is the Spirit saying to the churches? It's to do the works of the Father. As we do the works of the Father we overcome all our sinful habits because we are filled by the Holy Spirit.

A consuming-fire ministry is the best way to grow in Christ, and to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to enable us to do the "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we may walk in them." Each of us have different talents. Each of us have different gifts. So each of us needs to be involved in a different consuming-fire ministry.

Small groups have become more and more popular in many churches. Small groups provide the opportunity to interact with other Christians. Small groups can hold prayer and Bible studies. Sometimes, they get involved in a ministry as a joint project. But usually, these are short-lived efforts. The problem is that not everyone in the group is going to be drawn to the same ministry. The ministry does not become a consuming fire.

A better approach would be to have small groups that put emphasis on supporting each other's consuming-fire ministries. The group could help each member find the

ministry that is right for them. And until they find God's purpose for their lives with their own consuming-fire ministry, the members of the group can help out in the consuming-fire ministries of others in the group.

The small group can pray for each other's ministries. This will get the group prayer focused on our neighbors, instead of just about our own problems. The group can give testimonies about what God is doing in their lives by being involved in a consuming-fire ministry. This will tie the group together in one common purpose, which is to serve God. As the group gets closer and matures in this way, they can really begin to confess their sins one to another, and to overcome all sinful habits.

Small groups might or might not be associated with a larger church. After all, the early churches were probably just house churches networked together in the city. The primary function of a church should be to facilitate the work that God has prepared beforehand for each member. Consuming-fire small groups would grow quickly, because God is a consuming fire.

Chapter 7

Christian Perfection in the Sabbath

In the Sermon on the Mount, the sermon on holiness, Jesus said:

Matthew 5:19 Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus takes the Ten Commandments deeper. Anger is murder. Lust is adultery. He summarizes the first four commandments with, "Love God." He summarizes the last five with, "Love your neighbor." Understanding the commandments is the secret of the kingdom, and the key to holiness.

Romans 13:9-10 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Love is the fulfillment of the law. Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Mat 5:17). So does love remove the fourth commandment? Or does love and the quest for holiness find a deeper meaning for the fourth commandment? Is resting on the Sabbath God's provision for finding Christian perfection?

Before answering this question, let's explore some of the Scriptural issues regarding whether or not the Sabbath

has been abolished or changed. If you are a Sabbath keeper, you may be surprised at my conclusions. If you believe the Sabbath is on Sunday, you may be surprised at my conclusions. If you believe the Sabbath was abolished, you may still be surprised at my conclusions. The truth hides in the middle.

7.1) Was the Sabbath Fulfilled?

The first common approach to the Sabbath issue is to say that all Ten Commandments were a part of the Law of Moses, and were thus fulfilled in Christ. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. This approach is to interpret “fulfill” in very much the same way as you would interpret “abolish.” In effect, the approach is to say that the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ, and therefore we can now work any day of the week.

People who take this approach would say that all Ten Commandments were fulfilled and thus done away with when we went from the old covenant to the new. Under the new covenant, God writes his law on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:8-12). We still know that we should not murder or covet, but it’s not because these are listed in the Ten Commandments.

The problem with this approach is that there is no clear verse of Scripture that says we can now work on the Sabbath. There is, however, Scripture that clearly says we no longer need to be physically circumcised (Romans 2:25-29, 3:1, 1 Corinthians 7:19, Galatians 5:6, 5:11-12, 6:15, Colossians 2:11). The Scriptural evidence for this change is overwhelming. Likewise, there is strong Scriptural evidence for abolishing the eating or dietary regulations (Acts 10:9-16, 11:4-9, Romans 14:20-21, 1 Corinthians 10:27-30). But there

is no similar weight of Scripture for no longer observing the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance was considered much more important in the Old Testament than circumcision or the dietary regulations. Some quote Galatians 4:10 as meaning we no longer need to observe the Sabbath. This verse, however, does not specifically mention the Sabbath.

Colossians 2:16 does mention the Sabbath. For those who take this approach, this verse is reasonable. Nevertheless, the Sabbath in Colossians 2:16 can be viewed as associated with various religious festivals, since the context of rest of the sentence is focused on religious festivals. It's not clear that Paul is referring to the weekly Sabbath. Hence, there is no clear verse of Scripture that removes the command to observe the weekly Sabbath.

The dietary regulations and the religious festivals were “nailed to the cross” (Colossians 2:16-17), because they were shadows of Christ. Likewise, circumcision was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:11). These were shadows because they represented atonement for sin, whereas Christ is the only true atonement. Were the Ten Commandments shadows of atonement for sin, or were they commandments against sin? The Ten Commandments can be viewed as shadows of Christ in the sense that we are to obey all that Christ commands. How then, would the fourth commandment not also today be an example of what Christ commands?

Jesus often spoke of the Sabbath in the sense of correcting the overly strict interpretation of the Sabbath. Jesus never simply abolished the command even though he didn't hesitate to make enemies by what he said.

One often-overlooked problem with no longer observing the Sabbath is Matthew 24:20. Some people

interpret Matthew 24 as happening in 70 AD. Others believe Matthew 24 is still unfulfilled prophecy. If the Sabbath no longer needs to be observed, this change would have been made at the cross. In either case, Jesus, in Matthew 24:20, is speaking about a Sabbath that is still strongly in effect either in 70 AD or thereafter.

Therefore, I do not believe the Sabbath was abolished.

7.2) Was the Sabbath Changed To Sunday?

The second common approach to the Sabbath issue is to say that the fourth commandment is still in effect, but that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. Some people have said the commandment can be read as “one day in seven,” basically leaving it open as to which day is the Sabbath. But this view is inconsistent with Scripture.

In Exodus 16, before the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, and before the Ten Commandments were written, God sent manna from heaven six days a week. The seventh day was the Sabbath and they were told to rest (verse 23). In other words, God picked the day when the manna did not fall. In verse 23 God said, “Tomorrow is to be a day of rest.” He thus confirmed the weekly cycle.

Since then, there have been changes in the various ancient calendars. However, there has never been a change in the weekly cycle. We cannot interpret the fourth commandment as “one day in seven” arbitrarily because the day is a specific day that God made holy. The commandment tells us to keep that specific day holy. We can’t pick the day to keep holy, because we can’t make days holy. We can only keep the day that God made holy. And God made the seventh day of the creation holy before sin came into the world (Genesis 2:2-3).

Everyone is taught that the crucifixion was right before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54-56, John 19:31-42), and then Christ arose on Sunday, the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, 16:9, Luke 24:1, John 21:1). How can anyone with a straight face then say that the Sabbath is on Sunday and it was never changed? But some have made this claim. A more arguable view is that the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday. This is done using several verses that may indicate the early church worshiped on Sunday.

Acts 20:7 is the primary verse used as evidence that they routinely worshiped on the first day of the week. Thus, it's inferred that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. However, there is no indication that this was a weekly custom. This verse is simply in the context of a narrative about some events that were happening at that time. Even if it was a weekly custom, there is no mention of the Sabbath.

A counter-argument to this verse is Acts 16:13-16. This verse specifically mentions the Sabbath. Verse 16 indicates that it was a routine event. They would routinely and privately gather for prayer on the Sabbath. So what about Acts 20:7? There is nothing wrong with the "breaking of bread" on any day of the week. It doesn't even say this "breaking of bread" was in observance of the Lord's Supper. It was probably simply the evening meal. Moreover, they kept talking until midnight because they planned on leaving the next day.

The issue here is whether or not they stopped working on the first day of the week, or on the Sabbath. Remember that the fourth commandment says nothing about assembly for worship. It's a command to cease work for a day. We can routinely worship God in assembly any day of the week.

However, it would seem that Paul and his companions preferred to do this routinely on the Sabbath.

Another verse that is used to argue a Sunday Sabbath is 1 Corinthians 16:2. Paul asked each of them to set aside some of their earnings on the first day of the week. Nothing is said about a gathering. The verse doesn't even indicate that the money was collected on this day. Paul was simply asking them to individually, each week, set aside some of their earnings so that when he came there would be money available. Paul is asking each person individually to do this. It's not a gathering event. Each person was to set aside the money and keep it so that it could be collected at a later date when Paul arrived.

The first day of the week was probably mentioned because Paul wanted them to set aside some of the money that they had earned the previous week. Even if this verse were to indicate a routine gathering for worship on the first, this verse still says nothing about ceasing work on the Sabbath.

The other verse that is often mentioned when arguing a Sunday Sabbath is Revelation 1:10. This verse mentions the Lord's Day. It's the only verse in the Bible that mentions the Lord's Day, and this verse gives us no information about the Lord's Day.

Early church history indicates that the Lord's Day is the first day and was a day of worship. We should never use anything except Scripture to obsolete or alter Scriptural commandments. Even if the early church established a weekly worship on the first, that says nothing about whether they ceased work on Saturday or Sunday. I see nothing wrong with assembling for worship on the Lord's Day. The fourth commandment says nothing about assembly for

worship. It's a command to cease work for a day. We can routinely worship in assembly any day of the week.

There is no verse of Scripture that specifically changes the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. If Jesus had wanted to change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, surely he would have told us to do so.

7.3) Is the Sabbath the Day for Going to Church?

The fourth commandment says nothing about assembling for worship on the Sabbath. In Old Testament times, Leviticus 23:3 made assembly required on the Sabbath. However, this verse is right in the middle of talk about appointed feasts, which we know were nailed to the cross.

There are Old Testament verses that show us that during the millennium, there is worship on the Sabbath (Isaiah 66:23, Ezekiel 46:1,4,12). For those who believe in a millennium, these verses should show that the Sabbath has not been abolished. However, they are not conclusive as to the purpose or the nature of the Sabbath in this present age.

Basically, there is nothing in Scripture that requires us to have church on the Sabbath. It's simply a matter of custom. Customs during the millennium may be different than the customs of this present age. We should feel free, therefore, to have church on any day of the week.

The day we attend church should not confuse the issue. Instead, we should focus on the question of whether or not we should cease work on Saturday. Just as Jesus said that anger is murder, and lust is adultery, we should focus on finding the deeper meaning of the Sabbath.

7.4) Entering God's Rest

Many commentaries take the position that the Sabbath has been abolished. Three little verses in Hebrews 4:9-11 would seem to argue against this point. Some of these commentaries gloss over these three verses by saying that these verses are only speaking about God's rest, which is the rest that we can enter. These commentaries seem to pretend that the phrase "rests from his own work" is simply not in the verse.

Hebrews 4:9-11 NIV There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; (10) for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. (11) Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Hebrews was written to Christian Jews who had grown up religiously practicing the command to rest on the seventh day. In the Jewish culture of that time, the phrase "rest from his own work" would not have been words you just jump over and equate with "God's rest." Combine this with the fact that the writer had just a few verses prior mentioned the six days of the Creation, and God's rest on the seventh. The clear meaning of the verse is that those who are able to enter God's rest also rests from their own works by keeping the Sabbath.

These three verses should also present a problem for those who believe the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday. The weekly Sabbath in verse 10 is being compared with God's rest on the seventh day in verse 4. The Sunday Sabbath, on the other hand, puts emphasis on the worship service, and on the Resurrection, while taking away emphasis on the Creation. It would have taken quite a bit

of Scriptural explaining to convince Christian Jews of that time that the Sabbath had changed from the seventh day to the first. It's unlikely that these Christian Jews were considering the first day to be the Sabbath. And it would be even more difficult to argue, using Scripture, that the Sabbath was changed for some Christians but not for others.

Some commentaries have said that we rest from good works, which are really bad works, because they were not given to us by God to do. But such a concept does not flow from the context. And it says we rest from these works "just as God did from his." What would be the bad works from which God rested?

Let's take a closer look at the context of these three verses. Hebrews 3 and 4 teach us about God's rest. Verses 3:16-19 teaches us that those who are obedient to God will enter God's rest. Verses 4:1-2 teaches that this message must be combined with faith, or it's of no value. Verses 3b-5 show a relationship between God's rest and the rest God took on the seventh day of Creation. Verses 6-8 (and prior verses) teach us that Israel wandered in the wilderness forty years and did not enter God's rest. However, God said there would be another day when his people would enter His rest. These verses are talking about resting in victory after the struggle of overcoming sin. And verse 10 gives a requirement for entering God's rest. That is, "anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."

Verse 11 shows us that breaking the Sabbath is simply an example of disobedience. In other words, those who enter God's rest are obedient to all of God's moral commands, including all the Ten Commandments. The overall context of the passage is God's rest that we enter into with victory when we overcome sin. But that doesn't take

away the fact that the writer is using rest on the Sabbath as an example of obedience. Since the context is God's rest, it seems only fitting that the author would pick the fourth commandment as his example.

7.5) The Deeper Meaning of the Sabbath

Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments as the two greatest commandments: The first is to love the Lord. The second is to love our neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). The first four commandments are all about loving God. The last five are about loving our neighbor (Romans 13:9-10). The fifth commandment relates to both and is the bridge between the two sets.

The first commandment is simple, and can have no deeper meaning. We must not love any other God. There can be only one God.

On the surface, the second command is very similar. We are not to make idols. Considering this command more thoroughly, we need to understand that God is the Creator. We can create things, but our love of those things cannot become more important to us than our love for our Creator. We make money with our work. Nevertheless, the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10, Matthew 6:24). Money is the idol of the world today.

The third command is also about the love of God. If we love God, we would never use his name in any way that could be disrespectful. If we truly love God, we would never use "Jesus", "Christ", or "God" in any way that is not expressing our love for Him. Looking at it another way, we don't exclude "Jesus," "Christ," or "God" from our conversations. We always seek opportunities to unashamedly speak the name of our Lord.

The first three commandments are about loving God. The fourth commandment, to keep the Sabbath holy, is no exception. We spend time with those we love. The Sabbath is not some ritual whereby we stop working just in order to obey what God commands. The commandment is to "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Then, the text of the commandments proceeds into all the issues of not working. The purpose of the Sabbath is not about work. The purpose is stated in the first sentence of the command. The purpose of the Sabbath is all about holiness.

The purpose of the Sabbath is to spend a quiet day with our Lord. It's a day for prayer and meditation. It's a day to reflect on our obedience at the end of the week and ask God to help us in the coming week. It's a time to humble ourselves before the Lord, and to ask for holiness. This is also a time of joy and worship, to spend with our Father.

We remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy. We stop working in order to avoid the distractions of our work and the world. We have six days to work for our needs. The seventh is spent with God, and without the distractions of the six.

Some will say that they have a quiet time with the Lord first thing in the morning. Or perhaps it's the last thing in the evening before bed. However, the things of the world seem to press in on these quiet times. I believe that it's better to follow God's design and spend a whole day with God. The pressures of the week tend to crowd in on a daily quiet time. I find that a whole day, spent with the Lord, is easier to manage.

It's nice to spend the end of the week with God, and then start out the new week on Sunday by going to church.

At church we praise God, and we spend time with other Christians. We hear sermons and teachings from other Christians. The Sabbath, however, should be just for God alone.

Many people have to work on Saturday. Our culture does not allow for everyone to spend time with God on the same day. Compromises must be made. If, however, we just understand the purpose of the Sabbath, then we can do our best to find the right day to spend with God. The Sabbath was made for us. We were not made for the Sabbath. So for right now, we do the best we can to find God's holiness. When Christ's kingdom fully comes, Old Testament Scripture indicates the Sabbath will be fully integrated into the worldwide culture.

So is breaking the Sabbath a sin? No, I believe we have a freedom under the New Covenant that was not present with the Old Covenant of law. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are expedient. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be brought under the power of anything.

Romans 14:4-6 Who are you who judge another's servant? To his own lord he stands or falls. Yes, he will be made to stand, for God has power to make him stand. (5) One man esteems one day as more important. Another esteems every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind. (6) He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks. He who doesn't eat, to the Lord he doesn't eat, and gives God thanks.

The Old Covenant was for a theocracy. In other words, it was part of the law of the land. To break the Sabbath when it's the law of the land would be a sin. And that law of the land will return in the age to come, during Christ's millennial reign (Isaiah 66:23, Ezekiel 46: 1,4,12). In the present age, strictly speaking, working on Saturday is not a sin. But we must remember the Sabbath was given to us for the purpose of overcoming sin. If we simply neglect this gift then we are not doing everything that God has for us to overcome sin. And that in itself could be a sin.

The New Covenant includes the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this present age, the filling of the Holy Spirit is God's primary way for us to overcome sin. Paul had to face cultural differences. And when the Sabbath is not the law of the land there must be more flexibility. With the filling of the Holy Spirit we have this flexibility. But at the same time, we must understand the purpose of the Sabbath as being a tool that God has given us to overcome sin. We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). To this end, we should be using everything God has given us in order to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect at the coming of the Lord.

For example, if you have an exciting consuming-fire ministry that does not earn money, it's sometimes more important than keeping the Sabbath. Working in a consuming-fire ministry is not the same as working for money. The purpose of both is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to overcome sin. But if at all possible, avoid doing work that earns money or a living on the Sabbath. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. That was part of his ministry.

So, it's between you and the Father. The Sabbath was made for man. And each of us needs to overcome sin by whatever means the Father has provided.

The Sabbath was not abolished. The Sabbath was not changed to Sunday. And breaking the Sabbath is no longer a sin. But it would be a sin to neglect spending a day each week with the Lord if that's His way of helping you completely overcome all sinful habits. We need to use all that the Lord has given us in order to finish the race and reach the goal of Christian perfection.

As we do God's work, we get closer to God. Imitating God makes us more like God. It makes us more holy. We overcome sin much more easily as we do the Father's work. As we do God's work six days, we personally become more like God. As we build the kingdom of heaven, God builds us up. As we do God's work, God also works in us. We must "work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us] to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12b-13). God does the greater work as we do God's work.

**Overcome Sin, for the Kingdom of
Jesus Christ is Coming Soon.**

Epilogue

The seven chapters of this smaller booklet are also included as Part Seven of the bigger book titled, New Wine for the End Times. Christian perfection is the practical application of the New Wine System. From an End Times perspective, those who have overcome sin have entered God's Rest. If you would like to see all the Scriptural evidence for the New Wine System, allow me to recommend the bigger book.

If you have found this book useful, please visit my web site. Also, it would be very helpful if you could send an email to your family and friends and tell them about this book. Please include my website address. Thank you very much.

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The truth hides in the middle.

