

AFTER CONVERSION  
By Mark Blair

This is a book for those whom God has converted. The aim of the book is that those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation might have a firm foundation in Him. To you I write, friend, you whom the Holy Spirit of God has touched and converted from the way of unrighteousness. This conversion has happened because you have had your penalty of sin paid by the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross.

The best book for a new believer in the Lord Jesus to read is the Bible - the Word of God. However, I hope you'll supplement your Bible reading with the Scriptural truths that lie herein. Becoming a Christian means receiving the benefits of eternal life from the finished work of Christ upon the cross. Many questions about how or why this salvation applies to every aspect of your life will surely arise. By the grace of God, I pray that these words will aid you in your new life with Jesus Christ.

We must first understand what conversion involves. The word conversion refers to a change. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) (Sin is to fall short or miss the mark.) It is necessary for us to be changed from the condition of guilt before a holy and just God in order for us to become children of God, because we have fallen short of what God demands for salvation. The Lord Jesus said this change is being born from above, or born again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

In order for us to be born from above we must look to God. The severity of our sin makes our efforts to save ourselves no good. Because the Bible says that our righteousness, or our efforts of being good enough for God to save us from sin's penalty, are "like a polluted garment". (Isaiah 64:6) The good news of God's salvation is that when we could do nothing to save ourselves God did everything. When we stand worthy of the fires of eternal hell, God, in Christ Jesus, sees us as worthy of heaven.

As Paul has written, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Eph 2:8-9) Grace is not something we deserve, but a gift. God gives us this gift of salvation because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Very simply, what Jesus Christ has done for the believer is that He has lived, died, and risen from the dead for him. God gives salvation only because Christ has successfully done these three things for, or as a representative of, the believer.

God will not allow anyone who has sinned to get to Heaven. This rules out any of us getting there. So Jesus came to earth and lived a sinless, perfect life so that all who desire to go to Heaven may get to Heaven. Christians are not perfect but God looks upon them as perfect through the perfection of His Son. He lived for us a sinless life. Paul says in II Corinthians 5:21, "He (God the Father) made Him (God the Son) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we (the believer) might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The Bible says that the "wages of sin is death." (Rom 6:23) So that if we are sinners we must die an eternal death in Hell as the punishment. For this reason God put His Son to death upon the cross, so that all who desire to be forgiven can be so - justly. God does not throw out His law. No, He fulfills it by having Christ suffer the full penalty for the believer. He died for us to pay the full penalty of our sin.

If Jesus remained dead we would have no hope of raising from our death. Neither would we have real confidence that He paid the full price of our sin. But because Jesus rose we know that if we believe in Him we also shall rise after death. We know, too, that He rose for us to confirm our salvation.

Has the Holy Spirit brought you to a saving knowledge of this gospel of Jesus Christ? Have you trusted completely in the Saviour as your own? If so, then now is the time for you to read After Conversion. If you have not believed upon Christ, then seek God in prayer. Ask Him to cleanse you, forgive you, and make you His child in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, believe in con-

fidence that He paid your penalty. Now continue to read how you might live for Jesus and make Him the Lord of every aspect of your new Christian life. As Christians, we need to look at the life and teaching of Jesus as our model for life.

Just as a newborn baby is in need of much help, so is a newborn Christian. We need help to become more and more like Jesus every day, as God desires that we do so. Just as God's work alone brought to salvation, He alone changes us daily. He does so through many means - the Bible, fellowship, prayer, the love of other believers, and more. That is why Peter writes to new Christians and says, "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." (I Peter 2:2) The struggle to Christian maturity is achieved through a firm foundation in the Word of God. It is my prayer that God will use my words to help you to become more like the Lord Jesus. May God bless you through every page.

## REPENTANCE

We must now look to see what must take place for us to enjoy the eternal benefits of God's forgiveness. The Apostle Peter preached to the people of Jerusalem saying, "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19)

As the verse above implies "repentance" must come before forgiveness of sins can be applied. A judge cannot grant a pardon while the one who violates the law continues to commit crimes. The word of God calls us to forsake the ways of evil and come under submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. God has brought life to your soul that was once dead in sins and trespasses, now you must live for Him alone.

Repentance is to turn from, and hate, sin. It is a break from the disobedience that you loved before you were brought to conversion. "How?" you may cry at the thought of such a thing. "I've lived a number of years and become set in my ways. How can I change my way of life?" God is calling you to change the desire to continue in sin, wherever it exists in your life.

This change is not the result of human effort. It is a gracious act of God. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10) God's free gift of forgiveness is a wonderful act of love. Yet, the gift of repentance seems to be even greater. For not only has He fully paid the tremendous price of our sins, but He changes us so that we might turn from the powerful control of sin. He changes our hearts so that we want to turn from sin. Both of these gifts of God were provided by the life of the Son of God.

The Spirit of God touched your heart with the knowledge of your salvation while you were in rebellion against God. Your sins condemned you to eternal destruction. Paul says that we must not forget that we were once Gentiles, which means outsiders. "Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants

of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Eph 2:12-13)

Paul tells us, "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." (Col 3:1) Repentance is forsaking the love for sin that you had before you were saved. We must learn to hate the sin that could have sent us to an eternity in Hell. Our new love must be for our God who has spared us and for His will in our life. Do not ever look back to your sin, but strive to live for God alone.

The best way to accomplish repentance is to realize the enormity of sin. We tend to hold a light view of our disobedience against God. However, when we stand guilty in sin, God looks at us with grave disappointment. Those that have not found His favor await the just punishment of Hell. But praise God, we have found His forgiving favor because Jesus lived and died for us. We get an awful picture of the enormity of sin at the cross of Jesus Christ. We see that we were so bad that the God of creation had to come and die that we might be forgiven. The Lord of Glory was made a curse because of our sin. So, by thinking of the cross, God brings us to a godly grief because it was our sins that nailed His Son there. "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and bring no regret, but worldly grief produces death." (II Cor 7:10) Worldly grief is not sorrow for sinning against God but sorrow for being caught in sin. Yet, godly grief is sorrow because of the great expense of the death of Christ. When you realize that God had to die for your sins, that the nails through the hands of Christ were for the penalty of your sins, then you should strive to turn from sin in repentance.

There are five steps to true repentance. The first step is a change of mind. This change of mind is well illustrated in the story of the Prodigal Son. "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!'" (Luke 15:17) The Prodigal Son realized that there was no peace away from his father when he had left him for the love of sin. We, too, have squandered

the property of our God in loose living, as he did. The first step of repentance is the desire to go back to the love of God.

Second, we must have a true godly sorrow for sin. David said, "For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin." (Psalm 38:18) Some people are driven to the point of conviction or guilt, but are not sorrowful. They are not hurt by their rebellion against God. But, as was said previously, this godly sorrow is necessary in attaining repentance. You will not forsake something if you're not sorry because of it.

Third, this sorrow must move us to confess our short-comings before God. Unreleased sorrow and grief will only lead to anxiety and internal struggle. Confession of sin brings us to the joy of forgiveness. "But the tax-gather, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'" (Lk 18:13) Through this story Jesus teaches the love God has for humble sinners. Unconfessed sin is not hiding anything from God, He knows all your thoughts. Unconfessed sin is preventing Him from freely forgiving you.

Fourth, to truly repent, we must not only confess our sins, but forsake them. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." (Prov 28:13) This is sometimes very hard. You may lose friends, status, and popularity by trying to live for Christ. But in earnestly striving to forsake your sins you'll find the peace of pardon that surpasses all wealth. "What profiteth a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" (Luke 9:25)

The final step in repentance from sin is turning to God as Saviour and Lord. "For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." (I Thess 1:9) Of course, we will continue to sin until we are made perfect upon our entrance to Heaven. However, we must not live to please ourselves or our idols (girlfriend, car, wife, money, job) but to give glory to the true and living God.

Repentance is a hard thing to do, but it is very necessary.

As a Christian, your greatest peace and joy will come in being pardoned and separated from sin. If you remain unforgiven and continue in sin, you'll never have the peace of God. However, as you strive to live for Christ alone and forsake sin, you'll please your Father who is in Heaven. Jesus said, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:7) Praise God that He will help us to repent.

I urge you turn from your sin. You cannot become a Christian and make Christ another aspect of your busy schedule. He must become the Lord of your life and the King of your schedule. You must turn from ways of self-satisfaction and sinful pleasure and strive to give yourself entirely to God, as He gave all He had that you might live.

## READING GOD'S WORD

"Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." (I Peter 2:2) The Holy Spirit of God has raised you to repentance and forgiveness. This new birth has created in you a need for the spiritual nourishment of the Word of God. A believer in Jesus Christ has a tremendous need for a knowledge of the Word of God.

"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." (II Tim 3:16) God has sent you a special love letter to tell you all you need to know about Him. To prepare this letter for you He used many different men. God speaks to us through the words that He gave these men to write. They wrote sixty-six different books which have been compiled into the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible.

The Bible is the handbook of salvation. It speaks of the love of God for fallen and sinful man. It reveals God's plan of salvation for us through His Son Jesus Christ who is the Saviour. The Old Testament is the history of the Hebrew people who are the ancestors of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament we see foreshadowings and prophesies of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament we read of the life and teachings of Christ. The four gospels are followed by a history of and instruction to the Church, the Body of Christ, which is alive and growing today.

As Paul tells Timothy ( II Tim 3:16) the words of the Scripture are necessary for the Christian to be trained in the knowledge of God. Our letter from God is complete. The Bible tells us all we need to know about God and our life with Him. His words instruct and correct us in our walk with Christ.

Without a knowledge of these thoughts of God we are going down a dark alley. The Bible is like our map and compass to guide us through life. In His word we are told of the direction our life should take. David said, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105) The Ten Commandments are

(Exodus 20) the moral laws of Christian living. We are also reassured by reading of the men whom God has brought to Himself before us. Their words of strength and acts of courage motivate us to press on. Most of all, we are inspired by reading about Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who has laid down His life that we might spend an eternity with Him at the end of our walk through this life. God's word equips us to live the Christian life.

One of the most important aspects of the Bible is that it is where the will of God is revealed. More precisely, God's will cannot be known unless we know His word. As Christians, it is very necessary that we know the will of God. "What does God want from me and for me in my new life with Him? How do I know what to do? Where do I turn?" Surely, you have wondered about these questions.

To find the answer to these vital questions we must not turn to circumstances, chance happenings, or isolated events as clues to the will of God for us. The only thing that God is trying to tell us is what He has said in the Bible. A knowledge of the person of God comes through a knowledge of His Word. We can't figure out what God desires unless we know what He has said. Moses said, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." (Deut 29:29) When we seek wisdom, we are not to question things that happen in life, these are secret things. Wisdom, guidance, and knowledge come in knowing the Word of God. The more thoroughly we know the Bible, the closer our friendship and fellowship with God becomes.

Allow me to bring these thoughts into practical application. How does a Christian know if a recent job prospect is God's will for his life? He should turn to God's moral law - the Ten Commandments - in his Bible. Measure the circumstances against God's desire for His people. Is it contrary to the first commandment in that it comes before God? Will he be expected to break the fourth commandment and work on Sunday? Does the job have the support of the Christian's parents, as the fifth

commandment requires? (Providing the person is under his parents' submission.) Generally the Ten Commandments apply to any circumstance we will ever encounter.

In attempting to determine the will of God through His word, keep these verses in mind. "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." (James 4:17) God commands that we act without hesitation to obey Him. "...Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." (Rom 14:23) You can't pull anything over on God. If what you do isn't done with a pure heart and a clear conscience, then you are sinning against God.

So you see how a lack of knowledge of the Word of God only leads to a Christian's confusion. A firm foundation in Christ comes from a knowledge of the Bible. God does not allow ignorance of His law as an excuse for sin. May we say to our God as David did - "I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." (Psalm 119:11)

The Christian who does not read and study God's word is spiritually weak and under nourished. If you were to discontinue eating you would not be able to endure a day full of normal activities. In a very real way, you are seriously depriving yourself if you are not reading the Bible. A born-again Christian is a babe who must receive nourishment. "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." (I Peter 2:2)

Some Christians are misled to believe that the Word of God is a band-aid for the soul. When they are angry, they frantically flip through the pages of their Bible to find a passage that will cool them down. Yet, more often than not, such last minute attempts at help increases anger when they are not able to find the "right" verse.

The Bible is to be read daily for our spiritual protection and not as a last resort desperation move. Mal-nutrition is easily prevented by eating the proper foods daily. However, when one has suffered from starvation, mal-nutrition can rapidly lead to death. The simple illustration is a parallel to the importance for a Christian to read the Bible. A daily consumption

of the Word of God is necessary for spiritual strength.

As you read the Bible, it becomes a building block to be used in building a firm foundation in Christ. The Word of God becomes very much a part of you. Your spirit is refreshed, strengthened and nourished. As you read God's written word, He speaks words of life to you.

When you eat a banana, do you know how your body will burn the energy it produces? Usually, that banana is used to perform a function that you are not aware of. In the same manner, we are often unaware of the way God will use certain verses that we are reading. Do you refuse to eat the banana because you don't know how it will be used? No, because you know it is necessary to perform essential body functions. Do you turn to a different portion of the Bible when the one you are reading does not seem to be for you? I hope not. All of the message of the Word of God was written especially for you. At the time of your reading a particular text you may not know how God will use that text, but He has promised He will surely bless you from it. God has said, "For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11)

The same Holy Spirit of God who inspired the men who wrote the Bible applies the words of Scripture to your life. The Holy Spirit illuminates the words of God that you have once read. He brings to mind a passage that you may have read years before. A certain occurrence will strike a familiar note and you will say, "Oh, I read that once." The decisions we make in life should be based upon the principles that we have read in the Scriptures. When the Word of God is in our head and on our hearts we are able to know what the will of God is for every situation we encounter in life.

A knowledge of the Word of God guides us in our walk with Christ. A knowledge of the Word of God allows us to know the will

of God in our lives. A knowledge of the Word of God strengthens us to live a life that gives glory to Jesus Christ. You see, it is of tremendous importance that a Christian have a knowledge of the Bible. We should read the Bible slowly, daily, and thoroughly.

Everyone seems to be in a hurry to complete just about every task they begin. However, we must read the Bible slowly. The power of the Word is received as we understand and comprehend what we are reading. We must discipline ourselves to dig to the depths of the Word and to strive to see God's meaning. Our prayer should be, "Make me understand the way of the precepts, and I will meditate on thy wondrous works." (Psalm 119:27) Center your thoughts on the Scripture as you read.

When you came to realize the necessity of food, you began to eat daily. Since the Bible is so much a part of Christian living we must read it every day. Many Christians read in leaps and bounds at first, then gradually not at all. They will read ten chapters a day at first. Soon it is down to seven, or five, or three. Shortly afterwards, they have ceased reading the Bible at all.

Because this way of reading so often occurs, I encourage you to make and keep this promise to God. "I will read your Word for at least five minutes every morning and five minutes every evening." Usually, the hardest thing about reading the Bible is getting started. Some days all you will be able to spend is five minutes morning and evening. Some days you will have enough time to read for several hours. The important thing is that reading the Bible become a regular part of your daily schedule. Reading in the morning gives you good thoughts to begin and meditate on throughout the day. Ending the day with the Word of God allows you to slumber with good thoughts from the Lord. David said, "I revere thy commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on thy statutes." (Psalm 119:48) A faithful commitment to this promise to God should allow you to read both the Old and the New Testaments in one year.

The Word of God should be read thoroughly. Before you begin to read, pray to the Author of the Holy Scriptures and ask Him to

give you understanding. Pray to the Lord saying, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from thy law." (Psalm 119:18) Ask Him to give you concentration, to clear your mind from distracting thoughts, and to speak to you through His Word. When you finish reading, ask Him to give you strength to be a doer of His Word. "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does." (James 1:25)

God was gracious in giving us His Word. The Word of God is the final authority in all aspects of the Christian life. It is also the source of strength to live the Christian life. It is where we read of the wonderful love of our Saviour Jesus Christ. I encourage you, strive to make the Word of God a part of your life. I pray that God will write it on your hearts that you may live to please Him.

## PRAYER

Prayer is a two-way channel of communication with God. Just think of it, God wants to have us praise Him in prayer. Not only does He hear, but He replies, right away, to everything we ask of Him. Because God is who He is, He can listen to, watch over, and respond to every one of us - at the same time.

Prayer is a very sweet form of worship for those of us who trust in Jesus Christ's saving work on the cross. Jesus is the one who has offered up the sacrifice of Himself to the Father for our sins. He is our high priest. "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16) Because we stand forgiven in Christ's righteousness we can pray to God in confidence. We must always remember that our privilege of prayer came at great expense - the life of our dear Lord. Therefore, let us not take advantage of, or misuse, what God has given us. I have found for you the straight information from the Scriptures: the who, what, why, when, where, and how of prayer.

To whom do we pray? As Christians, we have committed our lives to God who is triune. That is, God has revealed Himself in three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Our prayers are to be directed to the Father. He is the one who gives every good gift to His children. He lovingly gave His Son to clear us of our sin's penalty. In the course of our prayer we can specifically speak to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. They, too, are God who deserve our praise and thanks for their works of grace in our lives.

Our prayers are to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that

the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:13) We pray in Jesus' name because He is the only One who can make us justified in the Father's eyes. The Father does not listen to the prayers of the unrighteous. (Unless, of course, they are pleading for forgiveness in Jesus' name.) He tells us so in Isaiah, "So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you, yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of bloodshed." (Isaiah 1:15) But, Christians have been cleansed from sin by Christ. Because we are followers of Jesus Christ, the Father loves us as much as He loves Jesus. We pray to our Heavenly Father in the name of His Son, our Lord.

What do we pray for? You may be surprised to know we are not supposed to ask for just anything. Jesus gave us a guideline for prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Saying, 'Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done!" (Luke 22:42) We, too, pray for the will of the Father. The will of the Father is contained in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, we pray for only what God has promised us in His Word.

This is not a limitation to our prayer life, but a tremendous source of confidence. Will God give us all we need to live for Him? You better believe it! We are no longer our own, but children of God. He has promised all we need if we seek Him earnestly. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33) But you must see the promise of "all these things" is preceded by seeking God and His perfect will in sincerity and truth. James said, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:3)

Pray for the salvation of many, especially those you love. Ask that God will give you confidence to share His Gospel. Pray that your life style may reflect the Christianity you confess. Pray for your Brothers and Sisters in Christ, your Pastor, the government, your family, and others.

Do not neglect to offer up sincere thanks and praise to God. God is not a servant to whom we thoughtlessly rattle off our requests. If we were to spend all of eternity offering Him thanks we would

never match the love He shows us. Don't think your thanks butter God up to answer your prayers. He knows the thoughts of your heart. Just be appreciative of what He has done for you.

We can get a wonderful idea of what to pray for by looking at the prayers of men in the Bible. Read the prayers of Jacob - Genesis 32:9-12, Moses - Exodus 34:9, about Elijah - James 5:17-18, Solomon - I Kings 8:22-53, David - Psalm 51, and Jesus - Matthew 6:5-15, 26:39-42, and John 17. Also read the prayers of the early church in persucution - Acts 4:24-30, and of Paul - Ephesians 1:15-19.

Why is it so important for followers of Jesus Christ to be people of prayer? Firstly, we have become new people. "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (II Cor 5:17) Our life is now to be lived to give glory to our God who has made us alive in Him. We must, therefore, acknowledge Him and communicate with Him in earnest prayer. Not only does He desire us to, but we are blessed as we do. We have a loving and sovereign God who desires that we live to the praise of His glory. "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matt 7:7-11)

Secondly, we receive strength in prayer to be a good soldier of the cross. The Lord has drawn us to Himself to actively serve Him by furthering His gospel. We are engaged in a serious battle against the forces of sin and death. We have received our victory upon Calvary's cross, but we fight for the sake of others. Paul tells us this in the sixth chapter of Ephesians. "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." (Ephesians 6:11) An important part of this armor is prayer. "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all persever-

ance and petition for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:18) We are weak and helpless in ourselves. Yet, in the Lord, we can receive strength and power, the power that crushed the devil on the cross. So we pray for strength to live for God because in ourselves we don't have such strength.

Third, and lastly, we pray because prayer is a tremendous source of comfort. Prayer is an act of submission to the superior power and wisdom of God. We are saying, "Lord, I can't handle this. Please help." We are comforted in being reminded that time and time again He has helped us. We remember that the Bible says if we trust Jesus He will come to our aid in every time of need. Even if we can't "feel" the Lord's presence, we know He is with us because the Bible tells us so. Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:18) So as we pray we remember the Lord is God, that He made all the universe in a word, and that He will come to our aid.

The Lord Jesus prayed when He needed the strength and comfort of His Father. In that dark hour in Gethsemane, just hours before He was slain, He received the blessed assurance that His Father was right with Him. "And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, 'Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done.' Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him." (Luke 22:41-43) We, too, need this strength to live for Jesus. As we pray for God's will to be done He prepares us to accept His will. Why should we pray? Because we really need the strength, comfort, and assurance of our Heavenly Father.

When should we pray? "Pray without ceasing." (I Thess. 5:17) We should have this constant communication and response to God. This is hard to achieve. So often our mind is filled with worldly, sinful thoughts that are not honoring to God. Yet, Paul's command means constant prayer certainly must be possible.

How much we want something is measured by how earnestly we pray for it. The merits of constant prayer are shown in the life of Paul. He was truly one of the greatest servants of the Lord. In fact, all of the "great" men in the Scriptures were fervent in

prayer, including our dear Lord Jesus.

Strive to speak to the Lord very very often. As a practical suggestion, spend at least once every day in serious prayer. Set aside a special time daily when you can fall to your knees and pour your heart out to the Lord. It is vitally important to your spiritual life that you have such a prayer time at least once a day, as well as your short prayers throughout the day. The effectiveness of your ministry for the Lord can be measured by the time you spend on your knees in prayer.

Where should you pray? It is important to remember that prayer is worshipping the Lord. Prayer is not to be a show of spirituality to men. "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." (Matt 6:6) Jesus meant this literally. Go in to a private, quiet place, when you can, to pray.

Today, it is becoming increasingly difficult to readily find a quiet place. Often times the situation will necessitate praying in public. However, this, too, must be a secret prayer. Not that you are to be ashamed of your Lord, but that you won't appear hypocritical. In the restaurant, quietly bow your head and praise God for what His hand has given you. We must be thankful to the Lord even when "people are around". Pray in all places with the principle of Matthew 6:6. When you do pray among men, either out loud or quietly, make sure your prayer is entirely directed to the Lord. If you want to tell someone something don't try to sneak it to them in a prayer, just tell them.

So, believer, you see there is much to learn about prayer. In fact, what I have given you just scratches the surface of prayer. Yet, one final question remains. How do we pray? Not, how in the sense of method, but in principles of proper prayer. There are basic scriptural ideas of how we should pray.

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:3) You must pray with correct motives. Really examine the motive behind each petition you offer up to God. Because God not only hears the words,

but looks to the heart. When we think God does not answer our prayers, it might be because we ask with wrong motives.

"I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also." (I Cor 14:15) You must pray in intelligence. This does not mean to figure out the best way out of a situation and pray for that. You must pray with a knowledge of the Bible. Make sure your prayers don't contradict the scriptures. Don't hesitate to quote the Bible in prayer, if it is in the proper context to the situation you're in. To pray with your mind is to pray in harmony with the Scriptures.

We have seen how the Lord Jesus prayed that His Father's will might be done. This is a basic principle of how we should pray also. Remember the reason you pray is because you believe God's intelligence is superior to yours.

"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven." (Matt 18:19) Pray with others in both mind and body. Take the opportunity to pray when you are with a Christian brother or sister. Yet, when you are alone pray with them as well, in one mind. Your prayers should be in harmony with the brethren. This teaching also stresses the importance of showing love to others. You are just fooling yourself if you believe you have a good prayer life and you hate your brother.

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matt 6:12) This is a petition in the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray. We are not forgiven because we forgive others. Only the blood of Christ can wash us clean. Yet, we must remember that our love for the Lord is no more than the love we have for our fellow man, who are created in God's image. Therefore, we must pray in a forgiving spirit.

Jesus taught that we must pray in humility. This is closely related to having a forgiving spirit. We must be humble among men and especially before the Lord. God is not compelled to give us anything because we mumble a few prayers. He gives us gifts because He loves us very much. Remember the undeserved love God has for you when you approach Him in prayer.

"But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord." (James 1:6-7) Be confident when you sincerely ask of God. If you don't really believe He will answer your prayers, He won't.

A word must be spoken concerning the Lord's answers to prayer. Every prayer of the believer asked in faith is answered. The answer is either "yes", "no", or "wait". If what you ask for comes to pass that is a "yes" answer. A "no" answer is just that God's infinite wisdom does not agree with your feeble mind. Remember, that because you are in Christ, what happens in and to your life is the best thing that could happen to you. Paul promised, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28) Sometimes the Lord does exactly what we ask Him to, but in His timing and not ours. This is what constitutes a "wait" answer. So God answers all of our prayers, right away, for us.

We pray to the Father in Jesus' name. We pray for what He has promised in Scripture. We pray because we need the Lord. We pray at all times. We pray to the Lord and not to men. Also, we pray to the Lord in confidence. We come in confidence to the mercy seat of God because of Jesus. He has taken the wrath of God for us on the cross and given us eternal peace with God. Now, as children of God in Christ, the Father freely gives us every good gift. "Pray without ceasing." (I Thess 5:17)

### CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

We come, dear friend, to a subject of tremendous importance to your walk with the Lord Jesus. I have repeatedly stressed that our forgiveness for sin was accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. Our salvation is a gift, but it did not come cheaply. The payment for sin's penalty was the broken body of our Saviour. We were once so dead in sin that we didn't even realize our condition. Then the Holy Spirit smashed our hardened hearts and we saw the glory that God revealed on the cross. Praise be to God!

The Holy Spirit applies the love our Risen Lord has for us through a knowledge of the Bible. The Scriptures instruct us in the necessary commitments of the Christian life. The word of God commands us to commit our entire life to the hands of Jesus. Some of these commitments are to read God's word, repent from sin, be fervent in prayer, and tell of God's salvation. God uses these means to teach us, correct us, and show us His love. But we must see that the Lord asks for everything we own, desire, and are. Jesus said, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27) This is the command of Christ we turn our attention to now. If your love for Jesus does not drive you to publicly commit yourself to Him then He says you are not worthy to call yourself a Christian.

Paul said, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (Romans 12:1) Today the trend in many Christian circles is to be a "lone wolf" Christian. Do you go to Church? "No, I hate religion. Me and a bunch of kids have a Bible study every Friday night." Do you go to Church? "Sure." Where? "Well I go to several different ones. I sort of move around." Do you go to Church? "No. I find the Lord in nature. I see the wonder of creation and worship." This carefree attitude toward Church hardly seems to be an effort to be "living sacrifices" for Christ. To be a living sacrifice one must

truly strive to keep the commands of the Bible. One command many neglect today is commitment to a fellowship of believers. The writer of Hebrews says, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25) It is through and in a biblical Church that your commitment to Jesus Christ is made.

A biblical Church is a fellowship of believers. It is a place to go and worship God through singing hymns of praise to Him. It is where the Word of God is read and applied to our lives by a Preacher. It is a place where we join in prayer and ask for God's mercy through Christ. We are commanded to join and become a vital part of such a group. Christians are not a group of self-sufficient hermits. We are a band of brothers and sisters who are dependent upon each other for a joyous and fruitful life. That is why Christ stressed public confession of faith. "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I also will confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I also will deny him before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33)

Notice Jesus offers words of comfort and words of warning. He says that the eternal life He won for you on the cross will be yours through public confession. Christ himself will be your advocate before the Father. Are you willing to receive these benefits? If so, you must submit to the obligations of Christian living. Christ must mean so much to you that you'll tell all the world you love Him. This is rather difficult. Notice, however, if you are not willing or ready to do so, God's condemnation awaits you. That is what makes real commitment so very important to you. Paul tells Timothy, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us." (II Timothy 2:12)

The New Testament worship was conducted in homes. People would gather to seek the Lord and praise Him. The apostles began to hold the Sabbath on Sunday in commemoration of the Resurrection. On Sunday we should break our normal routine. We should gather to worship God and serve other believers. A Church is not a big build-

ing, a stained glass window, robes, hymnals, and candles. It is a group of people who love and confess a lively faith in Jesus Christ. A Church is like a spiritual hospital where we can go to be refreshed and strengthened for another week of service.

What do we look for in a Church today? Many look for a beautiful building, beautiful people, an eloquent preacher, high society programs or a prospective date. I hope these are not your reasons for going to Church. A good Church honors the Word of God. The Bible is the final authority for all Church matters. It is where the key beliefs of the faith are explained - the deity of Christ and Salvation by grace through faith. The name of Christ should be honored in Church through every activity that is held. There must be a genuine concern for the Saint and the sinner. The simple gospel message must be proclaimed in and carried from the Church so that people will hear of Jesus. The needs of the members must be the concern of all. A congregation that is lacking in any of these areas does not deserve a minute of your time or a dime of your labors. Find an assembly that you are eager to commit yourself to. "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28-29)

It is through and in a biblical Church that our commitment to Jesus Christ is made. There are three key ways your commitment must be made. The first refers to your submission to the Holy Scriptures as the only authority for faith and practice. You must find a Church that honors the Bible.

Secondly, you must publicly confess a sincere faith in Christ. Paul said, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (Romans 10:9-10) Jesus instituted the sacrament of water baptism as a means of confession. Baptism is not a recommendation but a command to the believer. To be baptized means to be joined to Christ. We are spiritually baptized to Christ by the Holy Spirit

who makes us born again. We are called to make our stand for Christ publicly through water baptism as a sign of our inward faith. As you grow in Christ your baptism will become more and more meaningful. Especially as you partake of the other sacrament of the faith - The Lord's Supper. Communion is only for the believer who has been baptized and publicly confessed faith in Christ.

Confession is a big step and must be accomplished with much prayer. It involves a complete change of lifestyle and attitude. You will no longer be your own but Christ's. And what a wonderful thought that is. After your stand, stay close to Him. The world waits to make you stumble and the Devil strives to make you sin. But Jesus promised, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Thirdly, you are to commit yourself to the Fellowship of Believers at the Church you join. This is not a choice to be made lightly. The Christian life is a tough and serious battle with eternal consequences. The grim reality of Our Lord's death shows us this. But His Resurrection comforts us and proves the reality of His living presence watching and reigning over us. If you make this step you will be expected to attend the services of the Church. You must listen to the sermon, pray, read the Scriptures, sing, and worship the Lord. There is no profit in being under the instruction of a Preacher who does not honor the Word of God. If you want to hear a philosopher, be a Unitarian, a Jehovah's Witness, or a Christian Scientist. If you are interested in social programs be a Mormon. But friend, I urge you to flee from such assemblies. For those who have defiled the Scriptures, as they have, will burn in hell. Sit under the simple gospel preacher who lives, loves, and expounds the Word of God - and nothing else.

You are to make a commitment to serve others. "On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collection be made when I come." (I Cor 16:2) Give first to the Lord the best portion of all you receive. Yet, God wants more than your money. You are to be a missionary for

Jesus among your friends and family. You are to let your life-style reflect the teachings of God. Above all else, spend much time in prayer. Pray for your Christian brothers and sisters, the Pastor, and the gospel as it is spread by your Church.

There is more to being a Church member than yawning through a sermon. These three steps are rather sobering, aren't they? Anyone can raise his hand or go forward at a revival meeting. And anyone can go to Church and tithe every week. Yet, God looks to the heart, He knows if you are really in Christ. If you refuse to submit yourself to the authority of the Scriptures, publicly confess your faith in Christ, and commit yourself to a Fellowship of Believers you had better examine your heart. Yes, these are hard sayings, friend. But your very life hinges on these three responses to the gospel. I pray that you will shun the world, pick up your cross and follow Christ. Jesus said, "For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." (Matthew 11:30)

## SHARING YOUR FAITH

Christians are like beggars who have found bread - the Bread of Life. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our Bread of Life. Our search for the peace and pardon of God has ended at His cross. But thousands of poor souls have yet to receive His saving grace. What about those poor burdened sinners who have not found forgiveness through the blood of our Lord? Dear Christian, we must not covet the grace that God has given us. The Bible says, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Hebrews 13:16)

God desires that we share the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must realize that there are some who we dearly love who are in serious eternal danger because they are under God's condemnation. Our friends, our family, and even our enemies need to hear of the wonderful grace of Jesus. May God remind us that we ourselves would be on the way to hell if someone had not cared for us enough to tell us the story of the cross. I would like to share three reasons why we share our faith and some methods that might help us do so.

The most important reason we have for sharing our faith with others is that God commands us to do it. The Psalmist records, "Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day." (Psalm 96:2) Our daily Christian task is to tell of God's wonderful salvation. As followers of Christ we must be submissive and obedient to the commands of the Word of God. A very important part of the service God has called us to is sharing His gospel.

Notice from the verse above the joy of this service. "Sing to the Lord, bless his name." We are not sharing a dreadful disease or some kind of bad news, but the love of our great God. When we have the sweet melody of our salvation in our hearts and minds it will naturally flow from our lips. When you talk of Jesus, you should be speaking of the most wonderful person in your life. When you speak of the Salvation He accomplished on the cross, it is a joyous and triumphant message. The Creator of the universe once suffered to pay the penalty of your sin! May God give us grace

to appreciate His wonderful love. There is no room for a long-face or sullen spirit when we speak of the Saviour. Isn't it wonderful how God's commands are often the things that are most beneficial to us. "Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day." (Psalm 96:2)

This leads directly to my second reason for sharing the gospel. Our greatest real joy as Christians comes in pleasing the Father by doing His will. I am not referring to a temporal, worldly joy but an eternal, satisfying joy. David knew this wonderful joy. "I delight to do thy will, O my God thy law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:8) The joy that came to you when the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of your heart and showed you the crucified one can be continued. A true joy comes through a sincere effort to turn from sin and serve God. Jesus Christ's greatest joy was doing the will of His Father. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9) The word Jesus uses for "Blessed" in these Beatitudes (blessed sayings, listed in Matthew, Chapter 5) is the same as our word for "Happy". So that means those who share the gospel, that is what a peacemaker is, are really happy!

When you are filled with joy because of what Jesus has done for you, you should find it easier to talk to others about Him. If this is not true for you, ask God to show you the wonderful love He has for you through reading His Word. You may not yet have experienced a joy through service, but this does not mean the command to serve was not issued to you. "But may all who seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee; may those who love thy salvation say continually, 'Great is the Lord!'" (Psalm 40:16)

The third reason for us to tell of God's salvation conveys the most urgency. Paul records, "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) The word of God has issued this warning to all of mankind. God's word says that all of us stand guilty before a holy God in our own righteousness. This is the sad part of sharing the gospel. It is that those whose hearts remain hardened in sin will be condemned. This grim reality should give us a sense of urgency to tell of God's salvation. Who knows when life will end

for our loved ones. For a Christian, death is the beginning of the fullness of life. For an unbeliever, death is the beginning of eternal Hell. Brothers and sisters, these depressing thoughts are not my threats, but the truth of the Word of God.

Paul writes to the Church in Rome, "But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14) This verse does not only apply to Pastors and missionaries. It is for you and me. Sinful man stands guilty before a just and holy God. We must warn others of their impending doom and share with them the love of God that we have heard of and experienced. Will you depend upon the extra spiritual people at church to do this? Do you think surely, somehow, your friends will hear of Jesus without you having to bother? Well, stop such selfish and sinful thinking. Did the person who shared with you the gospel think so little of you? We must pray that God would give us real compassion for the lost. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!" (Luke 13:34)

So you see, friends, we share the gospel because God commands us to, because we experience real joy in responding to the command, and because those who don't know Christ will perish in sin.

We must now consider the message that we tell the world. The way that God accomplished our salvation was on the cross. The second part of Romans 6:23 explains what we should talk about. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We must share with all people the message of the person and work of Jesus.

There are many things about Jesus we can share with a non-Christian. We can tell them how happy we get when we meet with other Christians in fellowship. We can tell them how Jesus will someday return to earth in power and glory. There are many current authors who believe the day of His return is near. We can get into an argument with our friends about the proper religion. These

methods of talking about Jesus have some merit, but the most effective method is the simple gospel message. Because happiness is only a by-product of salvation. God is not calling us to a care-free, light relationship with Jesus. But He is calling us to repent and be forgiven through the cross of Christ. As Christians, we should anxiously await the return of our Lord. However, He will be returning to establish His Kingdom with those whose salvation He accomplished during His first coming. It is also important for us to stand firm for what the Word of God teaches, yet religions will not save man. Salvation is the gift of our Lord.

So when the strength of God gives us boldness to share with our friends, we must tell them the gospel. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16) This scripture teaches the absolute necessity of the gospel message for God to give salvation. All of our efforts must begin by realizing the absolute necessity of this gospel message. God does the work of salvation from beginning to end.

This is the plan of the Godhead to give salvation to the lost. The Father is the architect of salvation. He designed the means of salvation and wrote the names of all believers in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the earth. His Son, Jesus Christ, accomplished our salvation two thousand years ago by becoming a man and dying for us on a cross. The Holy Spirit comes to us when we are dead in our sin and gives us faith to come alive in Christ. We are made to see the enormity of our sin and how Christ has paid our penalty on the cross.

Our part in this tremendous plan is to share the gospel. The Holy Spirit works through the proclamation of the gospel message. That is what Paul referred to when he said, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation." So you see here the remarkable way God works? He has done everything necessary to save sinful man. All of the members of the Trinity become involved in the work of salvation. Yet, God says the power of the application of this

love to the human heart is released as we share the gospel. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) Failure to share the gospel in the light of this fact is a very terrible thing. (However, we are never responsible for the condemnation of another. Those who perish do so because of their unforgiven disobedience against the Lord God.) Nevertheless, we must not neglect the fact that we have been made the instruments of God's peace, we are the peacemakers.

We now need a brief explanation of what the gospel message is. The four New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are often called the four gospels. Yet, the gospel I am referring to is the special message that is revealed within the Bible. This gospel is the good news about Jesus, especially these four important points:

1) The gospel is a message about the character of God. We must tell people that God is the Creator of the universe. God is the one and only divine power in the universe. He never was born and never will die. He is a perfect God, perfectly good, perfectly loving, and perfectly just. He demands that we, His creation, be perfect and blameless in His sight.

2) The gospel is a message about sin. The truth is that we are not perfect and blameless in God's sight; we never have been and never will be. We are sinners and God's punishment for sin is eternal Hell. Sin is a direct violation of His character, a slap in His face. When we break God's laws we are openly defying Him and His holiness.

3) The gospel is a message about Jesus Christ. First, Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He is the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, who has become a man. Somehow that baby in Bethlehem was God who had taken the form of a man. "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) Second, Jesus Christ never committed sin or disobedience against His Father. This life of complete perfection was for us. He lived as we will never live, as our Representative.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (II Cor 5:21) Third, Jesus Christ paid the just penalty of sin through His death on the cross. He hung and bled and died for those the Father had chosen from all eternity. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Fourth, Jesus Christ rose from the dead after lying dead for three days. "He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification." (Romans 4:25) The resurrection proves that Christ's promises are true. He is now a living Saviour who rules over all and will someday return to earth. These four points outline the message of the gospel - the person and work of Christ. This is what we must tell people about God. There are many things we could say, but this is what God commands we say.

4) The gospel is a call to faith and repentance. We must call people to believe and fully trust in Christ's saving work. We must command people to put no trust in their own efforts to please God. We must also call men to turn from sin, repent, and obey the Lord Jesus. Paul summarized his ministry in Ephesus by saying, "How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:20-21)

I have given you three reasons to share the gospel. We have just seen what the Word of God teaches us to share. Now I offer three suggested methods of sharing the gospel. We are witnesses of the salvation God has brought into our lives. Since it is God who saves, we must pray for the effectiveness of our message. As we walk with God, His love will be upon our lips as well as our hearts.

A testimony is an effective way to speak of Jesus. Tell your friends how your life has been changed as a Christian. Tell them of the wonderful love that God displayed for you on the cross. Be a testimony to all you meet in deed as well as word. Surely they

will pose questions you cannot immediately answer. But you do not need to be a Bible answer man to share the gospel. Our knowledge of the Word of God will not give us a better gospel. Do not be afraid to admit that there are some answers you don't have. But remember the words of Peter, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." (I Peter 3:15)

Secondly, prayer is an important part of sharing the gospel. We must ask God for opportunities, situations, and a good time to share. Let us remember that God says to speak the word even when it seems the wrong time. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." (II Timothy 4:1-2) We should especially pray that God would give us boldness and confidence in His word. Ask Him to show you that it is His power that saves. Pray that you would not be lazy and slothful in the task that He has given you. Jesus said, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:38) Most importantly we must pray for the effectiveness of our gospel. We must be so concerned for those we speak to that we fall to our knees in fervent prayer for them. The gospel message must not be merely rattled off methodically to others. We must show a true concern by coupling our efforts with God's power through prayer.

The third suggestion for sharing the gospel involves our personal relationship to God. It will be easier and more natural for us to share God's love with others as we know Him better. When our thoughts are godly, then our words will be also. Jesus becomes a closer friend as we learn more of Him through the Bible. Your testimony will be more effective when it is backed-up by Christian conduct. In short, if your own life is controlled by God's love, the gospel of Jesus Christ will be your dearest love. Paul is a good example of this, "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the

world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal 6:14)

Therefore, brethren, let us labor in the service of the Gospel. If our earnest prayers and desires are to share the love of Christ with others, God will give us the strength to do so. I have offered you several reasons and suggestions that might aid you in doing so.

Our Lord Himself offers the greatest motivation for service. Think deeply of the love He showed through His death on the cross. The motivation of the cross is our fountain of strength for all we do in our service to God. When the going gets tough, we can look to Christ; He will enable us to continue on. The promise that the Lord gave Paul is given to us as well, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

(II Corinthians 12:9)

## HOW TO ENJOY WORSHIP

The Scriptures instruct us that Christian commitment is very important. We must commit ourselves to a gospel preaching church. Have you been to the morning worship service lately? Was it a joyous, profitable, and enjoyable service? Unfortunately, many people do not enjoy worship services. Therefore, we must know how to enjoy worshipping the Lord.

There are three categories of Christians who don't enjoy worship. First, there is the new Christian with no church background who finds a service strangely unfamiliar. Second, a new Christian who spent many years in church before conversion, never experiencing or understanding what worship is. Third, there are those who would rather go to an informal service.

The youth movement of Christianity falls largely into the third group. Many young people have heard the gospel through a contemporary method of evangelism. The Lord has done a great work through informal gatherings of Christians. However, young Christians can profit immeasurably through formal worship after they can begin to enjoy it.

There is often a sharp contrast between formal and informal worship. Christians gather informally on the floor, sing popular songs accompanied by an acoustic guitar, pray conversationally, and enjoy themselves. Christians gather formally in wooden pews, sing unfamiliar, old songs accompanied by an organ, and feel uncomfortable as the offering plate approaches. However, I believe formal worship is useful to the modern Christian. The problem is understanding and enjoying a formal worship service. To do this a Christian must be converted, be prepared, and be involved in a worship service.

To worship God is to honor, love, and adore Him. Only a Christian can show such a high level of love for God. It is vital to be converted, and know it, to enjoy worship. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life." (I Jn 5:13)

The unbeliever stands in waiting God's judgement of sin. Yet, the Christian has passed from death unto new life. Of course, there are unbelievers who go to church. There will always be phony Christians on earth. However, only a true Christian can be eternally blessed from worshipping God.

As a Christian, you must stand in firm confidence of your salvation. You'll never worship God as "Abba, Father" until you know you're going to heaven. For Scripture on our confidence in Christ, read the eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans.

Christians must be prepared to enjoy worshipping the Lord. There are five ways to be prepared. First, you should be in bed by midnight Saturday. This is the hour the Lord's Day begins. The Lord's Day does not begin when the service starts on Sunday morning. If your Saturday night activities prevent you from being fully rested to worship God, then forget them, or him, or her. Jesus said, "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." (Mark 14:33) Nothing should be more important to you than worshipping the Lord.

Secondly, you should have a quiet time of devotion early Sunday morning. Such a quiet time is vital every morning and especially Sunday. Don't just roll out of bed and sneak into the last pew after the invocation. That is like coming from a spiritual desert to enjoy rivers of living water. You'll get sick. Worship involves sharing the Lord with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Read the Scripture Sunday morning to have something to share especially on Sunday. You should see no man's face each day before you see the Lord's.

Thirdly, meditate during the prelude. Be sure you don't spend the time immediately before the service talking about the weather. Ask the Lord to teach and bless you. Read the portion of Scripture the message will be given from. Use the moments before the service wisely.

Fourthly, don't expect a "show". A church is not a theatre where the Preacher "does his thing". You must not sit back and expect to be entertained. Don't try to be lulled to sleep, but to be strengthened. You, friend, are to participate in the worship

service.

Lastly, determine to concentrate. Don't get too comfortable. Strain to comprehend the meaning of the message and how it applies to you. Remember that God's word is the very word of life. The measure of a good minister of the Lord is not eloquence and dramatics, but wisdom in and knowledge of the Scriptures.

To enjoy worship, a Christian must be involved in the service. Sing the hymns as unto the Lord. "I will sing of the lovingkindness of the Lord forever; to all generations I will make known Thy faithfulness with my mouth." (Psalm 89:1) Understand the words of the songs. You'll find that singing to the Lord is one of the highest forms of true worship.

Be involved in the prayers of the service. Apply the words and thoughts to your own heart as you direct them to God. If your church uses a prayer book, be careful of the prayer's becoming meaningless repition. Pour out your praise to God. Direct the words to Him yourself.

Be involved in the offering to the Lord. You can give the Lord a wonderful offering that doesn't cost a thing - yourself! God wants us to tithe a portion of all we earn, as well as ourselves. "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (Romans 12:1) Give yourself entirely to God and His kingdom.

Take your own Bible to church. Have it handy to mark or underline a passage of Scripture you want to study at home. Jot down the key thoughts and verses of the sermon for personal study. Our worship service should be the six days between Sundays.

Be personally involved during the sermon. Think about how the Word applies to you. Don't worry about how good the topic is for your neighbor. Let God, through His Word and servant, speak to you. How will the message make you a better Christian? What areas of your life do you need to change? To whom should you be reconciled in love?

A worship service is a wonderful thing. Pray that the Lord will help you to enjoy and profit from it. Be prepared and in-

volved in the service. Stand upon the promises of God. Believe with full assurance that Jesus Christ has died and risen again for you. By His love you are freely pardoned and made right with God. That great love should give us a reason to worship God. "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers." (John 4:23) Praise the Lord!

## INDWELLING SIN

Very shortly after your conversion you will be faced with a sobering realization - even Christians sin. In fact, those that have been forgiven continue to sin very much. The Bible emphatically teaches that this is true. "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (I John 1:8) This may seem to you a truth that need not be mentioned. But we, as the people of God, have an obligation to inform the world that we believe we are "not perfect, just forgiven". Many non-Christians believe Christians are perfect and consequently are shocked to find out otherwise. The issue at hand, however, is not that we are still sinners, but to see how God works in us, for us, and through us to "put to death our earthly nature."

We who have experienced the forgiveness of our sins by our Lord Jesus Christ grieve Him and His Spirit by our sin. It is sad to think that we still commit the same acts that nailed the Lord to the cross. For this reason, let us offer praise to our Lord Jesus that He would suffer to pay the penalty of our sins - past, present, and future. Again and again we are invited to return to the fountain of healing grace that flows from His precious bleeding side.

We sin as Christians because sin remains in us, even though we have been born again. This sin that remains in us is called "indwelling sin". Indwelling sin is what remains of our old sinful nature, the old man. By the mighty power of Christ Jesus this "old man" is a defeated and doomed man. Sin no longer has controlling power over us, yet it has power in us. We need to be informed about this old sinful nature that resides in us, to seek God's grace in subduing this nature now, and to have confidence that God will someday completely remove this nature from us. Before our conversion, we were controlled by this nature of sin. Sin was not our old nature, sin was our only nature. In fact, all men are separated from God and unable to come to Him from birth.

This is because of the sin of our representative, Adam, in the Garden of Eden. When Adam disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, all creation was brought under God's condemnation. This is called the doctrine of original sin. Adam represented us before God as a political legislator would represent his constituents. Many have sinfully and foolishly cursed God for punishing the creation because of Adam's sin. Yet, the Creator has never suggested or permitted the creation the option of criticizing Him. Our infinitely wise and loving God has said, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9) Paul teaches us here the extent of the punishment for Adam's sin, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Romans 5:12)

Now, all men are spiritually dead and unable to do anything good enough for God to save them from the penalty of their sin. "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins." (Ephesians 2:1) Instead of seeking to please God, non-Christians are children of the devil and under his control; they are slaves to sin. Paul continues in Ephesians 2, "in which you formerly walked according to the courses of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 2:2) This is very sad to say, but it is unfortunately what the Bible teaches. In fact, no man is able to please God. "And those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:8)

If we were left in this condition, all men would suffer the penalty of their sin in hell. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil." (Jeremiah 13:23) So there is no excuse to offer, no work to perform that we could offer God to cover for our sin. But God has graciously stepped in to the gloomy picture to save "a great multitude which no man could number." When all deserve hell, God freely offers Heaven to all who would believe in Him. When we were not able to say or do anything to save ourselves from

hell God freely and fully met the demands of His own standards. Jesus tells His purpose in coming to earth, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) He is God who became a man and entered in to this world of sin to save His people from their sins. Jesus cleared us from the penalty of hell by enduring our hell for us on the cross. We are His sheep who have heard the voice of our Good Shepherd and been brought into the fold of forgiveness and eternal life. Paul continues the parallel between Adam and Christ by saying, "For if by transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17) Isn't that tremendous!

When we were given faith to believe in Christ something happened to us immediately, outwardly. Now, as we live the Christian life, something is happening to us gradually, inwardly. Outwardly, Christ's payment of our sin was added to our account so that we could be cleared of our sin's penalty. Before we were saved, God saw us as unforgiven sinners. After we believed, we were forgiven sinners because Christ died in our place. The Bible teaches "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) This outward working of salvation that God has done for us is called Justification. We are now justified, which means we are made right with God because of Christ's payment of our sin's penalty. Justification is taught in this passage of Scripture, "For there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:22-24)

The inward workings of Salvation involve God's putting our old nature to death, and gradually removing sin from us. (As Christians, our new nature, the result of our being born again, is the perfection of Christ in us.) Before our conversion, our old nature reigned in us and controlled us. Paul speaks of the unconverted by saying, "In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the

light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (II Corinthians 4:4) Now, that nature has died with Christ. Two thousand years ago, when Christ died for us, our old nature was issued an irrevocable death sentence. Because God had chosen us to believe, He carried out the death sentence of His justice upon our old sinful nature. We should have to die our own eternal death, as the penalty of our sin, But Christ's death puts our old nature to death. The theological term of God working in us as His new creation is Sanctification. There are two aspects of Sanctification, initial and continuous. Initial sanctification involves God, when we believe, setting us apart from those that are lost. In continuous sanctification, God works in us to make us more and more like Christ. An illustration of these aspects of sanctification would be of a sculptor making a statue. Initial sanctification would be represented by the sculptor going to the rock quarry and selecting a roughly cut block of marble, setting the block of marble apart from all the others. Continuous sanctification is like the sculptor working on that block of marble in his studio and making a perfect statue. Paul prays here that God would sanctify the people from Thessalonica, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thessalonians 5:23) The end of this process is at the Second Coming of our Lord - Glorification. At that time we will be given new bodies that cannot sin but only do good. God will make us completely perfect, as Christ is perfect. Here Paul outlines how God the Creator works on His new creation, "and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." (Romans 8:30) By this promise of glorification we know that if our faith is in Christ, we will never lose our Salvation. God patiently works in us and with us, He will never leave us or forsake us.

Sanctification, God's working in us to make us like Christ is a work carried out by the Holy Spirit. He uses four main things to sanctify us. As we engage in these, prayerfully and intelli-

gently, the Lord purges us from the old nature and makes us like Christ. The first and most important is the Word of God. Jesus prayed to our Father and asked, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth." (John 17:17) In the Bible we read of God's love for us. His statutes in which we should walk are given to us in this love. Because our obedience to Him is the response He wants to His great love. The second means of grace is prayer. Prayer is offering up our desires to God for things in His will, in Jesus' name. The other two means of grace are the two sacraments of the Christian faith - baptism and the Lord's Supper. Water baptism is an outward sign of the inward baptism which is the union to God that happens when someone is born again. Baptism does not remove sin or give salvation. It is only for true believers who want to confess that they have been born again through a sincere faith in Christ. The Lord's Supper is a memorial supper to proclaim Christ's death. On a spiritual sense we are partaking of the body and blood of our Lord and remembering His sufferings for us. Therefore, we grow in grace as we read and obey the Word, pray, and properly partake of the sacraments.

The clearest Scriptural teaching of indwelling sin is in Romans Seven. Here the apostle Paul grieves because of His sinful nature. He sorrows because of the struggle between good and evil that happens in his body. "For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish." (Romans 7:19) Yet, he finds great consolation in the forgiveness he has received from Christ. "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25) We must be aware of our indwelling sin but be confident in Christ's power to change us and forgive us. Paul was aware of the power of his sin but he was also aware of the surpassing power and greatness of the grace of God.

The following three suggestions should prove helpful in your struggle against indwelling sin. First, as you realize your sin, praise God for His merciful and undeserved salvation. If you stood by yourself you would be condemned, but you stand in the righteousness of Christ where there is no condemnation. This

creates genuine humility when we see that Salvation is the gift of God from beginning to end. Real joy of salvation comes through grief for sin. When we are honest enough with ourselves before God to see our sin and its extent we then see it would take a great Saviour to deliver us from our sin! Praise God! Jesus is a great Saviour, far greater than all our sin! The answer is not to deny your sin, that is not healthy. The answer is to praise your Saviour. Secondly, seek strength and grace through the means of grace mentioned previously. To live the Christian life apart from any of these four means of grace is a dangerous spiritual denial. God's great love commands our greatest effort of obedience to Him. Lastly, keep yourself pure by avoiding sin's temptations, the snares of the devil, and the weaknesses of your flesh. Paul commands us to "Abstain from every form of evil." (I Thess 5:22) Pray that the all-powerful and all-surpassing strength of God will make you strong over sin.

The battle against our sin is a life-long struggle. We must always check our motives, intentions, and feeling. We must examine our thoughts, words and actions to see if they honor Christ. Yet, we battle indwelling sin with confidence, in the expectation of our glorification, and in the Resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ that binds sin's control now. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1)

## THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

Christianity is not a life of rules and regulations. It is a life of freedom, a life of abundance, a life of enjoying God. Christ gives us the freedom to live the kind of life that pleases Him. Jesus said we show our love for God as we strive to keep His commandments.

Our walk with Christ must be motivated by a deep-rooted love for Jesus. A Christian is not merely a person who prays, reads the Bible, worships God, shares the gospel, and is baptized. A Christian is a person who has had a change of heart, one who has turned to God from sin to be forgiven and adopted as God's child. Christian practices such as baptism and prayer are necessary commitments of the Christian life. However the unforgiven sinner who does such Christian practices is as lost as any man who does not trust in Christ's work on Calvary.

In the light of these facts we look at the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We have studied several important practices of the Christian life in some detail. Yet, we must keep in mind that God looks to our hearts to see if we love Him more than He looks to how much we put in the offering plate, Christian practices must be motivated by a love for Christ to be honoring to God. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Let us look to the word of God and see what the Lordship of Jesus Christ is, how God revealed His Lordship, how His Lordship must apply to our lives, and our motivation for honoring Christ as Lord.

Lord, Jesus, Christ, these are three very important words that have lost much of their meaning in today's world. The title of Christ teaches us that Jesus is the anointed King from God. He is the Son of God whom the Father sent to be the King and Messiah of the people of God. The name Jesus means Saviour. The mission of the Son of God was to pay the penalty of His people's sins on the cross. The title of Lord means that Jesus Christ is master of life. The Scriptures refer to Jesus as Lord nearly seven hundred

times. Yet, do we really think of Christ as Lord? Paul said, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." (Romans 10:9) "thanks through Him to God the Father." (Col 3:17)

Have you made this confession with a true acknowledgement of Christ as Lord? Lord does not mean pal or buddy, good friend, or a person that you sometimes obey. Lord means boss, king, ruler, and the one who always must be obeyed. Fortunately for us, Jesus is a merciful and loving Lord, our dearest friend. Yet, too often we neglect to offer Him the respect and obedience that He deserves and commands.

Four hundred years before the birth of Christ, God consoled the down-trodden nation of Israel with a reminder that the Lord would come to His people. "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming says the Lord of Hosts." (Malachi 3:1) This prophecy was gloriously fulfilled as John the messenger preached the baptism of repentance near the Jordan River. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!'" (Mark 1:3) At the close of Christ's ministry the people of Jerusalem praised Him as He makes His triumphal entry. "saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'" (Luke 19:38) He not be endured the cross of our sin as a punishment for being a King. "And they put up above His head the charge against Him which read, 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews!'" (Matthew 27:37) After the Resurrection, Peter preached on Pentecost of Christ's exaltation. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus who you crucified." (Acts 2:36) The Apostle John saw the glory of the Saviour as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns." (Revelation 19:6) So often we forget that the Saviour who once wore a crown of thorns now wears a Crown of Glory. is to change directions and turn from sin. But after we repeat, What must our reaction be to Christ's Lordship? He must always

reign in our hearts and minds as Lord. The Lordship of Christ involves total submission to Him in every area of our lives. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." (Col 3:17)

It can be difficult to make a specific application of this command. The Scriptures contain few specific references to twentieth century living. The Apostle Paul never knew what an airplane, or television, or motion picture was. Yet, the word of God is a relevant standard to twentieth century Christian living because it teaches specific principles for life. The Holy Spirit helps us recall the words of God we have once read so that we can apply them to the specific situation we are in.

The Scriptures do instruct us in the kind of dating, drinking, smoking, dancing, entertainment, and occupations that are pleasing to God. The over-riding theme of Scripture is that everything we do should honor God. "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (I Corinthians 10:31) To honor God is to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come." (II Cor 5:17) We must always remember that we are no longer to live to please ourselves. As Christians we must always remember that our old life was not pleasing to God. Therefore, we must be careful not to try to adapt our old standards to Christ's. Paul said, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2) Christ calls for us to forsake everything we had as unbelievers and carry our cross of holy Christian living. We must be different than the people of this world. Peter said, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (I Peter 2:9)

Repentance is only the first step of Christian living. To repent is to change directions and turn from sin. But after we repent, we are called to live a life that honors Christ as Lord.

To do deeds that honor Christ. To speak words that honor Christ. To think thoughts that honor Christ. The Christian life is a constant cycle of repentance, forgiveness, and re-direction. We must always remember, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

God's covenant with the Jews through Moses was regulated by many don'ts. Don't eat this, don't touch this, don't, don't, don't. The Old Testament law was a guardian of the people waiting for Jesus the Messiah. However, we are to obey the Ten Commandments because they are also the moral laws of the Christian life. Christ summarized the laws God gave to Moses with two do's. "And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

It is tremendously important that Christianity for you does not become nothing more than rules and regulations. The wonderful fact of the Christian life is the freedom God gives us - from sin, from death, from sin's penalty and from the Devil himself. Nevertheless, you must know the Scriptural principles that govern the Christian walk. Paul says that everything, outside those things specifically banned in the Bible, is lawful, but not all things serve the Lord's best interests for you. (I Corinthians 6:12) God has given you the Bible to make you "wise unto Salvation" and the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. "So," the question arises, "how do I know what the Bible says about Christ should be the Lord of my life?" These are a sample of God's exhortation to holy living:

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of His Son cleanses us from all sin." (I John 1:6-7)

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilements of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

(II Corinthians 7:1)

"If then you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1)

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 4:17)

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (II Corinthians 6:14)

"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (I John 2:15)

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18)

"No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." (II Timothy 2:4)

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)

To really know the directions your life should take to honor Christ I recommend these three steps: Read and study the word of God as your handbook for Christian living. Pray that God will guide you to be His disciple. Consult the advice of a mature Christian in whom you can confide, such as your Pastor, for guidance. Remember that our foremost authority is always the Bible because it is the word of God. You will never know the will of God until you know the word of God.

Submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not easy. Yet,

don't let anyone tell you the Christian struggle is not worth it. Indeed, the Christian walk, the walk in the Spirit, is rewarded by the abundant gifts of God. Paul promised, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23) Nothing can match the greatness of life through loving Christ and obeying His words. Not only does Christ freely give us eternal life, but He gives us abundant life.

Our motivation for obeying Jesus as Lord is His love for us. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." (II Corinthians 8:9) While we were poor and helpless in our sin, Christ the Lord accomplished our Salvation, our abundant, eternal life, on the cross. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

The Christian life is hard, but the same source of strength that raised Jesus from the dead, raises us to newness of life, and to submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God! "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:15-17)