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Introduction

Like a building under construction, you need a solid foundation to grow strong and to stand (Psalms 11:3). Jesus Christ is the only sure and lasting foundation Who can support you through the storms and tremors of life (1 Cor.3:11). Beginning in Victory, the first book in the Victory Foundation Series, is a collection of studies designed to help you know more about Jesus.

If you have never met Jesus, the scriptures you will visit will introduce you to a love and a destiny beyond your dreams. If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, these scriptures will increase your love and appreciation for Him and for what He has done for you.

These studies are also essential for older Christians. Only when you remain on the sure foundation of Jesus will you continue to grow. Those who have slid from a biblical foundation have ceased to mature in their relationship with God.

As you study and review the scriptures, you will strengthen your roots in the Lord. Take time to answer the questions and to understand the truths you discover. For additional insight into each study, look at the scriptures in the "Digging Deeper" section.

Whether for personal or small group study, you will enjoy these studies. May you draw closer to Jesus as you open His Word!

Eric Ahlstrom

The Sin Problem

Suppose you died today and stood before God and He asked you, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" How would you answer Him? Would you say, "Because I'm a good person and I did the best I could." Or would you say, "Because of all the good things I did." Or possibly because, "I believe in God."

Are you willing to trust that your answer is the answer? God is the one who has the answer to the above question. From the Bible, God, the Great Physician, gives you the diagnosis and the cure for what keeps you apart from Him.

1. What is God like? (1 John 4:8; Psalm 106:1; Heb.6:18; Psalm 145:17)

God is also pure, perfect, all-knowing, and all-powerful just to name a few qualities. Compare God's characteristics with those of man.

2. What is the spiritual condition of mankind? (Rom.3:10-18)

The difference between the nature of God and the nature of man is immeasurable—it is as vast as the difference between day and night; it is a gap called sin.

Sin is any characteristic, action, or thought contrary to God's nature. Sin is darkness in the soul; God is light, and in Him there is no darkness (1 John 1:5). You may not be as bad as most people, nevertheless in comparison to God your nature is in direct opposition to His.

3. How did sin come into the world? Does sin now infect you? Why? (Rom.5:12-14, 18; 1 Cor.15:21-22)

God did not create man to be a sinner. When God made Adam and Eve, He created them in His image, innocent of sin. In fact, after God finished creating Adam and Eve, He looked upon them and all He had created and said 'it was very good (Genesis 1:31).'

However, God gave Adam and Eve the ability to make choices. It was God's intention for man to choose to love Him and to fellowship with Him. God's best for them was an unbroken relationship with Him, free from the condemnation and pain which results from sin.

4. What did Adam and Eve choose? (Gen.3:3-6)

5. Why did they make that choice? (Gen.3:5; Isa.14:13-14)

Adam and Eve's choice to disobey reveals the basic root of all sin: they wanted their own way and didn't want to follow God's way. In essence, they chose to be their own gods.

6. How many of God's laws must you break to be guilty of sin? (James 2:10) _____

7. What are you doing if you say you have not sinned? (1 John 1:8) _____

8. Whom have you sinned against? (Psalm 41:4, 51:4)

There is not one person who has kept God's law completely. Everyone has sinned against God. Sin is not measured by quantity, or by its degree of evil; sin, no matter how "little," is absolutely evil because it violates God's law and nature. Just as committing one murder makes you a murderer, or stealing one penny makes you a thief, committing one sin makes you a sinner.

9. What does your sin and iniquity do? (Isa.59:2)

In the same manner that one cut in a telephone cord cancels the conversation with the person on the other end, only one sin cuts off your relationship with God. Therefore, it is impossible for you on your own as a sinner, to enter the presence of a Holy God, even for a moment.

10. What is the wage and penalty you deserve for sin? (Rom.6:23; 2 Thess.1:7-9)

11. What is the outcome for all unrepentant sinners? (Matt.25:41; Rev.20:12-15)

12. Who is under God's judgment? (John 3:18-19)

13. Will God really punish your sin? (Ezek.18:4; Ex.23:7)

God is a righteous judge who requires punishment for the violation of His law. He is also holy and cannot allow sin to dwell in His presence without violating His nature. God is perfectly just in not allowing you as a sinner into His heaven.

14. Who is foolish and why? (Prov.28:26; Jer.17:9)

You may sincerely "feel" you are OK with God as you are. Sincerity is a noble attribute. Nobody would want you to be a hypocrite. However, sincerity is not enough to make your feelings truth. What you believe is as important as how you believe. You may honestly believe that you won't get hurt if you jump off a tall building. But, sincerity will not make that belief a reality. What is the basis for your belief? Is it trustworthy or just wishful thinking?

Ask yourself, where did sincerity get the people who followed Jim Jones to Guyana, David Koresh to Waco, or Heaven's Gate in Southern California? Trusting in a feeling rather than on the truth of God's Word, the Bible, is a fatal mistake. You must see yourself and your actions from God's perspective, not from your own viewpoint. Unlike other religions, God does not ask for a blind faith from His followers.

15. How does God view your good works as an attempt to gain acceptance from Him? (Isa.64:6)

16. How good must you be on your own merit to be accepted by God? (Matt.5:48)

Sin is also defined as missing God's mark of perfection. You would have to be absolutely perfect in your actions, thoughts, and motives for God to accept you into heaven based on your own ability. One lustful, selfish, or evil thought is enough to separate you from God for eternity.

17. What cannot save you? (Gal.3:21; Rom.3:20)

18. What is the purpose of the law? (Gal.3:24; Rom.3:19-20; John 5:39)

19. Is saying you believe in God enough to be accepted by God? Why? (James 2:19; 1 John 2:4)

20. How does the Bible sum up your spiritual condition? (Rom.7:18)

Based on your own ability you have no hope of being accepted by God. The Bible accurately says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom.3:23 NASV). The good news is God never expected you to be good enough on your own.

Digging Deeper

2 Tim.3:2; Eccl.7:20; Rom.1:29-30; Ps.14:3; Matt.7:21-23; Matt.25:41; 1 Cor.6:9-10; Gal.5:19-21; Titus 3:5; Eph.2:8-9

The Blood of Jesus

In the first study you discovered that there is nothing you can do in your own ability to be accepted by God. You also discovered that sin must be punished. The question remains, who will pay the penalty for your sin? Will you pay (by eternal separation from God) or can someone else pay the penalty for your sin?

1. Who is Jesus? (John 1:1, 14; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Isaiah.9:6)

2. In what manner did Jesus come to earth? (Phil.2:5-8)

3. Why did Jesus come to earth? (John 3:16-17, 1 Tim.1:15; Matt.1:20-21; 1 John 3:5; Luke 19:10)

Jesus said directly and indirectly that He was (and is) God. Jesus' claims to deity leave you with only three possible conclusions about His identity: He is either insane, a liar, or God. Jesus did not give you the option to believe that He was only a good teacher or a prophet. If you closely examine His life and teachings, only one conclusion can be drawn: Jesus is God.

4. How can you be cleansed from sin? (Lev.17:11; Heb.9:22)

The penalty for sin is the loss of life. Since life is in the blood, God requires blood for the atonement and covering of sin. Under the old covenant, animal sacrifices were used to cover over sins because animal blood was pure and innocent, free from the sinful nature.

5. Why is the blood of Jesus a better sacrifice than the blood of animals? (Heb.9:13-14)

6. What is the "New Covenant" that Jesus desires to make with you through His blood? (Heb.8:8-12; Ezek.36:26-27)

7. What did Jesus do for you on the cross? (1 Pet.2:24, Gal.3:13, Rom.6:6-7)

8. What saves you from the wrath of God? (Rom.5:9)

9. What did Jesus do to pay the penalty for your sin? (2 Cor.5:21)

Only someone who has not sinned can legally pay the penalty for your sin. That someone can only be God Himself—Jesus, the second member of the trinity.

10. What is the gift Jesus offers you? (Rom.6:23)

11. What is eternal life? (John 17:3)

Eternal life is not a destination; it's a relationship with the Author of all life. Adam and Eve had eternal life in the Garden of Eden. When they chose to sin, this life of walking with God was cut off from them and their descendants. It is only because Jesus exchanged His sinless life for your sinful life that you can eternally walk with Him.

12. Who is accursed—devoted to destruction and the disfavor of God? (Gal.1:8-9; 1 Cor.16:22)

13. Why do other religions and cult groups preach another gospel? (Rom.1:21, 25)

14. Is there any other way for you to receive salvation, other than by Jesus? Why? (Acts 4:10-12)

You might be asking, "Aren't all religions pretty much the same?" From a distance you might think that all religions lead to God. However, upon closer examination you will find many major differences. Islam asserts there is only one God. Hinduism says there are many gods. Buddhism teaches there is no God. New Age espouses we are all gods. Pretty confusing, huh? They all can't be right. In fact they all seem to pretty much exclude each other. So where do you start in finding the truth?

You must first start with the founders of these major religions. Where are they now? All, save one, can be found in the grave. Jesus Christ alone backed His claim of deity by rising from the dead as He said He would. Over 400 eyewitnesses attested to this! Roman and Jewish historians also noted His life and miracles.

Jesus said He is "the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Can other founders claim this? Not legitimately. Again you are left with the conclusion that either Jesus was a liar, crazy, or God. Looking at His life and the lives of His followers, you can only conclude He is God.

Understandably, this claim is difficult to receive at first glance. Nevertheless it is a claim that should not be lightly ignored. Like most people, you will need to take some time to explore the claims about Jesus before you too will be convinced.

All the major religions attempt to reach God by minimizing the justice of God and erroneously elevating mankind's goodness. Christianity is God reaching down to sinful, fallen mankind. To believe man can keep a set of rules or do good deeds to pay for sin implies that

Jesus' death on the cross was an unnecessary waste, which is a grievous insult to His sacrifice.

Jesus was more than a good person who served as an example for you to follow; He is God Himself, man's only means of salvation. Other religions may promote a "good" lifestyle, but they are totally inadequate for the forgiveness of sin and the impartation of eternal life.

15. Why did God the Father raise Jesus from the dead?

(1 Pet.1:21) _____

16. What did Jesus say concerning your relationship with God?

(John 14:6)

What about all those people who have never heard of Jesus?

This is a good question. How will God evaluate people justly if not everyone has had the same opportunity? For most people on the planet, this is not an issue. Christianity has nearly covered the globe.

However, for the few remote areas where Christianity has not gone there is still no excuse for not serving God. God has stamped His signature on His creation and on the consciences of men. No one could seriously deny that life on this planet is by design. Every year scientists uncover increasing evidence of intelligent design that diminishes the theory of random chance evolution.

If you stop and think about your own conscience, doesn't it remind you of right and wrong? It should because you were created in the image of God. Yet for the people who run from God, it is what they do know about Him that conflicts with their self-interest that is the issue, not what they don't know.

God looks at what people do with the light of revelation they have and justly makes a decision for their eternity. Don't you think that God would make a way for those who are sincerely open to the truth and are willing to obey what they understand?

You may be thinking, "If God is good, why does He allow all the evil and suffering in the world?" There is no easy answer for this question. This very moment you could be feeling the pain of a friend or loved one who has met with some tragedy. However, when you read the newspaper about the crimes, famines, and wars, most of the time it is people hurting

people. The source of most tragedies is mankind's propensity to do wrong.

Sure, people do a lot of good things, too. Many of them do benevolent deeds because they have met Jesus and out of a new heart reach out to help others. Still, many individuals attempt to do good deeds to soothe a guilty conscience or to answer a sense of emptiness that resides in their souls.

So what is it about people that produce both good and bad? The answer is: God created man in His image. God is good and to some extent we reflect that image. Yet He gave us the ability to make choices, albeit limited to His boundaries. It is when the first man, Adam, chose to reject God's loving leadership that evil entered the world.

In light of mankind's history the real question one needs to ask is: "If God is just, how can He allow anyone into His heaven?" Only God could provide a way for man to enter His presence. Jesus Christ's mission was to pay the price for the wrongs of mankind and to provide a means for a person's heart to be changed.

What should be your response to this truth? It would be reasonable to investigate it and see how it applies to your life. Only after Jesus changes your heart will you stop being part of the world's problems and start contributing to the answer. There is no way for you to be accepted by God other than through what Jesus did for you on the cross.

God demonstrated His love for you by coming to earth as a man in order to suffer the most horrible death imaginable: death on a cross. Jesus paid the penalty for your sin and fulfilled the Father's demand for justice. In the next study you will look at what your response must be in order to receive the benefit from what Jesus did on the cross.

Digging Deeper

John 10:30; John 14:7-9; Rom.1:18-25; Eph.1:7; Rom.3:25;
1 Tim.6:3-4; Rev.12:11

A Change of Heart

Life is full of important decisions: whom to marry; which career to pursue; where to live. However, these decisions pale in significance compared to the most important decision you will ever make: to accept or reject God's offer of salvation, an offer you can neither earn nor deserve.

You might be thinking, "Isn't Christianity narrow-minded?" A glib answer is, "Certainly! Christianity can afford to be because it's right!"

Seriously, common sense dictates many exclusive conditions in life. We call them absolutes. Nevertheless, in this age of tolerance, it seems that the only thing that cannot be tolerated is intolerance! Some people go so far as to claim that there are no absolutes. But are they absolutely sure? In real life you depend on absolutes every time you drive down the street or turn on a light switch. Wouldn't it stand to reason that the most important question concerning your future should have an absolute answer?

Maybe the reason you may take an offense to Christianity as being the only way to God is because you grew up in a home that ignored or rejected Jesus. Or maybe your culture is opposed to Christianity. Join the crowd! Nevertheless you don't have to be locked into a death spiral because of your situation. You have a choice on what to believe.

If you are truly open-minded about your spiritual condition, you would give the Bible serious consideration as the answer to the eternal question of how to know God. Sure, there are hypocrites in the church just as there are counterfeit dollar bills in circulation. But don't let a bad experience keep you from trying again to find the truth that Jesus offers.

1. What is God's desire for you? (2 Pet.3:9; Acts 3:19-20)

2. How does the Bible define repentance? (Psalm 32:3-5; Prov.28:13; Ezk.18:21-23, 27-28; Isa.1:17)

Repentance, by definition, is a radical change of mind, attitude, and purpose regarding sin. When you repent, you agree that God is totally

right and that you are wrong. You abandon all your excuses for your sin and choose God's way above your own, despite how you feel.

3. How can you come to God? (John 6:44)

4. What attracts you to repent? (Rom.2:4)

5. Who initiates your salvation? (Phil.1:6)

6. Is there anything you can do on your own? (John 15:5)

God has taken the first step toward your salvation. You did not find Him, God found you—He was never lost! As you trust Him, He will make sure you also become what He wants you to be.

7. What produces repentance and what produces death? (2 Cor.7:10)

8. What must you do when you repent? (1 John 1:9)

9. What are some things to be confessed and turned from? (Gal.5:19-21; 1 Cor.6:9-10)

Sin triggers guilt. Guilt is your built-in alarm mechanism when a wrong is committed. However, having feelings of guilt or sorrow for your sin is not enough for you to receive forgiveness.

When you repent of sin, you turn from a life of sin and selfishness to a life of obedience and trust toward God. Only when you admit your sin

and repent can God forgive and remove the guilt of sin. Guilt without change is only worldly sorrow.

10. What must you do besides repenting to be saved from your sin? (Rom.10:9-10; Acts 20:21)
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11. What does God want of you? (Prov.3:5-6; Psalm 37:5)
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Knowing about Jesus is not the same as believing in Him. To believe in Jesus means to put your trust, confidence, and reliance in Him alone. Intellectual knowledge of the Gospel, when not acted upon, will not save you; only a trust in Jesus by faith will deliver you out of darkness.

12. What must you do to follow Jesus? (Matt.16:24)
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13. How will you find the life God wants you to have? (Matt.16:25-26)
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It is a fact that eternal life is a gift, yet to receive it you must release the things you hold dear to embrace the salvation God so freely offers. The things God wants you to keep He will give back to you. The parable of the prodigal son gives an example of what you must do to repent.

Read Luke 15:11-24.

14. What did the lost son choose to do when he recognized his poor condition? (vs.17-19)
-

15. How did the father react to his son's return? (vs.20)
-

The son hoped only to be accepted as a hired servant, yet the father received him back as a son. The lost son turned to his father when he realized his need; likewise God wants you to turn to Him in your need.

16. When you receive Jesus as Lord what does He give? (John 1:12)
-

17. What do you experience when you repent of your sins and believe in Jesus alone for your salvation? (John 3:3-7)
-

The only way to become a part of God's family is by birth. God has promised to make you His child when you repent of your sin and place your faith in Him alone.

18. What does God do with your sin when you repent? (1 John 3:5; Psalm 103:12)
-

19. Can you know for certain that you have eternal life? Why? (1 John 5:11-13)
-

God has said in His Word that you can certainly receive forgiveness and salvation today (2 Cor.6:2). To begin a relationship with God you must first repent of sin and of living for yourself.

Then you must believe in what Jesus did for you on the cross. Now, if you believe God is drawing you to Himself, you can respond to Him in prayer. In your own words, tell God what you are sorry for, ask for His forgiveness, and place your trust in what Jesus did for you on the cross.

The following prayer can be used as a guideline if you do not know what to say to Him:

Dear Jesus,

I know I am a sinner and I deserve to be sent to hell.

I am sorry for my sins (tell Him what you are sorry for) that have offended You. I repent and turn away from everything I know that is sin. I ask You to forgive me as I choose to stop trusting in myself and in what I can do to be accepted by You.

I believe what You did on the cross is enough to pay for my sins. I trust You and You alone to save me from the penalty of my sins.

Come into my life as Savior, Lord, and Master. Change me into the kind of person You want me to be.

Thank You Lord Jesus. Amen

Note: Repentance is a way of life for a Christian. As the Holy Spirit changes you into the image of Jesus, your mind will continually change (repent) about your values, lifestyle, and relationships.

Before making a decision, four lifestyle changes should be considered: 1) attending Church and fellowship regularly, 2) daily Bible reading and prayer, 3) telling others about Jesus, and 4) receiving training in the Christian life from other Christians.

Though these activities are not required to receive forgiveness of sin, they are key to your growth as a Christian. Don't worry about how you will change; God is only looking for your willingness to embrace the new life of faith in exchange for your old life of sin and selfishness. His grace will empower you to change *after* you have accepted Him as your Lord and Savior.

Digging Deeper

Lam.5:21; Ps.80:3, 7, 19; Acts 11:18; Acts 5:31; 2 Tim.2:25;
Ps.51:2-4; Eph.2:3; 2 Cor.1:9; Isa.1:18-20; Rom.13:12

Water Baptism

Jesus gave the Church two sacraments to keep: water baptism and the Lord's supper (communion). John Calvin, in his book Institutes of the Christian Religion, defines a sacrament as "an outward sign by which the Lord represents and attests to us His good will toward us to sustain the weakness of our faith."

A sacrament is a seal, an emblem of ownership and authenticity of God's covenant (an agreement between two parties) promise. As circumcision is the seal of Abraham's covenant, water baptism is the seal of the new covenant with Christ Jesus.

1. What three things are essential for beginning the Christian life? (Acts 2:38)

2. What was the immediate response of those who believed the Gospel? (Acts 2:41, 8:34-39, 16:29-33)

3. When Peter saw that the Gentiles had repented and received the filling of the Holy Spirit, what did he have them do? (Acts 10:47-48)

Repentance, baptism, and being filled with the Holy Spirit are not three separate options, but are unified actions. What separates Christian water baptism from a Saturday night bath? God's Word!

As value is added to paper when ink is stamped on it to make a hundred dollar bill, God establishes value in the act of water baptism with His Word. Though baptism is not required to receive eternal life, God commanded it to follow repentance to confirm His promise of salvation.

4. Why did Jesus come to earth to die? (Heb.2:14-15)

5. What are you identifying with and confirming when you are baptized? (Rom.6:3-4)

6. In what way are you united with Jesus? (Rom.6:5)

7. By what name are you to be baptized? (Matt.28:19; Acts 8:16)

Baptism is part of your identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. When you repented of your sin, you died to your old life by faith. What do you do with a dead body? You bury it.

Like a dead man who cannot bury himself, you are to be baptized by other believers in the authority of Jesus' name to signify the burial of your old life of sin. The word baptism in fact means to immerse. You would not consider sprinkling dirt over the head of a dead man a proper burial, likewise sprinkling water over your head is not a proper baptism.

Also, you would never consider burying someone unless he was dead. Baptizing an infant or anyone else who has not repented of his old life of sin will not accomplish the work of God by faith.

8. What was John's baptism? (Luke 3:3)

9. What instructions did Paul give to those who had been baptized into John's baptism? (Acts 19:1-6)

John's baptism was one of preparation for repentance. Those who were baptized by John the Baptist were admitting their need to have their sins forgiven. After Jesus rose from the dead, a baptism of preparation was no longer necessary since repentance is granted through Him.

Note: Jesus was baptized by John to fulfill the initiation ordinance for priesthood and to identify Himself with fallen humanity (Luke 3:21; Ex.40:12-15; Heb.2:17-18; Phil.2:6-8). Jesus became the High Priest once and for all to make atonement for all of mankind.

10. What will water baptism do for you? (1 Pet.3:21)

11. What appeal is made in baptism? (1 Pet.3:21)

The word "save" means deliverance from danger and harm, and is not limited to eternal life. Baptism "saves" you from the harm that fear and doubt can bring to an unclear conscience. When God confirms His covenant in baptism, confidence arises in your heart that you have indeed been forgiven and cleansed of sin and that you walk in newness of life.

Nevertheless going through the motions of baptism will not help you. Only when you repent of sin and trust in Jesus alone for salvation can you truly experience the benefits of baptism.

12. What is baptism likened to? (Col.2:11-12)

13. What is a true circumcision? (Rom.2:28-29)

14. What is God's intention for a circumcised heart? (Deut.30:6)

Baptism attests to you that you have been cleansed of sin. By faith, you identify with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection through water baptism. In baptism the Holy Spirit confirms in your heart the covenant promise of salvation.

Digging Deeper

Gen.17:11; Deut.10:6; Rom.2:28-29; Rom.6:6-10; Rom.4:9-12; Phil.3:3

The Holy Spirit

How can God have a personal relationship with you and the rest of the Church simultaneously? Are you to live the Christian life on your own? Who is the Holy Spirit and what does He want to do in your life?

The next two studies will help you answer those questions and help you understand the nature and mission of the third member of the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—separate in identity yet equal in essence).

1. What was promised in the Old Testament concerning the new covenant? (Ezek.36:26-27)

2. What did Jesus promise? (Matt.28:20)

3. What did Jesus say would be to your advantage? Why? (John 16:7)

4. What are other names for the Holy Spirit? (John 14:17, 26; Matt.10:20; Gal.4:6)

The Greek word for helper, counselor, or comforter is *parakletos* meaning "one called alongside to help." Jesus, when He was on earth as a man, could only be in one place at a time. Only after Jesus died and rose again could He, by the Holy Spirit, come to live within all believers.

5. How will the Holy Spirit help you? (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8; Rom.8:26-27)

6. How else does the Holy Spirit help you? (2 Tim.1:14)

7. What else will the Holy Spirit do? (John 15:26; 16:8)

The Christian life is supernatural; God never expected you to be a believer on your own ability. Only by the Holy Spirit's help can you live this supernatural life.

8. How are you born again? (John 3:6, 8)

9. What does the Holy Spirit tell you? (Rom.8:16; Gal.4:6)

10. What are you if you are a Christian? (1 Cor.3:16)

11. Where does the Holy Spirit dwell? (1 Cor.3:16)

12. When you are born again, what is your relationship with the Holy Spirit? (1 Cor.6:17)

When you were born again, the Holy Spirit immersed (1 Cor.12:13) you into membership of the Body of Christ. By the Holy Spirit abiding in you, your prayers need to go no further than your heart to reach God.

13. What are you not to do? (1 Thess.5:19)

14. What can grieve the Holy Spirit? (Eph.4:30-31)

15. What can set you against God? (Rom.8:5-8)

Knowing that He lives in you will deeply affect the way you live and think. You would never want to do anything to hurt a close friend or family member, yet when you forget or abuse the relationship, sorrow can result. Similarly you can do things unwittingly that offend or displease the Holy Spirit when you go your own way and forget He is with you.

16. How can you avoid opposing and grieving the Holy Spirit?
(Gal.5:16)

17. What is the result of your mind set on the Spirit? (Rom.8:6)

The Holy Spirit desires to lead you in the Christian life because, apart from His assistance, you can easily go astray on your own. Trust the Holy Spirit to be your helper and comforter, the One to change you into the person He wants you to be. In the next study you will discover how to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Digging Deeper

2 Tim.1:7; 1 Cor.2:9-12; Ps.139:7; Gal.3:2-3

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

There is a story about a Welsh woman who lived in a valley far away from any city. She was a simple, hardworking woman who knew little about the ways of the outside world. At great expense to herself, she had electricity installed in her little cottage.

A while later a neighbor asked her, "You use the electric lights so little, I wonder if it was worth what it cost you to have them put in?" "Oh, it was," answered the woman, "I switch them on every night to see in order to light my lamps. Then I switch them off!"

Think of it! With great power at her command at the flip of a switch, she continued the weary task of trimming wicks, pouring oil, and lighting smelly lamps!

You may laugh at this story, yet how often have you, as a Christian, not taken advantage of the power the Holy Spirit has made freely available?

1. How was Jesus enabled to do so much in His ministry?
(Luke 4:18; Matt.12:28)

2. Before Jesus released His disciples to their ministries, what did He tell them to do? (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5)

3. What were the disciples to receive? (Acts 1:8)

The Greek word for power is *dunamis* meaning force and ability (this is the root from which the word "dynamite" is derived). The primary sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is power—God's dynamite power. While the power varies in form from one person to another, the power of God will manifest when you are baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Is it any wonder that Jesus told His disciples to wait until the Holy Spirit had come upon them? He knew that they could not do the work of God without the power of God. It wasn't enough that the disciples had spent three years with the Son of God; or knew Him intimately; or were personally instructed by Him; or watched Him cure illnesses, cast out demons, raise the dead, calm storms and feed 5,000 men with a brown bag lunch!

Evidently, Jesus knew they still needed help from Someone, Someone Whom even Jesus needed in His earthly ministry: the Holy Spirit.

4. What did Jesus say the born again experience was like? (John 4:14)

5. What is the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit like? (John 7:38-39)

6. When did the disciples first receive the Holy Spirit? (John 20:22)

7. When did the disciples first receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:1-4)

The difference between the Holy Spirit indwelling you and filling you is like the distinction between a well and a river: they both have the same quality, water, yet differ in quantity or magnitude.

The born again experience is comparable to pouring water into a cup; the filling of the Holy Spirit is like taking the same cup of water and immersing it into an immense ocean. At the time you were born again, the Holy Spirit came to live inside you and to unite with your human spirit. When you ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, He energizes you with His overflowing power to live the supernatural Christian life.

8. Who can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit? (Luke 11:13)

9. What signs will follow believers? (Mark 16:17-18)

10. For what purpose are these signs given? (Mark 16:20)

11. How did the apostle Peter know that the Gentiles had become born again and were ready to be baptized? (Acts 10:44-48)

12. What does the Holy Spirit do for you? (Eph.1:13-14)

The Holy Spirit is a seal, a sign of ownership and authentication, for you as a believer. The Holy Spirit witnesses to you and others that you are one of God's children.

13. Who is the baptism of the Holy Spirit promised to? (Acts 2:39)

14. What is among the first manifestations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6)

15. What do you do when you speak in an unknown tongue? (1 Cor.14:2, 4; Jude 20)

16. What part of you is praying when you speak in an unknown tongue? (1 Cor.14:14)

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would fill any believer who asks Him. The Holy Spirit is a "gentleman" who will not force Himself upon anyone unwilling to receive His fullness (Luke 11:11-13). Yet you must ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, believing that He will answer your request.

Tongues, which is the spiritual gift of speaking an unlearned and often unknown language, is not required for being filled with the Holy Spirit. However this manifestation is one of the signs of a personal yielding to the Spirit of God and the sign the early Church looked for in believers receiving the Holy Spirit.

The Bible strongly encourages speaking in tongues because of the benefits derived from the gift. Most of the spiritual gifts God gives are for helping others, yet the gift of tongues is for the primary purpose of encouraging and edifying the individual believer. Remember, you need to be built up first before you can build up others.

17. What are you to do? (Eph.5:18)

The filling of the Holy Spirit is not just a one-time event. Though there is an initial filling when you are baptized in the Holy Spirit, you are to seek Him to fill you continually for the power to live the kind of life God wants you to live.

The Holy Spirit will give you the power to obey the Bible, the power to do what seems impossible, and the power to change areas in your life that seem unchangeable. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can overcome all obstacles that stand in the way of fulfilling God's will for your life.

Digging Deeper

Isa.28:11-12; 1 Cor.14:39-40; Acts 4:8; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-21

The New Life

When you became a Christian you did not just choose another religion. Something supernatural happened to you when you were born again.

1. What are you in Jesus? (2 Cor.5:17)

2. What was your former life like? (Eph.2:1-2)

3. What has happened to your old life? (Rom.6:6)

The new, born again you is not a patched up version of the old you. You have become something that has not existed before. The way you look at the world has changed because your relation to it has changed. You are now a citizen of God's kingdom and a member of His family endowed with its privileges.

4. What are you to do with your old life? (Eph.4:22)

5. How has your new self been created? (Col.3:10)

6. Who lives in your life now? (Gal.2:20; Col.1:27)

7. Why did Jesus give Himself for you? (Titus 2:14)

God has given you a new life with a new lifestyle. Jesus wants you to live like He did and He wants His life to be seen through you.

8. What is God doing in your life? (2 Cor.3:18)

9. What has God predestined for you as a Christian? (Rom.8:29)

You tend to become like those with whom you associate. As you spend time with God in prayer and in reading His Word, a transformation takes place in your life.

10. What do you no longer receive when you are in Jesus? Why? (Rom.8:1-2)

11. How was this freedom accomplished? (Rom.8:3-4)

12. What have you become because of Jesus? (2 Cor.5:21)

God has made you righteous by the work of Jesus on the cross, not according to your deeds. You are no longer charged with guilt for your past sins when you repent of them and trust Jesus for forgiveness. The feelings of shame and condemnation must now be replaced by the truth of God's Word. You were a sinner, but now you are a saint. A sinner is one who practices sin; a saint is one called apart to God.

13. What else has Jesus done for you? (Rom.8:37; 1 John 4:4; Eph.2:10)

14. What three inseparable parts does God want to preserve complete in you? (1 Thess.5:23)

When you repented and received Jesus as Savior and Lord, your spirit was regenerated. Your body however still waits to be made new when you get to heaven. Your soul, which consists of your mind, will, and emotions, has the possibility of being transformed during your lifetime on earth.

As a Christian, your mind is to be renewed by God's Word, your will yielded to God's will, and your emotions brought under control by the power of the Holy Spirit.

15. What happens when you are born again? (1 Cor.6:17)

16. What happens when you walk by the Spirit? (Gal.5:16)

17. What is in opposition to the Spirit? (Gal.5:17)

18. Out of what has God brought you? (1 Pet.2:9; Col.1:13)

Although you as a believer are united with the Holy Spirit, living by your flesh will stunt your spiritual growth.

The flesh is the inborn, sensual desire and passion for the selfish gratification of the senses and emotions. Pleasure seeking, self-serving lust, anger, gluttony, and self-centeredness are a few manifestations of the flesh. When you are born again, you are born into a battle against your flesh, Satan, and his demons; nevertheless Jesus living in you by the Holy Spirit is greater than your flesh and the devil.

One of the lies the devil uses to bring hatred and destruction to mankind is the theory of evolution as an explanation for man's existence. The theory of evolution is at the heart of racism, a belief that different groups of people evolved by chance at different rates resulting in differences categorized into races based on skin color, physical features, or culture. Take note: few people who hold to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution would admit that the full title to his book Origin of the Species is really On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life.

The truth is there are only two "races" of people: those born of Adam and those born again in Jesus (1 Cor.15:39, 47-49). Everyone can trace their ancestry back to Adam. When you are born again by the Holy Spirit, you become a child in God's family, and an ambassador of reconciliation (2 Cor.5:17-20). The only answer to racism is the peace and unity that comes at the cross of Christ.

19. What is your relationship to God now? (Gal.3:26; 4:6-7)

20. Where is God's temple? (1 Cor.3:16, 6:19; 2 Cor.6:16)

Jesus has set up His "holy place" inside your spirit where ongoing worship can take place; therefore you are not limited to worshipping Him in a "church" building on the weekend.

21. What are you in Jesus? (Eph.2:6; Rom.8:17; Eph.1:3)

22. How are you to realize these truths? (Eph.4:15)

The moment you were born again you became as righteous as you will ever be—the righteousness of God. As you mature in Christ, you will begin to realize God's Word concerning you is true. Your focus is to honor Jesus for what He is doing right in your life, not on what you have done wrong.

To encourage yourself, spend time thinking about your place in God's family. Begin seeing yourself in light of what the Bible says about you; let the Word form an image of security, purity, righteousness, and acceptance in your mind by faith. When you feel discouraged, spiritually attacked, or condemned for no reason, read the scripture and make God's promises part of your confession to remind yourself of who you are in Christ. What God's Word says about you is the true reality.

Digging Deeper

Rom.6:22; Phil.4:13; 1 John 3:2; 2 Cor.2:14; Rom.8:37; Col.2:10

Loving God's Word

The Bible is an amazing book written over a span of 1600 years by some 40 different authors, yet the continuity and agreement is seamless. Have you ever wondered why the Bible has been challenged for authenticity over any other book?

Unlike the books of other world religions, if the Bible were inconsistent or self-contradictory, there would be little basis for the Christian faith. However, no other book has withstood the criticism of history, science, or archeology like the Bible. The books of the other world religions are never taken serious in those fields and for the most part are passed off as spiritual prose. In contrast, the Bible continues to speak to every area of life and just as valid today as it ever was.

Think about it, is it really that impossible for an all-powerful and all-knowing God to communicate to ordinary men of His choosing to record His thoughts and guidance? It's a wonder in itself that God would condescend to man to speak to us at all. Yet He did.

With that in mind you would expect to find His book accurate about life and about the future. And you should. Did you know the Bible has over 2,000 prophecies documented fulfilled. The Bible spoke of a spherical earth and of ocean currents long before astronomy and oceanography bore these facts out. Nevertheless the real proof is in reading the Bible for your self.

1. What is the purpose of the scriptures? (Gal.3:24)

2. How were the scriptures given? (2 Tim.3:16; 2 Pet.1:20-21)

3. Who helps you to understand the Bible? (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27)

Reading God's Word, the Bible, is not a mere intellectual pursuit. God desires that you get to know Him through the revelation of His Word (His thoughts, opinions, and ideas written out for your benefit) by the Holy Spirit.

4. What is another name for Jesus? (John 1:1, 14)

5. If you love Jesus what will you do? (John 14:21, 23-24)

6. What must you do if Jesus is Lord of your life? (Luke 6:46)

When you love God's Word, you also display a love for Jesus. Your love for Jesus will not exceed a love for His Word. If Jesus is your Lord, His Word is the final authority for your life.

7. What should your attitude be towards God's word?
(1 Pet.2:2; 2 Tim.2:15; Job 23:12; James 1:21)

8. God promised Joshua success in the mission He gave to him. How was this to happen? (Josh.1:8)

God's Word is true soul food. To grow as a believer you must feed on God's Word regularly. A habit of reading the Bible takes time to develop, yet as you read God's Word, your desire for it will grow. Though you are not serving God selfishly to gain success, success will follow from having God's Word in your heart.

9. Where were you an enemy of God? (Col.1:21)

10. What does the Bible say about the mind? (Rom.8:6-7)

11. What does the Bible exhort you to do? (Rom.12:2; Eph.4:23)

12. How is your mind renewed? (Eph.5:26-27)

13. How does God describe His Word? (Heb.4:12)

14. What are you able to do if you know God's word? (Heb.5:14)

Your mind is either God's friend or His foe. God wants to scrub your mind of those thoughts that oppose Him by the powerful cleansing agent of His Word. As you learn God's Word, your thoughts become more like His thoughts making your choice between right from wrong easier.

15. What alienates you from the life of God? (Eph.4:17-18)

16. What are you to do with your thoughts? (2 Cor.10:5)

17. What has Satan done? (2 Cor.4:4)

God wants you to walk in the light; Satan wants you to walk in the darkness of sin and ignorance away from the Bible. If Satan can keep God's Word out of your heart, he has a chance of robbing you of God's blessings. The darkness left in your life unchallenged by scripture is Satan's main opening for attack.

18. What weapon is God's Word? (Eph.6:17)

19. How can you keep your life pure and free from darkness?
(Ps.119: 9)_____

20. Compare the wise and foolish men. If you want to be wise, what should you do? (Matt.7:24-27)

21. What will God's Word become to you when you take it to heart as did Jeremiah? (Jer.15:16)

The Bible is a precious gift from God to you. Your life must be firmly based on it to grow as a Christian. For your own benefit, your opinions must take second place to God's Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach the Bible to you. Hold fast to the promises you discover. Put your hope in the Word and believe.

Digging Deeper

Hosea 4:6; Deut.11:18-25; Acts 20:32; 2 Pet.1:4; Luke 8:21; Prov.4:20-22; Ps.119:9-11, 45-46, 89, 98-100, 103, 105; Matt.24:35

Faith Toward God

Faith makes it possible for you to receive what God has done and makes God's promises real in your life. Discovering true biblical faith will change your life.

1. What does it take to please God? (Heb.11:6)

2. What is faith? (Heb.11:1)

3. How does faith come to you? (Rom.10:17)

4. Who initiates your faith? (Heb.12:2; Eph.2:8; John 3:27)

Hope is a confident expectation that God's Word is going to come true for you in the future. Faith springs from God out of hope when He assures you that what you are hoping for will definitely happen. There are two Greek words in the New Testament for "word": the first is *logos*, meaning written word, the second is *rhema*, meaning spoken word.

Faith comes by the rhema word of God. To act upon a promise (logos word) without the assurance (rhema word) that God has granted it can be presumptuous. God has His timing for when His Word will be fulfilled in your life. The wonderful thing is God wants His promises to come true for you more than you do!

5. Why is faith important to you? (Rom.3:28; Rom.1:17; 1 John 5:4; 2 Cor.1:24; 2 Cor.5:7; Eph.6:16)

6. How does faith work? (Gal.5:6)

Love wants God's best for others. Therefore faith is for the advancement of God's kingdom, not for selfish gain.

7. What should you do to do the work of God? (John 6:28-29)

8. What did Mary say when God's word came to her?
(Luke 1:38) _____

9. What must accompany God's promises for you to receive them? (Heb.4:2)

10. Why could Jesus do no mighty works for people in His home town? (Mark 6:5-6)

To believe is to place your hope in and reliance upon God's written word and in the assurance (faith) God gives you concerning His promise. Doubt is an expectation that what God has promised will not happen. If you do not expect God's promise to come true, apart from God's overriding will and grace, you will probably not receive the desired benefit.
11. What does hope do for you? (Heb.6:19)

12. What are you not to do with your hope? (Heb.10:35)

13. What else must accompany faith to receive a promise from God? (Heb.6:12)

14. What is the life of faith? (1 Tim.6:12)

15. Who is your enemy? (1 Pet.5:8-9)

16. What do Satan and his demons try to steal from you?
(Mark 4:15-19)

A hope placed in God's Word is an anchor to your soul to keep you from drifting away from God and His promises. There are times when you must persevere in hope before you are able to receive faith from God. After receiving faith, you must hold onto God's assurance until the promise is realized.

Meanwhile, Satan wants to steal God's Word from your heart by tempting you to stray from the Word. Clinging to the hope in God's Word, while resisting doubt and fear, is your fight of faith.

17. What are you to look to? (2 Cor.4:18)

An example in the Bible of not looking at the natural circumstances and of clinging to the promise is the story of Abraham.

Read Romans 4:1-25.
18. What circumstances did Abraham face? (vs.19)

19. Did the circumstances weaken his faith? (vs.20)

20. What was his response to the circumstances? (vs.20)

21. What did Abraham consider above the circumstances? (vs.21)

There are other times when circumstances may appear hopeless regarding God's promises. At these times you must hold fast to hope in His Word. Though the obstacles are real, God's ability is far greater.
22. What is God's desire for your faith? (2 Cor.10:15)

23. What does God allow to happen and why? (James 1:2-3)

God wants your faith, the assurance He gives you, to grow. Like a muscle that needs to overcome the resistance of weights to develop and strengthen, faith needs trials and obstacles to overcome for growth.

24. What is faith without the accompanying works? (James 2:26)

Works are the fruit of faith. As you act on the assurance God gives you, works result. Put your hope in God's Word and listen for His assurance of the promise. Let God's faith arise in your heart to overcome the mountains that keep you from fulfilling God's will for your life.

Digging Deeper

Heb.11:3-39; Ps.27:13; Mark 11:22-23; Rom.12:3; 2 Cor.4:13;
Rom.9:31-32; James 1:6-8, 22-24

Knowing God

Have you ever wondered why God created you? Does He need you for His existence? Is there anything you can do for God that He cannot do for Himself? The answer to those questions is a resounding "No!"

Nevertheless God loves you and He created you to know and love Him. God desires a relationship with you; He wants to talk with you. This conversation with God is called prayer.

1. What pleases God? (Prov.15:8)

2. Why does God want your heart pure? (Matt.5:8; Psalm 24:3-4)

The study on repentance (*A Change of Heart*) becomes more important in light of spending time with God. Although God accepts you because of the blood of Jesus, your relationship with Him can be hindered by the darkness you allow in your life.

3. What does God want and what privilege does He grant in return? (John 15:5, 7)

4. What assurance do you have from God? (1 John 5:14-15)

God, as a loving Father, answers your requests because of His covenant promise and love; not because you have a right to an answer.

5. How are you not to feel? What are you to do when in need? What will result from prayer? (Phil.4:6-7)

6. How should you be in God's presence? (Psalm 46:10)

You cannot strive through your own effort to get closer to God; Jesus has done everything needed for you to talk to your heavenly Father. Often, God just wants you to sit still with Him as a child would rest in a father's lap. And there are times you will draw closer to God as you work along side Him to advance His kingdom. Being still in God's presence does not mean an absence of activity; it means that your heart is free from anxiety and fear, at rest and secure in His care.

- 7. What do you find when you approach God? (Heb.4:16)

- 8. What else do you receive when you spend time with God? (Isa.40:29-31)

God has the answer for every problem you have. In your weak and needy times, God wants to be your strength.

- 9. What attitude will hinder you from going to God? (Rev.3:17)

- 10. What are two reasons for not receiving from God? (James 4:2-3)

- 11. What does God resist? (James 4:6-7)

- 12. What other things can hinder your prayers? (James 1:6-7; 1 Pet.3:7; Psalm 66:18)

Pride, selfishness, and wrong motives will hinder your fellowship with God. Pride is an attitude that denies the need for any help; humility is an attitude that recognizes dependence upon God for assistance.

- 13. How did Jesus say not to pray? Why? (Matt.6:7-8)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____

- 14. What doesn't God want you do? (Luke 18:1)

- 15. What happened for the persistent widow? (Luke 18:2-5)

- 16. What will God do in comparison to the unrighteous judge? (Luke 18:6-8)

- 17. What must you do to receive an answer from God? (Matt.7:7-8)

God is not impressed by an abundance of empty words, nor does eloquence or loudness of speech in your prayer move him. Prayer reduced to a mechanical formula does not touch His heart either.

Nonetheless God wants you to persist with a sincere and believing heart in coming to Him for the answers to your requests. Without a belief that God will answer you, you will only go through the motions half-heartedly in attempting to approach God.

- 18. What happens when you agree on anything in prayer with another person? (Matt.18:19-20)

- 19. On behalf of whom should you pray? (1 Tim.2:1-2)

- 20. Why should you pray for these people? (1 Tim.2:2-3)

Sometimes God chooses to answer your request only when you pray with someone else. He also asks that you pray on behalf of others, a kind of prayer called intercession.

21. What will help you discern God's voice from your own thoughts? (Heb.4:12)

22. Who helps you in prayer? How? (Rom.8:26-27)

If the president of your country invited you to meet with him in his office, you would consider it a great honor. God, Supreme Ruler of the Universe, has granted you an even greater honor to spend time with Him every day in prayer.

The best advice for prayer is to talk with God as you would with a father you love and respect. There are many ways God uses to communicate His will to you: a quiet impression in your soul, a scripture that becomes alive to you, the advice of another Christian, and even circumstances. Whichever way God may speak to you, reading the Bible will help you understand and recognize His voice. Remember: prayer is supernatural, so trust the Holy Spirit to help you pray.

In the next Victory Foundation study book, Growing in Victory, you will discover how the Holy Spirit goes beyond helping you in your weakness and leads you into greater maturity as a Christian.

Digging Deeper

Ezek.22:30; Luke 18:9-14; 1 Cor.2:9-12; 1 Thess.5:17;
James 5:13-16; Mark 11:24; 1 Cor.7:5; 1 Pet.4:7



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