The Bible *Unpacked*

Foundations Edition

The Bible's teaching condensed for young believers

Paul Mallison

With the *NET Bible* plus other translations

The Bible Unpacked™

Foundations Edition

The Bible's teaching condensed for young believers

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This copy was made on: 9-Nov-24.

This work is dedicated to the members of the persecuted church, faithful to Jesus Christ.

Users are asked to pray regularly for persecuted Christians and, if possible, support them financially. These things can be done through organizations that provide both aid to them and prayer notices, such as those listed at: www.thebibleunpacked.net/persecuted-christians.

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Foreword

About this book

The aim of this book is to give a brief overview of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order, primarily using the Bible itself – i.e. verses taken from the Bible.

The chapters contain major headings, which in turn contain groups of sub-headings. The subheadings are followed by verses, from which they have been derived. The parts of the verses that the subheadings reflect are in italics. Some verses are followed by a comment.

To help readers have a grasp of the context of verses, often a brief introduction is included, in square brackets. These introductions usually just state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the most prominent speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Solomon and other wise teachers – who wrote the astute insights in the books called Proverbs and Ecclesiastes;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers and churches.

Tips for reading this book

Much care has been taken to interpret the verses in the light of both the passage they are from and Scripture as a whole. Nevertheless, if you think a verse has been used out of context, read the chapter in the Bible from which it is taken. See Hyperlinks to biblia.com.

Rather than reading this book from start to finish, for variety read chapters alternatively from the two major sections of the book, *What to Know* and *What to Do*.

Endorsements

Note that a number of the following endorsements are for *The Bible Unpacked* series in general or for editions other than this one.

The author has done a great job in collecting and arranging texts under doctrinal and practical headings.

Dr Paul Barnett, Bishop and noted author

I highly recommend The Bible Unpacked for its use both in evangelism and helping people grow in their Christian faith.

Dr Peter Ralphs, Former Principal of Bible College of Queensland

Paul Mallison has compiled an excellent resource for the seeker through to mature Christians.

Glyn Henman, CEO of Young Life Australia

I am a big fan of the Intermediate level one. I carry it everywhere with me.

Gary Irvine, YWAM Leader

About the Author

Paul Mallison has a BA Dip Ed from Macquarie University, Sydney. He has spent the majority of his working life teaching students from a cross section of ages and backgrounds. In his work he has composed numerous teaching materials.

Paul is a son of best-selling Australian author and international educator, the late Rev. Dr John Mallison. He is credited with extensive work on the final draft of the last two of his father's 20 published books.

He considers the theology of his The Bible Unpacked material to be "evangelical". As for a statement of faith, he adheres to the Apostle's Creed. Paul lives in Sydney, Australia.

Navigating This File

Hyperlinks – All Colored Text

Any colored text is a hyperlink. Headings in the main contents and in the *Major Headings* list are hyperlinks to the headings in the text. The page numbers in the *Scripture Index* and *Subject Index* are hyperlinks to the verses and topics listed.

If using *Adobe Reader*, to ensure that the target of a hyperlink will always be displayed at the top of the screen, from the View menu select Page Display and then Enable Scrolling –or Two Page Scrolling. Note that this file may not display correctly if it is opened in *Preview*, an Apple program. On an Apple device, use *Apple Books* (formerly *iBooks*) instead.

After clicking a hyperlink, to return to it, use Alt + ← (i.e. hold down the Alt key and press the left arrow key). On an Apple computer use Command + ←. If the focus has since moved to another page in the meantime, you will need to do this more than once.

Hyperlinks to biblia.com – to Check Context

With internet access, click a verse's reference to see the verse in its chapter at biblia.com, in the *NET Bible*. This allows users to check the context of a verse.

If you get a security warning asking whether you trust the website, ensure Remember this action for this site for all PDF documents is checked and then click Allow.

Quick Navigation Page

The last page in the file has hyperlinks to all: chapters; lists of section headings; Bible books in the *Scripture Index*; letters in the *Subject Index*; and other main headings.

This can be quickly accessed by pressing the **End key** – or **Ctrl** + **End**. On an Apple computer use Command + End.

Section I.

What to Know

Unit A

God and Spiritual Powers

1. God's Being

To begin to understand the Bible, we must know what God is like. This chapter teaches key fundamentals, providing the basic concepts for understanding how awesome God is.

God's Form

God is one

[Jesus, quoting Moses:] Listen, Israel, *the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* Mark 12:29b NET

God is a single thing. He is only one being.

God is spirit

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:24 NCV™

God is a spiritual being. He is not physical like people are.

God is everywhere

[God:] *I am everywhere— both near and far,* [24]*in heaven and on earth.* Jeremiah 23:23-24a CEV

God has great glory

They [kings] will sing about the ways of the Lord, for *great is the glory of the Lord!* Psalms 138:5 ISV

God's glory is a prominent part of his actual being. In fact his presence is sometimes described in terms of his glory. God's glory is also revealed or reflected in his extraordinary deeds.

God's Eternity

God has always been alive

Your throne, O Lord, has been firm from the beginning, and you existed before time began. Psalms 93:2 GNT

God will live forever

[Nebuchadnezzar:] Then I gave praise to *the Most High God*; I gave honor and glory to *him who lives forever. God's rule is forever, and his kingdom continues for all time.* Daniel 4:34b NCV™

God does not change

All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from *the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change*. James 1:17 NET

God's Power and Knowledge

God can do all things – nothing is too hard

[Job, to God:] *I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted; …* Job 42:2 NET

[The angel Gabriel, to Mary:] Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. [37]*Nothing is impossible for God!* Luke 1:36-37 CEV

God knows everything

God is greater than our conscience and *knows all things*. 1 John 3:20b NET

God even knows the future

[God, speaking to his people:] *From the beginning I told you what would happen in the end. A long time ago I told you things that have not yet happened.* When I plan something, it happens. What I want to do, I will do. Isaiah 46:10 NCV™

God has incredible wisdom

Our Lord is great and has awesome power; *there is no limit to his wisdom*. Psalms 147:5 NET

2. God's Character

In order to relate to God, we need to know who God is – what his character is like. In tackling this topic, this chapter includes teaching on the two primary personal characteristics of God, from which his other characteristics come. These are his holiness and his love.

God's Holiness

God is holy

Holy, holy, holy! The LORD Almighty is holy! ISAIAH 6:3B GNT

Being holy means that God is morally pure. It also means that he is separate from and intolerant of anything which is not morally pure.

There is nothing bad in God

[A PSALMIST:] They will say that the LORD is good. He is my Rock, and *there is no wrong in him*. PSALMS 92:15 NCV™

God cannot tolerate evil

[HABAKKUK, TO GOD:] *You are too just to tolerate evil; you are unable to condone wrongdoing.* HABAKKUK 1:13A NET

God's Righteousness and Faithfulness

All God does is right and just

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, for *all his deeds are right and his ways are just*. DANIEL 4:37A NET

[BELIEVERS, TO GOD:] *Just and true are your ways*, King over the nations! REVELATION 15:3B NET

God does not lie nor change his mind – he keeps his promises

God is no mere human! *He doesn't tell lies or change his mind. God always keeps his promises.* NUMBERS 23:19 CEV

God's Anger

God's anger is awesome

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *No one knows the full power of your furious anger,* but it is as great as the fear that we owe to you. PSALMS 90:11 CEV

God is slow to anger and does not stay angry

The LORD is merciful and loving, slow to become angry and full of constant love. [9]He does not keep on rebuking; *he is not angry for ever.* PSALMS 103:8-9 GNT

God's Love and Mercy

God is love

The person who doesn't love doesn't know God, because *God is love.* [9]*God has shown us his love by sending his only Son into the world so that we could have life through him.* 1 JOHN 4:8-9 GW

> The phrase "God is love" (v. 8) implies that God's nature is fundamentally love, rather than that love is simply a characteristic of God. It also reflects that God is the sole source of love.

God is merciful and compassionate

[JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] You have heard of Job's patience, and you know how the Lord provided for him in the end. For *the Lord is full of mercy and compassion.* JAMES 5:11B GNT

God's Goodness

God is good

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You are good and you do good.* PSALMS 119:68A NET

God exercises kindness

[A PSALMIST:] *How can I repay the LORD for all his acts of kindness to me?* PSALMS 116:12 NET

3. Jesus Christ

What distinguishes Christianity from other religions is largely its teachings about Jesus Christ. This chapter looks at this central figure, including the amazing claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Jesus Christ's Eternity

Jesus Christ existed in the beginning

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know *Christ who has existed from the beginning*. 1 JOHN 2:13A GW

Jesus Christ existed before the world was created.

Jesus Christ will be alive forever

But *Jesus lives forever, so he serves as a priest forever*. HEBREWS 7:24 GW

Jesus Christ remains the same

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever! HEBREWS 13:8 NET

Jesus Christ's Pre-Eminence

Jesus Christ has sovereign power

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF CHRIST:] By *his power to rule all things,* he will change our simple bodies and make them like his own glorious body. PHILIPPIANS 3:20B-21 NCV™

Jesus Christ has supreme knowledge and wisdom

[THE DISCIPLES, TO JESUS:] Now we know that *you know everything*. JOHN 16:30A GW

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *I will give you words and wisdom that none of your enemies will be able to oppose or prove wrong.* LUKE 21:15 GW

Jesus Christ has wisdom far superior to that of any enemy that believers may encounter.

Jesus Christ is everywhere

So Jesus came down, and he is the same One who went up above all the sky. *Christ did that to fill everything with his presence.* Ephesians 4:10 NCV™

The whole universe is filled with Jesus Christ's presence.

Jesus Christ's Character

Jesus Christ is holy

[Believers, to God:] Then they turned against *your holy Servant Jesus,* your chosen Messiah. Acts 4:27 CEV

Jesus Christ is righteous

[John, to believers:] But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, *Jesus Christ the righteous One,* ... 1 John 2:1b NET

Jesus Christ is loving

[Paul, to the believers in Ephesus:] And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to *understand the greatness of Christ's love—how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is.* 19*Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know,* but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:18-19 NCV™

Jesus Christ's Divinity

Jesus Christ is the Son of God

We have a great high priest, who has gone into heaven, and he is *Jesus the Son of God*. Hebrews 4:14a CEV

Jesus Christ has the nature and fullness of God

He always had the nature of God … PHILIPPIANS 2:6A GNT

For *God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son …* COLOSSIANS 1:19 NET

4. The Holy Spirit

To have a good understanding of God, it is vital that we know about the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is God's Spirit. As such the Holy Spirit is closely linked with God and what he does.

Note that in regard to the Holy Spirit and God's people, see the second half of *17. Keys to God's Interaction*, p. 53.

The Holy Spirit and God

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God

The earth [in the beginning] was barren, with no form of life; it was under a roaring ocean covered with darkness. But *the Spirit of God* was moving over the water. GENESIS 1:2 CEV

> The Holy Spirit is God's spirit. As such one should bear in mind that when the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit, it is in effect speaking of God himself. This is reflected by the Holy Spirit's divine characteristics, spoken of later in this chapter.

The Holy Spirit is linked with God's presence

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] The people who obey God's commands live in God, and God lives in them. *We know that God lives in us because of the Spirit God gave us.* 1 JOHN 3:24 NCV™

> This verse links the Holy Spirit with God's presence by teaching that because believers have God's Spirit, God lives in them.

God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are very closely associated

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them *in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ...* MATTHEW 28:19 NET

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* 2 CORINTHIANS 13:14 NCV™

The Holy Spirit's Divine Characteristics

The Holy Spirit is everywhere

[David, to God:] *Where could I go to escape from your Spirit* or from your sight? Psalms 139:7 CEV

The Holy Spirit is eternal

Through *the eternal Spirit* he offered himself to God and cleansed our consciences from the useless things we had done. Now we can serve the living God. Hebrews 9:14b GW

The Holy Spirit has sovereign power

[John, to believers:] *God's Spirit is in you and is more powerful than the one that is in the world* [Satan]. 1 John 4:4b CEV

> The description of the Holy Spirit as greater than Satan – "the one that is in the world" – shows the Spirit's great power.

The Holy Spirit has complete knowledge

For *the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God*. 1 Corinthians 2:10 ISV

> This speaks of the Holy Spirit searching out or finding out all things (cf. CEV, NCV, NLT).

The Holy Spirit Is Personal

The Holy Spirit communicates

[Paul, to believers:] But *the Spirit himself speaks to God for us,* even begs God for us with deep feelings that words cannot explain. Romans 8:26b NCV™

The Holy Spirit interacts in other ways

The church became stronger, as *the Holy Spirit encouraged it and helped it grow*. Acts 9:31b CEV

[Paul, to believers:] But if *you are led by the Spirit,* you are not under the law. Galatians 5:18 NET

5. Angels, Satan and Demons

To live the Christian life we must be aware of our allies and chief opponents in the spiritual world. The following teaching about them includes reasons to always be wary, but also reasons to be greatly encouraged.

Angels

There are millions of angels, surrounding God

[JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION OF A SCENE IN HEAVEN:] Again I looked, and I heard *angels, thousands and millions of them! They stood round the throne* [of God] *...* REVELATION 5:11 GNT

Angels are powerful beings who serve God

Praise the LORD, you angels of his, you powerful warriors who carry out his decrees and obey his orders! [21]Praise the LORD, all you warriors of his, *you servants of his who carry out his desires!* PSALMS 103:20-21 NET

Angels help and care for God's people

All the angels are spirits who serve God and are sent to help those who will receive salvation. HEBREWS 1:14 NCV™

The LORD's angel camps around the LORD's loyal followers and delivers them. PSALMS 34:7 NET

Satan

Satan is evil and is opposed to God's kingdom

[JESUS, EXPLAINING THE MEANING OF A STORY:] The seeds that fell along the road are the people who hear *the message about the kingdom*, but don't understand it. *Then the evil one* [Satan] *comes and snatches the message from their hearts.* MATTHEW 13:19 CEV

Satan is deceitful

[Jesus, speaking about Satan:] *Whenever he tells a lie, he's doing what comes naturally to him. He's a liar and the father of lies.* John 8:44b GW

Satan has great power and authority in the world

[John, to believers:] We are certain that we come from God and that *the rest of the world is under the power of the devil* [Satan]. 1 John 5:19 CEV

But Satan is not as powerful as God

[John, to believers:] *The God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet.* Romans 16:20a NET

Satan has been condemned

God has already judged the ruler of this world. John 16:11b CEV

Demons

Demons are evil and powerful spiritual beings

[Paul, to believers:] For we are not fighting against human beings but against *the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age.* Ephesians 6:12 GNT

> The terms "rulers", "authorities" and "powers" are indicative of the great – but limited – power of demons.

Demons can possess people and cause them great harm

A Canaanite woman from that area came to Jesus and cried out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! *My daughter has a demon, and she is suffering very much.*" Matthew 15:22 NCV™

Demons fear God

[JAMES, EXHORTING HIS READERS:] *You believe there is one God.* Good! But *the demons believe that, too, and they tremble with fear.* JAMES 2:19 NCV™

Unit B

God and the World: Basics

6. God's Creation

The formation of the universe – including the world and everything in it – is the most astonishing thing that has ever occurred. If we accept the following teaching about God and creation, then we should have little trouble in accepting the other claims that the Bible makes about God.

God Makes Everything

God made the heavens, the earth and everything in them

You are the only LORD. *You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, with all the stars. You made the earth and everything on it, the seas and everything in them; you give life to everything.* NEHEMIAH 9:6A NCV™

Because he made everything, all things belong to God

The heavens and the earth belong to you. And so does the world with all its people because you created them [12]*and everything else.* PSALMS 89:11-12A CEV

Creation is evidence of God and what he is like, to all people

[PAUL, REFERRING TO WICKED PEOPLE:] *They know everything that can be known about God, because God has shown it all to them.* [20]*God's eternal power and character cannot be seen. But from the beginning of creation, God has shown what these are like by all he has made.* That's why those people don't have any excuse. ROMANS 1:19-20 CEV

God Sustains Everything

Every creature's life is dependent on God

The life of every living creature and the spirit in every human body are in his hands. JOB 12:10 GW

God made and sustains all things through Jesus Christ

God created the universe by his Son, and everything will someday belong to the Son. [3]God's Son has all the brightness of God's own glory and is like him in every way. *By his own mighty word, he holds the universe together.* HEBREWS 1:2B-3A CEV

God's Creation of People

God has made people with a spirit

The LORD – he who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, *who forms the human spirit within a person* – says, … ZECHARIAH 12:1B NET

God has made people in his own image

Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness. Let them rule the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the domestic animals all over the earth, and all the animals that crawl on the earth." [27]*So God created humans in his image. In the image of God he created them.* He created them male and female. GENESIS 1:26-27 GW

> That God has made people in his own image is evident in that they reflect such things as his personal traits – e.g. aspects of his character and intellect – and that they have a spirit (as discussed in the previous subsection). Additionally, it is noteworthy that although God essentially is spirit, some descriptions of visions or "appearances" of God speak of him in terms of a human-like form (cf. Ezekiel 1:26-28; Daniel 7:9).

Every person will die

It is better to go to a funeral than a feast. For *death is the destiny of every person, and the living should take this to heart*. ECCLESIASTES 7:2 NET

People's spirits exist after death

As they [Jews] *continued to stone Stephen, he kept praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"* ACTS 7:59 ISV

Pray for persecuted Christians

7. God's Sovereignty

As the one and only God, God has supreme power and control over all things. Comprehending this and its implications is vital to having a sound understanding of God and of his relationship to the world – including his relationship with ourselves.

God Rules Supreme

He is the one and only God

[GOD:] And *there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.* [22]"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! *For I am God, and there is no other.* ISAIAH 45:21B-22 ESV

God rules over all

O LORD, you are great, mighty, majestic, magnificent, glorious, and sovereign over all the sky and earth! You have dominion and exalt yourself as the ruler of all. 1 CHRONICLES 29:11 NET

> Note that "LORD" is what God said is his name. It can be derived from the Hebrew for "I AM" (in Exodus 3:14). It appears to express God's unchanging nature, self-existence, self-determination and being ever-present.

God will reign forever

But *you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.* LAMENTATIONS 5:19 NET

God carries out his plans

The LORD Almighty has sworn an oath: *"What I have planned will happen. What I have determined to do will be done.* ISAIAH 14:24 GNT

God will impose his absolute rule on all

[JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] They said, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because *you*

have taken your great power and have begun to rule. Revelation 11:17 ISV

God Has Control over All Things

God has control over evil

[Paul, to believers:] The only temptation that has come to you is that which everyone has. But you can trust *God, who will not permit you to be tempted more than you can stand. But when you are tempted, he will also give you a way to escape so that you will be able to stand it.* 1 Corinthians 10:13 NCV™

God has control over nature

He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through the clouds. [12]*The clouds go round in circles, wheeling about according to his plans, to carry out all that he commands them over the face of the whole inhabited world.* Job 37:11-12 NET

God has control over the nations

[A psalmist, to God:] May the nations be glad and sing for joy, because *you judge the peoples with justice and guide every nation on earth.* Psalms 67:4 GNT

God Has Control over People

God has control over people's minds

The Lord caused the Egyptians to think well of them, and the Egyptians gave the people everything they asked for. Exodus 12:36A NCV™

God has control over people's actions

[Daniel, to King Belshazzar:] But you have not glorified the *God who has in his control your very breath and all your ways!* Daniel 5:23B NET

God controls all that happens to people

[A WISE TEACHER:] *When life is good, enjoy it. But when life is hard, remember: God gives good times and hard times*, and no one knows what tomorrow will bring. ECCLESIASTES 7:14 NCV™

8. God's Word

God's word is our window to God. For through it we learn about God and his relationship with us. This chapter begins with some basic concepts and then looks at a key aspect of God's word – God's covenant with Israel. This defined God's relationship with his people in the Old Testament and is critical to understanding the New Testament.

General

The Bible is God's word

Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. 2 Timothy 3:16a CEV

The Scriptures are the writings contained in the Bible – God's word.

God's word is true

The words of the Lord are true ... Psalms 33:4a GNT

God's word is active and powerful

God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. Hebrews 4:12 NCV™

God's word can penetrate to the very depths of our inner-selves, exposing our thoughts and attitudes for what they really are.

God's word brings spiritual life

[Jesus:] The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* John 6:63 NET

God's word gives light

[A psalmist, to God:] *Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.* Psalms 119:105 GW

God's word gives "light" – guidance and spiritual insight.

God's Covenant with Israel

A covenant is a firm agreement made between two parties. God's covenants are a key aspect and expression of his word – as are his commands, prophecies and promises.

God made a covenant with Israel, based on the laws he gave through Moses

The LORD *said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."* 28So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread, and he did not drink water. *He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.* EXODUS 34:27-28 NET

If the Israelites obeyed God, then they would be his people and he would be their God

[GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Obey me and carry out the terms of the agreement exactly as I commanded you. If you do, you will be my people and I will be your God.* JEREMIAH 11:4B NET

Faithful obedience to the law would bring righteousness

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *It will be righteousness for us, if we're careful to obey all the law* before the LORD our God, as he commanded. DEUTERONOMY 6:25 ISV

The Ten Commandments

[GOD:] *Do not worship any god except me. ... 5Don't bow down and worship idols. ... 7Do not misuse my name. ... 8Remember that the Sabbath Day belongs to me. ... 10... No one is to work on that day... 12Respect your father and your mother ... 13Do not murder. 14Be faithful in marriage. 15Do not steal. 16Do not tell lies about others. 17Do not want anything that belongs to someone else.* EXODUS 20:3, 5A, 7-8, 10B, 12-17A CEV

The Ten Commandments form the basis of the law that God gave through Moses. This law is sometimes referred to as the Mosaic Law.

9. The Problem of Sin

Knowing what sin is and what its consequences are is vital to understanding both God's relationship with humankind and the need for Jesus Christ's mission. Knowing about the law's provision of "atonement" is also critical to understanding these things.

What and Who

Sin is breaking God's law

Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law, because sin is a breaking of the law. 1 JOHN 3:4 GNT

Sin is committed by all people

All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. ROMANS 3:23 CEV

> The expression "fallen short of God's glory" (v. 23) most likely means that all people have failed to live up to a standard that matches God's glory. Sin is the reason for this.

Consequences of Sin

Sin means that we face God's anger

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Actually *all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds*. In our natural condition *we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.* EPHESIANS 2:3 GNT

> All people have lived sinful lives and face the consequences.

Sin results in physical death

Sin came into the world through one man, and *his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race because everyone has sinned.* ROMANS 5:12 GNT

Note that this verse refers to death initially coming as a consequence of the first sin, committed by the first man, Adam.

Sin brings the prospect of eternal death

For *the payoff of sin is death*, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 6:23 NET

God's holiness and justice mean that unforgiven sin must be punished with everlasting death. It involves everlasting separation from God, in hell.

The Law's Provision for Sin

An animal was offered by a priest to God to make atonement for anyone who sinned

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If any person sins unintentionally, then he must bring a yearling female goat for a purification offering.* [28]*And the priest must make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally ... to make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.* NUMBERS 15:27-28 NET

"Atonement" is where God accepts such an offering or sacrifice of a living being as a substitute for the life of a person who has sinned. God accepts the sacrifice as payment for the person's sin.

The high priest made atonement for Israel as a whole

[GOD, TO MOSES:] ... *he is to make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.* LEVITICUS 16:33B NET

However, Israel did not keep God's law and broke his covenant

Samaria [the capital city of northern Israel] fell because *the Israelites did not obey the LORD their God, but broke the covenant he had made with them and disobeyed all the laws given by Moses,* the servant of the LORD. *They would not listen and they would not obey.* 2 KINGS 18:12 GNT

Despite the law's provision for Israel's sin, the Israelites as a whole persisted in sin – rebelling against God and breaking

his covenant with them. This showed that ultimately the law was not sufficient to deal with sin.

Pray for persecuted Christians

10. God's Judgment

An understanding of God's judgment is needed to understand God himself, and also his salvation for people. Additionally, the topic of God's judgment contains some of the most awe-inspiring teaching, and even reasons for hope for God's people.

Reasons for God's Judgment

God's judgment is to punish sin

[Daniel, to God:] All Israel has broken your law and turned away by not obeying you. *Therefore you have poured out on us the judgment solemnly threatened in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against you.* Daniel 9:11 NET

God's judgment is to discipline his people

[Paul, to believers:] But *when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined* so that we may not be condemned with the world. 1 Corinthians 11:32 NET

God's judgment is to punish the wicked

But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, by being kept for *the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.* 2 Peter 3:7 NET

The Justice of God's Judgment

God judges fairly

[David, to God:] *You are fair and honest in your judgments,* and you have judged in my favour. Psalms 9:4 GNT

God judges correctly

"Yes, Lord God Almighty, *your judgments are true and fair.*" Revelation 16:7b GW

God repays people according to what they have done

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT:] *On that day everyone will see God's right judgments.* [6]*God will reward or punish every person for what that person has done.* ROMANS 2:5B-6 NCV™

God gives fair warning of judgment

[GOD:] *There are times, Jeremiah, when I threaten to uproot, tear down, and destroy a nation or kingdom.* [8]*But if that nation I threatened stops doing wrong, I will cancel the destruction I intended to do to it.* JEREMIAH 18:7-8 NET

What God says here regarding nations is also applicable to individuals.

The Wicked and God's Judgment

People may question God's apparent lack of judgment regarding the wicked

[JEREMIAH:] LORD, when I bring my case to you, you are always right. But *I want to ask you about the justice you give. Why are evil people successful? Why do dishonest people have such easy lives?* JEREMIAH 12:1 NCV™

But in due time God does take action against the wicked

[GOD:] *To me belong vengeance and recompense. In due time their feet will slip, because their time of calamity is near and the things prepared for them draw near.* DEUTERONOMY 32:35 ISV

Pray for persecuted Christians

Unit C

God and the World: Jesus Christ

11. God's Promised Messiah

The Old Testament Scriptures speak of a leader chosen and sent by God to save his people and to reign forever. This leader is known as the "Christ" or the "Messiah" – which are Greek and Hebrew terms respectively, meaning the "anointed" or the "Anointed One".

In New Testament times the Jews looked forward to the Messiah's coming – and many still do today. But the New Testament provides compelling evidence that this Messiah was in fact Jesus Christ.

Promise of a Messiah

Promise that one would arise as a great ruler of Israel

[GOD:] As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, seemingly insignificant among the clans of Judah — from you *a king will emerge who will rule over Israel on my behalf, one whose origins are in the distant past*. MICAH 5:2 NET

Promise that he would bring God's salvation to the nations

[GOD, AS SPEAKING TO THE MESSIAH:] *I will make you a light for all nations to show people all over the world the way to be saved.* ISAIAH 49:6B NCV™

Prophecy of the Messiah's Death for Sins

The Messiah would die for people's sins, but then be raised

But *he was wounded for the wrong we did; he was crushed for the evil we did. The punishment, which made us well, was given to him, and we are healed because of his wounds*. ... [10]But *it was the LORD who decided to crush him and make him suffer. The LORD made his life a penalty offering, but he will still see his descendants and live a long life.* He will

complete the things the LORD wants him to do. [11]*"After his soul suffers many things, he will see life and be satisfied. My good servant will make many people right with God; he will carry away their sins.* ISAIAH 53:5, 10-11 NCV™

Verse 5 speaks of the Messiah's suffering for people's sins bringing them spiritual healing – effectively peace with God. Verse 10 appears to speak of God raising his messianic servant to life (following his death). The term "his descendants" (v. 10b) refers to the servant's spiritual descendants – those who would be given life through him. The resurrection of the Messiah is further spoken of in v. 11.

The Messiah's Identity

The OT Scriptures show that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ

For with his strong arguments he [Apollos] defeated the Jews in public debates by *proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah*. ACTS 18:28 GNT

Jesus' deeds showed that he is the Messiah

Jesus performed many other miracles that his disciples saw. Those miracles are not written in this book. [31]*But these miracles have been written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God*, and so that you will have life by believing in him. JOHN 20:30-31 GW

Jesus Christ came as a human being

By *sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh* and concerning sin, he [God] condemned sin in the flesh, ... ROMANS 8:3B NET

God sent Jesus Christ "in a human body like ours" (NLT).

The Messiah's Purpose

God sent Jesus Christ to take away sins

You know that *Christ came to take away sins*. 1 JOHN 3:5A CEV

God sent Jesus Christ to save the world

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. *He sent him to save them!* JOHN 3:17 CEV

12. Jesus Christ's Mission

In carrying out his mission, Jesus Christ lived a life unparalleled in word and deed. His life culminated in his sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection. The Bible claims that our eternal destiny will be determined by how we respond to the New Testament's testimony to these events.

Jesus Christ's Ministry

Jesus did the work God wanted him to do

[JESUS, SPEAKING OF GOD:] *He is the one who sent me, and I must finish the work that he gave me to do.* JOHN 4:34B CEV

Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of God

Jesus went all over Galilee, teaching in the Jewish meeting places and *preaching the good news about God's kingdom*. He also healed every kind of disease and sickness. MATTHEW 4:23 CEV

Jesus Christ's Death

The Jewish authorities compelled the Romans to crucify Jesus

Pilate [the Roman governor] wanted to set Jesus free, so he spoke again to the crowds. [21]But they kept shouting, *"Nail him to a cross! Nail him to a cross!" ...* [23]*The people kept on shouting as loud as they could for Jesus to be put to death.* [24]*Finally, Pilate gave in.* LUKE 23:20-21, 23-24 CEV

> Pilate was trying to reason with crowds led by the Jewish religious authorities.

It was God's will that Jesus die – for everyone

God didn't spare his own Son but handed him over to death for all of us. ROMANS 8:32A GW

Jesus Christ's Resurrection

God raised Jesus from the dead

But *God raised him from death, setting him free from its power*, because it was impossible that death should hold him prisoner. ACTS 2:24 GNT

Jesus' body was not found in his tomb

[AN EARLY BELIEVER:] Some of the women from our group startled us. *They went to the tomb early this morning* [23]*and didn't find his body.* They told us that they had seen angels who said that he's alive. [24]*Some of our men went to the tomb and found it empty, as the women had said*, but they didn't see him. LUKE 24:22-24 GW

Jesus appeared to people after his resurrection

After his death Jesus showed the apostles a lot of convincing evidence that he was alive. For 40 days he appeared to them and talked with them about the kingdom of God. ACTS 1:3 GW

Jesus Christ's Ascension

Jesus was taken up to God in heaven

They [two angels] said, "Why are you men from Galilee standing here and looking up into the sky? *Jesus has been taken to heaven. But he will come back in the same way that you have seen him go."* ACTS 1:11 CEV

God gave Jesus Christ great glory

He [Jesus] was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—his death on the cross. [9]*For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name.* [10]*And so, in honor of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees,* [11]*and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father. PHILIPPIANS 2:8-11 GNT

13. Salvation through Jesus Christ

The teachings in this chapter are at the absolute heart of the New Testament and the gospel message. It is critical for anyone trying to comprehend the Christian faith to soundly understand them.

Forgiveness of Sins through Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice for our sins

We need a priest who doesn't have to bring daily sacrifices as those chief priests did. First they brought sacrifices for their own sins, and then they brought sacrifices for the sins of the people. *Jesus brought the sacrifice for the sins of the people once and for all when he sacrificed himself.* HEBREWS 7:27 GW

> Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice to God for people's sin – "once and for all". His sacrifice is enough for the sins of all people. Now no more sacrifices need to be made.

Jesus Christ's sacrifice means that our sins can be forgiven

But *Christ came only once and for all time at just the right time to take away all sin by sacrificing himself.* [27]Just as everyone must die once and be judged, [28]so *Christ was offered as a sacrifice one time to take away the sins of many people.* HEBREWS 9:26B-28A NCV™

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For *by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.* EPHESIANS 1:7B GNT

> The mention of Jesus Christ's "blood" is a reference to his sacrificial death for us, by which we can be forgiven.

Through Jesus Christ's death we can be at peace with God

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] You used to be far from God. Your thoughts made you his enemies, and you did evil things. [22]But *his Son became a human and died. So God made peace*

with you, and now he lets you stand in his presence as people who are holy and faultless and innocent. COLOSSIANS 1:21-22 CEV

Jesus Christ's resurrection was also crucial

Jesus was given to die for our sins, and *he was raised from the dead to make us right with God.* ROMANS 4:25 NCV™

> Jesus Christ's resurrection was crucial for us to be made right with God – i.e. to be forgiven and at peace with him.

Salvation and Life through Jesus Christ

God provides salvation through Jesus Christ

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God did not choose us to suffer his anger but to have salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 THESSALONIANS 5:9 NCV™

We can only be saved through Jesus Christ

Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us. ACTS 4:12 GNT

Through Jesus Christ we can have eternal life

God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that *everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. ...* [36]*Everyone who has faith in the Son has eternal life.* But no one who rejects him will ever share in that life, and God will be angry with them forever. JOHN 3:16, 36 CEV

God has provided salvation for the Gentiles through Christ

God did this [revealed his plan of salvation] *because he wanted you Gentiles to understand his wonderful and glorious mystery. And the mystery is that Christ lives in you, and he is your hope of sharing in God's glory.* COLOSSIANS 1:27 CEV

In OT times it was firstly only the Israelites, then after the Babylonian captivity more specifically the Jews, who were “God’s people” and as such knew the way of God’s salvation. But through Jesus Christ’s mission, God has made salvation open to the Gentiles.

Pray for persecuted Christians

14. The New Order

Through what Jesus Christ accomplished, God has established a new order in his relationship with the world. This chapter outlines the key aspects of this new order.

Righteousness by Faith and Grace

We are not made right by obeying the law – but by faith in Christ

For *no one is put right in God's sight by doing what the Law requires*; what the Law does is to make people know that they have sinned. ... [22]*God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ.* ROMANS 3:20, 22A GNT

> We are unable to be made right with God through obeying the law, as we are not capable of obeying it all the time. But now because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished, we can be made right with God by faith in Christ and what he has done.

We are made right by God's grace – not by law

[PAUL:] *I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then the Messiah died for nothing.* GALATIANS 2:21 ISV

> God's grace is his free and undeserved favor to people. By God's grace we are granted righteousness through Jesus Christ's death for us – as opposed to earning righteousness through obeying the law. Otherwise Christ's death would have been pointless.

A New Covenant

The first covenant was inadequate and superseded by the superior new covenant – through Christ

But now, Jesus has been given priestly work which is superior to theirs [the priests' ministry], just as *the covenant which he arranged between God and his people is a better one, because it is based on promises of better things.* [7]*If*

there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant, there would have been no need for a second one. ... [13]By speaking of a new covenant, God has made the first one old; and anything that becomes old and worn out will soon disappear. HEBREWS 8:6-7, 13 GNT

The covenant which God made with Israel, based on the law, proved inadequate as Israel could not keep the covenant laws and so be righteous before God. So God introduced a superior new covenant – through Jesus Christ. Under this covenant, God's people have not only been released from the old covenant's law, God's laws in fact become internal principles for them (cf. Hebrews 8:10).

Jesus Christ is now the high priest of God's people, interceding for them before God in heaven

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *We have a high priest who sits on the right side of God's throne in heaven.* HEBREWS 8:2 NCV™

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Christ died and was raised to life, and *now he is at God's right side, speaking to him for us*. ROMANS 8:34B CEV

Other Key Aspects

The kingdom of God came in Jesus Christ's mission

He [Jesus] *said, "The right time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News!"* MARK 1:15 NCV™

In Jesus' mission a more far-reaching, spiritual dimension of God's reign was established. It exists primarily in the hearts and minds of God's people. At the end of the age God's kingdom and authority will be imposed over all things.

God has made Jesus Christ Lord of all

Then *God gave Christ the highest place and honored his name above all others. [10]So at the name of Jesus everyone will bow down, those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. [11]And to the glory of God the Father everyone will openly agree, "Jesus Christ is Lord!"* PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11 CEV

15. ‘The Last Things’

The history of the world as we know it will culminate in Jesus Christ’s dramatic and awesome return. Associated with this is God’s final judgment of all people. Afterwards the wonderful and everlasting life with God will begin, for those who are his people.

Jesus Christ’s Return

Jesus Christ will return at an unexpected time

You know very well that *the day the Lord comes again will be a surprise, like a thief that comes in the night*. 1 Thessalonians 5:2 NCV™

Jesus Christ’s return will be preceded by distressful events

And *when you hear of wars and rebellions, do not be afraid. For these things must happen first, but the end will not come at once.”* 10*Then he* [Jesus] *said to them, “Nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.* 11*There will be great earthquakes, and famines and plagues in various places, and there will be terrifying sights and great signs from heaven.* Luke 21:9-11 NET

The Final Judgment

On his return, Jesus Christ will judge and reward all people according to what they have done

For *the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.* Matthew 16:27 NET

Those who have believed in Jesus Christ will be saved

[A jailer, to Paul and Silas:] *“What must I do to be saved?”* 31*They replied, “Have faith in the Lord Jesus and you will be*

saved! This is also true for everyone who lives in your home." ACTS 16:30B-31 CEV

Those who have rejected Christ will be condemned

The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. JOHN 3:18B NET

> This and the above subsections show that people will be judged according to their deeds and their response to Jesus Christ.

The ungodly will be thrown into fire

And Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. *The lake of fire is the second death.* [15]*And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.* REVELATION 20:14-15 NCV™

What people have known will be taken into account

For *all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.* ROMANS 2:12 ISV

The Afterlife

God's people will be given eternal life

[JUDE, TO BELIEVERS:] Keep yourselves in God's love as you *wait for the Lord Jesus Christ with his mercy to give you life forever.* JUDE 1:21 NCV™

There will be no more sorrow and no more death

He [God] *will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.* REVELATION 21:4 GNT

God will live amoung his people

[JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] I heard a loud voice shout from the throne: *God's home is now with his people. He will live*

with them, and they will be his own. Yes, God will make his home among his people. REVELATION 21:3 CEV

D. God and His Own People

16. The Standing of God's People

This chapter looks at the position or standing of God's people in relationship to God. Probably the most basic aspect of this is simply that they are God's people and so belong to him. As such the relationship between believers and God is both a strong one and a close one. This is underlined by the teaching that God's people are now "in" Jesus Christ.

Belonging to God

God's people belong to him

[Paul, to believers:] You put your faith in Christ and were given the promised Holy Spirit to show that *you belong to God*. Ephesians 1:13 CEV

They are God's people

[Paul, to believers:] God loves you and has chosen you as *his own special people*. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Colossians 3:12 CEV

God is their God

[Abijah, king of Judah:] But as for us, *the Lord is our God* and we have not rejected him. 2 Chronicles 13:10a NET

Being God's Family

Each believer belongs to the family of God

[Paul, to non-Jewish believers:] *You belong to God's family.* Ephesians 2:19b NCV™

God is the Father of his people

[Paul, to believers:] Grace and peace to you from *God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ! Romans 1:7b NET

God's people are his children

But *to all who did accept him* [Jesus] *and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God*. [13]They did not become his children in any human way—by any human parents or human desire. *They were born of God.* JOHN 1:12-13 NCV™

> Those who accept Jesus Christ and believe in him (v. 12a) are enabled to become God's children (v. 12b) – born of God (v. 13) into spiritual life.

Being "in" Jesus Christ

God's people are "in" Jesus Christ

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [believers], *the faithful in Christ Jesus*. EPHESIANS 1:1 NET

> Being "in" Jesus Christ involves the association of believers with Jesus Christ. Through this association they participate with Jesus Christ in such things as: his victory over sin and death; his life; and other blessings he has won.

"In" Jesus Christ they are redeemed and forgiven

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* COLOSSIANS 1:14 ISV

> Note that "redemption" or being "redeemed" refers to the concept of being bought by God, with Jesus Christ's death, from enslavement to sin.

Through Jesus Christ God's people have access to God

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Yes, *it is through Christ we all have the right to come to the Father in one Spirit*. EPHESIANS 2:18 NCV™

> Verses such as this which speak of God's people relating to God (e.g. praying to him) "through" Jesus Christ, appear to have in view one or more of the following three concepts: Jesus Christ's death opening the way into God's presence; Jesus Christ's priesthood; and God's people being "in" Jesus Christ. All three of these are aspects of Jesus Christ's role as a mediator in a believer's relationship with God.

17. Keys to God's Interaction

This chapter discusses key factors that underlie and influence all God does in relating to his people. The latter part looks at God's incomparable gift of his Holy Spirit, which is at the heart of God's relationship with each believer.

God's Presence with His People

God and Jesus Christ are always with their people

[God:] *Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.* Joshua 1:5b ESV

[Jesus:] And *remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* Matthew 28:20b NET

> Note that most of what this and the following chapters in *Part D* say about God is also applicable to Jesus Christ.

God is with his people in trouble

God is our refuge and strength, *an ever-present help in times of trouble.* Psalms 46:1 GW

God's Knowledge of His People

God knows his people

[God, to Moses:] *I know you by name.* Exodus 33:17b ISV

> The expression "I know you by name" indicates: intimate knowledge – "I know you very well" (GNT, NCV); and a personal relationship – "you are my friend" (NLT, cf. CEV).

God knows his people's needs

Your Father [God] *already knows what you need before you ask him.* Matthew 6:8b GNT

God's Love and Grace

God loves his people greatly

[David, to God:] You are good to us and forgiving, *full of constant love for all who pray to you*. Psalms 86:5 GNT

God shows much grace to his people

[Paul, to the Corinthians:] And in their [needy believers'] prayers on your behalf they long for you because of *the extraordinary grace God has shown to you*. 2 Corinthians 9:14 NET

> Here Paul speaks of God's grace in moving the Corinthians to generously give towards supporting needy believers. The verse illustrates that God's grace (his undeserved favor) is shown not only in his provision of salvation, but also in his ongoing dealings with his people.

God's Gift of the Holy Spirit

God gives his people his Holy Spirit, to help and live in them

[Paul, to believers:] All of this happens because *God has given us the Holy Spirit*, who fills our hearts with his love. Romans 5:5b CEV

[Paul, to Timothy:] *With the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us*, protect the Good News that has been entrusted to you. 2 Timothy 1:14 GW

God works through his people by the Holy Spirit

[God, to Zerubbabel who was a leader of the Jews:] I am the Lord All-Powerful. So *don't depend on your own power or strength, but on my Spirit.* 7*Zerubbabel, that mountain in front of you will be leveled to the ground. Then you will bring out the temple's most important stone* and shout, "God has been very kind." Zechariah 4:6b-7 CEV

> God would accomplish the work he was doing through Zerubbabel by his Spirit. By the Holy Spirit Zerubbabel

would overcome mountainous problems, in completing the work of rebuilding the temple.

18. God's Transformation of His People

Each Christian is being remarkably transformed by God. This chapter looks at what changes are involved and how God brings these about.

Spiritual Life

God's people are given spiritual life

[Jesus:] *The Spirit is the one who gives life;* human nature is of no help! *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* John 6:63 NET

> Jesus' words, together with the Holy Spirit, bring life. They give believers a spiritual awareness that enables them to live in relationship with God. As such they are "alive to God".

God's people are spiritually reborn of God

They did not become his children in any human way—by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God. John 1:12-13 NCV™

Holiness

God's people are made holy, through Jesus Christ's sacrifice

He [Jesus] *suffered to make the people holy with his own blood.* Hebrews 13:12b GW

God's people are being transformed to be like Jesus Christ

[Paul, to believers:] Our faces, then, are not covered. We all show the Lord's glory, and *we are being changed to be like him.* 2 Corinthians 3:18a NCV™

With the development of the believer's holiness, their characters grow more like Christ. As such believers increasingly reflect Christ's glory.

Spiritual Attributes

God gives his people love and faith

Peace to the brothers and sisters [believers], and *love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. EPHESIANS 6:23 NET

God gives his people peace

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Never worry about anything. But in every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks. 7*Then God's peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus*. PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 GW

God gives his people joy

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him*, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit. ROMANS 15:13 GNT

God gives his people wisdom and knowledge

God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to anyone who pleases him. ECCLESIASTES 2:26A GW

How God Transforms

God disciplines his people as his children, who he loves

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as his child."* 7*So hold on through your sufferings, because they are like a father's discipline. God is treating you as children. All*

children are disciplined by their fathers. [8]If you are never disciplined (and every child must be disciplined), you are not true children. HEBREWS 12:6-8 NCV™

God teaches his people

He shows those who are humble how to do right, and he teaches them his ways. PSALMS 25:9 NCV™

19. God's Care of His People

This topic has some of the best-loved verses in the Bible. They include some of the Bible's great promises, which reassure us at times when we wonder if God has "lost our address".

Basics

God cares for his people

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand [7]by casting all your cares on him because *he cares for you*. 1 PETER 5:6-7 NET

God consistently helps his people in need

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. PSALMS 46:1 GW

God Saves His People

God saves his people out of all troubles

[DAVID:] I sought the LORD'S help and he answered me; *he delivered me from all my fears.* ... [6]This oppressed man cried out and the LORD heard; *he saved him from all his troubles*. ... [17]The godly cry out and the LORD hears; *he saves them from all their troubles*. ... [19]*The godly face many dangers, but the LORD saves them from each one of them.* PSALMS 34:4, 6, 17, 19 NET

God enables them to overcome all that is in the world

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *If God is with us, no one can defeat us.* ... [35]Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us? Can troubles or problems or sufferings or hunger or nakedness or danger or violent death? ... [37]But *in all these things we have full victory through God who showed his love for us.* ROMANS 8:31B, 35, 37 NCV™

God Protects His People

God is a refuge for his people

He [David] said, *"The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, [3]my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge*, my savior; you save me from violence. 2 SAMUEL 22:2-3 ESV

God guards his people

Look! The one who is guarding Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. [5]The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade at your right side. [6]The sun will not ravage you by day, nor the moon by night. [7]The LORD will guard you from all evil, preserving your life. [8]The LORD will guard your goings and comings, from this time on and forever. PSALMS 121:4-8 ISV

God protects them until the end

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] You have faith in *God, whose power will protect you until the last day. Then he will save you, just as he has always planned to do.* 1 PETER 1:5 CEV

God protects his faithful people from spiritual harm, bringing their salvation to fruition at the end of the age.

God Sustains His People

God strengthens his people

Even children become tired and need to rest, and young people trip and fall. [31]*But the people who trust the LORD will become strong again. They will rise up as an eagle in the sky; they will run and not need rest; they will walk and not become tired.* ISAIAH 40:30-31 NCV™

God provides for all their needs

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS WHO HAD SUPPORTED HIM:] And *my God will fully supply your every need according to his glorious riches in the Messiah Jesus*. PHILIPPIANS 4:19 ISV

20. God's Plans for His People

God has wonderful plans and purposes for his people. Many of these concern the work he does through his people, with his incomparably great power. As this chapter shows, God promises to fulfill these plans and purposes – equipping and guiding his people accordingly.

Basics

God has plans and purposes for his people

[David, to God:] *You have made many wonderful plans for us. I could never speak of them all—their number is so great!* Psalms 40:5b GNT

For David, after *he had served God's purpose in his own generation*, died and was laid to rest with his ancestors, and so he experienced decay. Acts 13:36 ISV

In spite of their troubles, God will fulfill his purposes for them

[David:] *Though I walk straight into trouble, you* [God] *preserve my life, stretching out your hand to fight the vehemence of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me.* [8]*The Lord will complete what his purpose is for me.* Psalms 138:7-8a ISV

For the Lord says, 'Only *when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over* will I again take up consideration for you. *Then I will fulfill my gracious promise to you and restore you to your homeland.* [11]*For I know what I have planned for you,' says the Lord. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope.* Jeremiah 29:10-11 NET

> Despite his people's exile in Babylon and the apparent decimation of Israel as a nation, God would fulfill his promise and plans for them.

God's Work for His People to Do

God's plans for his people include work for them to do

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God has made us what we are. *He has created us in Christ Jesus to live lives filled with good works that he has prepared for us to do.* EPHESIANS 2:10 GW

God makes them willing and able to do his work

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God is working in you to make you willing and able to obey him.* PHILIPPIANS 2:13 CEV

God has great power for his people in doing his work

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was on them all. ACTS 4:33 ISV

God's Guidance of His People

God guides his people always

[GOD, TO HIS PEOPLE:] *The LORD will continually guide you* and satisfy you even in sun-baked places. ISAIAH 58:11A GW

> Note that the Bible speaks of God guiding his people in fulfilling his plans and purposes for them. More particularly, it tells of God guiding them in: living righteous lives; doing his work; and making choices in other matters.

God guides them in difficult circumstances

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *He was the one who led you through that vast and dangerous desert—a thirsty and arid land, with poisonous snakes and scorpions.* DEUTERONOMY 8:15A GW

[DAVID:] *When I am ready to give up, he knows what I should do.* PSALMS 142:3 GNT

> The implication of the second clause is that God not only knows but also guides in what one should do.

II. WHAT TO DO

E. Relating to God

21. Being Right with God

In using the expression “right with God”, this chapter has in view being made righteous in God’s eyes, which involves the forgiveness of one’s sins. The following teaching looks at the key issue of getting right with God – and at things to do in association with this.

Getting Right with God

Turn from sin to God and believe in Jesus Christ

[PAUL:] I gave solemn warning that *they should turn from their sins to God and believe in our Lord Jesus.* ACTS 20:21B GNT

> We need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God – the Christ (or Messiah) who the OT speaks about. We also need to believe that he is the means of forgiveness of sins, with what he accomplished by his death. As such, we are to trust in him for God’s forgiveness of our own sins. In doing so we are forgiven and thus considered righteous by God. In conjunction with this we are granted eternal life.

Believing in Jesus Christ brings forgiveness of sins

In addition, all the prophets testify that *people who believe in the one named Jesus receive forgiveness for their sins through him.* ACTS 10:43 GW

Believing in Jesus Christ brings eternal life

[JESUS:] For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that *everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.* JOHN 3:16 NET

We can be sure of God’s forgiveness

But *if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.* 1 JOHN 1:9 CEV

Do What Is Right

Obey God, along with believing

And by the command of the eternal God it [the message about Christ] is made known to all nations *that they might believe and obey*. ROMANS 16:26B NCV™

> Obedience is vital for acting in a way that is consistent with both our belief and being considered righteous by God.

Do good deeds, which are an essential part of true faith

His [Abraham's] *faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions.* ... [26]So then, *as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without actions is dead.* JAMES 2:22, 26 GNT

Live By the Holy Spirit

We have been freed from the law to live by the Holy Spirit

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] In the past, the law held us like prisoners, but our old selves died, and *we were made free from the law. So now we serve God in a new way with the Spirit, and not in the old way with written rules*. ROMANS 7:6 NCV™

> Through what Jesus Christ has accomplished, God's people have been freed from the Mosaic Law as the means of being right with him. We are instead to live by his Spirit.
>
> Living by the Holy Spirit involves: being both alert to and responsive to the Spirit's guidance; and relying on the Spirit's power, to help us and change us. Along with this, our minds should be focused on things of the Spirit (cf. Romans 8:5 below).

Instead of living by sinful human nature, live by the Holy Spirit

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *we do not live following our sinful selves, but we live following the Spirit*. [5]Those who live

following their sinful selves think only about things that their sinful selves want. But *those who live following the Spirit are thinking about the things the Spirit wants them to do*. ROMANS 8:4B-5 NCV™

22. Having Faith in God

Faith in God is absolutely fundamental to the Christian life. We in fact need to continually live by faith, doing so in all areas of our lives. The verses in this chapter give astute guidance on this critical subject.

What Faith Is

Faith involves believing in God

[Peter, to believers:] Through Christ *you believe in God*, who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory. *So your faith and your hope are in God.* 1 Peter 1:21 NCV™

> This links belief with faith (and hope). As such, it reflects that having faith in God involves believing in him. Such belief includes believing what he says.

We must also trust in God

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5 NET

> Trusting in God is a key part of having faith in God. Having faith in God can be defined as believing and trusting God. For we are to believe in God and what he says, and also confidently trust in him and what he says in regard to our own lives. One could say having faith means that: in our minds we are to believe and in our hearts we are to trust.

Faith is based on what we hope for

[Paul, to the Colossian believers:] When the true message, the Good News, first came to you, *you heard about the hope it offers. So your faith and love are based on what you hope for, which is kept safe for you in heaven.* Colossians 1:5 GNT

Now *faith is being sure of what we hope for,* being convinced of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1 NET

> The hope Christians have is not a groundless longing, but a confident assurance.

What to Have Faith For

Have faith that God will fulfill what he promises

[Paul, to men sailing on a ship with him in a bad storm:] For last night *an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve came to me* [24]*and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul! You must stand before Caesar, and God has graciously granted you the safety of all who are sailing with you.'* [25]Therefore keep up your courage, men, for *I have faith in God that it will be just as I have been told*. Acts 27:23-25 NET

Have faith that God will care for you

Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, received promises, shut the mouths of lions, [34]*put out raging fires, escaped death by the sword, found strength in weakness, became powerful in battle, and routed foreign armies.* Hebrews 11:33-34 ISV

> Various people of God are spoken of here as having faith that God would take care of them when facing very difficult circumstances.

Have faith that God will do what you ask

[David:] *Lord, in the morning you will hear me; in the morning I will present my case to you and then wait expectantly for an answer.* Psalms 5:3 NET

What Not to Do

Do not be afraid

[David:] *When I am afraid, I will trust you.* [4]I praise God for his word. *I trust God, so I am not afraid. What can human beings do to me?* Psalms 56:3-4 NCV™

Do not worry

Never worry about anything. But in every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks. [7]Then God's peace, which goes beyond anything we

can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus. PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 GW

23. Loving, Fearing and Obeying God

Love and fear are arguably the two prime emotions or attitudes that we should have towards God. Love and fear of God are both closely associated with obeying him. They are very strong, compelling emotions and provide the primary emotional motivation for obeying God (cf. Deuteronomy 10:12-13). Their importance is underlined by the fact that obeying God ought to be a constant aim of every Christian.

Love God

Love God with all your heart – which is most important

Jesus answered: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.* [38]*This is the first and most important commandment.* [39]The second most important commandment is like this one. And it is, "Love others as much as you love yourself." [40]*All the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets are based on these two commandments.* MATTHEW 22:37-40 CEV

Love for God is shown by obeying him

We show our love for God by obeying his commandments, and they are not hard to follow. 1 JOHN 5:3 CEV

Fear God

Fear God and nothing else

[GOD, TO ISAIAH:] *Don't be afraid of what they* [other people] *fear; do not dread those things.* [13]*But remember that the LORD All-Powerful is holy. He is the one you should fear; he is the one you should dread.* ISAIAH 8:12B-13 NCV™

God's people should not live in fear of his punishment

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] *God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them.* [17]*Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on Judgment Day; and we will have it because our life in this world is the same as Christ's.* [18]*There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment.* 1 JOHN 4:16B-18 GNT

Knowing and expressing the love of God drives out fear of punishment from God (v. 18).

Fearing God is closely associated with obeying him

[A WISE TEACHER:] *Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole duty of man.* ECCLESIASTES 12:13B NET

Obey God

Obey God's word

"Rather, *how blessed are those who hear God's word and obey it!*" LUKE 11:28B ISV

Persistently read God's word

He should keep it [a copy of God's teachings] *with him all the time and read from it every day of his life.* DEUTERONOMY 17:19A NCV™

Follow Jesus Christ

Follow Jesus Christ

Jesus then told the crowd and the disciples to come closer, and he said: *If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me.* MARK 8:34 CEV

In order to follow Jesus, we must set aside our own desires, no longer having ourselves as the focus of our lives. To “take up your cross” implies a willingness to bear any cost.

Make Jesus Christ your Lord

Honor Christ and *let him be the Lord of your life*. 1 PETER 3:15A CEV

24. Connecting with God

This chapter looks at how believers can get close to God, even knowing him. It then discusses the key topic of prayer – the prime means of communicating with God.

Seeking God

Seek God with all your heart

Now *seek the LORD your God wholeheartedly and with your entire being!* 1 CHRONICLES 22:19A NET

Persistently focus on God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *I remember you while I'm lying in bed; I think about you through the night.* PSALMS 63:6 NCV™

Praying to God

Pray to God as a caring father

Therefore, *this is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven,* may your name be kept holy. MATTHEW 6:9 ISV

[JESUS, TO A CROWD:] *Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!* MATTHEW 7:11 GNT

> Having a holy and loving Father in heaven should inspire us to make requests of him, doing so in awareness of him being such a Father.

Pray in the Holy Spirit

[JUDE, TO BELIEVERS:] *Pray in the Holy Spirit, ...* JUDE 1:20B ISV

> Having the Holy Spirit, believers are to pray "in the Holy Spirit". As such we are to consciously rely on the Holy Spirit's help in our prayers.

How to Make Requests

Ask for things in Jesus Christ's "name"

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] In that day *you will ask the Father for things in my name*. I mean, I will not need to ask the Father for you. JOHN 16:26 NCV™

> To ask in Jesus Christ's "name" is to do so in accordance with all that his name signifies. It is prayer that is consistent with Jesus Christ himself and his purposes – and made on his authority.

Ask earnestly and persistently

I cried out with all my heart, "Answer me, O LORD! PSALMS 119:145A NET

Jesus told his disciples a story about how they should *keep on praying and never give up*: ... LUKE 18:1 CEV

Believe that what you ask will be granted

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. MATTHEW 21:22 GNT

> Belief in prayer involves an understanding of God's will and genuinely trusting in God to fulfill his will.

God's Response to Requests

God answers those who obey and please him

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] And *God gives us what we ask for because we obey God's commands and do what pleases him.* 1 JOHN 3:22 NCV™

God grants anything that is in accordance with his will

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] We have courage in God's presence, because *we are sure that he hears us if we ask him for anything that is according to his will.* [15]*He hears us whenever we ask him; and since we know this is true, we know also that he gives us what we ask from him.* 1 JOHN 5:14-15 GNT

Pray for persecuted Christians

25. Exalting God

We exalt God by doing such things as glorifying, praising and thanking him. Exalting God is a very common theme in the Bible and – as this chapter shows – should also be a very prominent part of our lives.

Glorify God by Your Actions

Glorify God by how you live

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do everything for the glory of God*. 1 Corinthians 10:31 NET

> God's people are identified with him and so their lives are in a sense a reflection on God. Thus they should seek to do everything in a way that will bring glory to God.

Do not dishonor God by your actions

[Agur:] But if I am poor, I might *steal and bring disgrace on my God*. Proverbs 30:9b GNT

Praise and Thank God

Praise God constantly

Through him [Jesus Christ] then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. Hebrews 13:15 NET

[David:] *I will praise the Lord at all times; my mouth will continually praise him.* Psalms 34:1 NET

Give thanks to God always

Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:20 NCV™

... give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV

Reasons to Praise God

Praise God because of his greatness

Praise God because he is great! DEUTERONOMY 32:3B NCV™

Praise God for his love and faithfulness

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *I will sing praises to you before foreigners!*
10*For your loyal love extends beyond the sky, and your faithfulness reaches the clouds.* PSALMS 57:9B-10 NET

Praise God for his creative work

"Our Lord and God, you deserve to receive glory, honor, and power because you created everything. Everything came into existence and was created because of your will." REVELATION 4:11 GW

Praise God for his salvation through Jesus Christ

[ZECHARIAH, SPEAKING OF THE SALVATION THAT WOULD COME THROUGH JESUS:] *Praise the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come to save his people.* 69*Our God has given us a mighty Savior from the family of David his servant.* LUKE 1:68-69 CEV

Rejoice Before God

Rejoice when giving praise and thanks to God

Sing to God! Sing praises to his name! Exalt the one who rides on the clouds! For the LORD is his name! Rejoice before him! PSALMS 68:4 NET

You godly ones, *rejoice in the LORD! Give thanks to his holy name.* PSALMS 97:12 NET

Rejoice in God always

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord* [Jesus]*. I say it again: rejoice!* PHILIPPIANS 4:4 GNT

F. Church Life

26. Being One Body

The New Testament deals extensively with how we should relate to other Christians and with issues vital for the life of the church. The topics in this chapter are amongst the most prominent themes.

Be One Body

Church members form one body – the body of Christ

[Paul, to the Corinthian church:] *A person's body is only one thing, but it has many parts. Though there are many parts to a body, all those parts make only one body. Christ is like that also. ...* [27]*Together you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of that body.* 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27 NCV™

> The term "the body of Christ" figuratively depicts the spiritual union of Jesus Christ with his people. Moreover, it points to the unity Jesus Christ's people have together in their relationship with him.
>
> While the worldwide church is the whole "body of Christ", each local church is a form of "the body of Christ". And in each case the many members together make one body.

Be united as one

Now the whole group of believers was one in heart and soul, and nobody called any of his possessions his own. Instead, they shared everything they owned. Acts 4:32 ISV

Be at peace with each other

[Paul, to the church in Thessalonica:] *Be at peace among yourselves.* 1 Thessalonians 5:13b ISV

Submit to one another

[Paul, to the church in Ephesus:] *Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.* Ephesians 5:21 GNT

Do Things Together

Meet together with other believers

Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. HEBREWS 10:25A GNT

Participate together in church activities

They [the disciples] *gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.* ACTS 1:14 GNT

[PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH:] My friends, I ask you [16]to obey leaders like them and to do the same for *all others who work hard with you.* 1 CORINTHIANS 16:15B-16 CEV

Church members should participate together in God's work, cooperating with each other.

Love and Care for Each Other

Love each other as Jesus Christ loved us, even dying for us

[JESUS:] This is my command: *Love each other as I have loved you.* [13]*The greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends.* JOHN 15:12-13 NCV™

Pray constantly for each other

Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. *Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.* EPHESIANS 6:18 CEV

Help each other

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.* GALATIANS 6:2 NET

God is always fair. *He will remember how you helped his people in the past and how you are still helping them.* HEBREWS 6:10A CEV

Pray for persecuted Christians

27. Worshiping God

Worship of God involves honoring him, recognizing his worthiness. As such it includes acknowledging God's divine characteristics and wonderful deeds.

Worship is done directly through praise and thanksgiving – and by making offerings to God (giving to him from what we have). It is carried out both in church groups and privately.

Basics

We must worship God – and God alone

[GOD:] *Worship only me, the LORD your God!* EXODUS 23:25A CEV

Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He sent his angel and saved his servants, who trusted him. *They disobeyed the king and risked their lives so that they would not have to honor or worship any god except their own God.* DANIEL 3:28 GW

Live righteously in order to acceptably worship God

[GOD, TO UNGODLY PEOPLE IN ISRAEL:] *You twist the truth and stomp on justice. ...* 21*I, the LORD, hate and despise your religious celebrations and your times of worship.* 22*I won't accept your offerings or animal sacrifices— not even your very best.* 23*No more of your noisy songs! I won't listen when you play your harps.* 24But let justice and fairness flow like a river that never runs dry. AMOS 5:7B, 21-24 CEV

How to Worship God

Worship God in spirit

[JESUS:] But a time is coming — and now is here — when the *true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. 24*God*

is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. JOHN 4:23-24 CEV

> To worship "in spirit" is primarily an inward activity, rather than being centered on the performing of ceremonial acts (which was such a main part of OT worship). It involves our spirit – and thus our mind and will.

Worship God with reverence and awe

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Let us be grateful and *worship God in a way that will please him, with reverence and awe;* [29]*because our God is indeed a destroying fire.* HEBREWS 12:28B-29 GNT

Worshiping Together

Join with fellow believers in worshiping God

[A CALL TO FELLOW ISRAELITES:] *Come! Let's bow down and worship! Let's kneel before the LORD, our creator!* PSALMS 95:6 NET

Offer praise and thanksgiving together

They [Israelites] *praised the LORD and gave thanks as they took turns singing: "The LORD is good! His faithful love for Israel will last forever." Everyone started shouting and praising the LORD* because work on the foundation of the temple had begun. EZRA 3:11 CEV

Offerings

We are also to worship God with offerings

He [God] is wonderful! Praise him and *bring an offering into his temple. Worship the Lord,* majestic and holy. 1 CHRONICLES 16:29 CEV

Give willingly

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver.* 2 CORINTHIANS 9:7 NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

28. Serving God

The lives of each of God's people ought to be devoted to serving him. As this chapter shows, in serving God we need to rely on him and make use of the extraordinary spiritual gifts that he gives his people.

Devotion to God's Service

Be devoted to God's work

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your work in the Lord is never wasted. 1 Corinthians 15:58b NCV™

Serve only God

Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! Because it is written, *'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'*" Matthew 4:10 ISV

How to Serve God

Do quality work that bears "fruit" – "fruit" that will last

[Jesus, to his disciples:] And I gave you this work: to *go and produce fruit, fruit that will last*. Then the Father will give you anything you ask for in my name. John 15:16b NCV™

> Here "fruit" likely refers to spiritual outcomes of quality work for God's kingdom.

Pray to God for help in the work

[The believers, praying:] *Lord, listen to their threats! We are your servants. So make us brave enough to speak your message.* 30*Show your mighty power, as we heal people and work miracles and wonders in the name of your holy Servant Jesus.* 31After they had prayed, the meeting place shook.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and bravely spoke God's message. Acts 4:29-31 CEV

Spiritual Gifts

God gives believers a spiritual gift, through the Holy Spirit

Something from the Spirit can be seen in each person, for the common good. [8]*The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom, and the same Spirit gives another the ability to speak with knowledge.* [9]*The same Spirit gives faith to one person. And, to another, that one Spirit gives gifts of healing.* [10]*The Spirit gives to another person the power to do miracles, to another the ability to prophesy. And he gives to another the ability to know the difference between good and evil spirits. The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak in different kinds of languages and to another the ability to interpret those languages.* 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 NCV™

Use your spiritual gift to build up the church

It was he [Christ] who "gave gifts"; *he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers.* [12]*He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ.* Ephesians 4:11-12 GNT

Being Guided by God

To be guided by God, live a godly life

[God:] *If you put an end to oppression, to every gesture of contempt, and to every evil word;* [10]*if you give food to the hungry and satisfy those who are in need*, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon. [11]And *I will always guide you* and satisfy you with good things. Isaiah 58:9b-11a GNT

Ask God to guide you (as in troubled times)

[David, to God:] Indeed, you are my rock and my fortress. *For the sake of your name, lead me and guide me.* Psalms 31:3 GW

Pray for persecuted Christians

29. Significant Practices

It is important for each Christian to understand all significant church practices. Prominent amongst these are baptism, the Lord's Supper, confessing Jesus Christ and observing the Sabbath day of rest.

Baptism

God's people are baptized in (or into) the "name" of Jesus

On hearing this, *they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*. Acts 19:5 ISV

> By being baptized in or into the "name" of Jesus Christ, a person declares their identification and relationship with Jesus Christ – and also their commitment to him.

Baptism signifies belief

But *when they believed what Philip was saying about God's kingdom and about the name of Jesus Christ, they were all baptized*. Acts 8:12 CEV

Baptism signifies the washing away of sins

[Ananias, to Saul:] Get up, *be baptized, and wash your sins away*, trusting in him to save you. Acts 22:16B NCV™

The Lord's Supper

Observe the Lord's Supper

[Paul, to believers:] For I received from the Lord the teaching that I passed on to you: that *the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread, [24]gave thanks to God, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me." [25]In the same way, after the supper he took the cup and said, "This cup is God's new*

covenant, sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me." 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 GNT

The Lord's Supper symbolizes and remembers Jesus Christ's death for us. The breaking of the bread symbolizes the breaking of his body, and the pouring out of the wine symbolizes the pouring out of his blood – for the forgiveness of our sins.

Confessing Jesus Christ

Confess (or acknowledge) Jesus Christ, before others

[Jesus:] But I tell you, the Son of Man will acknowledge before God's angels everyone who *acknowledges me before people*. Luke 12:8 ISV

Things to confess about Jesus Christ

And everyone will *confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* and bring glory to God the Father. Philippians 2:11 NCV™

If anyone *confesses that Jesus is the Son of God*, God resides in him and he in God. 1 John 4:15 NET

The Sabbath

The Sabbath is holy – keep it holy by resting on it

[God, to the Israelites:] *Remember the Sabbath day to set it apart as holy. 9For six days you may labor and do all your work, 10but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your male servant, or your female servant, or your cattle, or the resident foreigner who is in your gates. 11For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.* Exodus 20:8-11 NET

It is permissible to do good things on the Sabbath

People are worth much more than sheep, and so *it is right to do good on the Sabbath.”* [13]*Then Jesus told the man, “Hold out your hand.” The man did, and it became as healthy as the other one.* MATTHEW 12:12-13 CEV

30. Church Leadership

For a church to function effectively it is critical that leaders know and do what is required of them. It is also important for church members to know what they should expect of leaders – and how to support them.

Leading the Church

Provide good leadership

Elders who provide effective leadership must be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 NET

Be gentle and sparing in the use of authority

[Paul, to church members:] Instead, *we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children*. 1 Thessalonians 2:7b ISV

[Paul, to church members:] For this reason, *although in the Messiah I have complete freedom to order you to do what is proper,* [9]*I prefer to make my appeal on the basis of love.* Philemon 1:8-9a ISV

Be an example for others to follow

[Paul, to church members:] Rather, *we wanted to set an example for you to follow.* 2 Thessalonians 3:9b GW

Caring For Church Members

Pray for church members

[Paul, to church members:] *We have not stopped praying for you since the first day we heard about you. In fact, we always pray that God will show you everything he wants you to do and that you may have all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives.* Colossians 1:9 CEV

Strengthen members in the faith

[Paul, to church members:] You are our dear friends, and *everything we do is to make you stronger.* 2 Corinthians 12:19b NCV™

Work hard at helping church members

[Paul, speaking to church members of Epaphras:] For I can testify that *he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.* Colossians 4:13 NET

Confront church members over sin

[God, to Ezekiel:] Son of man, *confront Jerusalem with her abominable practices ...* Ezekiel 16:2 NET

Teach God's word to church members

Paul lived in Corinth for a year and a half and *taught the word of God to them.* Acts 18:11 GW

Church Members' Duties to Leaders

Obey your leaders

[Paul, to church members:] He has made us sure that *you are obeying what we taught you and that you will keep on obeying.* 2 Thessalonians 3:4 CEV

Give your leaders material support

Those who are being taught the Christian message should share all the good things they have with their teachers. Galatians 6:6 GNT

Pray for persecuted Christians

G. Relating to People

31. Love

The importance of love could hardly be more emphatically stated by the Bible. Love should encompass every area of our lives and be the basis of all that we do in relating to people. Other personal qualities reflective of love are also discussed in this chapter.

Loving Others

What love is

Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or [5]*rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do.* [6]*Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil.* [7]*Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting.* 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 CEV

Love others as you love yourself – which sums up God's law

Let love be your only debt! *If you love others, you have done all that the Law demands.* [9]In the Law there are many commands, such as, "Be faithful in marriage. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not want what belongs to others." But *all of these are summed up in the command that says, "Love others as much as you love yourself."* [10]*No one who loves others will harm them. So love is all that the Law demands.* Romans 13:8-10 CEV

> The whole moral law – all that involves our relationships with other people – is summed up by the command to love others as ourselves. In doing so, we fulfill or carry out God's law.

Love your enemies and do good to them

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28]*bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ...* [31]*Treat others in the same way that you would want them to treat you.* Luke 6:27b-28, 31 NET

Showing Mercy

Show mercy – and God will show you mercy

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. LUKE 6:36 ISV

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. MATTHEW 5:7 NET

Forgive others and God will forgive you

If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. [15]*But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.* MATTHEW 6:14-15 CEV

Further Things to Do

Be humble, gentle and patient

Be humble and gentle in every way. Be patient with each other and lovingly accept each other. EPHESIANS 4:2 GW

Be generous and share with others

[PAUL, TELLING TIMOTHY WHAT TO SAY TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] Command them to do good, to be rich in good works, to *be generous and ready to share with others*. 1 TIMOTHY 6:18 GNT

Things to Avoid

Avoid anger

Do not become angry easily, [20]*because anger will not help you live the right kind of life God wants.* JAMES 1:19B-20 NCV™

Do not hate

You must not hate your fellow citizen in your heart. LEVITICUS 19:17A NCV™

Do not murder

You shall not murder. Exodus 20:13 ISV

32. Justice

Topics encompassed by the theme of justice together form a very large proportion of what the Bible says about how to relate to other people. Following these teachings involves not only doing what is right ourselves, but also ensuring that others are treated fairly – notably the needy.

General

Act justly

No, the LORD has told us what is good. *What he requires of us is this: to do what is just,* to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God. MICAH 6:8 GNT

Do what is right

[GOD:] *Learn to do what is right! Promote justice!* ISAIAH 1:17A NET

Do what is right and fair; that pleases the LORD more than bringing him sacrifices. PROVERBS 21:3 GNT

Do not show favoritism

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] Before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, I solemnly charge you to *carry out these commands without prejudice or favoritism of any kind*. 1 TIMOTHY 5:21 NET

Honesty

Speak the truth

You must do these things: Speak the truth to each other. ZECHARIAH 8:16 GW

Act honestly

Be honest and work hard, so you will have something to give to people in need. EPHESIANS 4:28B CEV

Do not steal, lie or deceive

You must not steal, you must not tell lies, and you must not deal falsely with your fellow citizen. LEVITICUS 19:11 NET

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. EXODUS 20:16 NET

Caring For the Needy

Defend the cause of the needy

Defend weak people and orphans. Protect the rights of the oppressed and the poor. [4]*Rescue weak and needy people. Help them escape the power of wicked people.* PSALMS 82:3-4 GW

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of all those who have nothing. [9]*Speak up and judge fairly, and defend the rights of the poor and needy."* PROVERBS 31:8-9 NCV™

Provide the needy with food and clothing

John told them, *"If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share it with someone else."* LUKE 3:11 CEV

She [Dorcas] *spent all her time doing good and helping the poor.* ... [39]So Peter got ready and went with them. When he arrived, he was taken to the room upstairs, where *all the widows crowded round him, crying and showing him all the shirts and coats that Dorcas had made while she was alive*. ACTS 9:36, 39 GNT

Treat foreigners the same as your native-born

The foreigner who resides with you must be to you like a native citizen among you; so you must love him as yourself ... LEVITICUS 19:34A NET

Caring for the needy is a vital part of true religion

What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world. JAMES 1:27 GNT

33. Wisdom

Wisdom is one of the attributes most highly valued in the Bible. Thankfully the Bible says much about how we can gain wisdom. The Bible also contains very astute advice on other topics associated with wisdom, notably speech – a key medium that we use in relating to others.

Wisdom through God

Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom

The beginning of wisdom is to fear the LORD*, and acknowledging the Holy One is understanding.* PROVERBS 9:10 NET

> Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom as it leads us to base our thinking and life on God and his teachings or commands – the source of true wisdom for life.

Ask God for wisdom

[JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] *If any of you need wisdom, you should ask God, and it will be given to you.* JAMES 1:5A CEV

Obeying God's commands brings wisdom

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I have greater wisdom than those who are old, because I obey your commands.* PSALMS 119:100 GNT

Wisdom through Others

Pay attention to instruction

[A WISE TEACHER:] *Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to the words of knowledge. …* [19]*Listen, my child, and be wise,* and guide your heart on the right way. PROVERBS 23:12, 19 NET

Take notice of correction

If you refuse to learn, you are hurting yourself. If you accept correction, you will become wiser. PROVERBS 15:32 GNT

Wise Speech

Be quick to listen and slow to speak

[JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] My dear friends, *you should be quick to listen and slow to speak* or to get angry. JAMES 1:19 CEV

Use few words

The more we talk, the less sense we make ... ECCLESIASTES 6:11A CEV

Speak graciously

The words spoken by the wise are gracious ... ECCLESIASTES 10:12A ISV

Remember that our words are determined by our "heart"

[JESUS, TO THE PHARISEES:] Offspring of vipers! *How are you able to say anything good, since you are evil? For the mouth speaks from what fills the heart.* [35]*The good person brings good things out of his good treasury, and the evil person brings evil things out of his evil treasury.* MATTHEW 12:34-35 NET

> In v. 35, "treasury" refers to the thoughts and feelings that people have stored up in their hearts.

Foolishness

Fools spurn and lack wisdom

Fearing the LORD is the beginning of moral knowledge, but *fools despise wisdom and instruction*. PROVERBS 1:7 NET

Wisdom is unattainable for a fool; in court he does not open his mouth. PROVERBS 24:7 NET

Foolishness involves acting contrary to God

Then Samuel said to Saul, “*You have acted foolishly. You haven’t obeyed the commandment of the* LORD *your God, which he commanded you.* For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, … 1 SAMUEL 13:13 ISV

34. Common Relationships

The Bible contains discerning insights and directions regarding our relationships with those who we have the most contact with. As such these teachings are among the ones which are the most often applicable in our lives.

Spouses

Husbands should love their wives

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her ... [33]Nevertheless, *each one of you must also love his own wife as he loves himself*, and the wife must respect her husband. EPHESIANS 5:25, 33 NET

Wives should submit to their husbands

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. EPHESIANS 5:22 GNT

Do not commit adultery

You shall not commit adultery. EXODUS 20:14 NET

Parents and Children

Parents should care for their children

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Instead, we were gentle when we were with you, *like a mother taking care of her children*. 1 THESSALONIANS 2:7B GW

Parents should teach their children about God and his deeds, inspiring them to trust and obey God

[A PSALMIST:] *... we'll declare to the next generation the praises of the LORD; his might and awesome deeds that he has performed. ...* [7]*Then they will put their trust in God and they will not forget his awesome deeds. Instead, they will keep his commandments.* PSALMS 78:4B, 7 ISV

Children are to honor their parents

"*Honor your father and mother*," which is the first commandment accompanied by a promise, namely, [3]"that it may go well with you and that you will live a long time on the earth." EPHESIANS 6:2-3 NET

Children are to obey their parents

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord COLOSSIANS 3:20 NET

Citizens and Governing Authorities

Citizens should obey the governing authorities, which are established by God

Obey the rulers who have authority over you. Only God can give authority to anyone, and he puts these rulers in their places of power. ROMANS 13:1 CEV

Governing authorities should act and rule according to God's laws

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If the king completely obeys the LORD's commands, he and his descendants will rule Israel for many years.* DEUTERONOMY 17:19-20B CEV

Servants and Masters

Servants should be obedient

Slaves, you must always obey your earthly masters. Try to please them at all times, and not just when you think they are watching. Honor the Lord and serve your masters with your whole heart. COLOSSIANS 3:22 CEV

Masters must treat servants justly

Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven. COLOSSIANS 4:1 NET

35. Spreading the Gospel

The theme of spreading the gospel – or message about Jesus Christ – is very prominent in the New Testament. Likewise it should be also one of the main focuses of our lives. This chapter largely looks at what we need to say and do, in advancing the spread of the gospel.

Tell People the Gospel

Tell people the gospel message about Jesus Christ

Then Philip spoke. Starting with that passage, *Philip told the official the Good News about Jesus*. ACTS 8:35 GW

> Note that the Greek word which is often translated as "gospel" basically means "good news".

Tell all people, everywhere

Then he [Jesus] told them: *Go and preach the good news to everyone in the world. ...* [20]*Then the disciples left and preached everywhere.* The Lord was with them, and the miracles they worked proved that their message was true. MARK 16:15, 20 CEV

What Things to Explain

Explain who Jesus Christ is

Soon *he* [Saul] *went to the Jewish meeting places and started telling people that Jesus is the Son of God*. ACTS 9:20 CEV

Tell people the results of Jesus Christ's death

What we mean is that *God was in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world. And he has given us the work of sharing his message about peace.* 2 CORINTHIANS 5:19 CEV

> We are to tell others that because of Jesus Christ's death, their sins can be forgiven and they can be at peace with God.

Tell people how they should respond

[PAUL:] *I warned both Jews and Greeks to change their lives and turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus.* ACTS 20:21 NCV™

How to Spread the Gospel

Present the gospel accurately and plainly

[PAUL:] *We use no trickery, and we do not change the teaching of God. We teach the truth plainly,* showing everyone who we are. 2 CORINTHIANS 4:2B NCV™

Spread the gospel bravely with God's help

[PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] But our *God helped us to be brave and to tell you his Good News.* 1 THESSALONIANS 2:2B NCV™

Act in a way that is consistent with the gospel

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] The only thing that matters is that you *continue to live as good citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of the Messiah.* PHILIPPIANS 1:27A ISV

Insights on the Gospel

The gospel is not dependent on our presentation of it – but on the Holy Spirit and God's power

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIANS:] *When I talked with you or preached, I didn't try to prove anything by sounding wise. I simply let God's Spirit show his power.* [5]*That way you would have faith because of God's power and not because of human wisdom.* 1 CORINTHIANS 2:4-5 CEV

There are many ready to respond to the gospel

Jesus said to his followers, *"There are many people to harvest but only a few workers to help harvest them.* [38]*Pray*

to the Lord, who owns the harvest, that he will send more workers to gather his harvest." MATTHEW 9:37-38 NCV™

H. Persevering

36. Standing Firm

The Bible contains numerous exhortations to be faithful to God and to hold to the Christian faith. It is a persistent challenge for every Christian to do so, until the end. This chapter provides important insights and instructions on this topic, for every believer.

Be Faithful to God

Be faithful to God and Jesus Christ

[Solomon, to the people:] *May you, his people, always be faithful to the Lord our God, obeying all his laws and commands, as you do today.* 1 Kings 8:61 GNT

When he arrived and saw how God had blessed the people, he was glad and *urged them all to be faithful and true to the Lord with all their hearts*. Acts 11:23 GNT

Do not forget God

[Moses, to the Israelites:] *Be sure you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments, ordinances, and statutes that I am giving you today. …* [18]*You must remember the Lord your God …* Deuteronomy 8:11, 18a NET

Persist until the End

Stand firm until the end

[Jesus, to his disciples:] All people will hate you because you follow me, but *those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved*. Matthew 10:22 NCV™

Persist so that you will receive the reward

So *do not throw away your confidence, because it has great reward.* [36]For *you need endurance in order to do God's will and so receive what is promised.* Hebrews 10:35-36 NET

Be ready for Jesus Christ's return

So *you, too, must be ready, because at an hour you are not expecting him the Son of Man will come."* MATTHEW 24:44 ISV

Engaging in Spiritual Warfare

Resist Satan

Be on your guard and stay awake. *Your enemy, the devil, is like a roaring lion, sneaking around to find someone to attack.* [9]*But you must resist the devil and stay strong in your faith.* 1 PETER 5:8-9 CEV

Use spiritual weapons and armor

For this reason, *take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand.* [14]*Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness,* [15]*by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, ...*
EPHESIANS 6:13-15 NET

> Verse 15 is most likely speaking of believers having a strong grasp of the truths of the gospel so as to be ready for action. Possibly a readiness to proclaim this gospel is in view. (Note that other spiritual weapons follow.)

Have Faith

At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One.
EPHESIANS 6:16 GNT

Use God's word

Accept God's salvation as your helmet, and *take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* EPHESIANS 6:17 NCV™

Pray

Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people. EPHESIANS 6:18 CEV

37. Rejecting Sin

The Bible does not merely tell us not to sin. As this chapter shows, the Bible gives practical instruction on how to deal with any sin that we have done – and also on how to avoid sin in future.

Dealing with Sin

Be sorrowful over your sin

The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit. God, you will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry for sin. PSALMS 51:17 NCV™

Confess your sin to God

[NEHEMIAH, TO GOD:] *I confess the sins that we Israelites have committed against you as well as the sins that my father's family and I have committed.* NEHEMIAH 1:6B GW

Ask God for forgiveness and restoration

[DAVID, TO GOD AFTER COMMITTING TERRIBLE SIN:] *Turn your face from my sins and wipe out all my guilt.* [10]*Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again.* PSALMS 51:9-10 NCV™

Avoiding Sin

Ask God for help to avoid sin

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *Don't let me do wrong on purpose, Lord, or let sin have control over my life.* Then I will be innocent, and not guilty of some terrible fault. PSALMS 19:13 CEV

For God will help us withstand temptation

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] You are tempted in the same way that everyone else is tempted. But *God can be trusted not to let*

you be tempted too much, and he will show you how to escape from your temptations. 1 Corinthians 10:13 CEV

Use God's word to avoid sin

[A psalmist, to God:] *I treasure your word above all else; it keeps me from sinning against you.* Psalms 119:11 CEV

Avoid sinful desires

[Peter, to believers:] Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to *keep away from fleshly desires that do battle against the soul, ...* 1 Peter 2:11 NET

Alternatives to Sin

Instead of living by sinful human nature, live by the Holy Spirit

God did this [sent Jesus to deal with sin] so that the righteous demands of the Law might be fully satisfied in us who *live according to the Spirit, and not according to human nature*. Romans 8:4 GNT

> Living by the Holy Spirit involves: focusing on what he wants; paying attention to his promptings; and relying on his power.

Instead of living as a slave to sin, live as a slave to God

[Paul, to believers:] But *now you have been set free from sin and are the slaves of God. Your gain is a life fully dedicated to him,* and the result is eternal life. Romans 6:22 GNT

> One of the most effective measures against sinning is to be busy doing good – as is the case when one lives as a slave to God.

Be Holy

We are to be holy, as God is holy

[God:] *“You must be holy, because I am holy.”* 1 Peter 1:14-16 ISV

Be set apart for God

[God, to the Israelites:] Therefore *separate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God*. Leviticus 20:7 ISV

38. Major Pitfalls

The “pitfalls” spoken of in this chapter are: pride, riches and sexual sin. These are three of the greatest dangers to one’s life as a believer. It is essential that we take to heart the Bible’s teaching about them.

Pride

Do not be proud or conceited

Don’t be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Make friends with ordinary people. ROMANS 12:16B CEV

Do not be wise in your own eyes

How horrible it will be for those who think they are wise and consider themselves to be clever. ISAIAH 5:21 GW

Instead of being proud, be humble

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] And all of you, *clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.* 1 PETER 5:5B NET

Riches

Riches are a barrier to a relationship with God

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, *“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” …* [25]*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*” MARK 10:23, 25 NET

Riches are not secure

Tell those who have the riches of this world … *not to place their confidence in anything as uncertain as riches.*. 1 TIMOTHY 6:17A GW

Hoarding riches will bring ill consequences in the afterlife

[Jesus:] But *how horrible it will be for those who are rich. They have had their comfort.* Luke 6:24 GW

So, do not love money and be content with what you have

Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never leave you; I will never abandon you." Hebrews 13:5 GNT

Sexual Sin

Avoid sexual sin

[Paul, to believers:] But *there must be no sexual sin among you*, or any kind of evil or greed. *Those things are not right for God's holy people.* Ephesians 5:3 NCV™

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law of Moses brought in *a woman who had been caught in bed with a man who wasn't her husband*. They made her stand in the middle of the crowd. [4]Then they said, "*Teacher, this woman was caught sleeping with a man who isn't her husband. …* [7]They kept on asking Jesus about the woman. Finally, he stood up and said, "If any of you have never sinned, then go ahead and throw the first stone at her!" [8]Once again he bent over and began writing on the ground. [9]The people left one by one, beginning with the oldest. Finally, Jesus and the woman were there alone. [10]Jesus stood up and asked her, "Where is everyone? Isn't there anyone left to accuse you?" [11]"No sir," the woman answered. Then Jesus told her, "I am not going to accuse you either. *You may go now, but don't sin anymore.*" John 8:3-4, 7-11 CEV

Sexual sin results in God's judgment

[God, to John:] But I will tell you what will happen to cowards and to everyone who is unfaithful or dirty-minded or who murders *or is sexually immoral* or uses witchcraft or

worships idols or tells lies. *They will be thrown into that lake of fire and burning sulfur. This is the second death.* REVELATION 21:8 CEV

39. Hard Times

Hard times are experienced by all Christians. This reality is reflected in the Bible. But the Bible also shows that there are a number of practical and effective things that we can do when undergoing hard times – the most prominent of which is praying.

Trust and Wait for God

Trust in God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] I have heard the slander of many; It is like terror all around me, as they conspire together and plot to take my life. [14]*But I trust in you, O LORD. I say, "You are my God."* [15]*My times are in your hands. Deliver me from the hands of my enemies and from those who pursue me.* PSALMS 31:13-15 ISV

> The statement: "You are my God" (v. 14), implies that the LORD is the one David trusts as being in control of his life, the one who held his present and future circumstances in his hands (v. 15a).

Take refuge in God

The one who lives in the shelter of the Most High and who abides in the shadow of the Almighty [2]*will say to the LORD, "You are my refuge, my fortress, and my God in whom I trust!"* PSALMS 91:1-2 ISV

Wait for God

Wait patiently for the LORD! Wait confidently for him! PSALMS 37:7A NET

Take comfort in God's word

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *When I suffer, this comforts me: Your promise gives me life. …* [52]*I remember your laws from long ago, and they comfort me, LORD.* PSALMS 119:50, 52 NCV™

> In v. 50 the psalmist speaks of God's promise renewing his life, through the hope that it gives.

Pray in Hard Times

Pour out your heart to God

O people, in every situation put your trust in him; *pour out your heart before him*; for God is a refuge for us. PSALMS 62:8 ISV

Cry out to God for help

[DAVID:] *In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried out to my God.* From his heavenly temple he heard my voice; *he listened to my cry for help*. PSALMS 18:6 NET

Persist in prayer to God

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *LORD God, my saviour, I cry out all day, and at night I come before you.* PSALMS 88:1 GNT

Praise and thank God amidst trouble

Then [Jehoshaphat] *he chose men to be singers to the LORD, to praise him because he is holy and wonderful. As they marched in front of the army, they said, "Thank the LORD, because his love continues forever." 22As they began to sing and praise God, the LORD set ambushes for the people of Ammon, Moab, and Edom who had come to attack Judah.* And they were defeated. 2 CHRONICLES 20:21B-22 NCV™

God in Our Hard Times

God is near us in hard times

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted, and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed. PSALMS 34:18 NCV™

God comforts us in hard times

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! *He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, 4who comforts us in all our suffering*, so that we may be able to comfort others in all their suffering, since

we ourselves are being comforted by God. 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 ISV

40. Persecution

The Bible warns that faithfully following God inevitably results in persecution and difficulties. But as this chapter shows, it also provides practical teaching on what to do when faced with persecution – and even gives reasons to rejoice.

Have Faith in God

Trust in God

[PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS AT CORINTH:] My friends, I want you to know what a hard time we had in Asia. *Our sufferings were so horrible and so unbearable that death seemed certain. [9]In fact, we felt sure that we were going to die. But this made us stop trusting in ourselves and start trusting God, who raises the dead to life. [10]God saved us from the threat of death, and we are sure that he will do it again and again.* 2 CORINTHIANS 1:8B-10 CEV

Do not be afraid

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. [29]Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. [30]Even all the hairs on your head are numbered. [31]So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows. MATTHEW 10:28-31 NET

Pray to God, asking for help

[THE EARLY BELIEVERS:] And now, *Lord, listen to their threats. Lord, help us, your servants, to speak your word without fear. [30]Help us to be brave by showing us your power to heal. Give proofs and make miracles happen by the power of Jesus, your holy servant.* ACTS 4:29-30 NCV™

> Note that the believers' prayer was for God to work through them during their persecution, rather than simply for God to stop the persecution.

Be Faithful to God

Remain faithful to God and Jesus Christ

[Jesus Christ, to believers:] Don't be afraid of anything you are about to suffer. Listen! The Devil will put you to the test by having some of you thrown into prison, and your troubles will last ten days. *Be faithful to me, even if it means death, and I will give you life as your prize of victory.* Revelation 2:10 GNT

Consider and follow Jesus Christ's example in suffering

[The writer, to believers:] *Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus*, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. *He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right-hand side of God's throne.* [3]*Think of what he went through; how he put up with so much hatred from sinners! So do not let yourselves become discouraged and give up.* Hebrews 12:2-3 GNT

Rejoice in Persecution

Rejoice because trials develop Christian character

[James, to believers:] *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you are involved in various trials,* [3]*because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* [4]But *you must let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.* James 1:2-4 ISV

Rejoice because of rewards for enduring persecution

How blessed are you whenever people hate you, avoid you, insult you, and slander you because of the Son of Man! [23]*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for your reward in heaven is great!* Luke 6:22-23a ISV

Pray for persecuted Christians

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Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org
Barnabas Fund provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local leaders.

Christian Solidarity International – csi-usa.org
CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk
CSW advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Open Doors – www.opendoors.org
Open Doors provides Bibles and other materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc
RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See www.idop.org regarding the International Day of Prayer.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com
This site provides weekly prayer bulletins.

The Bible League – bl.org.au/get-involved/bibles-for-the-persecuted
The Bible League provides Bibles for persecuted Christians. It also trains national believers to plant new churches in countries of persecution.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

World Watch Monitor – www.worldwatchmonitor.org
World Watch Monitor reports the story of Christians around the world under pressure for their faith.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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