

A Simple Guide to the Basics of the Christian Life

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Preface

This book is part of a series, and this is the third and final book in that series. While I am thrilled if anyone reads any of my books, and I would certainly hope that anyone who reads this book without having read the first two books in the series would still gain a great deal of benefit from it, it must be said that a lot in this book may be confusing to many without having read the first two books in the series. This book flows from the two books that have come before it, and the reader should be aware of this. The first book in this series is titled *A Simple Guide to the Basics of the Bible*, and the second is titled *A Simple Guide to the Basic Teachings of the Bible*. Both of these works can be found on my website. With all of that said, I hope and pray this book will be a huge help to you in your walk with God!

Before diving into the meat of this book I want to give you the opportunity to receive Jesus. If you have never received Jesus as your God and Savior, please do so now. You do not know what can happen even in the next few moments, and so there is

no time to wait. If you are not ready at this time, but become ready at any time you are reading through this series, please return to this section and receive Him. When you are ready, pray the prayer below sincerely from your heart and you will become a true Christian. It is very, very important to understand that merely saying the words of this prayer will not save you. There is no ritual, whether it be a prayer or anything else, that saves us. You must actually and sincerely mean these words or they will be of no help to you.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that you are God Almighty and the only Savior. I recognize that I am a sinner and I have come to hate my sin. I ask that you come into my life so that I can have an eternal relationship with you, your Father, and your Spirit. I ask that you forgive all of my sins based on what you did on the cross and through your bodily resurrection from the dead. I ask that you cover me with your righteousness. I ask that you give me your Spirit so that you will become number one in my life, far above all else, and so that I will be completely changed. I want to live my life for you from now on, and I can only do that through your Spirit. I understand that I will continue to sin until I die or you come back, so please give me the strength through your Spirit to always seek your help and to continue to ask for your forgiveness. I now know I will spend all eternity with you. I now love you and worship you, and I am so thankful and grateful to you for saving me. Amen.”

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Law of God

Bible Reading and Prayer

The most fundamental part of our relationship with God is Bible reading and prayer. Everything else we do as Christians flows from this fountain. This does not mean that Bible reading and prayer should ever become the focus themselves. The focus is on our relationship with God itself, as I make clear in the first chapter of the first book of this series. And none of this means that we enter into our relationship with God

through Bible reading and prayer, or even that we maintain and sustain our relationship through these things. These are works, wonderful and holy works, but works nonetheless. And we are not saved by any good works, not even these. Although it should be said that prayer is often a good way to first express to God that we have now placed our faith in Him.

We enter into our intimate and eternal relationship with God by faith alone. We stay in this relationship by faith alone. Now some Christians believe that we can lose our salvation by walking away from our relationship with God. They say that when we do this, we have lost saving faith. Others, like myself and all Confessional Presbyterians (as made clear in the second book of this series), believe that God will always sustain our faith and we cannot lose our salvation. With all that laid out, what I am talking about here in these first two paragraphs is how we grow in our intimacy with God. And we do that primarily through Bible reading and prayer. And the Bible is clear that all true Christians will grow in their relationship with God (John 15:1-11). Therefore, any professing Christian that does not regularly read the Bible and pray has shown that he or she is not a true Christian after all.

In the first book of this series, I talked about the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. I talked about some of the key things He shows us through this testimony. But, one of the things that I did not overly elaborate on there, because it is better to talk about it here, is the fact that the Spirit shows us when we are first saved that we grow in our walk with God through Bible reading and prayer. As I said in that book though, make sure you don't think God reveals most of his teachings to us through the testimony. He does not. God mostly reveals His teachings to us through the content of the Bible itself (2 Timothy 3:16). With that made very clear, this is one more truth the Spirit reveals to us through His internal testimony. There are countless passages in the Bible that talk about the importance and holiness of prayer and Bible reading. But it is important to note that these passages are only reiterating what the Spirit reveals to us through the testimony.

And when we take a moment to think about it, this all makes so much sense. Think about the vast majority of relationships that we have, and we can see that the primary way we foster each relationship is through verbal communication. Now I know

there are exceptions to this with infants and the severely mentally disabled, but even in those instances most will admit that they long to have verbal communications in these relationships. In all of these relationships, we do many things to foster our relationships. We laugh together; we eat food together; we play games together; we watch movies together; we go see cool places together; etc. And in some of these relationships, physical contact is appropriate. This can be as simple as hugs, but obviously in the marital relationship it goes far beyond that. The same is true regarding our relationship with God. We worship Him in song; we partake of the sacraments; we enjoy His creation; we receive His bountiful gifts; etc. But at the core of most of these relationships, and at the core of our relationship with God, is verbal communication. We speak to God through prayer, and God speaks to us through His word, the Bible.

This basic impulse within us that this is how we communicate with God and He communicates with us, is seen in the fact that almost every religion emphasizes prayer and their own particular scriptures. They have taken this impulse and warped it with false teachings and scriptures, but they still testify to this basic understanding deep within us. Now, with that said, most do not place the emphasis on their scriptures that we as true Christians do on the Bible. In fact, most of them accuse us of *bibliolatry*. This term refers to worshiping the Bible. But we do not worship the Bible. We do not pray to the Bible, we do not bow down to the Bible, we do not sing worship songs to the Bible. We are quite clear that the Bible is not God, it is His word. Having said that, God cannot be separated from His word. It is His chosen method for communicating with us. He has bound Himself to it and we are not to say otherwise. If we want to know what God is like, what He does, and what He requires of us, we must look to the Bible. And that is precisely why this series places so much emphasis on the Bible. The true church has always done so for the past two thousand years.

Far too many Christians try to grossly over-complicate the Christian life. The Christian life primarily consists of Bible reading, prayer, and following the basic commands of God. That is it. Now many of you may be tempted to think right now that I am arguing for a rather boring relationship with God. I am actually doing nothing of the sort. When we do things God's way, He fills us with Himself in ways that you can only imagine if you are a new Christian. That is true intimacy with God. If you are only

seeking to have a blessed life in the worldly sense, and see God as the means to that end, you are not truly a Christian. You must repent and genuinely receive Jesus as your God and Savior. God will give us a blessed life, but it is through intimacy with Him.

Be careful about “self-help” Christian books. Most of them are written by false teachers, and even the ones that are not are often not that good despite their popularity. I know that probably sounds judgmental or even jealous. That is not the case though. I am a huge fan of some of the best-selling Christian books. With that said, for the most part, you are far better off reading a sound theology book than an overly complicated book on Christian living that is filled with advice that is nowhere found in God’s word.

Next, focusing on God’s commands often makes new Christians nervous. It sounds legalistic and like maybe we are preaching salvation by good works. But we are not preaching salvation by good works at all. We are saved by faith alone. But as was discussed in the second book of this series, true salvation receives the Holy Spirit by faith alone and therefore the true Christian loves to do good works and understands that this is the way we grow in our walk with God. But at every point, we will end the day somewhat disappointed by the extent to which we failed God in our pursuit of good works that day. That is why we must remind ourselves of the gospel all throughout the day, and especially right before we go to sleep. The gospel is not only for when we are first saved. It is for our entire Christian walk. And if we are not regularly reminding ourselves of the gospel, we will despair. At the end of the day, we must always thank God for changing us so that we pursued good works to some extent that day, but pour out our hearts in gratitude to Him for the gospel because we know that if we ever had to be saved by our extremely imperfect good works, we would be doomed.

Finally, pray to Jesus all throughout the day in your head. We need Him all the time. Even if they are short prayers, just pray. And when you are ready after thoroughly going through this series, I really recommend reading my essays on prayer and a Bible reading plan. Both of those can be found on my website.

The Commandments of God

As has been repeatedly said in this series, we are not saved by our good works. But, as the passage from John above makes clear (John 15:1-11), if we truly love God, we will follow His commands. Do not ever listen to the legion of false teachers today that say otherwise. They will often take certain passages in the Bible badly out of context that seem to be saying that the law of God is a negative thing. These passages are only saying that the law becomes a horrible slavemaster over us if we try to be saved by it. And other passages are merely pointing to the fact that after Pentecost, we no longer need to follow a lot of the laws in the Old Testament. God wants us to be doing other things now as Christians. And so when people today try to force Christians to obey some of those laws, they are sinning. But the law of God in itself is a beautiful thing that we should thank God for every day because it shows us how to be pleasing to Him and how to grow in our relationship with Him (Psalm 1).

There are lots of commands in the Bible and we cannot cover all of them here in this book. Life is very complicated sometimes and many things in life vary greatly based upon culture. And the Bible, either directly or indirectly, applies to all of life. Thus, the reason it has so many commands. With that said, we can go over the most important and core commands found in the Bible. And many of the commands we will not cover in this work are implied by the ones we will cover. For instance, the Bible talks a lot about vanity and pride, two commands we will not directly touch upon in this book. But we will look at humility, and the command to be humble clearly means that we should also avoid vanity and pride. The more you prayerfully familiarize yourself with all these core commands, the more they will give you wisdom as to how to deal with very difficult situations where you may not be sure what the Bible has to say about that given situation. Further, when you are confronted with a really difficult situation, talk to your pastor and hopefully he can give you some solid biblical advice. But, most pastors don't have time to go over all of the basics of the faith with every new member, and that is why books along the lines of the ones in this series can be very helpful to new Christians.

It is very important to understand that many of the commands in the Bible do not apply to all of God's people at all times. Many unbelievers harp on this reality and say that if God doesn't change, His commands shouldn't change either. Don't listen to them

as they don't know what they are talking about. God doesn't change, but the world changes as technology changes and as God reveals more information to His people. Further, things changed radically after Pentecost because that is when God sent the fullness of the Spirit out to His people because of the work of Christ on our behalf. This does not mean that people during the Old Testament time did not have the Holy Spirit. They certainly did and couldn't have been saved without Him. But they did not have the fullness of the Spirit. And with that fullness, a lot changed.

And despite what the enemies of the faith say, this is hardly a difficult concept. When my children were little, they were not allowed to drive a car; go outside by themselves; use knives; and a whole host of other things. Today, they all drive; my two oldest have moved out; my oldest son goes camping all over Southern Utah; my daughter recently went on a trip to Florida with her friends; all my boys use very sharp knives to carve things and hunt; and they all use knives to make food. A lot changed as they got older! And while I changed plenty (unlike God and so that part of the analogy is imperfect), my basic view on all of these things never did. Hence, God has every right to change His law as He sees fit, and this in no way implies that He Himself changes.

The question though, is how do we know which laws to follow and which ones we do not need to follow from the Bible today? Christians have given different answers to this question, but all agree that if a command has strong evidence behind it across both testaments, it is a binding command for all Christians until Jesus returns. This doesn't mean that the command must be explicitly stated in both testaments. It only means we should see solid evidence of the basic principles behind the command in the Old Testament, in the Gospels, and in the rest of the New Testament. If this baseline is not followed, then it means we can make up God's commands as we go, and that would clearly violate the passages I have already referred to in this book as well as countless others. Do not listen to those that say we have freedom to pick and choose which commands we wish to follow and which ones we do not. Now, as said, some Christians argue for some commands beyond this baseline. It is fine to listen to those arguments as long as one avoids blatant legalism. But I, and most Christian theologians, agree that this baseline is all that we need.

Now, many Christians often wonder why we don't solely follow the commands in the New Testament as that would seem to be the last law God gave to us. The problem is that in the Gospels, they describe a time when a lot of the Old Testament commands are still in effect. And many of these commands are said to no longer apply to the people of God later in the New Testament. So, that method doesn't work. Further, even in the books after the Gospels, we see commands that are nowhere stated in the Old Testament or the Gospels, and that seem very cultural. For example, often Paul tells Christians to greet each other with a kiss. This doesn't seem to be a binding command. It seems to be cultural and this is confirmed by the fact that it is nowhere found as a command in the Old Testament or the Gospels. Hence, with all that laid out, if we stick to the commands that are found in the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament, we can be sure we are on the right track.

It is very important to understand that merely because the Bible records something as taking place, in no way means that God is endorsing what is being recorded. Often, the Bible records many atrocities and sins, even among God's true people, in order to show us how sinful this world is. Many unbelievers will respond to this by saying that God should have said something in these instances. But they badly misunderstand the Bible. God only spoke directly to His prophets, and even then He only spoke to them on very specific occasions. And God shouldn't have to say anything in these instances when He has already revealed that certain things were forbidden. Again, often God does not intervene in history, even with His people, in order to show us how sinful we are apart from Him.

And this principle doesn't only apply to the negative situations described in the Bible. It also applies to Jesus as well. While Jesus is our ultimate example, not everything Jesus did, are we permitted to do. For example, Jesus was often worshiped and received this worship, but we are never ever to receive worship from anyone at any time. With that said, when the Bible is clear that something is a command for us, such as having compassion on people, when we see Jesus do this so perfectly it is a major motivation for us. In this way, Jesus is our supreme example. Jesus is not our only example though, we can be highly motivated and inspired by the heroes of the Bible and church history. With that made clear, only Jesus is our perfect example.

A lot of new Christians ask about legalism because legalism is so often condemned in the Bible. But, they often are not sure what exactly constitutes legalism and what does not, and they certainly want to avoid taking license when it comes to God's commands. Therefore, it is very important we briefly address this issue now. Legalism is not nearly as complicated as people make it out to be. It is only this: adding to the law of God as it exists at any given point of history. Many will respond to this by saying that surely the Pharisees did far more than add a few commands to God's law. Yes, they did. But, they were not merely condemned for their legalism. They were also condemned for their greed; hypocrisy; heresy; and corruption. Further, they were extreme legalists, they did not merely add a few commands here and there. They added so many that it got to the point where they were negating many of the clear commands of God. Hence, they were not simply adding to God's law, they were overtly contradicting God's law at points.

You may be asking about now, "So, then do the Christians you described above that go beyond the baseline engage in legalism?" I think they do on some level. But, not to the point of heresy or being anything close to along the lines of the Pharisees. Therefore, in my estimation, we should strongly disagree with them, while still accepting them and loving them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. With that said, this in no way means that there are no groups that add to God's law to the point of heresy. There are many groups that do. For instance, the Seventh-day Adventists say that we are not allowed to eat certain foods when God's law in the New Testament has explicitly said that all foods are clean for Christians. This is an example of blatant legalism because their addition leads to an overt contradiction of current laws. True Christians never take things so far.

Now you might be saying, "Wait a second, you said that laws are only binding on us as Christians today if they are found across the Bible. But, if God condemned eating certain foods in the Old Testament, and then not in the New Testament, maybe certain foods are condemned again today. How am I supposed to know what to follow?" God allowing us to eat all foods is not something that is only found in the New Testament. It is true that God temporarily banned the eating of certain foods for much of the Old Testament period for good reasons. But, before the law of Moses was given, God's

people were allowed to eat all foods after the flood of Noah. Before that, God did not allow the eating of meat because it involves the killing of animals. But for much of the Old Testament era, God allowed the eating of all foods. Further, Jesus declared all food clean (Mark 7:19), and throughout the rest of the New Testament God on many occasions says that all foods are clean for Christians. So, this is an example of a command that is seen across the board in the Bible despite God for a time forbidding certain foods during the Old Testament time. Therefore, we can say that all foods will remain clean until Jesus returns.

Confessional Presbyterians believe that the 10 Commandments are a permanent summary of the law of God at any point in history. Not all Christians agree with us here though, and you should be aware of that. But because I am convinced that is the case, that is how this work will be organized as far as the final chapters are concerned. To be clear, Confessional Presbyterians like myself are not arguing that the 10 Commandments explicitly teach all of the commands of God. They do not. What we are saying is that we believe that every command of God at any given point of history is implied by one of the 10 Commandments. For example, when the 7th Commandment prohibits adultery, we believe that this commandment is explicitly and directly about adultery, but is implicitly and secondarily about sexual immorality in general. We believe that the general principle behind the command is that we should avoid sexual immorality. Therefore, when we come to that commandment in this book, I will cover all of the ways in which the Bible says that certain things constitute sexual immorality.

Finally, throughout this work I will often say that we as Christians should do this or that based on God's commands. This may at first glance sound like I am saying that God's commands only apply to Christians. But that is not what I am saying. The point in using this language throughout this work is to emphasize that we can only truly follow God's law (not perfectly of course) if we are in a right relationship with God. And God calls all people unto this relationship, He calls all people to be Christians (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore, all of God's commands apply to all people.

The Principle of the Lesser of Two Evils

With the basic elements of the law of God laid out, it is essential in this section to discuss the principle of the lesser of two evils. Many people, including far too many Christians, try to say that they do not believe in or operate according to this principle. But they are not being honest with themselves. This is one of the most common sense principles God has given to all people, and all people operate according to it everyday whether they admit it or realize it. Every time a loving parent pours medicine on a wound causing further pain to his or her child, he or she is functioning with this principle in mind whether aware of it or not. Hurting a child is wrong. All normal people agree with this. But, if we have to hurt a child in order to keep him or her from even greater harm, all normal people would agree that an exception to this rule must be made.

And we see this principle all throughout the Bible. God made exceptions to the law against incest in the early days of humanity so that humanity could grow. God made exceptions for polygamy for certain male leaders in the history of Israel so that they could have many descendants. The midwives lied to the Egyptians during the time of Moses in order to save the lives of as many Israelite babies as possible. And God commended them for this. Rahab lied in order to help the Israelite scouts and she also was commended for this. God made exceptions to the laws of Passover in the time of King Hezekiah for certain reasons. Throughout both testaments God looks at the job of a soldier as a noble one. Yet, soldiers are trained to kill. Killing is normally forbidden. But they do so in order to save more lives in the long run.

With this principle firmly established, it must be emphatically said that it is never ever to be abused. If God has not audibly and directly told you that you have permission to break a clear command of His that applies to the people of God today, more than likely you do not have permission. With that said, there are rare times where we must utilize this principle even without God audibly telling us to do so. A prime example was when many Christians hid Jews in their houses from the Nazis. When the Nazis would come to check their homes, they would lie to the Nazis in order to protect the Jews. They were breaking the law of God against lying in order to save the lives of these Jews and to save them from some of the worst torture in history as well. This was a godly use of this principle.

Unfortunately, many fake “Christians” seek to use this principle in order to justify their sin. I’ve often heard false “Christians” say that “god” is ok with them doing this or that because “god” wants us to be happy and disobeying this or that command is allegedly the only way for them to be happy. This is not using this principle in a godly fashion. It is blatant disobedience. And if this disobedience persists and is rampant in one’s life in many areas across the board, such a person is not truly saved. He or she does not have the Holy Spirit. This principle is to be avoided as much as possible and is only to be used in the most extreme cases, like in war.

Many people, including many true Christians, worry that this principle sounds like a “the ends justify the means” ethic (ethics refers to right and wrong). Or in more technical terms, the philosophy known as *situation ethics*. But, I am advocating no such thing. That type of ethic says that one can use the above principle in almost any situation according to what one believes will be a better outcome. A good example of situation ethics is when so many people today argue that it is ok to abort a baby because if the abortion does not take place the child may be poor. This is an outright evil ethic. We don’t go around killing poor people simply because they are poor. Further, you don’t know with absolute certainty that the child will be poor. The above principle can only be used on the rarest and most extreme cases and where it is abundantly obvious that the good of the outcome outweighs the evil of the means by a monumentally long way. The example with the Nazis above is a clear example of this principle being used in a godly manner. This may sound like I am contradicting what I said earlier about how people operate according to this principle everyday. I am not saying people should use this principle everyday, but that all people know at all times that it might need to be used at any given emergency point.

Christian Suffering

The Christian life is one of deep suffering. If you are not ready to suffer for Christ, you have not truly received Him. It is that simple. Many, many passages could be given to support this fact, but none is more clear or more powerful than 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Some false teachers try to say that this only applies to Paul. Nope, sorry, Acts 14:21-22

makes it quite clear that isn't the case. Many of these false teachers say that this only happened to Paul as punishment for his arrogance. They say that the passage makes it clear that "god" allowed Satan to bring this thorn in Paul's flesh in order to humble him. But, the passage does not say that God did this as a punishment for Paul's arrogance. It says that God allowed this preemptively to *keep* Paul from being arrogant. It was a blessing from God from the outset and not a punishment. The entire passage makes this quite clear.

And even if we were to grant that it was a punishment from God initially, the passage is clear that Paul asked in humble faith for God to take the thorn away. If this was indeed a punishment, then Paul clearly repented and God should have then healed Paul if God always desires to heal us if we have humble, repentant faith. But, God still said no. And God does not say that He refused to answer Paul's prayer in order to continue to punish Paul, but so that Paul would be strengthened in his weakness. Now, it is true that God often does punish us as our Father and God always uses these chastisements to sanctify us, as we saw in the previous book of this series. The key thing to understand though, is that our sufferings as Christians are not always the result of God's Fatherly discipline as this passage makes clear.

Now, does this mean that all of the sufferings of unbelievers are the result of God's punishment? On some level yes. However, it is important to understand that God does not punish all unbelievers as much as they deserve in this life. Hence, we cannot ever say that so and so is being severely punished because he or she has cancer or something like that. The existence of something really horrible in the life of an unbeliever, such as cancer, does not mean that he or she is worse than other unbelievers. Many times God withholds His punishments on unbelievers in this life. But, God will make everything even at the final judgment. I understand that many think John 9:1-3 contradicts what I have just said here, but this is not the case, and I have more to say about this important passage in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*.

Do not listen to the filthy rich tv preachers with their millions of followers who tell you that you can have nothing but victory in "Jesus," and by this they mean worldly victory. They never preach on the suffering of the Christian life because they are liars. And they make a fortune off of their lies. They tell people to give everything to their

ministries so that these people can be blessed. But in the end these people end up broke and disillusioned, and the tv preachers buy more mansions; more fancy clothes; more jets; and more punishments for themselves in hell.

Many of these false teachers, when pressed, will admit that the Christian life contains suffering, but they say God is always ready to give us the victory over this suffering and He never wants us to be sick or poor long term. They will even say that Paul's thorn in his flesh spoken of earlier was not necessarily a physical health issue. The problem is that Jesus and the apostles were all poor. And Paul was often beaten and whipped, he was stoned, he was shipwrecked, and I could go on. Do you honestly think that none of this affected his health? Give us a break. And death is the ultimate sickness, and all Christians are going to die other than those that are alive at the time Jesus returns. Many of these false teachers will point out that Jesus paid to eliminate all of our sickness and poverty. This is absolutely true. But as we discussed in the second book of this series, God does not give us the full benefits of all that Jesus earned for us right away in this life. Jesus also paid to eliminate death in our lives, and to eliminate sin in our lives as well. This is why we as Christians will all be resurrected at the last day, and will sin no more after that as well. But in this life we still sin; suffer; die; get sick; and in many cases are poor. Other very key verses in this regard are: Philippians 2:25-30; 1 Timothy 5:23; 1 Timothy 6:5; and James 1:9-11.

Many of these false teachers will emphasize the many passages in the Bible that talk about God blessing us, often with riches and good health, and about how we need to have faith to receive God's blessings. They are taking these passages badly out of context. The vast majority of these passages are using poetic and exaggerated language to point to the fact that our Father loves to bless His adopted children. And these passages are also often talking about the eternal state and not this life. As we talked about in book one of this series, Scripture must interpret Scripture. Any time we have two sets of passages that seem to be in conflict at first glance, we must seek to harmonize them in the most reasonable manner possible. True Christians do this by pointing to the poetic and exaggerated nature of these passages that the false teachers love to talk about, while the false teachers have to completely negate the many passages that talk about Christian suffering in this life. One approach loves God's word

and seeks to harmonize it, while the other rejects huge portions of it for their own greedy ends like the Pharisees of old.

As far as the passages on having faith, it is definitely true that sometimes God does cause us more suffering as a form of discipline or because we are not having enough faith. The crucial point though, is that this is not always the case. Sometimes God is bringing suffering into our lives to draw us closer to Him as Paul makes clear in the section from 2 Corinthians above. It is also true that sometimes these passages, including many directly from the mouth of Jesus, do at first glance make it sound like if we have enough faith God will always heal us or answer our prayers. But Jesus often used exaggerated language to get our attention.

Jesus said never to take vows. Yet, God sees vows as a godly act in moderation throughout the Old Testament, and we see many godly people taking vows throughout the rest of the New Testament (we will discuss vows later in this book). Jesus, at one point, said that divorce is never permissible. Yet, at another point, Jesus makes an exception (we will discuss divorce later in this book). Jesus repeatedly talks about hell using the language of fire (Matthew 5:22 and Mark 9:43-48 as two examples). Yet, at other points, Jesus uses language to describe hell that makes the use of fire nonsensical. For instance, Jesus says that people in hell will be cut into pieces (Matthew 24:50-51). And Jesus says that people in hell will be destroyed (Matthew 10:28). What would be the point of God burning our leftover pieces? And someone who is destroyed can't be burned because he would be gone! One could argue that maybe God cuts unbelievers into pieces and then burns them, and that is how they will in fact be destroyed. But then hell would not be eternal for unbelievers, and yet Jesus clearly says that it will be (Matthew 25:46). Hence, there is not going to be literal fire in hell. Jesus is using the strongest imagery available to help us understand how awful hell will be for unbelievers.

In light of all of this, and all that was said before this in this subsection, it is quite clear that Jesus is merely imploring us to have faith and God will deeply reward such faith, often with healing and financial blessings (but not always).

Finally, while it is true that God does not want all of His children to always be healthy and wealthy in this life, it is also true that God does not always want all of His

children to be sick and poor in this life either. Some false teachers take things too far in the other direction. They advocate what is known as an ascetic life. This refers to self-inflicted suffering and it was a huge problem in the Middle Ages. This is a form of legalism as God nowhere commands this. Many of these false teachers will over-emphasize the passages in the Bible on suffering and the passages that seem to condemn rich people. But, the passages seeming to condemn rich people are clearly talking about those who have gotten rich through greed and oppression. God does not condemn being wealthy. Abraham was wealthy; David was wealthy; Solomon was wealthy; Jesus was supported by wealthy women in His ministry; and Paul preached to many wealthy people and never told them to get rid of their wealth. Again, we must interpret all of Scripture in a harmonious way. Heretics (false teachers) seek to pit one set of passages against another.

You might be saying to yourself right now, "Ok, but how can rich people suffer, they're rich!" Trust me when I say that rich people, not just Christians, can suffer plenty. I grew up wealthy and I saw how hard my dad worked for his money. It took a lot out of him. I'm not saying that is true of all rich people, but it is true for a lot. And my mom has had a ton of health issues over the years. All of my parents' money has not been able to heal her of these ailments. And God will bring suffering to us in one way or another whether we are rich or not. Solomon was rich and yet he eventually suffered from a terrible bout of depression (read Ecclesiastes). I have known wealthy Christians who have had rebellious older children, who have had cancer, and I could go on. You may say, "Ok, but almost everyone suffers to some degree, so what makes Christian suffering any different." It is different because we react to it in a godly manner, always giving the one true God the glory, even in our suffering. That may not seem like a very big deal to the world, but to God it is a huge deal.

Chapter 2: Commandments 1-2

The First Commandment

The first four commandments from the 10 Commandments are addressing our love to God. The last six commandments are addressing our love to our fellow humans, especially towards our brothers and sisters in Christ. As Confessional Presbyterians, we do not believe this is an accident. We believe that this corresponds to what Jesus said about the two greatest commandments in Matthew 22:37-40. It must be said though, that even these two commandments can be summarized by the first. Even when we love our fellow humans, we must ultimately be doing so for the glory of God. All that we do must be motivated by our love for God. This does not mean that we should not love other things and only pretend to love them out of our love for God. We are to genuinely love other humans and all of God's creation, but our primary motivation should always be our love for God and His glory. Now this does not mean that we always have to feel like we are bursting with love for certain people. Sometimes, certain people drive us crazy and we are to be loving towards them as much as possible because of our love for God. But even in these instances, we should pray that God would grant us more genuine internal love for them in the process.

All of this is so important because it points to the fact that God is not interested in mere external acts. God looks upon the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Even our wicked desires and thoughts are sinful in God's eyes. This is why, as we will see, God makes it clear that it is not enough to simply avoid adultery outwardly. We must, both inwardly and outwardly, avoid all forms of sexual immorality. This is why it is not enough to merely avoid murdering or hurting someone. We must avoid hating people in our heart. We must actively love people from the heart. Now again, this is not always natural to us. But as stated above, we can always pray to God from our heart that He would grant us genuine internal love for certain people we struggle deeply to love.

With all that said, this does not mean we are to be doormats. Some people can completely rob us of our joy if we let them, and the Bible repeatedly tells us to have joy in the Lord. Love people as much as you can with the help of the Holy Spirit, but if someone is being abusive in any way, you must remove yourself from that person. You can still love them by sincerely praying for them. The only exception to this is if someone has committed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (we discussed this sin in the

second book of this series). In that case, you can still love that person by helping them from a distance in whatever ways you can. You can pray that God would give you opportunities to show them love, but you are not to pray for them directly (1 John 5:16-17).

It is so important to understand the key doctrine of the Bible that a work is only truly good in the sight of God if it is done for God's glory. Because the unbeliever does not love God above all else, he or she cannot truly do good works (Genesis 6:5). You may say, "But, I know a lot of unbelievers and they are wonderful people." We all do. And I certainly do. My parents are unbelievers and are positively amazing people. No one gets this more than I do. But that is the point. God is not saying that unbelievers do not do good things from an earthly perspective. They do and God will take these "good" things into account at the final judgment. They will receive less punishments in hell because of these actions (if they die as unbelievers). With that made clear, they do nothing preeminently for the glory of God and thus God does not recognize these works as truly good in His sight. You may say, "But I know many of them, and many are very religious people. They are very focused on the glory of God." No, they are very focused on the glory of the false "god" of their false religion. I know how harsh that sounds in our culture, but that is what the Bible teaches from beginning to end.

Understanding this key principle can alleviate a lot of confusion for new Christians when reading the Bible at first. For example, when Jesus says, "God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9; NLT)," it can sound like Jesus is saying that all who work for peace will be saved. And we all know lots of unbelievers who work for peace. The point Jesus is making is that anyone who claims to be a Christian and is not a peacemaker, is a liar and is not truly a follower of God. He is not saying that all peacemakers around the world are saved; this is because God does not truly recognize their peacemaking efforts as they are not making those efforts for the glory of God. Again, God will recognize those efforts in a secondary sense at the final judgment, but He will never recognize them in a full and complete sense.

With all of that background laid out, we can now jump into the actual commands of God. The 10 Commandments are found in Exodus 20:1-21. They can be summarized as follows:

- 1.) Love God far above all else.
- 2.) Do not make idols.
- 3.) Do not use God's name disrespectfully.
- 4.) Honor the Sabbath.
- 5.) Honor your parents.
- 6.) Do not kill.
- 7.) Do not commit adultery.
- 8.) Do not steal.
- 9.) Do not lie.
- 10.) Do not covet (want what others have).

In each section on each of the commandments, I will quote (from the Confessional Presbyterian catechism I provided at the end of the first book of this series) the primary commands from the Bible that I believe are summarized by the specific commandment under discussion. Then I will elaborate on each point and show from the Bible where these commands come from. Let us begin with the first of the 10 Commandments.

“Only worship God; love God far above all else, even when we are suffering in His name; believe what God says; learn about God from the Bible as His disciples; only pray to God in Jesus' name; as Christians, repent and confess your sins to God as your Father (not as your judge; you confess your sins to God as your judge when you are first saved); proclaim the gospel; be humble, but courageous.”

We are only to worship God. We will discuss in a moment what exactly

constitutes worship, but for now it must be said that the Bible is emphatic from beginning to end that we are only to worship God. We are not to worship lesser “gods” (there are none), and we are not to worship lesser beings, not even in a secondary sense. From beginning to end the Bible pounds home this command again and again. We are to love God far above all else, even when we are suffering in His name, and all of our worship should flow from this. As far as what constitutes worship, for now we will go by basic common sense: prayer; worship songs; offering sacrifices; spiritual rituals; prostrating ourselves (beyond a simple respectful bow); and reading scriptures are the most basic forms of worship found in almost all spiritual religions, and we see all of these in regard to the one true God in the Bible. I say much more about this key doctrine in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. We have already seen in the first book of this series some of the key biblical justification for this command. We are also to love God far above all else even when suffering for His name. This has already been seen from the first book of this series, and from what we have discussed in this book.

We are to believe what God tells us, even when it is difficult and goes against our culture and upbringing, without doubting (Job 19:25; Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 24:36-39; John 8:24; John 21:24; Galatians 1; Hebrews 11:1; James 1:5-8; 1 John 5:18-20; and Revelation 2). A lot of unbelievers say that it is wrong to have faith without evidence. They are right. But we do not have faith without evidence. The Holy Spirit has testified to us that the Bible is His word. That is the greatest evidence of all! And there is a ton of evidence for the Bible outside the Bible. Presenting this evidence to the world is known as apologetics (it doesn't have anything to do with apologizing despite the fact that the words look and sound so similar). You do not need to know a great deal of apologetics to be a faithful Christian. With that said, if you are interested, it can greatly strengthen your faith. It is also at least good to know where to point both believers and unbelievers to this evidence if they are interested. I discuss this more in my essay “Tips for Witnessing.” It can be found on my website in the section on the works for beginners.

None of this means Christians will never struggle with doubt. We often do indeed struggle with doubt as we struggle with many sins. But, unlike what many false teachers say, we should never see doubt as a healthy thing. When we doubt, we should not beat

ourselves up, but we should pray to God and ask for forgiveness and for Him to strengthen our faith.

We are to learn about God from the Bible as His disciples (Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 1; Matthew 4:4; Matthew 22:37-38; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 4:16; and 2 Timothy 3:16). We are not to read the Bible only so that God can tell us what we want to hear. We are to read it so we can learn about who God is because as true Christians we long to know who God truly is because we love Him far above all else. Some false teachers have tried to say that all disciples of “Jesus” are “Christians,” but not all “Christians” are disciples. This is false. A true Christian is a disciple of Jesus. This doesn’t mean we are all part of the original 12 disciples. Those were Jesus’ disciples in a very unique sense and became the first 12 apostles. But we are disciples of Jesus nonetheless.

Because we are to worship God alone, we are to pray to Him alone. And because Jesus alone is our mediator as far as salvation is concerned (as we saw in the second book of this series), we are to pray in His name alone. For a great deal more information on prayer, see my essay on prayer.

As Christians, we are to repent and confess our sins to God as our Father, and not as our judge (we confess our sins to God as our judge when we are first saved). The term *repent* means to change one’s mind or to turn around. In the Bible, it usually refers to turning from sin towards God. As believers, we are already turned toward God, but we are still to repent of our sins in the sense of confessing them and asking God to cause us to turn to Him more and more in order to overcome the sins in our life more and more. Confession and repentance are taught all over the Bible. I know of no one who denies this. Many people may not believe what the Bible says, but I know of no serious person who denies that the Bible teaches this because it is so pervasive in the Bible. And we saw in the last book of this series that when we come to God, He completely forgives us as our judge and only disciplines us as our Father. Therefore, we must only confess our sins to Him as our Father. As our judge, He has already been completely satisfied by the work of Jesus on the cross on our behalf.

Many false teachers have said that we do not repent when we first come to “god.” They say this would mean that we are saved by repentance and faith, rather than faith alone. They will say that we should repent of our sins throughout our “Christian”

walk to “god” as our “father,” but they say that when we first come to “god” as our judge, we need only to have faith. But repentance is a prerequisite for faith. We are not saved by our repentance, but one cannot have saving faith without true repentance. To say that this means we are saved by repentance and faith rather than faith alone would be like saying we are saved by being conscious and having faith. This is ridiculous. One cannot have faith without being conscious, but being conscious does not save us. When we come to God, we are asking for the Holy Spirit as a free gift. But in order to do that, you must understand that the Holy Spirit is going to change you into a holy person that loves God above all else. You cannot desire that the Holy Spirit would do this unless you have made a decision to turn from your sins. If you have no desire to turn from your sins, then clearly you do not want the Holy Spirit to change you.

With all that made clear, it needs to be said that some true Christian teachers have said that we do not have to repent when we first come to Jesus, but say we will repent eventually as true Christians. I strenuously disagree with this position, but it is not all out heresy. But, these teachers should be more careful to make it clear that all true Christians will eventually repent through the influence of the Spirit. They still need to make it clear to people that if they have no desire to change, even if only down the line, then such people are not ready to truly receive Jesus.

As Christians, we are to proclaim the gospel (this is known as witnessing as you are being a witness to the work of Jesus). This does not mean that every Christian has the gift of evangelism (evangelism means preaching the gospel). What it does mean is that all Christians should support those who do have the gift of evangelism. At the very least this can be done through prayer. And often it can go beyond prayer by supporting a missionary financially or something along those lines if God is calling you to do that. And if you are a parent, you must preach the gospel to your children. And if someone directly asks you about what you believe, you must not be ashamed and must proclaim the gospel. If you don't feel comfortable witnessing, I recommend reading my essay “Tips for Witnessing.” It can be found on my website. All of this is shown in the following passages: Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Isaiah 40:9-11; Proverbs 22:6; Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 9:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Timothy 4:5; Titus 1:6-7; and 1 Peter 3:15-16.

The passages from Proverbs and Titus do not mean that all children raised in godly homes will be saved. God alone saves. It does mean that Christian principles will never leave them and that younger children will only say they don't believe if they have not been taught the gospel by their parents. At first glance, the Titus passage could seem to only be about elders. But the point of the elder requirements found in that passage and elsewhere, is that an elder must be obedient in all of the basic commands of God. If he is really struggling in one area, he should not be an elder. Obviously all Christians struggle with sin, elders very much included. But, if a Christian is having a particularly hard time in one specific area, he should not be an elder. If we said that the Titus passage only applies to elders across the board, we would also have to say that, as one example, avoiding violence only applies to elders.

As Christians, we are to be humble and yet courageous at the same time (Psalm 27:1; Psalm 138:6; Proverbs 3:34; Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 10:28; Luke 1:52; Hebrews 13:6; and James 4:6).

The Second Commandment

“Do not make idols; do not engage in witchcraft or superstition; do not be worldly; do not get drunk/high/smoke (other than the occasional cigar or pipe); treat your body well; treat the earth well (but be careful not to overly exalt the earth); keep yourself and your possessions clean and well kept (be a good steward).”

If there is anything that is clear from the Bible, it is that God utterly hates idolatry (Isaiah 45:20; Matthew 22:37-38 [Jesus is quoting here from Deuteronomy 6:5, which is found right in the middle of the context of Deuteronomy 5-6]; and 1 Corinthians 10:7). Many true Christians have believed, and many still do, that even making pictures of God in any sense, constitutes idolatry. Most, myself included, believe that idolatry in the most literal sense means making something physical in order to worship it. With all that said, it must be made clear that idolatry in the broader and deeper sense, clearly refers to putting anything above God or allowing anything to become even close to God in our

hearts (Colossians 3:5). And that is the ultimate point Moses and Jesus are making in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37-38.

God hates witchcraft and superstition, and as His followers we are to avoid them at all costs (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:10-14; 1 Chronicles 10:13; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Isaiah 8:19-22; Matthew 4:1-11; Acts 19:17-20; Galatians 5:19-20; 1 Timothy 4:7; and Revelation 21:8). This means we must avoid psychics; mediums; palm readers; card readers; horoscopes; and even anything that remotely smacks of superstition. You may think that a horoscope is harmless, but they are demonic and the Bible takes all such things with grave seriousness.

As Christians, we are not to be worldly. Being worldly refers to copying the world and trying to be accepted by the world. And the term *world* in this context refers to the unbelieving world. There is much more that could be said about this concept, and I address some of these things in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. For now, I will say it is very important to avoid copying the world or trying to be accepted by it (Deuteronomy 18:9; John 17:13-19; and 1 John 2:15-17). And we must understand that the world will always hate God's true church as it hated, and still hates, the true Jesus (Matthew 5:10-11; Matthew 11:18-19; John 7:7; John 8:31-59; John 15:18-25; and John 17:14).

As Christians, we are to treat our bodies well. This doesn't mean we need to be obsessed with our health, but it does mean that in general we should avoid things that blatantly hurt our bodies. This includes eating nothing but bad food (or being overly obsessed and dependent on food); smoking; getting high on drugs; getting drunk; etc. (Genesis 1:26-27; Proverbs 20:1; Proverbs 23:20; Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 21:34-35; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 5:18-19; and Philippians 3:19).

Now some Christians think it is ok to smoke because often the effects of smoking don't fully show up until much later in life. This belief is not heresy, but the vast majority of Christians, myself very much included, think they are very wrong. Other Christians believe that even the very occasional cigar or pipe is sinful. A lot of Christians, myself included, think this is going too far. Many Christians believe that drinking alcohol at all is wrong. They are aware of the fact that God clearly allowed for the drinking of wine throughout the Bible, but they often argue that this was because it was so dangerous for people in the ancient world to drink water. They say that since this is no longer the case

and alcohol causes so many problems, it should be avoided altogether today. This is a strong argument and therefore we cannot call such Christians false teachers. But it does seem to me to be getting too close to adding to the commands of God. Therefore, I believe that moderate drinking is permissible, but all true Christians agree that getting drunk is not. You will have to prayerfully decide where you stand on some of these gray issues.

Finally, as Christians we are to take care of the earth (without obsessing over it), and keep ourselves and our possessions clean and well kept (we are to be good stewards). As we will see below, taking care of the earth also heavily ties in with the need to foster good human culture. As far as taking care of ourselves goes, this is clearly seen by all that was said above on our bodies and by the fact that God clearly takes cleanliness very seriously. Over and over in the Old Testament God talks about the importance of cleanliness. As far as the earth and our possessions go, this is plainly taught in the following passages: Genesis 1:26-30; Psalm 24:1-2; Psalm 33:12; Proverbs 14:34; Proverbs 21:20; Proverbs 29:2; Matthew 22:37-38 (in light of Psalm 24:1-2); Mark 10:28-30; Mark 12:13-17; John 2:1-10; John 10:10; Romans 13:1-7; James 1:17; Revelation 11:18; Revelation 19:6-9; and Revelation 21.

On top of these specific passages, in regard to culture, it should also be said that God repeatedly commanded feast days throughout the Old Testament; the Temple was ornately decorated at God's command; and elaborate weddings take place on numerous occasions throughout the Old Testament. These weddings would have included music (and not only worship music); dancing; games; art; lots of food; and festive clothing. There are too many passages for these things to list here, but no serious student of the Bible would dispute what I have said. As far as the last point on weddings, one could argue that these are descriptions and therefore don't hold the weight of being commands. But in light of the fact that Jesus attended, participated in, and contributed to a wedding in John 2, and what we read in Revelation 21, this position is not sustainable because these texts are clearly affirming what we see practiced throughout the Old Testament.

As far as not overly obsessing about the earth, this is clearly taught by all that has been said regarding idolatry and especially in Romans 1:18-25. Therefore, those

that seek to put more emphasis on the environment than on people or the things of God are not of God. However, people claiming to be “Christians” who have no regard for the environment; animals; culture; or their own possessions; are not truly following God either. This does not mean that Christians have to adopt a particular type of culture. God loves diversity. But, anyone who has no interest in music; art (of some kind); entertainment; politics (one certainly does not need to be too involved in politics; however a true Christian should know the basic issues and prayerfully vote); etc.; is someone who is choosing to not care about things God cares about, and this really is a form of gross selfishness. Much more could be said about this point, and I elaborate on this in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*, if you are interested. Also, a lot of Christians talk about social justice and illegal immigration in connection with this commandment, and I discuss those controversial topics in the above book as well.

Chapter 3: Commandments 3-4

The Third Commandment

“Do not take the Lord’s name in vain (this includes all of His titles); do not use bad language.”

God takes the use of His name and titles extremely seriously. This is because God is so holy (as we saw in the previous book of this series). He is to be respected at all times, and this absolutely includes how we speak about Him. Far too many in our culture today have the notion that “god” is a big cuddly Santa Claus in the sky. Far too many people who claim to be “Christians” say that they cannot worship God if He is otherwise. But they are refusing to worship the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is gracious; merciful; compassionate; gentle, slow to anger; and kind. But, He is still entirely holy. If we approach Him with reverence and humility, we will find Him to be like the words just used. Yet, if we come to Him on our own terms as if we are the top dog

and God must listen to us and conform to how we want Him to be, we will find ourselves confronted with a consuming and terrifying fire (I am not talking about literal fire here; “fire” is often used as a metaphor in the Bible for God’s intense wrath towards our sin). As we saw in the second book of this series, God (technically speaking) only has one name (Yahweh). But, He has many titles. And because of all that was said above, reverence must be given to all of God’s titles as well as His name (Exodus 3:1-15; Isaiah 6; John 17:11-12; Romans 3:24; and Philippians 2:5-11).

As Christians, we are not to use bad or inappropriate language (Proverbs 4:24; Hosea 4:2; Matthew 12:36; Ephesians 4:29; Ephesians 5:4; Colossians 3:8; and James 3:6-8). Now good Christians debate over all what constitutes bad language. You will have to decide where you land on these gray areas. With that said, any words that are universally recognized in any given culture as bad or inappropriate words must be avoided by true Christians. And overly crude jokes and stories are clearly to be avoided as well. As Christians, our speech should be wholesome and point people to God. This does not mean we are only to talk about God at all times. But, in general, our speech should show that we are different from the world as we belong to the one true God.

The Fourth Commandment

“Rest and worship God on the Sabbath; go to church on the Sabbath as much as possible; use your spiritual gifts; observe the sacraments.”

The Confessional Presbyterian view is that the Sabbath is not solely for the Old Testament era, and that Sunday is now the Sabbath after Pentecost. However, many Christians do not agree with this view. With that said, all Christians do agree that we need rest as Christians. We are not to work long days, seven days a week. If we do this, there is no time for God and that is unacceptable. All Christians also agree that Sunday (known as the Lord’s Day in the Bible [Revelation 1:9-10]) is the day for going to church. This does not mean that church services and other church activities can’t be held on other days of the week. They certainly can. What it does mean is that all Christians should try their very best to go to church on Sunday, and that churches must make at

least one service available on that day for the people of God. And all Christians agree that we must be part of a local church. It is completely fine to visit other churches, but we should not go to one church one week, then another a different week, and another one after that, etc. We must pick a church and be committed to it.

I understand that as our society becomes more and more secular, it becomes more and more difficult for people to take a lot of time off of work and go to church on Sundays. I do not want to be legalistic, so allow me to offer this practical advice. The overwhelming vast majority of us can get at least four Sundays off per year. If you cannot do this, then more than likely you need to change jobs. Spread these four days out across the year as much as possible. If you go to church four Sundays in a row and say, "Ok, that's my four and I'm good to go," you are missing the spirit of things here. That would mean you would attend church on Sundays for about a month and then could avoid it for another year; this is unacceptable. And when you are picking the four Sundays to take off, do all in your power to pick days when your church will be celebrating the Lord's Supper (also often known as communion). And on those Sundays, give what you can financially to your church in accordance with your income as you feel led by the Spirit. Then do what you can to participate in church activities during the week during any time you do have off from work as long as you are not getting overwhelmed. If all you can handle is one Bible study, then do that. Then do whatever it takes to set aside 4-5 hours a week in one chunk to do a really solid prayer, and to take time to read chunks of the Bible (still be praying short prayers in your head all throughout the day, every day).

Finally, talk with your pastor about your plan and explain why you are having to do this and that you are committed to the church. After all of this, do all that you can to add as many Sundays over the years as possible. Very few Christians cannot meet this bare minimum requirement. With all of this said, if you can make certain lifestyle changes to be in church on Sundays as much as possible, you should do so (missing on occasion for illness, travel, or needing a complete day off is of course fully permissible).

Next, it is so important that you find at least one extremely solid and sincere true Christian that you can fellowship with on a regular basis. Even if this is a close family

member, you must find at least one person. Often such a person will come from our local church. But, I do understand that sometimes certain churches are large and you may have a busy schedule. Therefore, that isn't always ideal and may not work for you. It doesn't have to be someone from your local church. It can be someone who attends a different church. Even if it is someone who lives a couple hours from you, make the effort to see him or her as often as possible. Phone calls; FaceTime; texts; social media; etc.; can all be helpful, but we need in-person interactions with true Christians on a fairly regular basis. This world will chew you up and spit you out as a Christian, trust me. We must have this support system.

As far as the need for rest and setting aside time for God, the Old Testament repeatedly commands observance of the Sabbath. Jesus talked about He is our ultimate rest, but this clearly implies that rest is a good thing (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus often would remove Himself from everything in order to pray (Luke 9:18). And Jesus constantly quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures, showing the importance of Bible reading. And as we saw above, John took time to worship God on the Lord's Day.

As far as the need to be part of a local church, in the Old Testament era (as we saw in the last book of this series) the people of God had to be in submission to the priests. They were not to be lone followers of God. Often when Jesus healed someone, He would tell them to go see the priest to fulfill the law, showing Jesus did not come to produce a new age of renegade Christians (Matthew 8:3-4). And after Pentecost, church discipline is clearly taught in 1 Corinthians 5. If the offender discussed in this chapter was not a part of the Corinthian church, there would be no way to discipline him. The Corinthians could have argued that he was not their responsibility if he went from church to church. Now good Christians do debate the need for formal church membership. Some argue that it is the responsibility of the individual Christian to choose a church, attend regularly, and participate as he or she can. Regardless of your opinion on this matter, all agree that the individual professing Christian needs to pick a church and eventually people at the church will recognize him or her, and if people at the church find out that this individual is living in sin, they are to begin the process of Matthew 18:15-20. If necessary, they are to bring the matter before the pastor or pastors and he or she must be disciplined by the church.

As far as Sunday being the specific day of worship for Christians after Pentecost, the principle of one day of the week being set aside was clearly taught by the Sabbath in the Old Testament. And even though Jesus chastised the Pharisees on many occasions for how legalistic they were about the Sabbath, He still recognized its validity (Mark 2:23-28). And we know from historical sources that the Lord's Day in the early church was celebrated on the first day of the week, which is our current Sunday. And we know that the Lord's Day should be observed because of the example of John seen above. Further, we know the churches met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). And the reason this day seems to be the one God set aside for us as Christians after Pentecost is because Jesus rose on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1-10). Finally, the author of Hebrews makes it clear that we are not to abandon this meeting time (Hebrews 10:25).

Now as said above, many Christians do not see enough biblical evidence for saying that all of Sunday must be set aside for rest and worship, but all Christians agree that the day should be set aside for at least one church service. Finally, the way the Jews calculated days was different than we do today. They thought the day began in the evening and ended on the next day in the evening. So, some churches offer services on Saturday night and many Christians attend then, and this is fully obedient to the basic principle of Sunday worship. As far as the need for Christian fellowship, see the following texts: Psalm 133; Proverbs 17:17; Matthew 18:20; Matthew 26:36-46 (especially verse 40); 1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Tim 2:22; and 1 Peter 3:8.

Next, we must discuss what all should take place in a church service. Not all Christians agree here, but all true Christians agree that while church services can get lively, they must still be reverent and not out of control overall. And all true Christians also agree that a church service should at the least have prayer; worship songs; the preaching and/or teaching of God's word; and the taking of an offering. Some churches do not formally take an offering, but simply make it clear how Christians can give as they feel led by the Spirit and this is fine. Further, all true Christians believe that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated in formal church services on Sunday at the very least a few times a year. Many churches celebrate it a lot more often than that (some as

often as every week), but all agree that at minimum it must be celebrated a few times a year. All of this is taught in the following passages: Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 1 Corinthians 14:26; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; and Ephesians 5:18-19.

Next, we must very briefly discuss spiritual gifts. All Christians after Pentecost are given at least one spiritual gift. A spiritual gift is an ability that God gives to us that clearly benefits the people of God in very tangible ways. The lists of spiritual gifts given in Scripture are not exhaustive, so if you don't see your gift on there, you don't need to worry. Sometimes God gives to us a natural gift before we are saved that He then uses as a spiritual gift after we are saved. And sometimes a spiritual gift won't show up in any way until after we are saved. A lot of Christians wonder how they can know if something is a spiritual gift or not. So, for example, you might be really good at football and use this natural gift to play with your buddies for fun on the weekend and not much more. That is merely a natural gift. But, if you are Kurt Warner, who has used his natural gifts at playing football as a tremendous vehicle for spreading the gospel, that is a spiritual gift.

Most Christians only have one gift and it is usually one that is not flashy. And this is completely ok. Most Christians have the gift of prayer, or of teaching their children the gospel, or of encouragement. Don't listen to overly zealous pastors who tell you that all Christians must be in ministry on some level. That isn't true and produces a lot of guilt and burn out in the church. If more pastors would relax and allow God to run His church, the church would be much better off. Those who have ministry gifts don't need to be prodded to do certain things, you can't keep them away. A lot of pastors will say, "But then we can't have as many programs." Yeah, we don't need most of them. Most of them attract people who want an entertainment "Jesus," and these people are not saved and rarely become saved. This is one of the core reasons the church is so weak and compromised in our nation today. I have a great deal more to say on spiritual gifts in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. For now you can check out 1 Corinthians 12-14 to get a solid feel for what the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts.

Next, all Christians agree that we must be baptized and partake of the Lord's Supper. Some Christians call these *the sacraments* and some call them *ordinances* or

some other name. I discuss these terms more in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. And some Christians believe in more than two sacraments or ordinances, but most only believe in these two. With that made clear, all Christians believe in at least these two because they are discussed so often throughout the New Testament. And while there is some evidence for some others, and so we should fully accept our brothers and sisters in Christ who believe in more, it must be said that in my opinion the evidence for others seems very, very slim.

Baptism, in the New Testament, clearly symbolizes us being cleansed of our sins by the work of Jesus. If you have not been baptized and you have truly received Jesus, you need to be baptized. Not for salvation of course, but out of obedience to God. Water is clearly to be used for baptism, and is to be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; the whole doctrine of the Trinity). The Lord's Supper clearly represents the body and blood of Jesus as He was tortured and killed on the cross for our sins. Bread and wine or grape juice are to be used in the Lord's Supper, and the Christian must examine himself or herself before partaking, and it must be taken with holy reverence (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Both baptism and the Supper are meant to remind us of our salvation in Jesus, and feed our souls in the process. The Lord's Supper is to be taken throughout our Christian lives, while baptism is not. Now some Christians believe it is ok to be baptized more than once for certain reasons, but all agree that it is not to be done over and over and over, etc., like the Lord's Supper.

All that was said in the previous paragraph is taught in the Bible by the fact that in both testaments God gives rituals to His people that contain physical elements that symbolize spiritual realities. This is obviously something that is very important to God. It is true that there are a lot more given during the Old Testament era, but this is only because the people of God at that time did not have the fullness of the Spirit, and so they needed more of them. Christian Baptism and the Lord's Supper were both instituted by Jesus (Matthew 26:17-30 and Matthew 28:19), and are referred to and discussed all throughout the New Testament. Baptism is not to be overly repetitive because the Bible says that we as Christians *were* baptized into Jesus (past tense; Romans 6:3-4). Whereas the Lord's Supper is clearly presented as something that is to be repeated throughout the Christian life (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Some Christians

believe that it is ok to celebrate the Supper alone or in a small group outside of a formal church context. I disagree with this, but all true Christians agree that normally the Supper should be celebrated as a local church as presented in the above passage from 1 Corinthians.

Much, much more could be said about the church because it is such an important topic, and I give a great deal more information on it in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*, if you are interested.

Before moving to the next chapter, I do want to offer some practical advice on finding a good church if you are new to Christianity. There are so many heretical churches out there, that you really want to be careful here. Satan never sleeps and it shows with all the craziness he stirs up that calls itself “Christian.” Below is a list of godly, Bible-believing, Conservative Evangelical denominations (some of these don’t like to be called denominations, but for all practical purposes that is what they are). Obviously my preference would be that you join a Conservative Evangelical Presbyterian denomination, but that is merely my preference. There are millions of wonderful Christians in many other denominations and movements all over the world. If you have been convinced by a lot of my arguments in this series towards really considering Confessional Presbyterianism, I would love it if you would read *Doctrine: Going Deeper*, where I give a lot more information about it and advice towards finding the best Confessional Presbyterian church closest to you. I want to be clear that these are not the only godly denominations or movements out there. There are many other much smaller ones, like my denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. But, these are the major godly denominations in our nation that believe the Bible and so they will probably be the easiest for you to find.

- 1.) The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
- 2.) The Christian Reformed Church in North America
- 3.) The Presbyterian Church in America
- 4.) The Southern Baptist Convention
- 5.) The African Methodist Episcopal Church
- 6.) The Assemblies of God

- 7.) The Church of God in Christ
- 8.) Calvary Chapel
- 9.) The Association of Vineyard Churches

None of these denominations are perfect by any means. In numbers 1-6, you might find some Liberal Protestant churches that have not yet been rooted out of these denominations. In numbers 6-9, you may find some Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches that have not been rooted out of these denominations. If you are wondering why this is the case, it is because sometimes churches are moving in a negative direction, but are still not bad enough for the denomination to kick them out yet. So, unfortunately, often they are allowed to stay and eventually become heretical. Because of this, often there are times where there are fully false churches in a true denomination or movement before the denomination or movement has had a chance to completely realize this.

The most important thing you can do when first looking for an individual church is look at the church's statement of faith on their website. This is even more important than the denomination or movement it claims to be part of for the reasons stated above. If they don't have one, that is a red flag. If they don't have a strong statement on inerrancy, that is a red flag. If they don't have a strong statement that we are saved by faith alone, that is a red flag. If they don't have a strong statement on the fact that the Spirit changes us in salvation so that we as true Christians live a life of holiness and good works, this is a red flag. If they don't have a strong statement on the Trinity, that is a red flag. If they say that the persons of the Trinity are simply "God manifesting" Himself in these persons, that is a red flag as that is probably a church that believes that "god" is one being in one person. Churches that use that language usually believe that the terms *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* are merely names, titles, designations, or roles for the one person that is "god." The correct language is to say that God exists in these three persons.

If you peruse their website and they seem to be soft on gay marriage or transgenderism, that is a red flag. Many churches today have clear and strong statements on the issues of sexuality and gender. But, many do not as many use older

statements before these issues were a major controversy in our culture. So, the lack of a strong statement on this front is not necessarily a red flag, but you should look through the website to see if there is anything that raises your eyebrows. And if necessary, ask someone connected with the church where they stand on that issue. If there is anything that just sounds off or bizarre on a statement in general, that is a red flag. Most true Conservative Evangelical churches will have a strong statement on inerrancy; a strong statement on the Trinity; strong statements on the gospel; and will talk about other matters like the church; the sacraments or ordinances; the end times; etc.; in pretty straightforward biblical ways.

If you go to a church with a strong statement of faith, you should be good. But, because some churches are drifting and don't always reflect their statement of faith any longer, start at any church with caution and have your antenna up. If any of them start to teach anything that I have made clear in this series is blatantly out of bounds, find a new church. I know that can be painful, but it must be done. If you find a really good church that you like that is not on the above list, that is of course fine, but for the most part you will be pretty safe with the above list. If you live outside of the United States, I am so thrilled that you are reading this book. I recommend reaching out to someone in one of these denominations to see if they can help you find a good church where you live, as often pastors from these denominations have connections to pastors in other countries.

Chapter 4: Commandments 5-7

The Fifth Commandment

“Honor your parents and those in authority unless they tell you to do something sinful.”

God takes disrespect and disobedience to the authority figures He has put over

us in our lives very seriously, especially our parents. This does not mean that we have to obey our parents for the rest of our lives, but it does mean that we must always show them the highest respect unless there is some unrepentant abuse involved that makes it dangerous for us to be around them. We are to obey the authority figures in our lives, even when what they are saying doesn't make perfect sense to us. The only exception to this is if they tell us to do something sinful. Now this does not mean that any authority figure has the right to tell us to do things that are blatantly absurd, nor does it mean that they have a right to be overly invasive in our lives. Authority figures may give us a long series of orders, each of which taken alone is not sinful, but taken together are tyrannical. When this takes place, these authority figures are asking us to sin by submitting to tyranny.

It is not always easy to know when an authority figure has crossed this line, you must prayerfully use discernment here. But two key errors must be avoided on this front. The first is that we are not to become doormats for people. We are created in the image of God with tremendous dignity, and we are not to allow people to rob us of that dignity. The second is a rebellious spirit where we disobey authority figures in the name of fighting against tyranny. If your boss tells you to clean your office and it doesn't seem that dirty to you, you need to clean your office with a good attitude. Failure to obey over such matters is setting a horrible example, and is therefore deeply sinful.

This command is plainly taught in the following texts: Genesis 1:26-27; Deuteronomy 5:16; Deuteronomy 17:12; 1 Samuel 10:1; Proverbs 10:17; Proverbs 20:20; Daniel 3; Matthew 15:4; Matthew 17:24-27; Matthew 19:4; Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-7; Ephesians 6:1-3; Hebrews 13:17; and 1 Peter 2:13-14.

The Sixth Commandment

“Do not kill or be violent (which includes abortion, euthanasia, and suicide).”

We are not to physically harm others or ourselves. Therefore, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide are all horribly sinful. I understand how controversial that last sentence is in our culture, and I have much more to say about this in my *Doctrine*:

Going Deeper. This command does not mean that we are to be pacifists as Christians. Far from it, the doctrine of pacifism is heresy as it goes so clearly against the overall teachings of the Bible. All such things as self-defense; just war; police work; corporal punishment; sacrificing oneself for others (like a soldier jumping on a grenade, or a mother running into a burning home to save her child); etc.; are all permissible and/or commended throughout the Bible. These are all common examples of the principle of the lesser of two evils. With that said, as we discussed with that principle, we should do all in our power to keep such instances as rare as possible. This doesn't mean that a soldier or a police officer can't be a full-time soldier or police officer. What it does mean is that they are to avoid violence as much as they can.

This command is clearly taught in the following verses: Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 9:5-6; Proverbs 23:13-14; Matthew 19:4; Mark 7:17-23; Mark 12:17; Luke 22:35-38; Romans 13:1-5; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; and 1 John 3:15. Soldiers are throughout the Bible described in a positive light. And in the ancient world, soldiers were also the police force in most cultures. Corporal punishment, including the death penalty, is taught all over the Old Testament, no one denies this. And in the day of Jesus and the early church, it was understood that governments had the right to use corporal punishment, including the death penalty for the most serious crimes. This does not mean that the Jews were ok with the way in which Rome severely abused this right, they certainly were not. But, they did understand this basic right. Therefore, in Mark 12:17 above, Jesus is saying to give to the governing authorities, even if they are evil, what belongs to them. And that clearly would have been understood to include the right of corporal punishment. The same is true of Paul's words in Romans 13.

Further, the commandment against violence does not mean that people can never rebel against a government. But this must only be undertaken when a government has become completely tyrannical, and a large number of people organize in order to defeat the government. If there are not enough people to do this, the enterprise should not be done because it will only end in the deaths of many people for no reason. And until a government has been legitimately overthrown, Christians must still obey it except in the places where it tells them to commit sin unless they are actively part of a godly resistance movement.

The Seventh Commandment

“Spouses must love each other deeply; husbands must love their wives like Jesus loves the church; wives must respect and submit to the authority of their husbands, and they must manage their households well; immodesty, lust, fornication, adultery, pornography, polygamy, homosexuality, bisexuality, transgenderism, incest, bestiality, any sexual acts or thoughts outside of marriage (marriage is between one man and one woman and Christians are only supposed to marry Christians), are all outlawed; do not divorce; have children and raise them to be Christians unless God specifically calls you not to get married and have children.”

Almost everything about this command goes against our current culture. Many people who claim to be “Christian” will not follow all that is said above for this reason. But most, although not all, of what I’m about to say constitutes essential Christian doctrine as it is taught with such abundant clarity across Scripture. To deny these essential points is to deny the authority of Jesus Himself. I understand that many readers may not want to hear this, but it is absolutely the case.

Christian spouses are to love each other deeply, especially the husband to the wife. His responsibility is greater there because the wife is to submit to her husband, which is obviously a difficult thing to do at times. The Christian spouse must love in this manner even if his or her spouse is not a believer and is not very loving in return. I know how hard this is as my ex-wife was very mean to me and my children for years. As I’ve said before, this does not mean we should be doormats. If you find yourself in this terribly difficult situation, you have to prayerfully ask God to help you maintain the balance between being as loving as possible while not being railroaded. Christian wives are to submit to their husbands, as said. However, this does not mean that the husband is to rule over her with an iron fist. He has no right to do this. In fact, the Bible is quite clear that wives should be the overall managers of the house. Therefore, there is a sense in which she should make most of the day to day decisions and the husband

should submit to her! He is to be the leader on the larger decisions and when there is a conflict between the two parties that cannot be resolved, he gets the deciding vote. Now, her being the manager does not in any way imply that she is to do all the work, while he gets to be the “supervisor.” As the leader, he should do most of the work and always make sure she is not getting overwhelmed.

All of this is taught in the following passages: Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2-3; Proverbs 31:10-31; Mark 3:13-19; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Timothy 5:14; and Titus 2:4-5. Some good Christians believe that the requirement of submission for wives was only temporary because there is not a lot of evidence for it in the Gospels. I, and most other Christians today and throughout church history, do not find this argument compelling. The submission of wives is rooted in their punishment after the fall as seen in Genesis 3. This does not mean that men are not punished. In fact, they were punished more in the sense that they are given greater responsibility, and the Bible is clear that those with greater responsibility will be judged more strictly at the final judgment. I understand that this fact is small consolation to women at times as we have to live in this current world, but the fact remains that men will be judged more harshly at the final judgment than women, just as Jews will be judged more strictly than Gentiles. This is why I, and most other true Christians, believe that women should not be pastors (only men could be priests; and 1 Timothy 2:11-14). And while it is true that women during the Old Testament time had far less rights than men because of this punishment, and that God for the most part removed this reality after Pentecost, male headship is still found in the Gospels because Jesus only appointed men to be his primary 12 disciples, who went on to become the first apostles. Therefore, there is strong indirect evidence in the Gospels for continued male headship in the church and home in the Gospels.

Some Christians have argued that women should not work outside of the home based on 1 Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:4-5. But the language of both of these passages is harkening back to Proverbs 31, where the wife clearly works outside of the home and earns income from doing so. This does not mean that women must work outside of the home; what is described in Proverbs 31 is a woman who has a great deal of freedom and authority in her home. As far as the Gospels are concerned, why would Jesus take away such a position from women? There is no evidence that He did. Further, women

were among His closest followers and some even paid for His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). God also gave women the enormous privilege of being the first to see Jesus risen from the dead while the male disciples were hiding like cowards. There is therefore no reason to think that women are to be confined to the home if they wish to work outside of it. With that said, they are still responsible for being the primary managers of the home. If doing both starts to become overwhelming, the husband should find ways for her to receive the help she needs.

Next, God takes sex very seriously. It is a wonderful gift from God on the one hand, but there are black and white boundaries according to God's commands. The simplest way to understand these boundaries is to say that all sexual acts and thoughts outside of marriage are strictly forbidden. I know that can seem like a very tough standard, but that is what the Bible teaches beyond the shadow of a doubt. Because of this, the long list of sins given at the beginning of this section, are in fact sins according to the Bible. I understand that this creates a whole host of practical difficulties, and I cannot address all of them here in this book. I address many of them in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*, if you are interested. For now, what I can say from personal experience is that the best way to fight against these difficulties is through lots and lots of prayer. This will not completely remove the difficulties, but it will over time allow us to focus more and more on Jesus and His work, and not on the difficulties themselves. All of this is taught in the following sections of the Bible: Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2; Song of Solomon; Matthew 5:27-30; Mark 7:17-23; Romans 1:18-27; and 1 Corinthians 7. As far as incest is concerned, the OT has many laws against it and no one denies this. It is condemned in the NT in the following passages: Mark 6:17-18 and 1 Corinthians 5.

Marriage is only to be between one man and one woman, and Christians must only marry other Christians. I understand that sometimes a person becomes a Christian after marriage and the spouse does not convert. The Christian is to stay married in these situations according to 1 Corinthians 7, but this is a very difficult situation as I know from years of very hard experience. Often these marriages end in divorce, as did mine. The fact that marriage is only to be between one man and one woman is taught by all of the passages above. The fact that Christians are only to marry other Christians is seen by the fact that God condemns marrying unbelievers over and over and over

again throughout the Old Testament. No one denies this. And Jesus pointed to Adam and Eve as the perfect template for marriage and they were both in communion with God (Matthew 19:4-6). And Paul says that we are not to be overly united with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). In that context, Paul is not specifically talking about marriage, but if this applies to lesser unions, obviously it would apply to the greatest union that can exist between two human beings. This does not mean we cannot be friends with or work with unbelievers. But it does mean that we are to treat such relationships with care, and we are not to get too close. I know that can be hard, but that is what the Bible teaches.

Many enemies of the faith try to say that this is all contradicted by the fact that the Bible allows for polygamy. But this is sheer nonsense. God allowed polygamy in the rarest of cases as an example of the lesser of two evils principle, so that certain prominent men in biblical history could have many, many descendants. The fact that polygamy is condemned in the Bible overall is seen by a massive amount of evidence. God first created Adam and Eve. Polygamy was never the norm in Ancient Israel. Song of Solomon is a book about the ideal marriage, and it describes one man and one woman. God often describes Israel as His wife (singular) throughout the Old Testament. The church is often called the bride (singular) of Jesus throughout the New Testament. Jesus referred to Adam and Eve as the perfect template for marriage, as we saw above. And when Paul discusses the requirements for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, Paul specifically says that an elder or deacon must be faithful to his wife (singular).

Christians are not to divorce. With that said, it is often the case that an unbeliever (either someone who never professed Jesus or someone who has fallen away from the faith) will divorce a Christian and there is not much anyone can do about it. As divorce rates skyrocket in our culture, it is no surprise that divorce has become more common in the church. This is unimaginably sad, but if a Christian did not do anything wrong, he or she should not be disciplined in any way by the church. Also, there is a sense biblically that when adultery or abandonment have occurred by an unbelieving spouse, a divorce has occurred in God's eyes. When this happens, the believer is free to make this formal with the government. But the believer is also free to reconcile and start over if the

unbelieving spouse is willing to do so. And the believer is also free to wait for the unbelieving spouse if abandonment takes place if the believer wishes to do this. All of this is taught in the following passages: Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:31-32; and 1 Corinthians 7.

Some good Christians have argued that Christians can never be divorced. They say that even if an unbelieving spouse divorces the Christian, the Christian should wait for the return of the spouse as the two will always be married in God's eyes until one of them dies. They usually have some pretty creative interpretations for Matthew 5:31-32 and the first portion of 1 Corinthians 7. With that said, the Bible is so clear about how much God hates divorce, and Mark 10:5-12 seems to support their position at first glance, that we should fully accept these Christians as our brothers and sisters in Christ. But, most Christians, myself included, think that they are going too far.

Other good Christians, in my estimation and the estimation of most other Christians, go too far in the other direction. They say that exceptions should be made based on the lesser of two evils principle for abuse. Because abuse is such a serious reality in far too many marriages, especially from the husband towards the wife (although that is not always the case; sometimes the reverse does in fact happen), we should certainly not condemn these brothers and sisters in Christ for this position. Having said that, I do not believe it is biblical. An abused spouse should file for a legal separation immediately upon the principle that God has created us in His image and we are not to willingly allow ourselves to be the doormat of anyone. The abused spouse should never be required to reconcile with the abusive spouse, but at the same time, he or she is not in my opinion free to remarry as he or she is still technically married in God's eyes. If the abusive spouse repents and changes, and the abused spouse feels safe and wishes to reconcile, that is certainly permissible. But the abused spouse should never be pressured by the church or anyone else to reconcile if the abused spouse does not wish to do so. I have more to say about divorce and remarriage in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*.

The overwhelming vast majority of Christians should get married and have children. And Christians are to raise their children to be Christians. This does not mean that all children raised in godly homes will be saved. God alone saves. But it does mean

that Christian parents are to do all in their power to help their children understand the gospel so that the children can be ready to receive it if God chooses to regenerate any of the children. And God's normal way of saving people is saving those raised in believing homes because of the strong foundation that is laid in that home. All of this is plainly taught in the following passages: Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2; Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Matthew 22:37-38; and Titus 1:6. There are exceptions to this rule. Jeremiah, Jesus, and Paul were all exceptions. And Paul makes it clear that those called to a celibate unmarried life can actually do more for the kingdom of God in 1 Corinthians 7. This does not mean they are holier or more righteous, it simply means they have more time to serve God. But this is always presented as an exception in Scripture, and so you should be sure God is calling you to this lifestyle before you enter into it.

Next, a celibate lifestyle is no excuse for transgenderism. While far too many in our culture today will defend transgenderism no matter what, some will at least grant that they can understand how transgenderism could never work within a married relationship from a biblical perspective. If a biological man says that he is a woman and marries a man because he is attracted to men as a "woman," this would certainly seem to violate the passages regarding homosexuality. If a biological man says that he is a woman and marries a woman because he is still attracted to women, this would certainly seem like two women married together even though that would of course technically not be the case. Even if surgery is involved here, most can see that this certainly makes a mess of things from a biblical perspective. But, some have said that they do not see the harm if a biological man calls himself a woman because he feels like one, as long as he does not marry, from a biblical perspective. But this view is certainly not sustainable, and is why no true Christian accepts it or ever will accept it.

We do not even need to prove that the Bible specifically condemns this sin throughout its pages to know that it does in fact do so. This is because God says that He made humans male and female in the image of God. This means that our gender is part of the image of God. To turn around and say that we can be otherwise than God created us is to call God a liar. And lying is condemned repeatedly all throughout the Bible as we will see, especially calling God a liar (which would be extreme blasphemy). See Genesis 1:26-27 and Matthew 19:4. This is why God so strongly condemns acting

like the opposite sex (Deuteronomy 22:5). Many will argue that if God wanted men to be men and women to be women so badly, He would not have created men who feel like women and vice versa. This is a terribly misguided argument. People struggle with feelings of transgenderism because of the fall and not because God directly created them that way. I do understand that this is still a very difficult and controversial subject in our culture, and I have a lot more to say about it in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*.

Finally, we need to discuss the number of children Christians should have. Some good Christians have argued that Christians should never use any form of birth control and have as many children that come along. They say that “be fruitful and multiply” has no restrictions. Because of this key phrase at the beginning of the Bible, and because God looks upon having children so favorably throughout Scripture, we cannot condemn these solid Christians. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. With that said, most Christians, myself included, see this as a somewhat extreme position. The Bible never says or implies that Christians must have as many children as possible. It merely gives a general statement on being fruitful and multiplying, and this principle is reiterated in various ways throughout the Bible. And in the ancient world, most children died before they were five and so not a lot needed to be said on this front. But, things have changed considerably for us and this requirement of some Christians puts a very difficult financial burden on many good Christian families.

With all that said, most birth control methods in our culture today are abortive and therefore must be avoided by Christians. Condoms, diaphragms (as long as they are not used with gels and other items), and the “pull-out” method are all acceptable biblically. Some have tried to argue that the last method is not permissible based on Genesis 38:8-10. But this is only one verse and is being taken out of context. I encourage you to read this verse in context and the actual sin of Onan will become rather evident. This verse shows that this method was known in biblical times, and it is nowhere condemned in the Bible (not even in this verse). Again, it is very doubtful it was used all that often in biblical times for the reasons I stated in the previous paragraph, but it is of high relevance for Christian families today. In my estimation, it provides us with strong evidence that not only is this method of birth control permissible, but that birth control in general is permissible as long as it is never abortive. You may say, “Ok,

but you hardly proved that using the standard of a command must be found across the Bible.” But, as we will see, the command to take care of our family financially is found across the Bible. Hence, if there is no clear biblical evidence against birth control, it certainly seems permissible if it is used in the interest of being able to better provide for one’s family.

Chapter 5: Commandments 8-10 and Conclusion

The Eighth Commandment

“Do not steal; be honest and fair in all of your dealings with others.”

This one is pretty straightforward. I know that many good Christians who are deeply entrenched in the business world in our culture have expressed that they are often confronted with very gray scenarios, and often don’t know when a line is being crossed by the company. They often don’t know when to say something or leave the company or when they are indirectly involved in possible stealing. I don’t have great answers for these situations as I’m not a businessman. As I said at the beginning of this work, whenever we find ourselves in these very not black and white circumstances, we should pray like crazy and consult with our pastor. This command is plainly taught in the following texts: Proverbs 11:1; Mark 7:17-23; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

The Ninth Commandment

“Do not lie; keep your vows, but make vows rarely.”

This one is also fairly straightforward. Good Christians do often ask about occupations such as spies and undercover cops, as well as people in horribly wartorn areas that often have to lie in order to survive and save lives. All of these types of things

fall under the lesser of two evils category. With that said, I do think spies and undercover cops need to take as much time off as possible, and also take as many alternative assignments as possible where they will not be required to lie. Living in a constant state of lying, even if for godly purposes, is unhealthy and should be avoided as much as possible. This command is taught in the following sections of Scripture: Proverbs 12:22; John 8:44; and Colossians 3:9.

Finally, we are to keep our vows and we should make vows as rarely as possible. With that said, occasional vows are necessary and can at times help us be more obedient to God. Certain heretical groups down through the ages have condemned all vows based on Jesus' words in Matthew 5:33-37. Similar language is also found in James based on Jesus' words. But Jesus is clearly using hyperbole there to condemn the Jewish religious leaders who were teaching the people to take vows lightly and were being hypocritical about them (see Matthew 23; especially verses 16-22). This is also confirmed by the fact that Jesus plainly upholds marriage, which entails a vow (Mark 10:1-12). Therefore, James, based on the example of Jesus, is also using hyperbole in order to emphasize the fact that we should rarely take vows. This doctrine is taught by the following passages: Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Mark 10:1-12; and Acts 18:18.

The Tenth Commandment

“Don't be greedy and be content with what you have; work hard; give as much as you can to the church and other people (especially the poor); love people as much as you can, especially God's people; forgive others (especially fellow Christians) sincerely from the heart when others ask for forgiveness; in light of all of God's commands and all He has done for us, the Christian should have faith, hope, and love in all things; keep an eternal focus and be filled with joy in the Lord!”

This command covers a lot and so we are going to need to spend a lot of time on it. The first item we will address here is not being greedy and being content with what God has given us. This does not mean that we can't be wealthy (as we have already

seen), or that we can't dream about future plans or things we would like to have in our life. God is our loving Father that loves to lavish good gifts on us. The Bible talks about this all throughout Scripture (Matthew 7:9-11 as one key example). And the Bible is clear that sometimes this does include material earthly blessings (Mark 10:28-30). What this does mean is that we are not to obsess over such things; we are never to allow these things to get anywhere close to the love we have for God; we are not to be overly disappointed when God does not give us certain things; we are not to be jealous of others; and we should always be so thankful for all that God does give us as we are so undeserving (what we actually deserve is hell; don't ever forget that).

A lot of people get confused here because they point out that the Bible explicitly calls God jealous. There certainly is a form of godly jealousy. If your spouse is cheating on you or is being overly flirtatious with others, you are obligated to have a holy jealousy in those instances, and God has that same kind of jealousy for His people. This doesn't mean God needs us, but once He has chosen to enter into a relationship with us, He takes our faithfulness very seriously. In the previous paragraph, I was talking about petty jealousy and it is sinful. All of this is taught in the following verses: Proverbs 15:27; Habakkuk 3:17-19; Mark 7:17-23; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; and 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

As Christians, we are to work hard. This does not always mean directly working for money. You may be a housewife, who earns no direct income, but God still demands of you that you work hard as a housewife (and most housewives work extremely hard[!]; my mother was a wonderful housewife for most of my upbringing and so I saw this firsthand). Having said that, in light of all that has been said so far in this work, we must make time for rest and we are not to obsess over our work or put it on too high a pedestal. And none of this means that Christians who legitimately cannot work or cannot work full-time should feel guilty. None of this means that Christians should only seek jobs that are going to give them the most success and money. We should always seek the jobs or vocations that will best allow us to serve God. Now for some Christians that will indeed be a very successful career that they use to give large amounts of money to the church in order to advance the kingdom of God. But that is not the case for most Christians. All of this is taught by what we have seen in this series so far, and

in the following passages: Proverbs 14:23; Matthew 25:14-30 (especially verse 26); and 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

As Christians, we are to give as much financially as we can to the church, and to other people in general (especially the poor). This does not mean that we are to be reckless with our money. First and foremost, we must make sure that our family members have what they need. And all Christians should give in accordance with their income as they feel led by the Spirit. It is very important though to give directly to the church and not solely to charities in general. God works through the church to advance His kingdom. With all that said, it is extremely holy for the church itself and for individual Christians to give what they can directly to the poor. And in Scripture, the poor does not only refer to those that are financially poor. It also refers to widows, orphans, and those that are oppressed.

A lot of people believe that governments are the best, if not only, way to help the poor. But, this is not the case and this viewpoint is certainly not biblical. Because many Christians point this out, we are often accused of being hypocrites for not listening to our own Scriptures. This is simply not true though. Merely because we do not believe that governments are the best way to help the poor, does not in any way mean we do not care about them. If these critics ever bothered to read a book on church history or actually look at the work of countless truly Christian ministries today, they would quickly see that they are slandering us, period.

Some people advocate for Socialism in the name of helping the poor. Socialism does not help the poor. Socialism makes the leaders of Socialist regimes filthy rich and powerful, while everyone else lives in utter poverty. The system is not biblical in any way, but is grotesque evil masquerading as altruism. No true and knowledgeable Christian has ever defended it and none ever will. Now it is true that good Christians do debate over how much governments should be involved in helping the poor. These are good debates and you will have to decide where you stand on them. But, anyone who believes that the government should completely control the economy is advocating Socialism. And any such person is either grossly ignorant of the facts or is not a true Christian. I have much more to say on this topic and that of social justice in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*, if you are interested.

Finally, it should be noted that “Christian” advocates of Socialism often appeal to the church found in Acts. It is true that God set up a temporary social system in the early church that loosely resembles Socialism in order to emphasize Christian unity and to help the poor among the earliest Christians. But there is zero evidence that this was ever to extend to governments, or even continue in the church beyond the early days of the church after Pentecost. Now, certainly the basic principles behind this arrangement still apply. The church, supported by the people of God, is to see that the needs of all true Christians are met.

As far as showing all of this from the Bible, we must start by saying that the Old Testament has countless commands on tithing. Tithing meant giving a specific amount of your income to the work of God. No one disputes this. And Jesus lambasted the Jewish leaders over their hypocrisy regarding tithing, but He still made it clear that tithing was good (Matthew 23:23). And while God does not give specified percentages to His people after Pentecost, He still requires giving to the church (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). As far as giving as much as we can to others in general, the Bible is quite clear that God loves a cheerful and sacrificial giver (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35; and 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 [Paul is quoting Proverbs 22:8 here]). As far as having a special regard for the poor, this is found all over the Bible (Exodus 22:22; Proverbs 14:31; Jeremiah 22:3; the entire ministry of Jesus[!]; Galatians 2:9-10; James 1:27; and James 5:4).

As far as taking care of our own family first, we have already seen the importance of honoring our parents and taking care of our children. How are we honoring our parents if they need financial help that we can give, and we fail to do so? And how can we train our children in the Lord, if they don't even have their basic necessities? And if we are to help others in general as much as possible, how can we possibly fail to help our own relatives if they need assistance? Finally, on this point, see Matthew 15:1-7 and 1 Timothy 5:8. Some false “Christians” have tried to say that all of the passages on helping others apply almost exclusively to fellow believers alone. This is clearly contradicted by Jesus in Matthew 5:43-48 (it is also contradicted by Proverbs 24:17 and 1 Peter 3:9). As far as Socialism goes, it is more than enough to say that the system has utterly failed every single time it has been tried, and it has been tried on

multiple occasions. Any notion that it only needs to be fixed is contrary to the plain historical facts. It makes everyone poor and so if we are supposed to help the poor, we must condemn this system. There is also more direct biblical evidence against it, but this is a complicated topic that is beyond the scope of this book. I say a great deal more about it in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*, as said above.

A lot of true Christians ask at this point, “How can I be expected to give so much money away when I’m usually the one that needs the financial help?” Believe me, as someone who is not rich and has needed a lot of financial assistance over the years, no one is more sympathetic to this question than myself. I have had to take money from my parents, from the church, and from many individual very generous fellow believers over the years. There is no shame in this if you are walking with the Lord and doing your best to serve Him. But, no matter how hard it is, give even just a little of what you can each month. Even if it is just 50 bucks to the church, and 10 bucks to a homeless person on the street, give at least some. Obviously, try hard to give more than that in the better months, and sometimes we have to give sacrificially and trust in God. Sometimes money comes in that should go to a bill, and you need to sacrificially give it to the church, trusting that God will honor this. Now, don’t be stupid or reckless with your money. With that said, on occasion as you feel led by the Spirit, it is a good thing to give sacrificially in this manner. And no one is saying that you have to give money to others, even family, that you don’t have. The point is, if you can reasonably help and you refuse to do so, you are sinning.

The last thing to be said here, is that a lot of these passages do not merely refer to financial help. We are also to help out our fellow humans in more hands-on ways as much as possible as well. We will discuss this point more below. With that said, one of the most practical ways we can help people is financially. And this is especially true for those who work long hours and do not always have a lot of time for hands-on ministry.

As Christians, we are to love all people as much as possible. The reason I qualify this is because obviously none of us has enough money to truly help everyone in the world. Further, some people, though not most, are so difficult to deal with that if we are not careful, we can allow them to rule over us and steal our dignity and joy. This is not

biblical. With that said, we as Christians are supposed to put up with a lot, as much as we can handle without falling into the traps stated above.

In light of all of this, Christians should not be racist; sexist; prejudiced; oppressive; suppressive; judgmental; selfish; angry; irritable; impatient; rude; and we should not gossip about or name-call or slander other people. As Christians we should not be show-offs who do things for the praise of people. We must always seek the glory of God alone. This does not mean we cannot reward good Christian behavior, God Himself will reward good Christian behavior at the final judgment (1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:6-10). This is one of the key reasons to avoid being a lukewarm Christian, and the Bible (especially Paul) urges us again and again not to be lukewarm believers. Lukewarm Christians do not live in sin, as that is impossible for a true Christian, but they often do the bare minimum as a Christian and thus will be very disappointing to God at the final judgment. Hence, we also should reward good Christian behavior. But, this should be done for the glory of God because every true Christian will give God the glory when he or she is recognized by the church or people in general.

None of this means that we should not call evil evil, or that there is never any place for righteous indignation. As Christians, we are to proclaim the truth and this will often offend people. Many unbelievers will say that we are being racist; sexist; prejudiced; etc.; simply because we don't agree with them on a certain issue. Don't let that overly stress you; remember, Jesus was horribly slandered in His day as well. What all this does mean, is that we must always remember that apart from the grace of God we are no better or different than anyone else. And God becomes angry often in the Bible, as do countless godly people for godly reasons. With that said, we should be slow to anger. There exists a ton of passages to support all of this, and as you come across them in your Bible reading I hope you take serious note of them. But, for now, it is more than enough to say that all of this is plainly implied from what we saw above on loving our enemies. If we are to love our enemies, how much more so should we love all people? You may say, "But, this statement from Jesus is only found in the Gospels." The command to love our neighbor is not though (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31; and Romans 13:8-10), and Jesus is clearly clarifying what loving our neighbor means with His

statement on loving our enemies. And there are a number of other passages found throughout the Bible that make this truth clear, only in less emphatic words.

A lot of Christians become confused about Christian love. They will often point out that many unbelievers they know are exceedingly loving. They will further point out that some true Christians they know can be really difficult people sometimes. They wonder what makes true Christian love all that different from the love found in other worldviews. What these Christians are failing to understand is what we discussed earlier in this book. And that is that something is truly good and holy only if it is done preeminently for the glory of God. Many unbelievers are indeed amazingly loving people. But they are not acting this way in the name of Christ. And many Christians are new Christians or have come from very, very rough backgrounds. So, even though they are often terribly rough around the edges, God accepts their efforts at love because they are striving to love for His glory. When the Bible talks about how only true Christians really love God's way, it is saying that if someone is not loving, he or she is not truly saved, even if he or she is right-on about doctrine. And if someone is loving, but does not love for God's glory, he or she is of course not truly saved either. These passages are not intending to say that you can take 10 true Christians and 10 true Muslims, for example, and the 10 Christians will always be more loving from an external perspective. That isn't always the case and we know that isn't always the case from experience and church history. But, that is not what the Bible is teaching and so there shouldn't be as much confusion here.

A lot of Christians often feel guilty because they don't internally feel all that loving towards certain people. They say that they can understand that God is calling them to love people outwardly for His glory, but they admit that they also understand God wants us to love people internally as well. This is normal and should not produce so much guilt. The remedy for this is prayer and lots of it. I can't emphasize enough how important prayer is in the Christian life. So many Christians today in America want a self-help book to tell them what to do. These books only end in failure and disappointment. God's appointed remedy for these things is prayer. We must be saying short prayers in our head all throughout the day, every day. And we must set aside a solid chunk of time once a week, every week, for long periods of fervent prayer. When

Christians fail to do this, their walks with God severely suffer. Don't expect anything otherwise. A true Christian will never fully live in sin, but if you are not praying as stated above, your walk will be weak, frustrating, and erratic.

The Bible is clear that our love for people should be especially focused on God's people. A lot of Christians will mistakenly believe sometimes that we should actually be more loving towards the world. They reason that believers have Jesus and the Holy Spirit, while the world does not. Therefore, they think, the world needs our love more. This is not a biblical perspective however. From beginning to end, the Bible makes it clear that God has special regard for His children. Therefore, we should do the same. Even the very famous passage, Matthew 25:31-46, that is often taken out of context and used as strong evidence for ministry to the world, is actually talking about being loving towards God's people. Read the whole narrative carefully, especially verses 40 and 45, and you will see that this is the case. Now, based on what was said above, we are certainly supposed to do ministry towards the world. However, as this section from Matthew and so many other passages make clear, our top focus is to be towards the people of God.

One of the main ways we are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ is by extending love and grace over issues where Christians often disagree. This does not mean we cannot have passionate discussions and debates over these issues, as some of them are quite important to the life of the church. But, if an issue is not something that is addressed with complete clarity in the word of God, we must not divide over such issues. This does not mean that denominations are sinful. It does mean that true Christian denominations, organizations, and movements should work together for the gospel as much as possible. This teaching is plainly implied by all that we have seen so far in this book, and it is highlighted very strongly by Paul in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8, as two key examples.

Finally, the last thing to touch upon here before moving to another topic is the question of how we love people in our current Postmodern culture. A lot of Christians say that a lot of people in our culture will not accept love from us if we don't affirm them. Hence, these Christians wonder how we can love people who won't receive our love if we stick to our true Christian convictions. The answer to this question is not complex

even though I know a lot of Christians in our nation will not like it. The answer is you simply love them anyway. If someone will not have anything to do with you, pray for him or her and pray for him or her a lot. And most people will give lip-service to not wanting to have anything to do with us, but most of the time if you are very cool with someone, he or she will quickly back down. Once this takes place, and I cannot emphasize this enough, you don't have to shove our views on things upon him or her. Many Christians feel like they are being a bad witness if they don't, but that isn't the case.

Now, it is true that many true Christians are called to be evangelists and missionaries and thus have to be a little more forthcoming and "pushy" (for lack of a better term) with people. But, that is not true for most Christians. You simply have to be ready to answer people if they ask you what you believe. And when that happens, I recommend following the advice I give in my essay "Tips for Witnessing." Until someone asks you though, just love people using common sense. Hang out with them. Listen to them. Help them with their work if they are your co-workers. Buy them gifts on holidays. Bring them food. Hug them if they are huggers. Loan them money if you can and they ask (preferably just give it to them if you are able). The list goes on and on. You don't need to make things as complicated as so many Christians think. And despite what our culture tells you, you don't have to fudge your convictions. And once you establish a relationship with someone, if he or she asks you what you believe, he or she is going to be a lot less likely to reject you even if he or she really doesn't like what you are saying. And if he or she doesn't reject you, just keep loving him or her like before. If he or she does reject you, pray for him or her and pray a lot. This is biblical love. Compromising your convictions so as to be liked is not.

As Christians, we are to forgive others, especially our fellow true Christians. A lot of Christians wonder how we can forgive people who don't know they need to be forgiven or who don't want to be forgiven. Obviously, in these cases a full reconciliation cannot take place until they realize what needs to be done. With that said, we should always be prayerfully examining ourselves to see if we are the one who needs to seek out forgiveness. What we can do in these situations is forgive in the sense of not hating these people and praying for these people at the very least. Full forgiveness though,

can indeed only take place when someone asks for it. When this is done, it is absolutely not permissible for a true Christian to refuse forgiveness, even when this is very hard.

A lot of Christians wonder about forgiving someone who asks for it when the person clearly does not truly want forgiveness or is still refusing to recognize the worst of his or her behavior. Obviously as Christians we want to lean heavily towards being gracious and giving people the benefit of the doubt. When, for example, our fellow Christian asks for forgiveness over something minor, it should be quickly given without much thought even if we have our doubts about how fully sincere the person is being in the moment (maybe we suspect that his or her spouse or pastor told him or her that he or she must ask for forgiveness). With all that said, when it is obvious someone is not being sincere or is refusing to actually ask for forgiveness for the real issues at hand, there is nothing unbiblical about saying that you are not going to foster his or her dishonesty and sin. Now this does not mean that this always has to result in cutting off the relationship. We should be very, very hesitant to ever do this with anyone. But it does mean that we can say that the relationship is not going to be fully healed and we are going to be putting up a lot of boundaries until the other person is ready to acknowledge how horrible and hurtful the behavior in question has been.

And sometimes, for the sake of our own dignity and health, we do have to fully cut off relationships sometimes (Acts 18:6). Even in these instances though, we must not hate and we must continue to sincerely pray for the offender. Many Christians say that this is not biblical. They say we must completely forgive no matter what. But God does not fully forgive His enemies. He sends them to hell. We are not to set up a standard that is above that of God. Yet, when it seems clear that someone is sincere in asking for forgiveness, especially when this is coming from a fellow believer, we must truly extend the requested forgiveness even if the matter is frighteningly serious. Forgiveness is discussed all over the Bible, especially by Jesus Himself, but again all that has been said here is plainly implied by all that we have discussed on love.

In light of all that we have learned over the course of this series, we as Christians are to have faith, hope, and love in all things. And we should always keep an eternal focus. As hard as it can be sometimes, we are always to trust in God, knowing that He will take care of us, with a specific focus on the fact that eventually God will bring us to

the fullness of eternal life. This helps us to not overly focus on this life and allows us to love God, people (especially God's people), and creation in general more and more. Therefore, as Christians we should not be overly bogged down with worry. I understand that this can be especially difficult when it comes to finances for those of us who are not wealthy. But this is what God commands of us. I understand that some Christians struggle with clinical anxiety. For those who do have this condition, there is nothing unbiblical about seeking medical help for this. With that said, you should seek that help and prayerfully ask God to help you in this area as God does not want us to be overly beset with stress, so that we can focus on Him. All that has been said in this paragraph is common sense based on all that we have learned in this series so far and is particularly the focus of Matthew 6:25-34 and 1 Corinthians 13.

Part of having an eternal focus is eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus. Constantly reminding ourselves that Jesus is coming back and could come back in our lifetime, is a major motivator to not overly fixate on the things of this life. One of the doctrines Jesus focused on the most was the concept of the kingdom of God. This is a very rich and somewhat complicated doctrine, and therefore I unfortunately cannot fully unpack it in this series. I say a great deal more about it in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. For now, every day we should remind ourselves that the kingdom of God is coming with Jesus. He will one day rule and reign over the earth in such a fashion that all evil will be rooted out, and we will see Him in the flesh every day. What an amazing reality that will be!

With all that said, you must be aware of the fact that Satan and the demons will do all in their power to keep you from all that was said in the previous few paragraphs. This is known as spiritual warfare. This doesn't mean you will feel the presence of Satan or the demons, although on the rarest occasions that can take place. And you should always take comfort in the fact that Satan and the demons cannot possess true Christians. But, often we will go through phases where everything under the sun is going wrong, beyond coincidence, and beyond the normal struggles of the Christian life. The longer you walk with Jesus, the more you will be able to recognize these phases as they begin to take place. When these phases are happening, we must remind ourselves of the gospel and the core truths of God's word. Then we must pray diligently for God to give us the strength to get us through these difficult times. The Bible often talks about

how all Christians will experience persecution. Many Christians who live in nations that do not allow the persecution of Christians, especially Christians in America (for now at least), wonder how these passages apply to them when they do not experience persecution. They apply because all true Christians will at the very least experience genuine spiritual warfare. All of this is discussed in the following verses: David often experienced horrible spiritual warfare from King Saul, who was possessed by an evil spirit (a demon; see 1 Samuel 18:10-11 as one example); Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 6:10-18; and 1 John 4:4. I also say a great deal more about spiritual warfare in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*.

Finally, in light of all that we have learned about in this series, we as Christians should be overflowing with joy and gratitude. God has poured out so much grace and mercy upon us, it truly is unimaginable. He has revealed so much of Himself to us through His word, we should be at a loss for words regarding how thankful we are to Him. This does not mean you have to be outwardly happy, happy, happy at all times. I understand completely how stressful life can be, especially the Christian life. And some Christians have more quiet and introverted personalities. There is nothing wrong with this. But we should often throughout the week have moments of intense inner joy and gratitude in the Lord. If you struggle with this, pray that God would fix your perspective and remind you of all that He has done for you.

Conclusion

I know that I have talked a lot about false teachers and groups that claim to be “Christian” who are not in this series. I fully understand how unpopular such talk is today in our culture. Far too many in the church today seek to water down all talk along these lines, sometimes even compromising and accepting some of these groups as being a part of God’s true church on earth today. The problem is that this isn’t biblical no matter how much we may want it to be so that we won’t be so hated in our culture. For further discussion on this, please see my essay “Addressing Heresy,” if you have not done so already. For a full defense of this truth, please see my *A False Kind of Christianity*. No matter how harsh this reality may seem to you, please remember that the overwhelming

vast majority of Israelites throughout the Old Testament era were not true Israelites from a religious standpoint. They claimed to worship “Yahweh,” but they also added a number of other “gods,” teachings, and practices to their religious outlook. And all of these things were repugnant to God regardless of how nice these people may have otherwise been. See Jeremiah 7 for one very clear example of this. The same is true today. Many people claim to follow “Jesus,” but they add beliefs and practices to their religious outlook that He condemns. We are not to set ourselves up above Jesus. If He condemns these beliefs and practices, we must do so as well.

Because of the very real danger of false teachers out there today, please allow me to give you a list of excellent and recent teachers that you can rely upon as sound Bible teachers. I do not agree with everything each one of them says, and they certainly do not agree with each other on everything. Most of them are not Confessional Presbyterian. But, it will be good for you to have a wide range to work from as you seek to come to your own conclusions from the Bible. Most of these are still alive today, but some have passed away in the last few years. These are (in no particular order): RC Sproul; James White; Norman Geisler; Wayne Grudem; John MacArthur; Phil Johnson; Justin Peters; Alisa Childers; John Cooper; Al Mohler; Paul Washer; Steve Lawson; Stephen Nichols; Allen Parr; Mike Winger; Allie Beth Stuckey; Janet Mefferd; Melissa Dougherty; Voddie Baucham; Nancy Pearcey; Chuck Smith; Greg Laurie; Emilio Ramos; Ken Ham; and Bodie Hodge. I could recommend so many others, but I don’t want to overwhelm you. Please don’t feel like you need to look into each of these. I simply want to give you a wide sample to choose from.

Also, because so many heretical groups put out very popular “worship” music, I would like to recommend some godly and orthodox worship music. These are not the only sources on this front, but they are two of the best. The first is Sovereign Grace Music. Their music is absolutely excellent and is robustly orthodox and focused on God and the Bible. And if you are into the older hymns, but set to more modern music, I highly recommend Reawaken Hymns.

Ok, you have finished this series! Well done my friend, I truly hope it has blessed you! If you have any questions about this series, any questions at all, please send them

to me. Please see my “Leave a Bible Question” section on my website in order to find out how to do this.