

Basic Training Bible Ministries

Presents

The Word Became Flesh

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Joh 1:1, 14

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Seven Great Doctrines

1. This “*beginning*” is one of seven in the Scriptures.
God is a God of order. He has a plan which is working out according to divine wisdom. Everything has a beginning, a purpose, and an end.
 - a. Eternity Past. The never-ending beginning (Joh 1:1; 1Jo 1:1; Rev 1:8, 22:13)
 - b. Creation. Heavens, earth, angels, and man (Gen 1:1; Mat 24:21; Mar 10:6; Heb 1:10)
 - c. Sin and Evil. The beginning of rebellion against God by Satan (Joh 8:44; 1Jo 3:8)
 - d. Human History. The Garden (Gen 1:26; Mat 19:4, 8; Mar10:6; Eph 3:9)
 - e. Gospel Story. The beginning of the redemption story (Mar 1:1; Luk 1:2)
 - f. Church Age. The birth of the Church (Act 2:1–4, 11:15)
 - g. New Creation. The new humanity (Eph 2:14–16; Col 1:18; Rev 3:14; 21:1–2, 5)
2. Since “*the Word was with God,*” there is a distinction of persons.
In the Trinity—as revealed in the Bible—Father, Son, and Spirit all share the same essence, but are distinct Persons, with different functions.
3. That “*the Word was God*” can only be explained by the Trinity.
This “*Word,*” though distinct from God the Father and the Spirit, is yet God. Our finite minds are too small to grasp all that this involves.
4. In the Person of Jesus Christ, God became fully man, without sin. We call this the Doctrine of the Incarnation. God could only become man, and be born without a sin nature, by means of the virgin birth.
5. His life revealed to eyewitnesses the nature and character of God. This goes with Joh 1:4, “*In Him was life* [the life of God, eternal life], *and the life was the light of men.*” In His life was revealed “*the beauty of holiness*” (Psa 27:4, 29:2, 90:17, 96:9). According to Joh 1:18, He is the living “*exegete*” of God to men.
6. Christ is unique, of all creatures, in that He is the “*only begotten.*” He is unique in the Godhead, for He became man. He is unique from the angels, as He created them. He is unique among men, for He—though a man—is God.
7. God’s glory is encompassed in “*grace and truth,*” the perfect balance of absolute veracity with infinite compassion. It has been said that truth without grace is tyranny, and grace without truth is sentimentality.

The study of the Man Christ Jesus will never be completed. Throughout all eternity, those who have believed in Him will continually discover new and exciting insights into His Person and work (Eph 2:7). The following brief portraits are less than a drop of water compared to the seas of the world.

I. **He Came to Seek and to Save the Lost**

“... for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Luk 19:10

Jesus Christ is *“the good shepherd”* (Joh 10:11). I believe in saying this, our Lord meant to identify Himself as the shepherd of whom David wrote in Psalm 23. In the parable of the lost sheep (Luk 15:4–7), Jesus speaks of the rejoicing in Heaven over the one sinner who repents, as more than the ones needing no repentance. Often in His lessons, He brings in the idea of the lost sheep (Mat 10:6, 15:24). His passion was not only to save—this He accomplished on the cross. But through His life, there was a yearning to seek out the hardened, lonely, broken, and forsaken men and women, and bring them home to God. If we fail to win many to faith in Christ, perhaps it is because we have forgotten that we must seek them where they are.

It is a principle of divine revelation that truth encompasses both positive and negative aspects. Every negative, like one of the Ten Commandments (*“Thou shalt not ...”*) is premised on many positives. The command not to do something is grounded in the desire of God that we enjoy the blessings that come from obedience. So also, the positive goal of salvation in the above quote is built on many negatives. Consider the following:

A. **Not to Judge, but to Save**

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” Joh 3:17

It has always amazed me that the only Man in human history who was perfect and holy did not judge men. One day He will judge all men (Heb 9:27), but not until they have had opportunity to trust in Him in this life.

In the story of the woman taken in the act of adultery (Joh 8:1–12), Jesus does not condemn her. There are good reasons for this. First of all, He Himself would die to pay the penalty for her sins, as He would for all men (1Co 15:3–5; 1Jo 2:2). By His death, He removed condemnation for all but the sin of unbelief (Joh 3:18–19). Secondly, by the woman calling Him *“Lord”* (Joh 8:11), it appears that she had recognized Him for who He was. Perhaps she had seen or heard of Him before. Possibly, it was His gracious shielding of her from her tormentors that brought the light of truth to her soul. The story illustrates for us the amazing capacity for compassion and mercy which Jesus showed to everyone He met.

B. Not to Be Served, but to Serve

“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Mat 20:28

In the Man Christ Jesus, we have the Creator and Master of the universe, come down to act as the servant of His own creatures. That service would include a lifetime of sorrow and grief (Isa 53:3), only to end in contempt, ridicule, scourging, and crucifixion. Not until He had endured all these things was His service complete.

In the Upper Room on the night of His betrayal, Jesus gave the disciples a lesson in humility and service (Joh 13:1–17). In the ancient world, and much of the third world today, it was both custom and good manners to have a lowly servant greet incoming guests and wash their feet from the dust of the streets. But in that room on that night, there was only Jesus and the disciples. Though they would have known the proper thing to do, none of the disciples was willing to volunteer to wash the feet of the others. Perhaps it was because even as they entered that final gathering, they were arguing about which of them would be greatest in the kingdom (Luk 22:24).

Jesus then took the place of the lowliest, in keeping with His words, *“I am gentle and lowly in heart”* (Mat 11:29) and washed their feet. But there was much more than just good manners in this act. He was teaching them—and us—that even those who have been *“bathed”* by saving faith must receive His cleansing day-by-day (Joh 13:10; 1Jo 1:9). He was also giving them an example of how we are to imitate His care and compassion for others (Joh 13:13–17). We wash the feet of others by serving them, forgiving them, and leading them to correction and cleansing when there is fault in their lives (Mat 18:15–20; Jam 5:16; 1Jo 1:7). How we need to learn the strength displayed in the meekness of Christ!

C. Not to Call the Righteous, but Sinners

“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Mat 9:13

Here Jesus quotes from Hos 6:6. God, using the story of Hosea and Gomer, calls the nation of Israel to return to Him in submission and faith. It is the condition of the heart and the soul—not the outward religious activities—that He wants to see.

It is evident that Jesus did not come to call righteous men to repent, for *“there is none righteous, no, not one”* (Rom 3:10). His call goes out to all, but only those who recognize their own lost condition will respond to it. Every passage in the Bible that condemns sin and rebukes our participation in it is designed to convict us of our need—not that we be under judgment, but that we might escape judgment through faith. Even as believers, we often come to think of ourselves as “good enough,” and thereby fail to see how much corruption remains in our lives. To those exercised by God’s disciplinary hand (Heb 11:5–11), whose eyes are opened daily to the standard of Christ-likeness, every day is a

day of conviction, repentance, and the cleansing that brings correction and fellowship (1Jo 1:7–9, 2:6).

D. Not to do His Own Will, but the Father's

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me ... nevertheless, not as I will, but ... Your will be done.” Joh 6:38; Mat 26:39, 42

Part of the “*mystery of godliness*” (1Ti 3:16) in Christ becoming man, was the necessity for the Savior to “empty Himself” (Phi 2:5–9). This is called the Doctrine of Kenosis, from the Greek verb translated either “*emptied Himself*” (NASB) or “*made Himself of no reputation*” (NKJV). This means that He voluntarily laid aside His divine powers in so far as using them for His own benefit. He became fully man in His need to live by faith in the Heavenly Father, and with reliance on the power of the Spirit of God.

That this required going against His own will at times is implied in the above quotes. Not only in the great struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane, but in day-to-day life, Jesus had to submit His will to that of the Father. He hungered when He could have eaten. He ministered to the crowds, even when He was so weary and wanted to rest. He rose very early in the morning to pray, even after ministering after dark the night before (Mar 1:32–35).

All through His life, Jesus was preparing for the cross. And His final prayers, in the Garden on the night of His betrayal, show that each and every denial of self had paid off in His willingness to go to the cross for us. Bear in mind that it was not just the scourging and crucifixion that He dreaded. Far beyond these was the fact that He would literally become sin in our place (2Co 5:21) and bear the full penalty of those sins—that was the greatest fear. It is because of His self-denial, to a greater degree than any man has ever reached, that He is exalted and given the Name that is above every name. To that Name, one day, “*every knee should bow ... and ... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phi 2:10–11).

E. Not Just to Die, but to Rise Again

“I lay down My life for the sheep ... No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again ...” Joh 10:15, 18

Though Jesus had to be born a man in order to die, He also died to rise again. Too often we speak of the crucifixion and forget the resurrection. If you study the messages of the apostles in the book of Acts, you will find that their focus was on the resurrection. Paul made it a prominent part—the exclamation, if you will—of his Gospel message (1Co 15:3–5).

It is by the resurrection that we have the assurance that our Savior conquered Satan, sin, and the grave. The empty tomb is a silent shout of victory over death. We serve a crucified Savior, but we also proclaim a risen Lord. It is by the resurrection that Jesus was “*declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*” (Rom 1:4).

It is by the knowledge of the resurrection that we are assured of our future resurrection to share in His eternal kingdom (1Jo 3:1–3). It is by faith in His resurrection that we are empowered by the Spirit of God to live in resurrection life (Rom 6:4–14). Over the years, we have all seen so many lives transformed from sin and shame to living trophies of God’s grace. Every child of God is called to live as “*more than conquerors through Him who loved us*” (Rom 8:37). This transforming power is due to the reality and victory of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

Application

Paul often speaks of the fact that we are debtors to live in the power of the resurrection life (Rom 1:14–17, 6:4–14). This is a debt of gratitude and thanksgiving for the grace which has been poured out on us through the work of redemption and the regeneration of our soul. May we all strive, not in our own strength, but by faith in the power of His indwelling Spirit, to live worthy of our calling (Eph 4:1).

II. He Gave Our Conception of God a Face

“But He said, ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live.’” Exo 33:20

A. God’s Glory Veiled

Moses was one of the greatest figures of the Old Testament record, perhaps second only to Abraham. So intimate was Moses with God, and so unique among all the prophets, that of Him the LORD said, “*He is faithful in all My house, I speak with him face to face*” (Num 12:7–8). Also, in Exodus we read, “*So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*” (Exo 33:11). His relationship to God was one of utmost intimacy.

Moses’ greatest desire was to see the face of God. However, the fact was that the barrier of sin remained between God and man until the cross of Christ. This truth was illustrated both by the veil worn by Moses (Exo 34:29–35) and by the veil in the tabernacle (Exo 26:31–33), both of which hid the glory of God from sinful men.

B. The Veil Removed

With the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the veil was removed, specifically for those who believed in Him (2Co 3:14, 16). Of Him, John writes:

“We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” Joh 1:14

By “glory,” John speaks of the visible manifestation of invisible characteristics or qualities—what we would call the essence or nature of God. As the author of Hebrews writes:

“[He is] the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person ...” Heb 1:3

Or, as Paul declares:

“He is the image of the invisible God ...” Col 1:15

Therefore, the “face” of God was revealed in Christ, as He said to Philip:

“He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” Joh 14:9

With the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, a new revelation of the glory of God was given in human frame (Joh 1:18). Christ Himself became the living “exegete” of God to men. To see Him, was to view the invisible Heavenly Father in action in the common routine of daily activities.

Then, at the conclusion of the crucifixion, the literal veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom (Mat 27:51). This signified that the way into the presence of God was open to all who believe in Christ. His glory was now approachable by faith.

C. Greater Revelation

But this was only the beginning of that revelation, which would not be fully realized until the New Covenant was inaugurated among men, on the day of Pentecost.

“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2Co 4:6

Many believers today seem to think that the disciples who walked with Jesus had an advantage over us, for they saw Him with their own eyes, and heard Him with their own ears. With this, the Apostle Paul would heartily disagree!

Not until Pentecost was the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, given to those who believed in Him (Joh 14:16–18, 25–26, 15:26–27, 16:7–15; Act 1:8). This was the inauguration of the Church Age, and “*a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh*” (Heb 10:20).

D. Better Promises

Jesus Christ, now resurrected and ascended, provides for believers far greater powers and provisions than experienced by the children of God in any other age.

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.” Heb 8:6

This means that we, who live today, have far greater advantages than anyone living before, as well as spiritual perception coming from the Holy Spirit that those early disciples never had. Just consider the transformation in the original apostles after the day of Pentecost had come.

If we who live in the Church Age, with the indwelling Spirit, and the completed Canon of Scripture, fail to see the glory of His face or hear His voice, it is only due to the sluggishness and dullness of our own hearts (Heb 5:11–14).

In fact, it was most likely the greatest promise Jesus ever made that those who learned His Word, and lived it by faith, would see His hand and sense His presence, and that of the Father, in ways more real than physical sight could ever give (Joh 14:21–23). It can only be our disobedience that deprives us of this ineffable experience.

Application

In the life of Jesus, the invisible heavenly Father was made visible to mankind. In the same way, the resurrected Savior should be visible to the world through the Body of Christ. Each of us, as members of His Body, should be a living example of His resurrection power (Gal 2:20; Phi 1:21; Col 3:1–3).

III. He Revealed the Heart Behind the Tables of Stone

“Go and do likewise.” Luk 10:37

A. The Law in a Nutshell

The incident that gave occasion for the story of the Good Samaritan was that of a “lawyer,” a scribe considered to be an expert in the Law of Moses, asking Him a common question, *“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* (Luk 10:24). In response, Jesus asked the scribe to summarize the meaning of the Law, which he rightly did by giving the two greatest commandments (Luk 10:27). In his response, we find agreement with Jesus’ own summary of the Law:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it; ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Mat 22:37–40

When the lawyer asked, “*And who is my neighbor?*” (Luk 10:29), Jesus told the story of the compassionate Samaritan, and said, “*Go and do likewise.*” In other words, the Law of Moses, written on tablets of stone, had behind it the heart of God. Each command rightly obeyed demonstrated love to God, to men, or both.

B. The Crux of the Cross

These two commands reveal the spiritual significance of the structure of the cross, with its vertical beam pointing from man to God, and its horizontal beam pointing from man to man. However, no one will ever be able to “*go and do likewise*” among men, until first the right relationship is established with God, by faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus brought this new conception of the Law to light by a new way of seeing God. Search the Bible through, and not until Mat 5:16 will you read the words “*your Father in heaven*” which immediately precedes “*the Law [and] the Prophets*” (Mat 5:17). But this was addressed to His disciples, reminding us that not until we believe in Him does God become our heavenly Father.

The cross of Christ is the only bridge between sinful men and a holy God. It is also the key to right attitude and conduct between men. Apart from the substitutionary death of Christ, the kind of love God offers is unattainable. By trusting Jesus Christ as Savior, we receive God’s love toward us, resulting in eternal life. We also receive the empowerment to express this love, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) for “*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*”

C. Militant Love

Contrary to the thinking of many, the love espoused and practiced by Jesus was not pacifism. The love of Christ was—and is—a fighting love. A love that will not fight against evil, fight for those loved, is merely sentimental nonsense.

*“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us,
that we should be called children of God! ... For this purpose
the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works
of the devil.” 1Jo 3:1, 8*

The militant aspects of the love of God are seen in Jesus’ routing of the moneychangers (Mat 21:12), and His fearless denunciation of the evils of the religious leaders (Mat 23:1–36). The apostles followed His example in their resistance to and refusal of the self-assumed authority of their leaders (Act 4:19, 5:29).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood that it was unspiritual to remain passive in the face of the evil of Nazism, and therefore joined the resistance and died for his attempt to destroy Hitler. He was but one of a multitude of Christians in Germany, France and other countries, who resisted Hitler’s evil, delivered Jews from death, and even fought in the underground army.

We must not forget that the same Almighty God who gave Moses the commandments, led Joshua and the children of Israel to victory in the land of Canaan. The same God brought deliverance from Antiochus by the warrior-spirit of Judas Maccabeus.

Scripture makes it clear that when Jesus returns, He comes as *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah”* (Rev 5:5). It will be an act of love, for His beloved people, when He wages just war against the forces of Antichrist, and the world sees Him as *“the LORD of Sabaoth,”* the Lord of armies (Rom 9:29; Jam 5:4). A love that will not fight against evil is nothing more than a devilish deception.

D. Paul’s Summary

Paul grasped the truth of the love of God behind every commandment. Truly the Law of Moses is summarized by one word, when rightly understood in a biblical context—that of spiritual love.

“For the commandments ... are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Rom 13:9

Jesus was able to encompass all commandments for the child of God into one. What is often called the eleventh commandment is for those who believe in Jesus Christ:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you ... By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Joh 13:34–35

Only He who gave the Law through Moses could comprehend it in its purest form. Only He who was God in the flesh could “fulfill the law and the prophets” (Mat 5:17). And only by His Spirit, are we who trust in Him enabled to fulfill the righteousness of the Law as we walk by the power of His Spirit (Rom 8:1–4).

Application

In an age when the power of biblical Christianity is being neutralized by political correctness and tolerance of evil, we must revive the ancient chivalry of the Apostle Paul (Eph 6:10–18). We need to recover the qualities of vigilance, faithfulness, courage, spiritual strength, and discerning love (1Co 16:13–14).

IV. He Personified Grace and Truth

“And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’” Joh 8:11

A. The Theological Crossroads

We have already noted that Jesus came into the world *“full of grace and truth”* (Joh 1:14). In fact, it was this perfect balance by which the glory of the Father was revealed in

Him. He embodied the truth to which no man could attain, and a grace that reached to each and every one.

In these two elements, there appears to be a paradox, or a tension, which is difficult for us to reconcile. Truth upholds righteousness and, therefore, demands judgment on all that falls short of that standard. Grace, on the other hand, cries out for forgiveness, and is the fountain of mercy.

Grace and truth are reconciled in the Person and work of Jesus Christ—and nowhere else. It is due to who He is, and what He has done, that “*Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed*” (Psa 85:10).

B. Judgment or Mercy?

The Pharisees were entirely right, based on the truth of the Law of Moses (see Lev 20:10), to demand the stoning of the “*woman caught in adultery*” (Joh 8:3). However, they had forgotten other provisions for showing mercy (Mic 6:8), which Jesus often spoke of, saying, “*I desire mercy and not sacrifice*” (Hos 6:6; Mat 9:13, 12:7). They had also let the man go, which makes the whole case suspicious.

Jesus had declared Himself committed to the fulfillment of the Law of Moses (Mat 5:17). In effect, He declared that the woman was guilty, and deserving of punishment, but only by a sinless judge. Since He was the only One present who was without sin, He alone could judge her. Or forgive her. But on what grounds? He must be willing to bear the judgment for her sins!

Many suggestions have been given on what He wrote in the dust. The most relevant is that offered by Randolph O. Yeager, author of *The Renaissance New Testament*. Mr. Yeager suggests that Jesus wrote God an “I.O.U.” for the woman’s debt. He states, “*The same finger that wrote upon the stone at Mount Sinai the words of her condemnation now wrote upon the stone the legal arrangements for her salvation*” (Vol. 6, pg. 161). Perhaps He wrote Psa 40:6–8:

*“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire ... I come ...
to do Your will, O my God ...”* (cf., Heb 10:5–14)

By His death on the cross, He not only fulfills the demands of the Law for judgment, but at the same time provides the only basis for forgiveness.

C. Grace Never Diminishes Truth

In His statement to the woman, Jesus strikes a perfect balance between grace and truth. “*Neither do I condemn you,*” is forgiveness directly from God. In His command, “*Go and sin no more,*” there is the inflexible standard of God’s righteousness to be upheld. His forgiveness did not exempt her from the only standard acceptable to God. Because of

what Christ accomplished on the cross, His truth never bends to accommodate grace, nor is grace ever hindered by truth.

This command begs the question: Did the woman sin again? Knowing human nature, we can be sure she did. So where did that leave her? In light of her calling Jesus “*Lord*” (Joh 8:11), I would suggest that it would bring her right back to the feet of the only One who is righteous, and the only One who could forgive her on the basis of His own sacrifice on her behalf!

Application

It is difficult, but necessary, to attain spiritual balance. Grace without truth is mere sentimentalism. Truth without grace becomes heartless legalism. The key is an equal focus on the written Word of God and the indwelling Spirit of God. The point of balance between Bible study and faithful living is in developing a vital, effective, prayer life (Mat 26:41; Joh 4:23–24; Eph 3:14–21, 6:18)

V. He Demonstrated the Manliness of Godliness

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.” 1Ti 3:16

A. The Mystery of the Son of Man

There is a great mystery bound up in the manhood of Christ Jesus. It is a mystery that will never be fully explained this side of eternity, and probably not even then. While there are many angles to this mystery, perhaps the simplest, yet the most powerful for us, is the simple manliness of the Savior.

B. The Mystery in Eight Parts

In the above passage, Paul cites eight aspects of the mystery of godliness. The word “*godliness*” comes from two Greek words: *eu* which means “good,” and *sebeia* meaning “reverence, devotion, a proper attitude toward God.” In all its uses, the word combines the idea of right doctrine (1Ti 6:3; Tit 1:1) and right conduct (1Ti 2:2, 4:7, 6:6).

In the following eight points, we have truths concerning the humanity of Jesus Christ. They take us from the time Christ stepped down into history at the virgin birth to His return to His throne via the ascension (see Phi 2:5–11):

1. First of all, it is a “*mystery*.” In the ancient sense of the term, this meant something that only those who had been “initiated” could understand. For Christians, the initiation is the new birth through faith in Jesus Christ.
2. Next, the mystery concerns the revelation of “*godliness*.” or “god-likeness.” What is God like? Only in Christ can the question be answered.

3. “*God was manifested in the flesh.*” We call this the incarnation, by means of the virgin birth. The second member of the Godhead became a man and lived among men, as the “*express image*” of God (cf., Col 1:15; Heb 1:1–3; Phi 2:5–9).
4. He was “*justified in the Spirit.*” A better rendering would be “by means of the Spirit,” speaking of His constant dependence upon the Spirit of God. In simple terms, He was “declared righteous by means of the Spirit,” that is, His life reflected—in every detail—the righteousness of God.
5. Jesus was “*seen by angels.*” He was the object of amazed angelic observation. The angels observed the miracle of the hypostatic union (God and man in one person) with wonder and amazement (see 1Pe 1:12).
6. He was “*preached among the Gentiles.*” This task was largely carried out by Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.
7. Jesus was “*believed on in the world.*” This is the response of faith in those who hear the Gospel message—the one and only key to eternal life.
8. And, finally, He was “*received up in glory.*” Here, we have the resurrection and ascension to the Father’s right hand.

C. **The Power of Godliness**

Of these eight, it is the fourth that is most often misunderstood. To be “*justified*” means to be declared righteous, or shown to be righteous. This one aspect of the “*mystery*” encompasses the entire life of our Lord.

In becoming a man, as we will see in our next topic, Jesus willingly accepted the limitations inherent in manhood. In other words, by “emptying Himself” (Phi 2:7), He could not rely on His inherent Godhood; but as a man, He must trust in God’s Word and Spirit just as other men.

By His constant reliance upon the Spirit of God for strength, and His faith in the Father, He lived an obedient life from infancy to death. Thus, He was “justified by means of the Spirit,” that is declared and proven to be righteous in all His ways. He alone could say to His critics, “*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*” (Joh 8:46). And, though they hated Him, they could not.

D. **The Manliness of God**

His was the manliest of lives, because it was the godliest life. In Him, the ideal of the Father for mankind—even in a sinful and broken world—was fully realized. He revealed to the world, with all our false conceptions of manliness, that to be a man, was to be a godly man.

It may be for this reason that Jesus’ favorite title for Himself was “the Son of Man.” He laid the emphasis on His humanity. In His life, all the aspirations of the heavenly Father for mankind were realized. He alone was truly, “in the world, but not of the world” (Joh 17:14). In Him, the fullness of God was made visible to man.

Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote about godliness. In his epistles, he mentions “*godly*” or “*godliness*” around twenty times. In every reference, what he is speaking of is a reflection of the character of Jesus Christ.

In Paul’s theology, all sound doctrine led to godliness (1Ti 6:3; Tit 1:1, 2:11–12). Bear in mind that by “*godliness*,” Paul meant “Christ-likeness.”

Application

To grow in godliness is to develop in Christ-likeness. As we permit God’s purpose to be fulfilled in our lives, we begin to reap His spiritual blessings. This brings the assurance that we will also receive eternal rewards in His kingdom. In His first public message—the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus mentions eternal reward eight times (cf., Matthew 5–6). Perhaps this is why Paul tells us, “*godliness with contentment is great gain*” (1Ti 6:6). As missionary/martyr Jim Elliot said, “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*”

VI. In Him, We See the Humility of God and the Godliness of Humility

“Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.” Phi 2:6–7 (NASB)

A. The Stooping Savior

To state that humility is a quality of the character of God seems at first to be strange. We tend to think of God in terms such as “Sovereign, Almighty, Transcendent” and so on. Yet, in Christ, we see His amazing humility displayed again and again. In the above passage, which looks at the mind, or attitude, of Christ prior to His virgin birth, we see not only humility, but the glorious condescension resulting from it. Jesus was willing to “stoop” to human status.

The phrase “*He existed*” refers to His eternal existence as the second member of the Godhead. The “*form of God*” speaks of the very essence of Deity, manifested in a glory unseen by human eye (Joh 1:18; 1Ti 6:16). Although eternally coexisting with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus was willing to make “*Himself of no reputation*” (Phi 2:7, NKJV), or better “to empty Himself.” This is called the Doctrine of Kenosis, from the verb *kenoo*, by which Jesus was able to “lay aside” the use of His divine powers, to truly experience life as a man from infancy to death, yet apart from sin.

B. The Power of the Spirit

All the amazing powers demonstrated by Him during His earthly life were due, not to the exercise of His own inherent abilities, but to His reliance upon the Spirit of God. In this way, He is “the Son of Man” in the fullest sense, demonstrating what man was designed to be before the entrance of sin into the world.

Though He was God in the flesh, He was willing to be scorned, mocked, abused, and ultimately crucified (compare Isa 52:13–53:12 and 1Pe 2:21–25). In His confrontations with the arrogant Pharisees, He displayed amazing restraint in His words and actions. The true majesty of His humanity was magnified by the fact that, though He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (Joh 1:3; Col 1:16–17), He yet reasoned and pleaded with His enemies.

C. The Incomparable Christ

No man in history compares to Him! He alone is one who it is impossible to over-estimate or over-magnify. All the hymns ever written, all the theological works ever produced, will never encompass the greatness of His Person. And yet, He took a little child on His knee to illustrate the nature of true greatness (Mat 18:4). He, who alone was without sin, could forgive sinful men and women (Joh 8:11; Mar 2:5), declaring that His mission was not to condemn the world, but to save it (Joh 3:17).

The Lord Jesus is the only truly incomparable Man who ever lived. And yet, it is due to His humility, to His condescension, and to His gracious restraint, that we find in Him the most lovely and winsome and heroic life ever lived. He is the very epitome of the word “gentleman,” even defining Himself as such when He said:

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Mat 11:28–29

No man will ever be more manly or more courageous. Speaking of Him, Albert Einstein said, *“I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene ... No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.”*

According to Jesus’ own words, humility is the first step of the human soul toward godliness.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Mat 5:3

Application

Genuine humility is submission to God. It is the recognition that we are spiritually bankrupt apart from His grace. We must always bear in mind that all our service—anything we have to offer to Him—was first given to us by Him. God gives grace to the humble that they might serve Him without fear (1Pe 5:5–6; Luk 1:74–75).

VII. His Credentials were His Life

“For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” Mat 7:29
(cf., Joh 7:26; Luk 4:36, 20:2; Mar 11:28; Mat 8:9)

When the Lord Jesus spoke the Word of God, He had an authority no other man could possess. Certainly, this was due to the fact that He was the Author of the Scriptures. But it came from much more than this. He was the living embodiment of everything He taught. He was the “living Word” (Joh 1:14).

The Jewish Scribes and Pharisees were impressed with titles and credentials. In this, they were much like people of our own time, who think education automatically equates to intelligence, or worse yet, wisdom. And yet, the contrary is shown in the common usage of the term “educated fools.”

A. Wisdom for Dummies

Jesus demolished the academic and scholastic pretensions of the religious leaders of His day. He did it, not by being more academic or more technical, but by His ability to communicate the deepest truth about God in terms a child could understand. It was because of this that “*the common people heard Him gladly*” (Mar 12:37). Yet, His appeal and popularity were a threat and an offense to those who considered themselves to be the guardians of the truth. They tried to undermine His message by pointing to His lack of formal training:

“And the Jews marveled, saying, ‘How does this Man know letters, having never studied?’” Joh 7:15

But the secret of His wisdom and ability to communicate it is found in His response to their scorn:

“My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” Joh 7:16–17

Not only does Jesus declare that His obedience to God’s Word is the key to His authority, but also that only they who desire to live it can ever understand it. In other words, He is saying that His life is His credentials.

B. The Power of Example

We, who are teachers of God’s Word and witnesses to the truth of the Gospel message, should weigh His words carefully. We are accountable to God not only to know the truth, but also to practice it in our lives. We will always be an imperfect reflection of the Lord we serve. Our authority rests in the fact that we speak the Word of God in truth. But the impact of our words on the souls of men will be determined, to a great degree, on how much those truths have affected and transformed our own lives. We will do well to heed the words of Paul to Timothy:

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith,

lay hold of eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” 1Ti 6:11–12

Application

Jesus often said that “*wisdom is justified by her children*” (Mat 11:19; Luk 7:35). The point is that knowledge without life-change is not wisdom. It is when Christ lives through us that true wisdom is attained (1Co 1:30–31). We are justified by faith, and that faith is justified as we demonstrate its power to the world.

VIII. He Established that the Key to Learning is the Will to Obey

“If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” Joh 7:17

Here, Jesus makes the most astounding declaration regarding His identity and how anyone, regardless of training or social status, can be absolutely sure of it.

A. Christ the Living Word

In context, Jesus had been teaching in the Temple. The multitude were amazed at His teaching, asking, “*How does this man know letters, having never studied?*” (Joh 7:15). What they were really asking was, “Who was this man’s teacher?” In the Jewish rabbinic system, much of one’s credibility depended upon where and under whom he had studied. When Paul said, for example, “*I am indeed a Jew ... brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel*” (Act 22:3), this would carry much weight among the Jews.

Jesus is making a two-fold point here:

1. Either I am speaking for God, or I am speaking on my own authority. The only way to know from whom I speak is to surrender unconditionally to the will of God—then you will know.
2. I have wisdom no man who came before has ever had, because “*I always do those things that please Him*” (Joh 8:29). In other words, My Teacher is Him who sent Me, and I am the full and final expression of His will (cf., Heb 1:1–3).

This is also why “*the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Mat 7:29). He spoke, not as a student of the Law, but as the Giver of it—which He was!

The Pharisees, who claimed to know the will of God as contained in the Law, were committed to His death. While they claimed devotion to God’s will, they could not recognize in Him the embodiment of God’s will.

B. Wisdom Begins with Reverence

We have shown earlier that Jesus so limited Himself as a man (Phi 2:6–7) that He had to learn and grow as a normal person does (Luk 2:51–52). This present passage explains how, at the age of 12, He could baffle the scholars of the Law (Luk 2:46–47). His explanation of this total grasp of divine truth lay in His unconditional commitment to do the will of God.

His declaration that the **will to do** precedes the **power to know** is simply a restatement of an old truth, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”* (Pro 1:7). As was illustrated by Ezra, if we want to gain a deep understanding in the things of God, we must prepare our heart, not only *“to seek the Law of the LORD, [but] to do it”* (Ezr 7:10).

What Jesus says here has great implications for every child of God. Those who have trusted in Jesus Christ are born again by the wisdom of faith, and *“wisdom is justified by her children.”* So said Jesus (Mat 11:19; Luk 7:35).

C. The Treasury of God

Since we know that *“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Col 2:3) are hidden in Christ, we conclude that to be “in Christ” is to have access to those treasures. The purpose of this amazing “access” (Rom 5:2; Eph 1:3, 2:18, 3:12) to the treasury of Heaven is that we might share the riches of God with the world (Eph 3:8–9).

Here is the spiritual conundrum of the Christian: We cannot share what we do not know, and we cannot know if we will not do. This is the very point attacked by James, when he says, *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”* (Jam 1:22). It is easy to hear only, and deceive ourselves into thinking that we know the truth, when we do not.

But it is important to note that Jesus conditions knowing on the **will to do**. The truly humble acknowledge that *“what I will to do, that I do not practice”* (Rom 7:15). The desire is present, but the power is not. This is where prayer is so crucial. Two passages help explain:

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” Joh 15:7

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” 1Jo 5:14–15

D. Preparing the Heart

Remember that Ezra “*prepared his heart*” both to seek and to do (Ezr 7:10). If we truly desire to do God’s will, our prayers will center around the wisdom to know it and the power to do it. Instead of praying for things or circumstances, we will be praying for His will to be done in our lives. And such prayers will be supernaturally answered!

Consider the extended prayer of Paul for the Ephesians. First, he prays that “*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling; what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints ...*” (Eph 1:18), and then concludes “*that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ...*” (Eph 3:16–17). First comes enlightenment and then enablement. The prayer for both is born out of the genuine desire to know and to do the will of God.

Application

True reverence for God is both humbling and empowering. In the Old Testament, we often read of those “*who tremble[d] at His word*” (Isa 66:5; Ezr 9:4; Hab 3:16). We can never rightly confront the Word of God without being made aware of our spiritual nakedness and His awesome glory. It is the desire to be changed by His power that takes the fearfulness out of “the fear of the Lord.”

IX. He Declared that the Power of Teaching Lies in Doing

“... *all that Jesus began both to do and teach ...*” Act 1:1

“*Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*” Mat 5:19

“*The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do ...*” Mat 23:2–3

Jesus called the religious leaders of Israel “blind leaders of the blind.” They loved to pontificate, but they did not know where they were going. They loved to impose heavy religious obligations on men, but made no effort to do those things themselves (Mat 23:4).

A. In Word and in Deed

By contrast, Jesus was the living example of everything that He taught. In His life, men could see the reality and power of the truths He taught. This was the secret of His

magnetism and impact. He taught about the grace of God, and also demonstrated it (Joh 8:11–12; Luk 7:48). He spoke of God as a loving heavenly Father, and the people saw that love and care in Him (Joh 6:1–14). All that He did was a picture of all that He taught.

This is the great dilemma for all who are gifted and called to teach. None of us will ever attain to His standard. As James put it so well, *“For we all stumble in many things”* (Jam 3:2). And remember that this was James, the half-brother of our Lord, who was called *“James the Just.”*

Yet even our human frailty provides a means of demonstrating the truths we teach. Consider the Apostle Paul, who could say of himself, *“I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells”* (Rom 7:18), and *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”* (1Ti 1:15). Yet, at the same time could say, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1Co 11:1).

It has often been said that people are not looking for a **perfect** leader, but they are looking for a **faithful** leader. If we are faithful to the Word that we teach, we become an example to others who struggle with sins and failings of their own.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Heb 2:9

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” Joh 14:6

B. The Hero of History

In all the records of the history of the world, with all the wars fought, and all the heroes cited, not one—or even all of them together—could equal the courage or heroism of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His mission to this earth was a one-man rescue mission for all of humanity. We cannot calculate what it cost him, for we have no capacity to comprehend what He left behind in His heavenly kingdom. We are incapable of gauging the depth of His sacrifice, because we have no frame of reference for the agony of a sinless soul bearing the sins and shame of the entire world!

In His great compassion and condescension, He entered into the world as a helpless infant to take on all the forces of Satan’s realm combined with the hatred of an unbelieving world. Yet He was armed with a bold confidence born of His assurance that no power could withstand His Father’s will. His impregnable armor was the prototype of that with we are exhorted to put on (Eph 6:10–18), and consisted of absolute conviction of divine truth.

C. Jesus Knew from Whence He Had Come

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only man who ever lived that was never conflicted regarding His identity or purpose. That He knew His origin, purpose, and destiny is clearly stated (Joh 13:1–3). From the words of conviction He spoke at birth (Heb 10:5–7), to His words at the age of twelve (Luk 2:49), to His final words on the cross (Luk 23:43), He was certain of the path He trod and its conclusion.

D. His Descent was Deliberate

Paul summarizes the deliberate work of Christ by saying, “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief*” (1Ti 1:15). This was an echo of our Lord’s own words, “*for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luk 19:10). For Him who held such great love for His own creatures, the price was small. In His eyes, the company of those who would believe was the treasure hidden in the field for which He would joyfully sell all that He had (Mat 13:44). His self-emptying (Phi 2:6–7) and His descent to earth had in view His ascension, leading a host of liberated captives (Eph 4:8–10).

E. His Aim was the Cross

The crucifixion was no accident! It was planned in Heaven before time began, and its effects were announced to angels before man was created (Rev 13:8; Tit 1:2). All through the Old Testament record—from the offering of Abel, to the Passover Lamb, in a multitude of ways—the crucifixion was anticipated and portrayed. It was the single stroke of divine genius by which, at one and the same moment, Satan could appear victorious and be forever defeated!

F. His Death Bought Life

Although He was born to die, Jesus was never preoccupied with death. His focus was on life—both eternal and abundant—and always in that order (Joh 10:10). The Scriptures assure us that His life was joy-filled (Psa 21:1, 40:8; Pro 8:30; Mat 18:13; Heb 12:2). The only reason we do not see His joy in the Gospel records is that the grim and sober shroud imposed on us by joyless expositors has blinded us to it. Can you catch His exultant joy over the faith of the Centurion, when He said, “*Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such faith, not even in Israel*” (Mat 8:10). Or when He took a child in His arms, as an example of humble faith (Mat 18:1–4). If we can’t imagine the smile on His face at these times, we are insensitive to His joy.

G. The Simplicity of Salvation

The way of salvation is just too simple for most, even believers, to accept. How often do we hear the naysayers declaring some man-made obstacle to the simplicity of faith? Whether we require works before, or after salvation, this is not the salvation Jesus offered!

He declared that it was simple enough to be understood and received as a little child, and no other way (Mat 18:1–4). Furthermore, it is something that a man hanging on a cross is able to do (Luk 23:42–43). In neither case is anything added beforehand to gain life, nor afterward to assure that one has it.

Today, the world is filled with “preachers of insecurity,” who cast doubts on everyone who does not live up to their exalted idea of what a “true Christian” must look like. The problem is that, like these preachers of today, neither did the disciples!

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” Joh 1:12

To cast doubts on such a simple message is to deny His Word, and to denigrate the Son of God. Don’t balk at the simplicity of salvation—rejoice in it!

Application

We are only fit to lead if we learn to follow. Those who are most qualified for the ministry are the ones who are most fearful of its responsibilities. For this reason, James warns us not to rush to be teachers (Jam 3:1–2). Fortunately, in the same text, he reminds us that even the best of us will fail at times. We will often do our best teaching when we deal with our own failures with honest confession, earnest correction, and hard-won victory.

X. He Brought the Joy of Heaven to a Sorrowing World

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” Joh 15:11

A. The Smiling Savior

Have you ever considered that the one thing the Gospel accounts cannot convey to us is Jesus’ facial expressions? Where do we find Him speaking with a twinkle in His eye? I have to believe it was there, when He spoke to the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mat 15:21–28). Where do we find a passage that records “Jesus laughed”? Yet He surely did, and most likely in what appeared to be the most hostile confrontations with His enemies (see Psa 2:1–4).

When Jesus says to His intimate disciples “My joy,” I have to believe He was speaking of a quality of His life they had observed and marveled at repeatedly. The Scriptures assure us that His life was filled with a heavenly delight and joy (Psa 40:6–8; Heb 10:5–7, 12:2). It was something unique about His life that they had observed, pondered, and hungered for.

B. Things Old and New

“Behold, I make all things new.” Rev 21:5

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ is the bridge between Old and New Testament truth. In His first major discourse, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), the Lord interpreted all the Law, and brought all previous revelation to its original intent and meaning.

Then, in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25), He confirms the prophecies of His Second Advent, and the conditions of the Tribulation leading up to it. This message is a link between the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Finally, in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17), the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples for His coming departure, and the formation of His Church (cf., Mat 16:18). But, much more than this, in these five chapters, He laid the groundwork for the remainder of the New Testament record. Every doctrine of the epistles is grounded in this last message of Jesus.

C. New Provision for a New People

As indicated above, every truth contained in the epistles is anticipated, and given in seed form, in the Upper Room. The promise of the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Joh 14:16–18, 26–27, 15:26–27, 16:7–14), making possible the fulfillment of the “*new commandment*” (Joh 13:34–35) is all new revelation—for a new age—though anticipated in the New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34). Not only will the Lord’s departure bring the coming of the Holy Spirit, but the day of Pentecost would usher in the Church Age, and the formation of the Body of Christ, called the Church. The word “church,” made up of *ek* and *kaleo*, means “called out ones.”

The identifying mark of the Church, made up of every believer in Jesus Christ, would be the fruit of the Spirit, “*love, joy, peace ...*” (Gal 5:22–23). These are the qualities we find in the record of the early church in the book of Acts. In these gifts, brought by His Spirit, we see the fulfillment of the longing of the prophets:

*“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me ... to give them
beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment
of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Isa 61:1, 3*

With the virgin birth—the coming of the Savior—the joy of Heaven invaded a dark and mournful world. It was joy, the unique possession of God Himself, and not judgment, that Jesus brought into this world. Consider the angelic announcement to the shepherds:

*“I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.
For there is born to you this day in the city of David
a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luk 2:10–11*

The “*good tidings*” is what we call “the Gospel,” the “good news.” And the effect of the good news, received and believed, is “*great joy*.” One cannot help but wonder what has happened to the people of God since that announcement was made. There seems to be

little of either “good news” or “great joy” among those who profess to believe in Him! Perhaps this explains why the impact of the Church of Jesus Christ on our world is so minimal!

“For the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Neh 8:10

D. Spiritual Sickness and Pseudo Joy

If spiritual strength is the product of the joy of the Lord, then it follows that the joyless believer is spiritually anemic. Just as bad as the lack of joy is the phony, hyped-up emotionalism of the modern church. Such superficial and entertainment-induced euphoria will never stand the test of afflictions and persecutions. Biblical joy is a deep-rooted optimism and anticipation, based on the conviction that God is at work in this evil world to bring all things to the fulfillment of His wise and perfect plan (Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28; Eph 1:9–11).

To the child of God who lives by the conviction of God’s Word, and in the power of His Spirit, there is a powerful and abiding assurance that the “*all things*” from which God will bring the “*good*” includes even the evils, trials, and heartaches of life. Knowing the end of the story lets us in on the great secret of God’s joy. All things—both good and bad—will, in the end, work for His glory and for our eternal blessing and reward in His kingdom. The very worst the world has to throw at us only enhances the very best He has waiting for us. Surely this was what Jesus hinted at, when He said to His disciples on that last night together:

“Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” Joh 16:20

The author of Psalm 126 spoke of the return from the exile, saying, “*Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing*” (Psa 126:2). If the return from Babylon was such a joyful event, what do you suppose our entrance into His eternal kingdom will be? And since we are already citizens of that kingdom (Phi 3:20), shouldn’t we now bear the banner of that heavenly homeland before this tear-stained world?

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Rom 14:17

Application

We have all seen the damage done by those who follow a joyless religion. I cannot call it faith, for true faith brings spiritual joy (Rom 5:11; Gal 5:22). The absence of joy is often the indicator that we have ceased trusting and started trying in our own strength. In the same way, when we are consciously living in His presence, there will be an undertone of joy, even in times of trial (Rom 5:3; Phi 4:4; 1Th 1:6, 5:16; Jam 1:2).

XI. He Revealed the Simplicity of True Wisdom

“Look at the birds of the air ... do not worry ... Consider the lilies of the field ... and yet I say to you ... O you of little faith ...” Mat 6:26, 28–30

A. The Care-free Savior

Of one thing we can be certain: Jesus never worried. So great was His trust in the Heavenly Father, and in His sovereignty and omnipotence, that worry never entered His mind. In the above passage, Jesus equates worry to *“little faith.”* This is faith indeed, but it is immature. By contrast, spiritual maturity should come with less and less anxiety and worry. It has been said that worry is like a rocking chair, it keeps you going, but you never get anywhere. I remember my father often quoting, “How much pain the things that never happen have caused us.” How true this is. We should strive to lay hold of the truth that *“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind”* (2Ti 1:7).

B. Child-like Faith

“Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them ...” Mat 18:2

Jesus often used children to illustrate the nature of faith. In the Old Testament, faith is spoken of as *“the fear of the LORD.”* We are told that *“the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom”* (Pro 1:7, 9:10). In this sense, children are often far more wise than their elders. How often have I heard of children who calm the fears of their parents by reminding them of some simple verse or principle. Not only is child-like simplicity the standard for faith, it was also Jesus’ standard for spiritual greatness (Mat 18:1–4). In this sense, Jesus was the most child-like of men.

C. Out of the Mouth of Babes

“But wisdom is justified by her children.” Mat 11:19; Luk 7:35

The verb *“justified”* means “to declare right.” When we are justified by God through faith in Christ, we are justified by God, that is, declared to be right or righteous (Rom 3:24). The children of wisdom are believers, since, as we saw above, *“The fear of the LORD [faith] is the beginning of wisdom.”* By believing in and acting on the truths of God’s Word, those who believe declare those truths to be right. The wisdom revealed in God’s Word is therefore *“justified”* by the faith of believers. It is written, *“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise”* (Psa 8:2; Mat 21:16). This was true of the children at the triumphal entry, crying *“Hosanna”* (Mat 21:15). It is also true of the smallest, weakest believer who chooses to trust in the promises of the Word of God.

D. Wisdom is a Man

“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” 1Co 1:30

The Lord Jesus Christ is the embodiment of all divine wisdom. In His earthly life, He lived out the wisdom of God in every thought, word, and deed. By this means, He was able to overcome the world at every turn (Joh 16:33). It is only by our spiritual union with Him, through faith, that we are known in the Bible as “overcomers” (1Jo 5:4–5), and even “super-overcomers” (Rom 8:37). By the imputation of His righteousness (Rom 4:5, 23–24; 2Co 5:21), we share in His victory over Satan, sin, and death—even sharing in His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation at the Father’s right hand (Col 3:1–4). He who is the wisdom of God has become to us, all that God’s wisdom can do for sinful man: *“righteousness [imputed] and sanctification [set apart to God] and redemption [present salvation, future glorification].”*

Application

True wisdom is not an issue of intellect. It has been said that, “wisdom is not in knowing much, but in knowing what is essential.” Biblical truths are simple because they are fundamental. God in His very nature is simple, because there is no contrast or contradiction in His nature. Far greater is the humble and simple child of God who strives to live according to the Bible in the simplicity of truth received by faith, than the great theologian who ponders the depths of revelation but does not live accordingly.

XII. He Revealed that Spiritual Ties are Stronger than Blood

“For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” Mat 12:50; Mar 3:35

The Lord Jesus Christ always elevated the spiritual over the physical and material. His eyes were fixed on the Father’s kingdom, and on bringing men and women, boys and girls, into a right relationship to God.

He was often misunderstood by His own blood-kin, who at times thought He was out of His mind (Mar 3:20–21). Even His own brothers did not believe in Him until after the resurrection (Joh 7:5). But to those who trusted in Him, He embraced them with all the love of the Father, bringing to them an understanding of the secrets of the household of God.

It is important, however, to see here that Jesus is not only speaking of those who trusted in Him as Savior. His emphasis is on those who **do** the will of the Father. Certainly, the will of God is fulfilled by believing in His Son (Joh 6:28–29). But obedience to His will does not end with saving faith. Beyond the cross comes discipleship (Mat 28:18–20; Luk 9:23–26). Relationship is established once-for-all in regeneration, but fellowship is won day-by-day through obedience.

A. Family or Household?

“But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” Heb 3:6

Notice that in the above references from Matthew and Mark, Jesus spoke of His real family as *“whoever does the will of My Father in heaven.”* In the Hebrews passage above, there is a condition, *“if we hold fast.”* The issue here is not that of relationship only, but of active fellowship.

In the ancient concept of the “household,” each member had a part to play. It’s what we would call today one’s “chores.” When you cease to do the chores you have been given, you are no longer acting as a member of the household. In the story of the prodigal son (Luk 15:11–32), it is worth noticing that the father never ceased to be a loving father, longing for the return of his son. On the son’s part, however, he ceased to be a part of the household when he left the care of his father. In the mind of the father, the son was *“dead”* and *“lost”* (Luk 15:24, 32). The relation was unchanged, but the fellowship and communion was destroyed. No believer ever ceases to be a child of the Heavenly Father due to disobedience. However, when we live in the rebellion of sin, we are functionally, operationally “dead” to the family, like a broken arm is to the body (see Heb 12:13 and Jam 2:17, 20).

B. Children versus Sons

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the [mature/adult] sons of God.” Rom 8:14

This verse is often misused due to failure to examine both the context and the words used in the text. In Rom 8:12, Paul declares the truth that, as believers, we have a debt of gratitude *“not ... to live according to the flesh.”* This exhortation would be meaningless if it is not possible as a child of God to do so.

Those who choose to live in the flesh *“will die.”* That is, according to the context again, they will not experience the life-giving ministry of the Spirit of God in their *“mortal bodies”* (Rom 8:11). The Spirit-enabled life is the normal Christian life. All that is outside this spiritual enablement is abnormal from God’s point of view.

Those who *“put to death the deeds of the body”* (Rom 8:13b, compare Gal 5:19–21), will *“live,”* in the sense of true life—the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The contrasting ideas of life versus death are further defined for us in Rom 8:15. What Paul means by “death” is *“bondage”* to the sin nature, while “life” is *“adoption”* into the family of God.

Now, there is much confusion in the biblical idea of adoption. We think of it as a child adopted by those who are not its natural parents. That is not the way Paul uses the term. He is thinking of adoption from both a Jewish and a Roman point of view. We would call

it “coming of age,” or “initiation into manhood.” It was the ceremony in which the “child” was now recognized as an “adult son.” The Jewish version was called “Bar Mitzvah,” meaning “Son of the Law.” It was the age of accountability and personal responsibility.

Please note that Paul distinguishes, in the context, between being a “child” (relationship) and being a “son” (obedient fellowship). In Rom 8:16, he assures us that the indwelling Spirit of God (cf., Rom 8:9–11) testifies with our own human spirit that we are “children of God.” The word here is *teknon*, which speaks of a child prior to the right of adoption. And, in Rom 8:17, he affirms, “*if [we are] children, then [we are] heirs of God.*” All of this is dealing with our status as born-again children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But Paul does not stop here.

Going back now to our main verse (Rom 8:14), we find that “*as many as are led by the Spirit of God,*” that is, those believers who live by the Spirit (Rom 8:13), “*these are [the] sons of God.*” Here, Paul uses the word *huios*, the word for “adult sons.” The point Paul is making is that maturity involves obedience. While all believers are “children” of God, not all live as “adult sons” in the sense of spiritual maturity.

This now explains the conditional clause in Rom 8:17, which confuses so many believers. All believers are children of God, and “*if children, then heirs.*” So far, so good. We are all heirs of God, but not all will fully share as “*joint heirs with Christ.*” The only condition required for sharing in the inheritance of God is faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. But to be a joint-heir with Christ requires that “*we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*” Just as Paul later states:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Rom 8:18

“If we endure [suffer with Him], we shall also reign with Him ...” 2Ti 2:12

Application

What does it mean to “suffer with Christ?” This does not mean you must be beaten, scourged, or crucified in the literal sense. In Rom 5:1–5, Paul makes it clear that it is simply to trust Him and find joy in His promises and power in the midst of whatever sufferings come to us in life. In this, James agrees whole-heartedly (Jam 1:1–12). We do not choose our trials, they are orchestrated and permitted by God for our growth. When they come, we either face them in faith, or question God’s goodness and complain. To the victor goes the spoils. How we live our daily lives does matter in eternity!

XIII. He Invites All Believers to Become Friends of God

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ... And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.” Jam 2:21, 23

A. Justified by Faith or Works

In the person of Abraham, we have one of the great figures of the Bible. He becomes the standard of what salvation (or justification) means for the Apostle Paul (see Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6, from Gen 15:6). But for Abraham, being a believer alone was not enough. Like all the great examples of believers in the Bible, he went on to maturity and true spiritual greatness.

Not only was Abraham “justified by faith,” James tells us he was also “*justified by works*.” Remember that the word “*justified*” means “to declare righteous,” and the issue here is, who is making the declaration? In the Romans and Galatians quotes above, God declares Abraham righteous on the basis of his faith, which is what we commonly call salvation. James, however, is dealing with those who are already believers (see Jam 1:18–19), and note that he calls them “*brethren*” throughout the book). His focus is not on evangelism but rather on edification. The “salvation” of which he speaks is the daily deliverance from a fruitless life (see Jam 1:21–22).

Abraham was therefore “*justified by works*” in offering Isaac to God without reservation. By this act, his “*faith was working together with his works, and by works [his] faith was made perfect*” (Jam 2:22). The word “*perfect*” is the word used for maturity. Faith that does not produce works is “*dead*,” in the same sense Paul spoke of in Rom 8:6 and 13. Death is often used in the Bible for that which is non-functional or inoperable (see Rom 4:19).

James is making the point that when our faith produces works (see again Jam 2:14–16) we grow. Growth comes from work, this is true in every area of life. Strain produces gain, while inactivity produces atrophy.

The great lesson here is that every believer has opportunity on a daily basis to convert faith into works. Those who do this consistently, as Abraham did, will become “*friend[s] of God*.”

“*You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.*” Joh 15:14

B. Five Stages of Growth

Jesus made it clear that not all believers choose to become intimate with God. There will be those who make a daily decision to “abide in Christ” (Joh 15:4–5), and these will bear “*much fruit*.” Others will make abiding in His presence a haphazard experience, and will bear some fruit. The amount of fruit produced in our lives is dependent on how obedient we are. Our obedience in turn will affect our growth and maturity. Consider five stages of spiritual growth, from terms used in the Bible. These terms conform to five Hebrew words for faith:

1. The Spiritual Babe
Paul uses this word of Corinthian believers who had not grown up in their faith (1Co 3:1). It's a rather uncomplimentary word when used of any but the new-born believer. In the Hebrew, the word *amen* speaks of beginning faith. It is a word-picture of one leaning on a staff for support.
2. The Young Man, Spiritual Adolescent
Those who have grown, but are not yet mature, may be referred to as spiritual "teenagers." In 1Jo 2:12–14, we actually see the first three stages of spiritual growth, including the term "young men." These are growing, but not yet mature, believers. This fits with the second Hebrew word for faith, which is *batach*. Generally translated "trust," it speaks of trust in trials (Job 13:15), like the young men who overcome by their strength (1Jo 2:14).
3. The Mature Man
In the New Testament, the word most used for maturity is *teleios*, which is often unfortunately translated "perfect." We tend to think of perfect in terms of sinlessness, but the biblical concept is "that which is complete," or "has attained to a goal." In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the third word for faith was *chasah*, which depicted one taking refuge, like David in the cave of Adullam. The mature believer has learned the power of spiritual faith-rest (Heb 4:1–13). Such a believer has learned to "stand still and see the salvation of the LORD" and to let God fight their battles (Exo 14:13–14).
4. The Spiritual Soldier
Paul often spoke of those who were his "fellow-soldiers" (Phi 2:25; 2Ti 2:3). He never used the term lightly, but only of those who had faced and overcome great dangers and stood firm in their faith. Those who learn to wear and use the full armor of God (Eph 6:10–18), in the face of great opposition, make up these ranks. In the Hebrew, the word *yaqal* spoke of such faith. The word-picture is of a warrior on a battlefield who is wounded, and must quickly apply a field-dressing to his own wound to keep on fighting. This is the word used by Job in the midst of his sufferings, and translated "trust" in Job 13:15.
5. The Friend of God
Few believers are actually designated as "friends of God" in the Bible. In addition to Abraham, we could add Rahab (Jam 2:25), since the word "likewise" that begins the verse would apply what is said of Abraham to her as well. Then there is Moses, the "friend" of God (Exo 33:11; Num 12:7). This is the height of spiritual achievement, but it is open to all. The Hebrew word *qawah*, translated "wait" in Isa 40:31, speaks of consistent faith over a long period of time.

C. Twelve Apostles, Three Friends

"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transformed before them ..." Mat 17:1–2 (emphasis added)

The passage emphasizes that these three were separated from the others for special privilege and purpose. And this was not the only time. These three were also selected to be with him at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mar 5:37) and were called on to pray for Him in the Garden (Mat 26:37; Mar 14:33). It is evident that something was different in these three from the group of twelve. Since Jesus knows the hearts of men, and does nothing without good reason, we can only conclude that these three shared a greater intimacy with the Master, due to a deeper spiritual growth and grounding in their souls. All believers are among the elect, the chosen, but some among the chosen are choice.

Application

“But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk.” 1Co 7:17

The one who would be a friend of God need not be a pastor, or a missionary, or someone of note. Every child of God is invited into this deep rapport and blessed fellowship with the Most High God. Genuine spiritual hunger and consistent spiritual growth will eventually usher us into His “inner circle,” which is inclusive—not exclusive. None are shut out, but only those who hunger and thirst to fully know the Lord Jesus Christ will be satisfied. Pretense and façade are the enemy of spiritual reality. The Apostle John, about whom we read very little, was “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (Joh 21:20). No great deed or famous reputation could match that simple title.

XIV. He Brought Heavenly Riches to a Bankrupt World

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Mat 6:19–21

A. Inheritance vs. Investments

We have already discussed from Rom 8:14 the biblical distinction between children and adult sons, and between those who are heirs of God and those who are joint-heirs with Christ. It is necessary to affirm that every child of God is an heir, and will share in the inheritance, of God (Gal 3:29, 4:7). We are also told in 1Pe 1:3–4 that this inheritance, based solely on faith in Jesus Christ, is eternal and unfading. This promised inheritance belongs to every child of God.

However, this is the baseline, not the epitome of the spiritual wealth Jesus came to give. If we need any evidence of how important this topic was to Him, consider that beginning in Mat 5:46–6:21, our Lord mentions “*reward*” and “*treasure*” eleven times. In the Scriptures, repetition implies emphasis. His point is that, how we live will determine our heavenly return on the spiritual investment of faith in action.

B. The Storehouse of Heaven Opened

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph 1:3

“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ...” Eph 3:8

Every believer begins their spiritual life with access to the infinite riches of Christ (Eph 1:18, 2:7, 3:8, 16). These riches are spiritual in nature. When we claim and act upon these riches by faith, we are *“lay[ing] up ... treasure in heaven”* (Mat 6:19). In eternity, our investments will be rewarded in the eternal currency of Heaven. While all believers will share in eternal inheritance, not all will share equally. This is often illustrated by Jesus in parables such as the parable of the talents (Mat 25:14–30). We must always bear in mind that, *“to whom much is given, from him much will be required ...”* (Luk 12:48).

C. The Kingdom of the Heart

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ... knowledge ... self-control ... perseverance ... godliness ... brotherly kindness ... love ... for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly [richly] into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2Pe 1:5–7, 11

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” Pro 16:32

Each and every child of God is given a kingdom over which he or she must rule. This is the kingdom of our own heart. How we rule the inner kingdom now in this life will determine the degree to which we shall reign and rule with Christ in eternity. This is why Peter warns us in the quote above to give *“all diligence,”* in adding works to our faith. Faith in Jesus Christ begins the spiritual journey, but it continues in the works of faith. The seven stages of spiritual self-discipline, laid out by Peter, have to do with taking charge of the inner kingdom of the heart. Each of these will, in turn, affect our outward conduct toward others. We call this spiritual transformation, or conformity to Christ (Rom 8:29, 12:2; 2Co 3:18).

At the Judgment Seat of Christ (see 1Co 3:10–15; 2Co 5:10), we will all be evaluated in the perfect light of God’s standard. The issue here is not sins—which were dealt with once and for all at the cross (2Jo 2:2). Rather, the issue will be *“what have you done with what I (God) gave you?”* At this time, to each will be given the reward due for the faith by which each has lived. It was this promise that compelled the Apostle Paul to live such a sacrificial life, for the *“prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phi 3:14). This is why he challenges each of us, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1Co 11:1).

XV. He Demonstrated the Life of the Holy Spirit, the Power of Faith

“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure [to Him].” Joh 3:34

A. The Life of the Spirit

When the Pharisees and chief priests sent officers of the temple guard to take Jesus, they returned empty-handed. When asked why they did not bring Him bound, they answered, “*No man ever spoke like this Man!*” (Joh 7:46). If the words of the Lord had such power, what must it have been like to be in His presence, to not only hear His words, but to see His mighty deeds? Even in the common things of daily life, the disciples were astounded at the vibrant power of His life (Joh 21:25; 1Jo 1:1–4).

All of the personal dynamic of the life of Jesus pointed to the truth that had come from God, and that He was God in the flesh. And the purpose of it all was to lead men and women, boys and girls, into the saving faith in Him alone. But the secret behind His power was His unconditional surrender to the Spirit of God. He showed to the world what a life of heavenly quality in the midst of a corrupt and evil world looked like. He proved that it is possible to live “*blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*” (Phi 2:15). Those who trust in Him, and love Him, have been proving it ever since.

B. The Power of Faith

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Heb 12:2

The Spirit of God empowers the child of God to do the will of God when they trust fully in Him. Lack of righteousness in our lives is due to our lack of power. Lack of power signifies the absence of the fellowship of the Spirit. This lack is due purely to our lack of faith. Following the problem even further back, lack of faith is the result of failure to hear the Word of God on a daily basis (Rom 10:17).

Jesus is said to be the “*author and finisher of faith.*” Because this passage is often mistranslated, it is also often misunderstood. Consider several main points of the text:

1. First of all, the word “*looking*” literally means “looking away,” and indicates a turning from the things of this world to a preoccupation with Jesus Christ on a daily basis. We look at Him as He is revealed in the Word of God.
2. Then, the Greek word translated “*author*” is also used in Heb 2:10, where it is translated “*captain.*” It speaks of one who is a “prince-leader,” one in authority who also humbly walks and works among His people. As the “*author ... of faith,*” He is the fountain and focus of all faith.
3. Not only is He the source of all true faith, He is said to be the “*finisher*” of it. We tend to think of this as our faith beginning when we trusted in Him, and finishing when we enter His presence. The word used here, however, is from *teleios*, the same

word Jesus used in His victory cry from the cross, *“It is finished!”* (Joh 19:30). It means to bring something to ultimate fulfillment.

4. Now comes the real key in this verse. The word *“our”* is italicized by the translators. This means it does not occur in the original text. By adding this word, we completely change the meaning of the verse from a Christ-centered focus to a man-centered focus. While it is true that our faith begins and ends with Him, and that the race of faith begins at the cross and ends in eternity, that is **not** what the verse is saying. Literally, *“He is the prince-leader and fulfiller of faith.”* In other words, only in Him do we see a true and full demonstration of a life of faith.

Paul tells us in 1Co 11:1 to *“imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.”* I have no doubt that Paul often fell short of Christ’s example. No man has ever compared to His life of faith. He stands unique in all of human history, far above all the greats of Bible believers (see Heb 3:1–6), the only perfect picture of faith. This is what our verse is saying.

Application

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2Co 3:18

“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2Co 4:6

In these two passages, the idea of Heb 12:2 is captured. In fact, they are a summary of the entire theme of our study. In Christ Jesus, the Light of God, the revelation that brings us into the knowledge of His glory, is found. The Word of God is a mirror. However, the reflected image is not ours, but His. We see Him through His Word, and as we behold Him, we are transformed into the likeness of His image. We receive light, knowledge, and glory from Him, shining in our hearts by the indwelling Spirit of God. No man can look steadfastly on the face of Christ and not be changed!

It is my earnest prayer that this study will bring each of us to “behold His glory,” and be enraptured by the “beauty of holiness” seen only in Him. He presents such a captivating image that even the smallest seed of faith will be blessed by the process of inner transformation into His likeness. The book of Hebrews captures the thing we lack so much in our hustle-and-bustle lives:

“But we see Jesus ... Therefore, holy brethren ... consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus ... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher [perfecter, NASB] of our faith ...” Heb 2:9, 3:1, 12:2

May God grant that each of us be delivered from the distractions of our time, to look upon His face, to behold His glory, and to be changed into His image!

Philip Schaff in *The Person of Christ* (New York: American Tract Society, 1913, pg. 33) wrote the following:

Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mahomet, and Napoleon;

Without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and schools combined;

Without the eloquence of schools, He spoke words of life such as never were spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of any orator or poet;

Without writing a single line, He has set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art and sweet songs of praise, than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.

Born in a manger, and crucified as a malefactor, He now controls the destinies of the civilized world, and rules a spiritual empire which embraces one-third of the inhabitants of the globe.

There never was in this world a life so unpretending, modest, and lowly in its outward form and condition, and yet producing such extraordinary effects upon all ages, nations, and classes of men.

The annals of history produce no other example of such complete and astonishing success in spite of the absence of those material, social, literary, and artistic powers and influences which are indispensable to success for a mere man.