

# **The Book of Jonah**

## **Preface**

Those of you who are familiar with the story of Jonah and the whale know that Jonah hopped a ship heading in the opposite direction when God commanded him to go preach to the Ninevites. You will also remember how God provided Jonah with a “living submarine” to get him back where he belonged. But often, knowledge of Jonah stops with this miraculous event. While we may be vaguely familiar with the great revival in Nineveh, we are too often ignorant of the “story behind the story”—the one dealing with Jonah's rebellious attitude toward what God had called him to do.

As we examine this episode from Jonah's life, we will focus on a number of principles related to personal evangelism, especially principles that will help us understand how we are to approach this God-ordained task. When we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we become ambassadors, charged with the responsibility of communicating the Gospel to people around us. Yet how many of us—like Jonah—try to escape this call to “be a blessing”? How many of us allow our personal prejudices, our fears of being embarrassed, or our pursuit of personal comfort to hinder our witness? Are we willing to go to the Russians? To the Iraqis? To our unbelieving neighbors? To our unsaved co-workers or fellow students? To the homeless? To nursing-home residents? To people dying in cancer wards or AIDS hospices?

If you are a Christian who does not joyfully seek out opportunities to share Christ with a dark and dying world, then this study is for you. It will help you understand why all Christians must be committed to personal evangelism.

## **Background**

Jonah was a prophet to Israel in the 8th Century B.C. who was given a commission to evangelize Israel's most despicable enemy—Assyria. In Jonah's day, the Assyrian Empire (whose capital was Nineveh) had the largest army, the greatest warriors, and a vicious, bloodthirsty reputation. When they defeated an enemy in battle, they tortured captives in various ways: yanking out their teeth, impaling them on stakes, dismembering them and feeding their remains to animals, or skinning them alive.

As Jonah and the people of Israel looked to the east and the north, they saw a nation that was constantly advancing and threatening to destroy them militarily. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, why a patriot like Jonah would balk at God's command to go proclaim the Word of God in Nineveh. Jonah wanted God to wipe out the Assyrian threat to Israel by annihilating them—not by offering them eternal life.

But Jonah's will was not God's will. Because God was able to see into the hearts of the Assyrians, He knew they would respond to His grace and truth. All God needed was a messenger to carry the good news to people who were ready to listen to and obey the call of God.

God's desire was not just to save and bless the Ninevites. He also wanted to bless Israel by allowing her to fulfill her divine commission to witness to people in other nations. The Jews in Jonah's day were neglecting this commission because they wanted to monopolize God's grace rather than share it with the Gentiles. Their attitude of exclusiveness violated God's plan: He blessed Israel by making her the custodian of His Word so she could be a blessing to other nations by sharing that Word (Gen 12:2–3).

As a prophet in a nation that existed under a divine commission to evangelize, Jonah was doubly obligated to go to the Ninevites. However, his intense hatred of the Assyrians made him a reluctant messenger who fought God at every turn—a messenger of truth so disoriented to grace that he became angry with God because untold thousands were saved.

## **Rebellion**

**Principle One:** We have a commission from God to evangelize the world!

*“Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amattai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’”* Jon 1:1–2

Throughout history, God has always revealed His will for believers through His Word. Consequently, believers cannot hope to fulfill the plan of God for their lives unless they faithfully study and apply His Word. In the opening verses of this book, the “*word of the Lord*” tells Jonah that he is to go to Nineveh to tell the people that God is about to judge them for their wickedness. Since God's grace always precedes His judgment, He first commanded Jonah to tell the Ninevites that He was about to pour out His wrath upon them but offered them the way of escape through faith. The ingredients of this divine commission to Jonah were threefold: the messenger, the mission field, and the message.

### **The Messenger:**

As a prophet and a believer, Jonah was commanded to evangelize the Ninevites. Today, the responsibility to evangelize belongs to every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ (2Co 5:18–21). The importance of being a messenger of the Gospel is declared in Rom 10:14–15 by the apostle Paul, the greatest evangelist of all time:

*“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?  
And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?  
And how shall they hear without a preacher [messenger]?  
And how shall they preach unless they are sent?  
As it is written; ‘How beautiful are the feet  
of those who preach the gospel of peace ...”*

Unbelievers must hear the Gospel before they can respond to it. Because God wants all men to come to a saving knowledge of Christ (2Pe 3:9; 1Ti 2:4), He graciously provides the messengers to preach the good news. Jonah himself had benefited from the faithfulness of someone else who

gave him the message of salvation. Therefore, as a recipient of grace, he is obligated to take the message to whomever God deems fit, even to the Assyrians Jonah hated.

Jonah's name should also have reminded him of the debt he owed. In the Hebrew, "*Jonah*" means "dove," which is symbolic in Scripture of the ministry and the work of the Holy Spirit. Jonah is also called the "*son of Amittai*." "*Amittai*" comes from the Hebrew *amet*, which means "truth or doctrine." Thus, Jonah is a "son of doctrine or a son of truth." As a recipient of God's grace and truth, he is responsible for extending both to the lost. He is supposed to see himself as a debtor to grace and eagerly seek opportunities for spreading the Gospel.

### The Mission Field:

God not only commissions a messenger to spread the Gospel, He also makes it clear where that messenger is to go. The messenger must follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit—who is the "*Lord of the harvest*" (Mat 9:38)—because only God knows where positive volition toward the Gospel exists. Furthermore, the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit prepares the unbeliever to respond to the Gospel (Joh 16:8–13). Apart from this spiritual preparation, the most convincing arguments man can devise will not persuade the unbeliever of his need for Christ.

Wherever there are spiritually hungry people, God sends His messengers. Every believer is an ambassador for Christ (2Co 5:19–20) with a divine commission (Mat 28:19–20; Act 1:8) to preach Christ to a dying world. God told Jonah to go to the Ninevites, and we should ask ourselves where He has told us to go. Every one of us should view where we live, work, and play as our mission field—proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to unbelievers as the Holy Spirit leads.

### The Message:

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh with an uncompromising and unpopular message. Jonah must tell these wild, barbaric, and violent Assyrians that their lives were an affront to the righteousness of God. This is not the "good" part of the Good News! But one part of evangelism is the declaration that man is not acceptable to God—no matter how moral, self-righteous, or religious he may be. The Bible clearly declares that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom 3:23). No matter how much man tries to be acceptable to God through his own efforts; his good deeds are only "*like filthy rags*" in God's sight (Isa 64:6). Thus, Jonah's message was designed to make the Ninevites aware of their need for salvation and give the Gospel a fair hearing.

Making the Assyrians aware of their sinfulness was not an easy task because they were a very religious people. They worshipped a number of man-made gods such as Ishtar (goddess of love and fertility) and Dagon (half fish and half man who supposedly emerged from the sea to establish Nineveh and Babylon). In the book of Nahum, Nineveh is a symbol of the apostate religions of mankind, which substitute man-made gods for the one true God. Yet, in Jonah's day, God saw into the hearts of the people and responded to their positive volition by sending his messenger, Jonah to offer them salvation.

**Principle Two:** If we refuse to evangelize, God will discipline us.

*“But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.”* Jon 1:3–4

Jonah refused his divine commission as God’s messenger to go to Nineveh and tell the Assyrians of their need for Christ. Instead, fully aware that he was being disobedient to God’s plan, he fled to Tarshish. Later, Jonah admitted why he ran: “...[to] *forestall this* [salvation of the Ninevites], *I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity*” (Jon 4:2–NASB).

The root of Jonah’s disobedience is prejudice; he hated the Ninevites so much that he did not want God to give them even one opportunity to respond to grace. Race, nationality, language, sexual persuasion, and customs are never a reason to withhold the Gospel from anyone. In Jam 2:1, 9, believers are warned to guard against prejudice: “*My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality* [an attitude of personal favoritism] ... *But if you show partiality, you are committing sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*” The Bible makes it clear that God looks on even the most despicable person with kindness, impartiality, patience, and—most of all—love (Rom 2:11; 2Pe 3:9). Because Jesus Christ died for all, salvation is open to all (1Jo 2:2).

How serious a sin is prejudice? In Jonah’s case, severe enough to make him disobey a direct divine command! Jonah flagged a ship headed for Tarshish, a city in southern Spain that lay geographically in the opposite direction from Nineveh. The fact that people in the ancient world considered Tarshish “the end of the world” illustrates just how desperate Jonah was to avoid obeying God’s command! However, no matter how hard he tried, Jonah could not escape the omnipresence or sovereignty of God. He could only refuse to go to the place of fellowship, a place where God could prove His power through productive service, a place where God could prove His power through Jonah by saving the Ninevites and blessing Israel in ways Jonah could not imagine. After rejecting God’s commission to evangelize the Ninevites, Jonah ran into God’s overruling will and faced the consequences of his disobedience. While he was on the ship headed for Tarshish, God sent a storm of grace designed to correct the rebellious prophet.

**Principle Three:** God uses crises to prepare unbelievers for the Gospel.

*“Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him and said to him, ‘What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us so that we may not perish.’”* Jon 1:5–6

God sent both a “*great wind*” and a “*mighty tempest*” (v. 4) indicating just how violent a storm this was. According to the Hebrew word for “*mariners*,” these were experienced seamen who had spent much of their lives on the sea. They had been out in every kind of storm the Mediterranean could brew up; yet this storm was like nothing they had ever experienced, and they were afraid.

Where was Jonah during the storm? Asleep in the bottom of the ship! His sleep, however, was not the sleep of faith—as demonstrated by Peter in prison (Act 12:6). Jonah’s sleep revealed his spiritual apathy toward God’s will for his life and his indifference regarding the lives of these sailors. Consequently, God sent an unbelieving Phoenician sea captain to wake him up both physically and spiritually. The captain’s words, “*Perhaps your God will consider us so that we may not perish*” are true: Jonah’s God **was** concerned about them and did not want them to perish. Furthermore, Jonah’s God will cause His reluctant messenger to deliver the message of salvation in response to the sailors’ questions about the origin of this crisis.

*“And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us cast lots that we know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.’ So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, ‘Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you? So he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land.’” Jon 1:7–9*

Because the storm scared these men like they had never been scared before, they were eager to hear the truth. The casting of lots demonstrated their superstition: they were convinced that some god was angry with one of them, and they determined to find out who. After God caused the lot to fall on Jonah, the sailors wanted to know everything about him. God used the crisis of the storm to wake them up spiritually so they would seek truth as they intently questioned Jonah.

Like these sailors, all unbelievers have some kind of god in which they place their trust—their religion, their good deeds, or their human strengths and capabilities. But when they face death, they become acutely aware of how impotent their gods are. In crisis, the Christian has a great opportunity to demonstrate his perfect assurance in the power and faithfulness of God and to display a persuasive life-witness to unbelievers caught up in the same crisis. Unfortunately, too many Christians are not spiritually mature enough to handle the crisis without caving in to fear, or, like Jonah, they simply do not care what happens to the unsaved. In either case, they miss an opportunity to “*give a defense to everyone who asks [them] a reason for the hope that is in [them]*” (1Pe 3:15b).

As the sailors sought answers from Jonah, he responded by identifying himself as a Hebrew, setting himself apart from them both nationally and spiritually. As a Hebrew and a believer, he was a member of a missionary nation responsible for revealing God to an unbelieving world. Until he said, “*I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land.*” Jonah had done nothing to witness to these men. Even when he did speak, the truth came in the form of a barb; he subtly attacked their false gods for being unable to deliver them from the fierce storm.

Jonah did not speak about his God or desire to share Him with men trapped in the darkness of unbelief; he spoke only from his antagonism toward all who were not of the house of Israel. **Principle Four:** The more we reject God's will, the more hardened our hearts become.

*“Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, ‘Why have you done this?’ For the men knew he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Then they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?’—for the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, ‘Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know this great tempest is because of me.’ Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to the land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.”* Jon 1:10–13

Because these unbelieving Phoenician sailors were roused by crisis to seek God, they did not scoff at Jonah's declaration that he was “fleeing from the presence of the Lord.” They responded with a statement of incredulity that he would try to do something so foolish—“*Why have you done this?*” When they asked Jonah what they should do to survive, Jonah told them to throw him overboard—an offer to save their lives through his death. While this may seem a noble sacrifice, it is really an indication of just how hardened his soul had become. He would rather drown in the churning sea than extend an offer of eternal life to these men!

Furthermore, Jonah's solution reflects man's way of thinking about crisis—not God's. God wanted Jonah to evangelize these sailors so He could deliver them both physically **and** spiritually. While Jonah's death would have “bought them” physical deliverance from the storm, faith in the Messiah would deliver them from eternal damnation. Because Jonah did not care about their eternal future, he offered only a temporal solution to the crisis caused by the storm.

For these unbelieving sailors, God designed the storm to unleash their fear of death, to break through the veil of their unbelief, and make them seek deliverance. They stood at the brink of eternity, needing only a glimmer of truth to change their lives and their eternal future forever. But the man with the light refused to share it willingly.

For the hard-hearted Jonah, the storm represented the warning stage of divine discipline in which God tries to rouse the disobedient believer to repent and be restored to fellowship. On the ship headed toward Tarshish, Jonah was out of God's geographical will (where God wanted him to be) and operational will (what God wanted him to do). But rather than confessing his sins so he could be cleansed and restored to fellowship (1Jo 1:9) (thereby ending the discipline), Jonah clung to his hatred.

Ironically, these unbelieving, Phoenician sailors proved to be more compassionate than Jonah; they were reluctant to kill him in order to save themselves. Thus, instead of throwing him into the sea, they first tried to row to the safety of land. While their human compassion may seem admirable, it put them into conflict with God's will for them and for Jonah. As long as they had a plan to deliver themselves, they would not seek salvation from the only One who could provide it, nor would they allow God to deal with Jonah as He must. Consequently, God intensified the storm and thwarted their rescue attempts.

**Principle Five:** In evangelism, the credit belongs to God.

*“Therefore they cried out to the Lord, and said, ‘We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man’s life and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You.’ So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. They the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.” Jon 1:14–16*

As the storm-tossed sea grew more violent, the sailors had no option but to throw Jonah overboard. The increased violence of the storm ended their attempts to maneuver around the plan of God for Jonah’s life and for their own. Before they cast Jonah into the sea, they petitioned God to show them mercy for killing Jonah. After they threw Jonah into the sea, the storm ceased, and these men had proof that Jonah’s God is the one true God. The word “*feared*” is the same word Jonah used in declaring his faith in the Lord (v. 9). They believed because they saw the grace of God in abating the storm—not because of the effective witness of Jonah. The sailors had come to a saving faith in spite of Jonah. Consequently, by the end of Chapter 1, these men were **in** the will of God because of their saving faith while Jonah was still **out** of the will of God, in the wrong place, and under divine discipline. Yet in spite of Jonah’s disobedient position, God still used him to bring these sailors to Himself, proving that God’s power is the foundation of all effective witnessing.

**Principle Six:** God uses even our disobedience to His glory.

*“Now the Lord has prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” Jon 1:17*

While Jonah undoubtedly expected to die when he was cast into the sea, God had another plan. He exercised His overruling will in Jonah’s life by giving him a miraculous ride to Nineveh inside the stomach of a great fish. Thus, no matter how much Jonah balked, God led him to the unbelieving Ninevites who had been prepared to hear the Gospel through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In spite of the prophet’s reluctant witnessing, hundreds of thousands of people would be saved—to the eternal glory of God.

Not only was Jonah’s ride in the belly of the great fish a familiar one to many people, it is considered one of the greatest miracles in the entire Bible for at least two reasons: First, God used Jonah’s deliverance as a sign of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as Jonah was delivered to the sea so the sailors could live, so Jesus Christ was delivered for the sins of the entire world (1Jo 2:2, 4:10) so those who believe in him may live in the presence of God for all eternity.

Second, God used this event 800 years later to illustrate how the Jews of Christ’s day were without excuse in refusing to recognize their Messiah. In Mat 12:38–41, Jesus Christ called the religious Jews “*an evil and adulterous generation*” because they had repeatedly seen the power

of God demonstrated in his life, yet still demanded more signs (v. 38). Christ told them, “*no sign will be given ... except the sign of the prophet Jonah ...so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*” (vv. 39–40). He then told them, “*The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here*” (v. 41).

If the men of Nineveh are commended for their positive, faithful response to the message of a flawed prophet, how much more condemned will the religious Jews of Jesus’ day be for their lack of response to the One who is infinitely greater than Jonah—the Savior who willingly came down from heaven and offered His life for the entire world!

### **Empty Obedience**

**Principle 10:** God wants us to hear and obey His Word.

*“Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.’”* Jon 3:1–2

The phrase “*the Word of the Lord*” is found twice in the opening verses of this chapter; whenever God repeats something, it is because He wants us to pay careful attention. Remember that “*the Word of the Lord*” came to Jonah in chapter 1 when God first commanded him to go to Nineveh and proclaim His message. After rescuing Jonah from the storm and from the fish, God made it clear to Jonah that He had **not** changed His mind about Nineveh. He commanded Jonah a “*second time*” to go and proclaim His Word in “*that great city.*”

Consider for a moment just how great a city Nineveh was. Archaeology has confirmed that the circumference of the entire area was about 60 miles, which supports the statement here that it took three days to walk through it. Its 100-foot-high wall had more than 1,500 towers raised above it and was so wide that the Ninevites could race three chariots at a time on the top. The city’s population was between 600,000 and 1,000,000 people. But God did not measure the greatness of Nineveh by such statistics. He looked into the hearts of the people and saw “*fields [that] are ... white for harvest*” (Joh 4:35b). He sent Jonah to reap that harvest.

God displayed His grace to other people in Nineveh who were hungry to know Him by sending a messenger. He does not allow Jonah’s failure to result in hundreds of thousands of people dying without having heard the Gospel. God also displayed His grace to Jonah by not casting him aside as the messenger. This proves that a man’s past failures do not hinder the plan of God and proves that it is the message, not the man that is the issue.

**Principle 11:** It’s God’s power—not our performance—that makes evangelism effective.

*“And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. They he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’”* Jon 3:4

Although it took three days to walk through the city of Nineveh, Jonah spent just one day performing the task God assigned him. In spite of his decision to obey God recorded at the end

of chapter 2, Jonah's actions here show that he had fallen back to his old position: he still hated the Ninevites and feared their positive response. Consequently, Jonah only partially fulfilled the work God gave him to complete. He only covered a third of his territory, and he proclaimed only half of the message.

In a gesture of overt obedience only, Jonah shouted a hellfire-and-brimstone message at the citizens of Nineveh: "God will destroy you in 40 days for your wickedness!" But this is a one-sided distortion of the Gospel: Jonah proclaimed the "bad news" (they're all sinners who deserve to go to hell) but left out the "good news" (God has provided a Messiah to save all those who will believe in Him).

In spite of Jonah's lack of integrity for his mission, God used the harshness of his lopsided message to get the attention of the Ninevites. Before the Ninevites could undergo a change of the attitude that would lead to their deliverance, they must first see their need for salvation. Until man understands he is a sinner in need of a Savior, he will not seek that Savior. While the Gospel is the "good news" that promises salvation, the unbeliever must understand the "bad news" first: he must realize his unacceptable standing before a holy God, and he must understand that he has two appointments with God—death and judgment—if he fails to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 9:27).

The overwhelming response of the Ninevites to Jonah's halfhearted message proved that God's Word will prevail no matter how man may try to hide the truth. Jonah's deliberate distortion of that message leads many students of the Word to ask a question: "Why did God choose a man so opposed to the task?" God in His omniscience knew what Jonah's attitude would be, but He chose to work His purpose through Jonah to illustrate an important principle: effective evangelism is based on the power of God, not on the talents, arguments, methods, personality, or motivation of the messenger.

In fact, when an unbeliever comes to know Jesus Christ, many believers may have been involved in giving him the information he needed, each acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit to plant seeds of truth at various times in that unbeliever's life. Paul illustrates this principle in 1Co 3:6–7: "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters is anything, but God who gives the increase.*" Paul also points out in Phi 1:15–18 that though men preach, Christ is proclaimed. Paul's humble attitude reveals his understanding that God can work through a man whose motives are wrong just as easily as He can work through a man whose motives are right. God proves this to Jonah through the salvation of the Ninevites.

**Principle 12:** Spiritual problems require spiritual solutions.

*"So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be*

*covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?”* Jon 3:5–9

The amazing thing about this passage is the response of the Ninevites to Jonah’s message. An enemy had come with a message of doom; but instead of killing Jonah, hundreds of thousands of people turned to the Lord. Consider the fact that when Jeremiah carried a similar message to his own people, the religious leaders wanted him put to death (Jer 26:1–15). What a contrast is the positive response of the Ninevites! Of course, in his divine sense of humor, God used Jonah’s terrifying appearance—hair, clothes, and skin bleached stark white by the gastric acids inside the fish’s stomach—to make His warning much more dramatic, especially for a people who worshipped the fish-god, Dagon!

Jonah’s drastic message demanded a drastic response. And *“from the greatest to the least,”* the Ninevites expressed their repentance (or change of attitude) toward God. Even the king laid aside his royal robes and put on sackcloth—a symbol of his humility before God and his complete dependence on divine mercy. He then ordered a fast for both the people and the animals in Nineveh. Why? The object of fasting is to set aside normal functions and spend that time focusing on God’s Word through study, prayer, and the application of specific truths to one’s own life. The king wanted everyone in his kingdom focusing on God—not occupied with feeding themselves or their livestock.

Unlike Jonah during the storm when he asked the sailors to throw him overboard, the king was humble enough to seek a spiritual solution to a spiritual problem. He did not respond to this threat of destruction as most rulers would; he did not call up the military. While a strong military is essential in fighting against human enemies, it is utterly helpless to deliver a nation God has destined for destruction. Understanding that human power is not the answer, the king sought divine power; and he exercised a spiritual solution—faith in God.

Though the message of God is delivered by a reluctant prophet, the people of Nineveh sought and found their salvation: they *“believed in God.”* The Hebrew word *“believed”* is *amen*—the same word used in Gen 15:6 where we are told, *“Abraham believed in the Lord; and it was accounted [reckoned/credited] to him for righteousness”* (compare Rom 4:3; 2Co 5:21). God always imputes His righteousness to the believer at the moment of salvation. Thus, the Ninevites’ faith in God’s power to deliver them from death (*“the wages of sin,”* Rom 6:23), resulted in their salvation.

**Principle 13:** There is no conflict between the mercy of God and the judgment of God.

*“Then God saw their works, that they had turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.”* Jon 3:10

Is God’s holiness somehow compromised by His compassionate decision not to destroy Nineveh? Not at all (though Jonah will shortly argue the point). The believer involved in personal evangelism cannot afford to be confused regarding the mercy and judgment of God.

While Satan seeks to slander the integrity of God with phrases like, “surely a loving God would not send His own creatures to hell,” the believer must be free of such sentimental distortions of truth.

God is holy, and no act of God can ever compromise or contradict His character. His holiness is made up of His righteousness (perfect goodness) and His justice (perfect fairness), and it is the foundation for all His actions toward man. While the Bible declares that God is love (1Jo 4:16), His love never acts in a way that compromises His holiness. Consequently, when the love of God is directed toward man, it acts consistently with His righteousness and justice. Anything less would be incompatible with divine standards.

Since the righteousness of God demands judgment for sin, God’s love cannot ignore or overlook man’s sin. But God’s love found a way to save man while still satisfying His holiness: Jesus Christ willingly submitted Himself to be judged on the cross (2Co 5:21). The eternal object of the Father’s love was judged for the sins of the world (Rom 5:8; Gal 1:3–4). The cross, then, becomes the basis of receiving God’s love; and Christ becomes the key to solving man’s problem with sin and spiritual death. Everyone who comes to God through the cross has satisfied His righteousness (Rom 3:25), is justified (Rom 4:3), and receives the uncompromising love of God (1Jo 3:1–2, 4:7–12).

Eight hundred years before the cross, the Ninevites became the recipients of God’s mercy rather than His wrath because of their faith. And God’s justice was not compromised when He decided to spare them, because the price of that mercy would be paid by Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. While judgment is sure to those who reject Christ, God patiently pursues every person—in grace—just as He pursued the Ninevites: *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward you, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2Pe 3:9).

The response of the Ninevites confirms the condemnatory words of Christ in Mat 12:39–41 regarding the unbelief of the scribes and Pharisees. Even though the messenger is a bitter, angry prophet who despises the idea that they will share Heaven with him, the Ninevites responded magnificently to God’s gracious offer of salvation. Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why Jesus Christ said the men of Nineveh will have the right to condemn those who observed the glory of the Messiah with their own eyes and refused to believe!

## **Anger**

**Principle 14:** Mental attitude sins rob us of the joy of service.

*“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!’”* Jon 4:1–3

As a prophet whose job was to proclaim truth so people can respond, Jonah should have been happy over the salvation of the Ninevites. So why was he angry? The answer goes back to Jonah's prejudicial attitude of exclusiveness. Jonah wanted God's grace reserved for the Jews, not extended to those despicable Gentiles. In fact, his venomous hatred for the Ninevites made him boil at the thought that they too were now the recipients of God's mercy.

In his anger-driven cry to God, Jonah revealed what motivated him to flee to Tarshish: He knew the Lord would be gracious and compassionate to his most hated enemies, but he did not want God to "[relent] *from doing harm*" where the Ninevites were concerned. As a student of the Word, Jonah was familiar with statements found throughout the Word regarding God's grace, mercy, and compassion. So he could not escape the fact that God wanted to save the Ninevites. In his flight to Tarshish, Jonah was saying in effect, "I can't stop you from saving them, Lord, but I can make sure you don't use me to do it." When the overruling will of God deposited him on the beach, Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites still had not changed. As seen in Chapter 3, Jonah distorted the message of salvation in a resentful half-obedience to God's command.

Now his worst fears had been realized—the people of Nineveh had turned to God. Jonah's furious response was to tell God that he wanted to die. What should have given him great joy—the positive response to God's grace by thousands of people—was instead a deep source of bitterness and anger. Rather than approaching his mission to Nineveh filled with mental-attitude sins, Jonah should have been motivated by a love for God and a sense of gratitude for his own salvation. With the proper divine attitude, he would have found joy—not anger—in Nineveh's deliverance.

Students of the Word often marvel at the contrast between Jonah's negative attitude and his success at winning souls. By today's standard of measuring spiritual greatness, Jonah would be considered a "dynamic soul winner" and would have his name and picture splashed across every Christian magazine in the country. But God does not measure success as men do. While men measure an evangelist's success by the "number who come forward," God looks at the attitude behind the evangelist's actions.

Nowhere is this principle more evident than in the life of Noah. Unlike Jonah who tried to avoid giving the Ninevites the Gospel, Noah wanted to see people saved. Unlike Jonah who witnessed for one day and won thousands of converts, Noah spent 120 years witnessing and only converted the members of his family. But which man pleased God the most? Noah, who—because his faithfulness in doing the work God called him to—never wavered.

**Principle 15:** When we refuse to adjust to grace, our values become distorted.

*"Then the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade till he might see what would become of the city." Jon 4:4–5*

Notice the gracious question God asked Jonah in an attempt to show Jonah his disorientation to grace: "*Is it right for you to be angry?*" Obviously, the answer is "No!" But like a petulant child who knows he's wrong and won't admit it, Jonah did not reply.

Divine questions such as these are designed to emphasize the maladjustment of man to God's grace. In Gen 3:9, God asked Adam—after he sinned—“*Where are you?*” Obviously, God knew where Adam was; the question was designed to awaken Adam to the reality of his spiritual death. In 1Ki 19:9, God asked Elijah, “*What are you doing here?*” after the prophet had fled in terror when Jezebel threatened his life. God's question caused Elijah to voice his bitterness at being the “only” faithful believer left in Israel. God then revealed to him that there were—in fact—7,000 other believers who had “*not bowed to Baal*” (1Ki 19:18). The question God asked Jonah was designed to deal a death blow to his arrogant attitude that somehow he was worthy to be saved but the Ninevites were not. Unlike Adam and Elijah, Jonah did not answer God.

Instead, he went some distance from the city, sat down, and waited to see if God would destroy the city as He had promised. Because Jonah hoped disaster would strike, he left the city to protect himself and to get a ring-side seat to watch the fireworks. Then, to guarantee his own comfort, Jonah rigged a shelter to provide some cooling shade. Jonah's actions reveal just how distorted his thinking was: He was more interested in making himself physically comfortable than in preventing the eternal destruction of hundreds of thousands of people. He probably put more effort into building his sunshade than in evangelizing Nineveh!

His attitude stands in sharp contrast to Paul's attitude found in 1Co 9:1–9 where Paul displays the heart of a servant, one who willingly denies self in order to preach the Gospel to unsaved men and women: “*For though I am free ... I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more*” (v. 19). Paul goes on to say in 2Co 12:14–15, “*... I do not seek what is yours, but you ... and I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls ...*” (vv. 14b–15a). Jonah won't even break a sweat for the Ninevites.

**Principle 16:** God never stops trying to teach us His perspective.

*“And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’ Then God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’” Jon 4:6–9*

When believers refuse to learn from the Word, God brings about circumstances that become object lessons. In this passage, we see how God appoints three things—a plant, a worm, and the wind—to teach Jonah what he refused to learn from the question asked him in Jon 4:4.

First, God appointed a plant to grow up and over Jonah, providing additional shade for his comfort. The Hebrew word indicates that it was a gourd plant; but the word is related to a verb that means “to vomit.” The gourd thus connotes something that is nauseous, and it illustrates God's evaluation of Jonah's attitude toward these unsaved Gentiles. Even so, we see God's grace in providing shade for this undeserving prophet. Because of this provision, Jonah was “*extremely happy*” (Jon 4:6 NASB)—as most self-centered people are when their needs are met. But this

happiness was short-lived; God would soon destroy what Jonah enjoyed in order to teach him an important lesson.

Second, God gave a worm a divine commission: destroy the plant. According to the Hebrew word used here, the worm took to his task with vigorous obedience, attacking the plant and causing it to wither. Verse 6 is the only place in the Bible that says Jonah was happy. Why did God give Jonah something he desired, something that would give him pleasure, and then remove it? So that Jonah would get his eyes off his own comfort and back on God's plan for his life. Only then would he be able to focus on what has eternal importance. While possessions can be a wonderful source of enjoyment in life, greed destroys our capacity for the greatest possession of all—spiritual contentment (1Ti 6:5–10). This worm destroyed something Jonah took pleasure in so that Jonah could find pleasure in what cannot be destroyed.

However, this is not the only lesson the worm taught. Because of Jonah's great knowledge of the Psalms, the appearance of the worm should have stirred his remembrance of Ps 22:6, a Messianic passage referring to what Jesus Christ would go through on the cross: "*But I am a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people.*" The word for "worm" refers to an extremely rare purple grub, crushed in ancient times to make a special dye for the robes of royalty. The passage revealed how Jesus Christ would be crushed on the cross so we might wear the royal robes of God's imputed righteousness (2Co 5:21). Consequently, God used the worm to remind Jonah that the promised Messiah will die for all—not just for him and not just for the Jews ("*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*" 1Jo 2:2). This knowledge should have made Jonah eager to share the Gospel with all men regardless of his personal feelings, but it did not. So, again, God intensified Jonah's suffering.

After the worm destroyed the plant, God appointed a hot east wind to scorch Jonah. As the heat increased, Jonah began to suffer sunstroke; as he is fainting, he begs "*with all his soul*" (Jon 4:8 NASB) to die. This is the response of a believer under divine discipline: Jonah was void of satisfaction, fulfillment, and contentment. Why? Because he would not heed God's warning and repent. Instead, whining that he wants what he wants—his will, not God's. If God wanted Jonah dead, He would kill him. Since He didn't, obviously God wanted Jonah to live. The miserable prophet felt so sorry for himself that he craved death, an attitude that says "I know better than God what's best for me."

In his self-pity, Jonah took the withering of the plant as a personal insult. God again tried to wake up the obstinate prophet by asking him a question: "*Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?*" The first time, Jonah did not answer; this time, he spewed forth nonsense, telling God that he was so angry about the **plant** he wanted to die! Jonah's childish obstinacy would be amazing if it were not so much like many of our own attitudes. Just think how many times the little irritations of daily life have caused us to start complaining about how terrible our lives are.

**Principle 17:** God wants us to share His compassion for the lost.

*“But the Lord said, ‘You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?’”* Jon 4:10–11

The book of Jonah ends with the Lord’s attempt to teach his angry servant two more lessons. In the first, God tried to make Jonah understand that everything he has is by grace. God reminded Jonah that he didn’t work for the plant, make the plant grow, or cause the plant to die. The entire process was God’s doing. Consequently, the only attitude Jonah is entitled to is the same one Job expressed: *“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”* (Job 1:21b).

The second lesson relates to Jonah’s lack of compassion. By reminding Jonah that there were 120,000 children—*“[those] who cannot discern between their right and their left”*—and many animals in the city, God attempted to soften Jonah’s hardened heart. There is something wrong in the soul of a man who has more compassion for a dead plant than for a perishing city where so many innocent victims will die! Jonah may have believed that he had a multitude of reasons to hate adults who are morally responsible for their evil behavior; but he had no reason to hate innocent children and dumb animals.

The book of Jonah doesn’t record Jonah’s response to the final words of God in this chapter. We don’t know if Jonah pouted in silence, uttered more death wishes, or confessed his mental attitude sins and was restored to fellowship. It would be wonderful to think that Jonah recovered spiritually and joyfully went back to Nineveh to teach the new converts more about God! But it’s equally probable that he refused to hearken to the Lord’s voice and eventually died the sin unto death. (A reference to a prophecy made by Jonah in 2Ki 14:25 indicates that he may have recovered and continued his prophetic ministry.)

We do know that believers like Jonah who seek to hoard God’s blessings and God’s compassion for themselves are both miserable and destined for divine discipline. As children of God, believers come under discipline when they operate outside the will of God. This is because *“for whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Heb 12:6). God doesn’t discipline us because He’s vindictive, but because He wants to get us back to the only place of blessing we will ever know on this earth—inside His plan.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this study, we’ve seen how Jonah’s hatred for the Ninevites lead him to disobey God. We’ve also seen God’s grace in the numerous attempts He made to correct His recalcitrant prophet. Jonah saw the obedience of the fish, a plant, a worm, and the wind. He saw the repentance of the heathen sailors and the people of Nineveh—yet he stubbornly clung to his prejudice and his self-will. Even in Jonah’s refusal to submit to the divine plan, God is glorified. He demonstrated His awesome power to accomplish His will in history in spite of man’s

sinfulness and willfulness. God is **going** to get His will done whether we like it or not! But if we make His will our priority, we can share in the pleasure and joy of seeing divine providence at work in human history.

If we are faithful to His call, we will also receive eternal rewards for performing whatever tasks He allots us. Like the good servants in the parable of the talents, we will one day hear our Lord say, *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord”* (Mat 25:21).

We won't hear these words unless we heed the warning of this book and avoid Jonah's sinful attitude toward the unsaved—an attitude that led him to fight God. It's not wrong to want God's grace and blessing; it is wrong to refuse to let God channel His blessings to others through us because we are prejudiced or overly concerned with our own comfort. When Jesus Christ gave us our “marching orders” in Mat 28:19–20, He laid upon us a duty to ask ourselves whether we have joyfully and eagerly embraced this divine commission:

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Have you done so today?

### **Principles of Effective Evangelism**

No greater example of faithfulness and personal integrity regarding evangelism can be found in the Word of God than the apostle Paul's. By understanding his intense desire to see all people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, Christians today can learn the right attitude regarding the Gospel so they can fulfill their divine commission to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in whatever mission field God has placed them.

*“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved ... Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”* 1Co 15:1–4

In this passage, Paul clearly states the content of the Gospel. It involves three simple statements, all verifiable by the testimony of Scripture and of history:

- *Christ died.* His death was both sacrificial and substitutionary. He died *“for our sins”* in the sense that he took our place. Because He was imputed with our sins, we can—by faith—be imputed with His righteousness (Rom 4:23–25; 2Co 5:21). Thus, the issue is no longer our sins, but whether we believe in Christ (Joh 3:16–18).
- *Christ was buried.* Christ's burial is a subject of prophecy (Isa 53:9) and was a matter of great concern at the time (Mat 27:57–66). The great care with which He was buried reveals that His death was complete and the payment for sin final.

- *Christ was raised from the dead.* Christ declared that He would rise from the dead on the third day (Mat 16:21)—and he did (Act 2:24–32)! The resurrection of Christ was witnessed by hundreds of people, not just the Lord’s disciples (1Co 15:4–6). Jesus’ resurrection is the victory note of the Gospel!

In 1 Corinthians 15:14, Paul emphasizes the importance of the resurrection when he says, “*if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty [vain] and your faith is also empty.*”

In Rom 1:2–4, Paul also declares that the Gospel he was preaching is consistent with the Old Testament message of salvation. People who lived before the Incarnation were not saved by keeping the Mosaic Law, but by faith in the Messiah who would one day come. Paul illustrates that God’s method of salvation has never changed when he quotes Gen 15:6, “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*” (Rom 4:3). Accordingly, the following New Testament verses give the mechanics of saving faith:

“*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*” Joh 3:16

“*... believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved ...*” Act 16:31

“*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” Eph 2:8–9

“*I am under obligation [indebted] both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*” Rom 1:14–16 (NASB)

Once the believer understands the Gospel message, he needs to adopt the proper mental attitude toward witnessing. Paul’s thinking in the above passages illustrates three essential attitudes: obligation (eagerness), impartiality, and courage.

- **Obligation.** The word “*obligation*” is from *ophello* and speaks of one who is obligated or indebted because of the nature of things. Paul saw himself as a debtor because salvation by grace made him a slave of Jesus Christ. While the Holy Spirit had given him the spiritual gift of apostle (commissioning him to teach the truth), Paul was compelled by the love of Christ (2Co 5:14) to freely give as he had freely received (Mat 10:8). Every Christian is supposed to have this attitude of being a grace debtor. Our gratitude for what God has done in saving us should lead us to extend that same grace to others.

Paul’s sense of obligation would not let him back down in the face of suffering for Christ’s sake. He was an expert in the field of suffering for the Gospel (2Co 11:23–33, 12:7–10), yet it was his burden for the unsaved that gave him the greatest anguish (Rom 10:1). In this attitude, he attained the highest point of fellowship with Christ (Phi 3:10).

- **Impartiality.** Paul never limited his ministry to a certain group of people. He went to the Greeks (cultural society), to the barbarians (uneducated and primitive), to the wise (Jewish theologians and Athenian philosophers), and the foolish (the willingly ignorant). In this manner, Paul expresses the impartial attitude of God who makes no distinction as to who may or may not be saved (Rom 2:11, 3:22, 23; 10:12). Since God places no limits on who He allows in Heaven, Christians have no right to withhold truth from anyone because of their race, nationality, sex, intellect, culture, economic status, or religion.
- **Courage.** Paul was not ashamed to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the center of political power in his day where he knew it would receive scorn and contempt—and Paul right along with it! To the Roman, Jesus Christ was a member of a deposed race; He had been condemned and crucified as a criminal. The idea that this obscure Jewish rabbi could be the Savior of the world was preposterous to them. Because God’s power is “*made perfect in weakness*” (2Co 12:9), Paul boldly proclaimed Christ even when he himself was in chains (Act 28:16). As a result, many in Rome became Christians.

Paul’s bravery illustrates how the Christian who learns to place his confidence in God finds sufficient courage for facing the wrath of unbelieving man. The bold proclamation of the Gospel has never failed to conquer human might and put Satan’s armies to flight!

### **Tips for Effective Evangelism**

Once the Christian is “armed” with the right message and the right attitude, what else is needed for effective evangelism? If the apostle Paul were “running a clinic” on how to witness for Jesus Christ, he would undoubtedly give the following “tips” on how to do it right!

1. All Christians need to accept their divine commission as ambassadors for Christ and ministers of reconciliation (2Co 5:18–20).

Instead of waiting for God to give them some “special leading” to speak the Gospel, Christians need to act according to what God has already called them to do. The fact that all believers have been commissioned ambassadors for Christ should give them an attitude of availability—a willingness for God to lead them to the right place, at the right time, with the right message, for the right person! Christians are always to be ready to “*preach the Word! ... in season and out of season ... with long-suffering and teaching*” (2Ti 4:2)—or as Peter says, “*to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in [them]*” (1Pe 3:15).

2. Believers must be flexible when presenting the Gospel.

In Act 16:1–13, Paul circumcised Timothy “*because of the Jews who were in that region*” who knew Timothy’s father was an unbelieving Greek. Yet in Gal 2:3–5, he did not compel Titus, a Greek, to be circumcised. Why the apparent inconsistency? Because in Timothy’s case, his not being circumcised would have become a hindrance to the ministry. In Titus’ case, Paul refused to compromise with the Jewish legalists who insisted that salvation be based on circumcision (Gal 2:5; Act 15:1–2). Paul’s reverence

for the Word of God, combined with his spiritual discernment, gave him the necessary flexibility to know which method would be most edifying in each case. He was not bound by human restrictions in the function of his ministry, nor did he have a “set method” for presenting the truth. He let the Holy Spirit guide him on each occasion.

3. Christians should avoid sensationalizing the Gospel in order to attract unbelievers to Christ.

We live in a time when a “public-relations” mentality—with its emphasis on “Christian celebrities” and Madison Avenue gimmicks—has infiltrated the church. We erroneously think that if we can just make the Gospel a little more entertaining or attractive, more people will believe in Christ. But the Gospel of Christ doesn't need any human embellishment! It is a “supernatural” thing, not a “sensational” thing. Christians need to follow Paul's quiet example of honesty, orderliness, and faithfulness in the performance of his ministry as found throughout his writings. In 1Co 2:1, Paul tells his readers that he *“did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to [them] the testimony of God for [he] determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”*

4. Believers must be willing to endure persecution for their faith.

In 2Co 11:24–28, Paul gives a portion of his “Medal of Honor” citation for the things he suffered for Christ. When facing imprisonments, stonings, scourgings, hearings, shipwrecks, robbers, plus numerous other forms of opposition, Paul maintained his eternal perspective on the things he suffered because of his total commitment to the cause of Christ:

*“... we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”* 2Co 4:16–18

Every Christian should have this attitude and be, like Paul, an “ambassador in chains” (Eph 6:20) if that is what God requires. For whatever believers suffer on behalf of their faith, it is nothing compared to an eternity with Christ!

5. Christians must live a life of honor so that the Gospel is not discredited.

While it is impossible for Christians ever to reach a point of sinless perfection on this earth, they should strive to live a life that gives *“no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things commending ourselves as ministers of God”* (2Co 6:3–4a). Unfortunately, many believers *“give the devil an opportunity”* (Eph 4:27, NASB)—through carnality—and thereby give the unbeliever an excuse to reject the Gospel of Christ. Just as Peter tells Christian wives of non-Christian husbands that their husbands *“without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives”* (1Pe 3:1), all

Christians should be sensitive to the potential influence their godly lives can have on those around them. Unless an unbeliever **sees** something different, something of value in the Christian's life, he will have no reason to ask about "*the hope that is in you*" (1Pe 3:15).