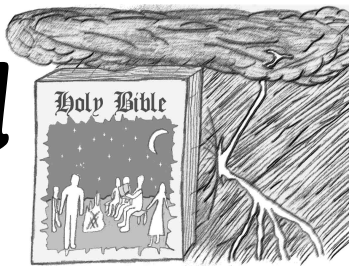
Shelter in the Word



He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. You are my refuge and shield: I have put my hope in your Word. ***—Psalm 91:1; 119:114***

Vol. 4, No. 3 Helping you become self-sufficient in the Word—for a lasting relationship with the Almighty **May-June 2001**

Being a Successful Overcomer

by John Eastman

Do you know what is the most important thing going on in the universe right now? The answer is that God is creating his own spiritual children from mankind! In Romans 8:14-17, the Apostle Paul writes with great joy, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, **these are the sons of God**…the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ…**that we may also be glorified together.**"

This is our true destiny, to become God's own sons and daughters. **"We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"** (1Jn 3:2).

This is not just "spiritual talk"; this is the best way God can explain it to us. If you have had a good relationship with your children, think about your love for them, the sacrifice you went through for them and how happy you are with their accomplishments. That is what God feels for us!

If you had a good relationship with your parents, think about the times when it was best. If you did not grow up with loving parents (I did not), think about others who did love you, or the happiest family that you have known. God is better than that. He is a perfect parent! He wants the best of all of his children and wants to spend a lifetime with us.

So what does **overcoming** have to do with our salvation and becoming children of God? After all, many of today's churches teach that if you simply profess Christ as your Savior, then you are "saved". Like the old Christian hymn, "Just as I am", they teach Christ has done it all for you at the cross. Basically, they believe there is nothing else required of mankind for salvation. While Christ's work of sacrifice is sufficient for all mankind, his work in us is not finished. **If we were guaranteed salvation, then why would Christ *repeatedly* warn us in the book of Revelation to overcome?**

Christ says, "..to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life…He that overcometh shall not be hurt by the second death *(eternal death)*…He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; *and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life*…." (Rev. 2:7, 11, 26, Rev. 3:5) Clearly, overcoming is important to God and is connected with our salvation. The good news is that **Christ gives us all the help we could ever need to succeed at overcoming.**

Christ in You

What is often not grasped by most Christians is the "mystery" regarding the *process* of salvation and overcoming sin through Jesus Christ. If we can understand this mystery, we will know how to be a successful overcomer. In Col. 1: 26-27, we read, "The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are

Also In This Issue:

4 Dramatic Change
6 Questions & Comments from our Readers
8 How Important is Attitude for Bible Study?
9 Work Out Your Own Salvation

A separate article, *Starting a Local Congregation,* is included at the end of this issue. We hope it will help you in your congregation—new or old!

the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**." The "mystery" is that Jesus Christ is the One who gives us the strength to overcome! We need to understand that by Christ dwelling in us through God's Holy Spirit, He gives us the sufficient strength and power to overcome. He helps us and makes it possible for us to be successful overcomers and to receive the glory of salvation, which is the entry into God's kingdom and family forever.

The confusion about having "guaranteed salvation" may be based on the fact that God loved us so much that He sent His Only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were *still sinners*, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Rom. 5:8-9). This verse does tell us the wonderful truth that we are saved through Christ. But, it does not give us free license to keep on sinning! God tells us in the Bible that He will not dwell with sin (Rev 21:3, 7-8). In Galatians 5:19-21 we are told that sinners will not enter the Kingdom of God. Christians need to understand that salvation is not "guaranteed". Rather, salvation is *the gift of God* (Rom 6:23). This means that God decides who shall receive this gift! And, God says He will save those who overcome sin! Brethren, we must persevere in our calling and be successful overcomers.

The Apostle Paul describes his *daily battle with himself* overcoming sin, calling himself a "wretched man" (Rom 7). Paul explains that since the "wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:33), we "die" daily because we sin daily. Overcoming requires true repentance of sin and turning away from the sin that ensnares us (Rom. 2:4). The only way to win this battle is to have an unconditional surrender to let Christ direct our lives. Although Paul says we may sin daily, he is not talking about going out daily and committing the physical acts of adultery or murder. Paul is talking about the condition of our hearts (our thoughts), and how our thoughts are not completely pure (Jer. 17: 9). In this physical life, we still battle daily against thoughts of coveting, lusting, and hate. As we overcome, our sinful thoughts and sinful acts should become fewer and farther between because we will grow in Christ's righteousness and He will give us the strength to overcome. Paul knew the "mystery" of the power of Christ in him. The Apostle Paul is talking about Christ *delivering him from being a slave of sin! Brethren, this is the true meaning of overcoming!* Paul understood that Christ is "the beginning and finisher" of our salvation (Rev. 1:5), and joyfully thanked Jesus Christ for His help in overcoming.

Don't Give Up

In Luke 9:62, Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." Christ is using this spiritual analogy about perseverance in our faith. In this story a person went out to plow a section of land. He started in the cool of the morning, but as the day progressed and the heat was rising, he was sweating and the insects were bothering him. Then, he began to have difficulty plowing the rocks and the hard soil. It was at this point that he started to have "second thoughts" about finishing the job, and started to form in his mind reasons (or excuses) why he should quit plowing. Soon enough, he walked away from the unfinished job. Christ is trying to make a spiritual lesson here. When God the Father, who is the Master Potter (Isa. 64:8), brings one to Christ (John 6:44), then the person who is called is warned to "count the cost" (Luke 14:26-33) and makes a full commitment to go all the way to become God's holy, righteous, spiritual child. In the beginning things may not be too hard for him, but after a while his spiritual travels start to be-

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come rough and sometimes his trials, overcomings, and tribulations multiply and may become severe. It is at this point in his spiritual life that he may have "second thoughts" about his calling and commitment. He may make excuses about keeping God's commandments, and he may even give up. Christ says that this person is not fit for the kingdom of God. In Rom 11:29 Paul writes, "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Even though this person has reached the point of spiritual fainting, the two most important things that should be on this person's mind are, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phillip. 4:13), and the other one is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27).

Christ also gives us another important spiritual analogy about being a successful overcomer. In Matt. 14:23-32 is the story of Peter walking on the water. Peter saw Christ walking on the Sea of Galilee and being amazed asked Christ if he, too, could walk on the water? Christ commanded him to come to Him, so Peter got out of the boat and started towards Christ, walking on the water! But, Peter was distracted by the fierce winds and tossing waves, and he became afraid, having "second thoughts". And, having doubts about his success, he began to sink and cried out for help to Christ. After pulling him from the water, Christ said, "Oh you, of little faith, why did you doubt?". Peter had doubted that Christ would give him the power to be successful at walking on the water! Brethren, we should learn from this story.

We do not want to be like the Israelites who reached the Promised Land and doubted God's help to save them from the Giants. As we go through life we will encounter spiritual "giants" and obstacles in our path, but we should not doubt the power of Christ to make it possible for us to overcome these "giants". Sometimes our trials, overcomings, and tribulations can become very severe and we can become afraid and doubt Christ's power like Peter did in the water. We should know that it is especially at times like this that we need to be more diligent in our faith in Christ, not doubting Him, that He will make it possible for us to succeed. **Having the spiritual knowledge and faith that Christ will help us in everything is the essence of being a successful overcomer!**

A Personal Example

I would like to personally mention something that happened to me regarding overcoming. I was baptized in 1972, and from then on I tried of my own initiative to be a successful overcomer. As time passed, I was continuously disappointed with myself that I was not able to live the righteous life that God wanted. I was striving hard with prayers, studying, fasting, and still found myself unsuccessful at overcoming sin. The harder I would try to be a perfect Christian, the greater the realization that it was to no avail. Eventually, I even had a breakdown and I began to have "second thoughts" about whether I was even called as a Christian. Not knowing what to do, God must have inspired me to "hold fast" to my calling until He would later reveal to me what I needed to know. All I knew was that I was committed to stay with God unless God would send an angel to tell me that I was not called.

Many years later, my striving to overcome was still met with the feeling that I was a failure—even a minister and friend told me I should leave the faith. Then, something wonderful happened to me! After 24 years of struggling with sin and meeting constant failure after failure, suddenly I was able to successfully keep God's commandments and had the strength to overcome sin with God's righteous thoughts. Of course, I know that none of us will obtain complete perfection in this life. The Apostle Paul explains this in Philip. 3:12, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already perfected; but I press on…" What happened? I believe Christ came to me and gave me the strength I needed to overcome. Why didn't Christ help me during the first 24 years of my calling? **Because during those first 24 years I didn't strongly believe in the power of Jesus Christ within me!** My earlier relationship with Christ was not directly with Him, but through my membership in a church organization. I had a misguided focus on the human ministry, rather than focusing completely on Jesus Christ as my High Priest and personal spiritual champion, the only One capable of delivering me from the slavery of sin!

I would like to encourage any reader who is having problems with overcoming sin to continue on without quitting (Eccl. 10:4). Some of us who have more to overcome will take longer than others who have less to overcome. And, God works with all of us in different ways, so it is not wise to compare ourselves with others. God worked with Moses for over 40 years to help him overcome and to develop God's righteousness. You must **never take sin for granted** and become used to it in your life because you can lose your salvation. **The one thing you don't want to do is to leave God.** If you feel that you have left God—or that God has left you, you can always humble yourself through prayer and fasting, beseeching God for understanding and help. We must also remember that Christ encourages us and during the hour of our need (Rom. 8:31-39), we can go before Him boldly and ask for His help (Heb. 4:15-16).

One serious obstacle to our overcoming is a common misunderstanding of the role of the ministry. Ministers are to be our servants and shepherds in the faith, pointing us to Jesus Christ, the only One who can heal us physically and spiritually. Christ made this clear in John 3:14, "Christ said, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Some ministers will stand in the way (mostly in the organized churches), blocking the brethren's view of Christ because they want the brethren to be loyal to and dependent upon them to get to Christ. This is keeping the brethren from having a one-on-one personal contact with Jesus Christ in order to glorify their own importance. These ministers want to receive the honor, glory, and reverence that only belongs to Jesus Christ. This is nothing but true idolatry, by literally deeming themselves as the "way" to Christ, rather than humbly leading people to a direct personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

These ministers want the worship that belongs to God, even though most do not realize it (Phlp. 1:15-17). Jesus Christ is our High Priest and Chief Minister and is the only One worthy of praise and worship. The apostle Paul says, "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand" (2Cor. 1:24). This means that a minister is not supposed to have control over the brethren's faith and the **brethren are not supposed to stand on the foundation of the ministry, but on the foundation of Jesus Christ because He is our Rock.** As long as a minister usurps the authority of Jesus Christ, this minister will be an obstacle to our overcoming through the power and strength of Jesus Christ.

In Summary

Time and space will not permit us to discuss everything in the Bible about overcoming. The intent of this article is to give the reader the basic understanding that Christians are expected to overcome, and that this is possible **only** through the power and strength of Jesus Christ living within us. There are many other important spiritual tools that a Christian can employ to do "battle with sin", such as fasting, keeping the commandments of God, wearing the spiritual armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18), and especially keeping the Sabbath Day.

The 7th Day Sabbath pictures overcoming by Christ living in us and giving us rest from sin (Heb. 4:9). Brethren, we must be diligent not to quench the spirit of God. Just like Israel perished and lost sight of God, Christians today can also lose the vision of God's plan of salvation. Prov. 29:18 tells us that, "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keeps the law, happy is he." The Sabbath Day is the vision that we can overcome sin with the power of Jesus Christ living in us, which also helps us to keep the vision during the other six days of the week.

All of this is important and vital to overcoming. *But, being a successful overcomer is not attainable without the single most important ingredient in our lives, that being the "mystery" of the power and strength of Jesus Christ within us.* Simply put, as Christians going through life and doing daily "battle with sin", we can be overcomers if we focus on and anchor ourselves to our High Priest, Jesus Christ. He is our Foundation, our Rock, the One who strengthens us against sin and makes us successful overcomers; **Jesus Christ, our hope of glory.** 🕮

Dramatic Change

by Tommy Willis

Man is entering the wildest ride in history. The problems facing this modern society are endless. And dramatic change is here and will continue.

Not only the secular world has been having much change, but in this past decade, the way believers have been meeting has also changed. But some cling tenaciously to the status quo they are familiar with and do not want any intrusion of the new. They want to preserve the present institutions at all cost. But we need to ask ourselves what is the will of God in all these matters that He has allowed to come on us.

In the midst of extreme change some become fractured people; they "fall to pieces" under stress. The clashing currents of change has them whirling out of control as they try to catch their balance.

Social tension has many on edge—"personality disintegration" takes place with some. Psychotherapists have competing therapies as people flock to them in record numbers.

Many have difficulty making the transition through these changes; like an electrical shock it leaves them dazed.

We now have cell phones, faxes, e-mail, the Internet; and all of these can be fine tools to use. But

as daily life speeds up we fail to see how much the pulse of society pressures us to go at the speed of its wake. The accelerated pace leaves most with little time for reflection. They just go with the flow of the crowd without giving much thought to their actions. This affects people in and out of the Church. But we cannot use this as an excuse not to spend time with God.

With the technological explosion many suffer from information overload. We often feel that the Internet is making us wise; but sheer data does not give us wisdom. God does not rush the growth process. Each believer will have to be taken through the same process that Christians were taken through thousands of years ago. The information revolution cannot be a short cut to the long slow growth process that we all must be taken through if we are going to grow to maturity in Christ.

Many writers and teachers have talked about creating a "new civilization" or Utopian institutions. But they fail to see that man's basic nature is not capable of living in peace. Human nature has been afflicted by sin ever since Adam. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1Cor 15:22).

Some strike out with a "new" way to govern and rule, and it is often based on past political tracts, with just a new twist. And once again it will not work. The new political structure or institution will often erupt with the same problems because the same human nature is at the helm. So the changes that take place are often just repeating the old formats.

And this has been a part of the problem with the scattering within many church denominations and organizations. Many who left big church organizations did so for good reasons. But problems and infighting sometimes erupt even in small groups or small house churches. This is because the same human nature is there—it doesn't disappear because we leave a Church organization. **Human nature** is at the helm in the smaller groups, too.

[Editor's note: While church hierarchy may prevent an individual believer from attempting to solve problems in the corporate groups, the believer should be able to use the principles of Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1-2 to address the problems created by human nature in small groups.]

The biggest enemy in any camp is ourselves, the human nature we were born with. Paul describes it well in Romans 7:14-24; here we see twenty years after his baptism Paul says he keeps doing the evil he didn't want to do. When will we learn the lesson that we are the big problem? Then we will walk in fear and trembling and see the need for prayer in every matter. And then there will be less and less sins committed; through prayer and contact with God. He will apply more of Christ to our "Adam-like" human nature so that we can be free from self to serve God (2 Cor 4:10; Gal 6:14; Gal 2:20). **This discipline of the Holy Spirit** will help us more than anything to make the transition through these changes.

The student of history will see that there has always been change; but he will also see the changes are coming in with a more dramatic way as the end of the age draws near. Scripture tells us that this is a fact:

> Luke 21:6 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.

But as believers, there is no reason to fear all these things. Many are spending <u>much time</u> studying prophetic events and the time elements--planning what to do and how they are going to handle these coming times. Although it is wise to be prepared, Jesus tells us to make up our minds ahead of time to not even think about how we are going to answer people:

> Luke 21:14 Settle it in your hearts not to meditate before what you shall answer:
>
> 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

God wants us to keep our minds on Him today, to take one day at a time and not to fear about how we are going to handle the matters that are ahead. If we keep our mind on Him today and build up our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, then we are going to be given the insight we need when the time comes—just as the above scripture promises.

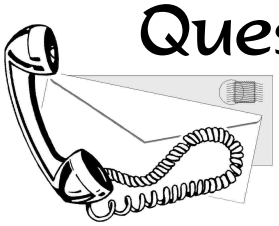
But many are distracted with all kinds of prophetic events and time elements—as if this is going to save them when the time comes. What will save us is a growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If we are praying and studying and learning to stay with Him, then He will be there to guide us into what we need to see just like the above scripture tells us. Many of the prophetic studies just become a distraction to people.

> Luke 21:36 Watch you therefore, and Pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man"

Draw close to God, and He will have you endure the dramatic changes that are coming. 🕮

Questions & Comments

from Our Readers



Jul 22, 2001

Dear Mr. Edwards:

Here's my recent essay titled: *In God We Trust* relating to the motto on coins.

http://www.accuthump.com/book/book.html#igwt

I would appreciate any/all comments, suggestions and opinions.

Also, I sure would like to know your thoughts regarding this: When going through the physical KJV Bible I discovered that the printed word "God" in the Old Testament was written in excess of 2300 times.

But, found that "GOD" (a little larger capitalized "G" while the capitalized "O" & "D" are slightly smaller) was used approximately 298 times; whereas, and amazingly, the all same sized capitalized letters of "GOD" was used only once in the Old and New Testaments.

To help you understand what I am trying to say, here are the different sizes of the letters denoting God used in the Bible: "God", "GOD", "GOD".

My question is **Why** is "GOD" used in this manner? What is the intent? I've search through many an old and newly issued KJV Bible and they are all the same.

I've tried to come up with all possible explanations (intended and unintended type setting, non biblical emphasis, although this may well be a Biblical emphasis, etc., etc.) and keep coming up with no answers.

The following references all have "GOD":

Genesis 6:5, 15:2, 15:8; Exodus 23:17, 34:23; Deuteronomy 3:24, 9:26; **(however 28:58 has same sized capped letters used in "GOD");** Judges 6:22, 16:28; 2 Samuel 7:18, 7:19 twice, 7:20, 7:28, 7:29, 12:22 ; 1 Kings 2:26, 8:53; Psalm 69:6, 71:16, 73:28, 109:21, 140:7, 141:8; Isaiah 3:15, 7:7, 10:23, 10:24, 22:5, 22:12, 22:14, 22:15, 25:8, 28:16, 28:22, 30:15, 40:10, 48:16, 49:22, 50:4, 50:5, 50:7, 50:9, 52:4, 56:8, 61:1, 61:11, 65:13, 65:15; Jeremiah 32:17, 32:25, 44:26, 46:10 twice, 49:5, 50:25, 50:31; Ezekiel contains "GOD" 216 times; Amos 1:8, 3:7, 3:8, 3:11, 3:13, 4:2, 4:5, 5:3, 6:8, 7:1, 7:2, 7:4, 7:4, 7:5, 7:6, 8:1, 8:3, 8:9, 8:11, 9:5, 9:8; Obadiah 1:1; Micah 1:2; Zephaniah 1:7; Zechariah 9:14

In the New Testament, ACTS 17:23 has the same size capitals "GOD". Oddly, or amazingly there is no capitalized style "GOD" in the New Testament.

Respectfully,

— Joseph Cummins

Dear Joseph,

Thank you for referring me to your essay, *In God We Trust.* You have compiled an extensive amount of interesting information on your web site. I hope to read more of it in the future.

Fortunately, I can give you a definite answer on your question about why "God", "GOD", "GOD" are used in the Bible. The reason why the answer is not easy to find in King James Bibles is probably stems back to King James' command not to have explanatory notes in the King James Version. His goal was to have one authorized version so that there would be no disagreement as to what the Bible said. Unfortunately, when the translators found passages that could be understood more than one way, or when they translated different Hebrew words to the same English word, they had no good way to convey that information to the reader. (The Geneva Bible, published 51 years before the KJV had extensive notes.)

The Companion Bible and other study Bibles will explain that "LORD" and "GOD" are used in the King James Version when the Hebrew word is "YHVH" (pronunciation is disputed: "Jehovah", "Yahweh" or others are possible). The Hebrew "YHVH" is usually translated "LORD", but there are times when it appears with another word, such as the Hebrew Adonai, which also means "Lord". Rather than write "Lord LORD" they write "Lord GOD". Since "YHVH" is translated "GOD", they use the SMALL CAPITALS.

"YHVH" is occasionally translated "GOD" In some places where it is not part of the phrase "Lord GOD". For example, in Genesis 6:5, "YHVH" appears without any other divine names, but is translated "GOD" in the KJV while most other translations are consistent and say "LORD" in that verse. The expression "GOD" never appears in the New Testament because it was translated from Greek (not Hebrew) and there is no direct equivalent of "YHVH" in the Greek manuscripts.

Finally, the two verses where "GOD" appears in all capitals are Deuteronomy 28:58 and Acts 17:23. In both cases, the translators decided to write a whole phrase in capitals, so the word "God" ended up in all capitals, too. The KJV translators probably wanted to do justice to the emphasis placed on God's name, "…that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD" (Deut 28:58). The KJV translators did not use quotes, so in Acts 17:23, they made the four words of an inscription all capitals: "… I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD…" The Hebrew and Hebrew words for "God" are not somehow different.

—Norman Edwards

June 28, 2001

Hi Mike,

[Mike Kawasaki distributed our free tract, *How Can You Meet Other Singles* with his *Sabbath Singles Connection* (PO Box 647, Biggs California 95917, mikekawa@inreach.com). He passed on this letter.]

Happy Sabbath. Good stuff. Good advice. I also learned, after ramrodding through a marriage to the **wrong** person that, as the article says, a **bad** marriage is worse than **no** marriage. I married an unconverted person, convincing myself that God was working with her and would in fact convert her.

Of course, the one I forgot to consult about this was God! Rather I was trying to give Him **my** instructions. After being in a miserable marriage and then getting out of it, the "mystique" about being married was gone. Not that I believe marriage can't be wonderful, but also it is hard work and requires personal growth on a person's part. I guess, too, a person should not look to marriage to supply all they feel they are missing in life in kind of a never-never land of bliss.

I have had a lot of female friends since then but do not feel the compulsion to make some kind of "relationship" out of each woman I know, or, on the other hand, reject them and move out [of their lives]. It is not, as the article points out, to be a cattle market. There is a lot out there to be enjoyed and a lot of people to be enjoyed if we will but let ourselves.

Mike, if anything I've said here would, in any way help, feel free to use it on the internet. But I think the article said it much better then I ever could.

Your brother in Christ,

— Tom

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter.

There is one degree of effectiveness when a teacher quotes the scriptures and says, "this is what the Bible says about marriage and this is the kind of trouble you will have if you ignore this teaching." It is very easy for a listener to say, "I don't see the scriptures that way; here is what I think."

Another degree of effectiveness can be achieved when a teacher says, "I know people who have made these mistakes in their marriages and here are the problems that happened to them." It is still easy for a listener to say, "I wonder if it really happened that way—I wonder if he is exaggerating the story just to scare me?"

Sometimes, the most effective teacher is the one who says: "I thought I knew about marriage, I didn't listen to what other people were saying, I got married, and my marriage was not successful." It is hard to refute a personal story.

You mentioned the issue of marrying an "unconverted person". I would like to respond to that. The following scripture is frequently quoted to show that a Christian should not marry an unbeliever:

> 2Cor 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

Yet, an individual wanting to marry an unbeliever will frequently say, "but the person I want to marry is not wicked; he/she is nice; we get along fine." At least, they are getting along for a while.

God put an incredible ability in people, especially young single people, to overlook the difficulties in others when they are "in love" with them. This emotion usually grabs hold long before a couple decides to marry. **But young people need to realize that this emotion will not hold their marriage together forever.** God put it there to get couples through the rough spots at the beginning. Marriages, especially if there are children to be raised, have to be based on individual competence and emotional stability, and willingness to love and help the other.

So often, the main thing that couples find out during their "dating" phase is that they can get along with each other while they are doing "fun things". (This is partly useful—if a couple cannot get along while they are doing "fun things", they probably should not get married.) Nevertheless, it is the times that decisions have to be made and when work has to be done that create the most difficulty in a marriage.

It is natural that two thinking people will disagree. **The question of how they will resolve their disagreement is where conversion is so important.** The methods that people can use to resolve their disagreements vary: force, trickery, emotion, rewards, persuasion, persistence, threats, etc, etc.

The Christian basis for resolving disagreements should be **the principles of the Bible, the will of Christ revealed through prayer, counsel from other Christians and love for each other.** When a Christian marries an unconverted person, they will not have a common basis for resolving their differences and the converted person is not free to resolve them in an unbiblical manner. (Whereas, two **un**converted people may agree to use a psychologist to resolve their problems—even though the psychologist may recommend ungodly things, like extramarital affairs to "spice up" their lives.)

What makes a converted person? Do **not** look for a person who simply "has the same beliefs" that you do. Beliefs can be "learned" and "shallow"—they can change. Look for someone who studies the Bible and who is willing to change their life based upon what they learn from the Bible.

—Norman Edwards 🕮

How Important Is Attitude for Bible Study?

by Tommy Willis

As Christians we know we are supposed to study our Bible diligently. But the attitude that we study with is vital to be able to receive the spiritual insight necessary.

We often want to go about these studies to become intellectual and biblical scholars, rather than coming to meet the Lord Jesus in our studies. This relates to what Jesus said in Mt 11:25, "…I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have **hid** these things from the wise and prudent, and have **revealed** them unto babes."

Here we see the importance of having a childlike attitude in order to have revelation from God. One may study the Scriptures diligently (as the Pharisees did) but not be able to receive the revelation necessary because of the attitude that one approaches the study with.

We can study the Bible diligently and be able to quote from cover to cover with amazing brilliancy, knowing all the right doctrine. But until we learn to approach our studies with a tender childlike attitude we will not be able to receive from God the revelation necessary to illuminate the written Word.

> Isa 57:15 I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

> Jms 4:6 God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"

If we want God with us and to be properly led by His Spirit, then we cannot afford to get in a proud attitude.

> Jer 9:23 Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches.
>
> 24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord which exercises loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness on the earth.

We can wind up glorying in the wisdom we feel we have gained from a lifetime of Bible study, feeling we see many things that others don't see. And we can then pass right over these biblical principles that tell us how God will hide from and resist those who become wise in their own eyes. When we get in this attitude, we will then have to be laid aside by God.

It is easy to get away from simply sitting before Jesus Christ and asking Him to take us by the hand and lead us through the Bible so that we will come to know Him. All too often we boast of some technical approach with which we are trying to study the Bible. Many boast how they have gone over the Greek and Hebrew, and how they have specific insight from years of study. Studies like this may have value. But they can harm us if we no longer see the simple truths that God's Word shows in just about any translation.

> 1Cor 1:19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

To approach God with a childlike, tender attitude is vital for our studies. The more we depend on our own wisdom, the more God's Word is hidden to us, and the less we will be able to see even if we strongly desire it.

But to the humble heart and mind God's revelation will come forth to feed the spiritual food necessary. They will be given meat in due season. The walls of a humble heart will not hinder them from being fed. As they are able to handle it, they will be brought step by step in their spiritual development.

Let us learn to approach God with the childlike humility necessary in our Bible study. Then He can give us the wisdom of Christ; He is our wisdom

> 1Cor 1:30 "But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"

We will seek the wisdom of God, as we should, when we realize that we cannot depend on our own wisdom. Until then our attitude will be a hindrance to the Holy Spirit.

As we acknowledge our lack before God, and come before Him with this childlike attitude, seeing that we know nothing before Him, open and tender, then He will shine His light on the pages of the Bible so we can be taught properly. 🕮

Work Out Your Own Salvation

by Jerry Laws

The book of Philippians was written to the believers in Christ; the Saints, the Holy Ones, the Children of God—of whom we are. Therefore, the messages should be applied personally. (It's amazing how often the Scriptures always seem to apply to someone else.)

Let's break into this letter of Paul in Chapter 2. The caption in most Bibles says, "Be Like Christ" and the first eleven verses in this chapter (It would be well to read them first) prepare us for verses 12 and 13. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure**." (NAS throughout.)

This one, tightly packed, sentence needs to be unbundled so that we may have a clearer vision of what God is doing with we believers, individually. When we unpack or unbundle something, we take it apart, piece-by-piece, and examine the contents. This is what we shall attempt to do with this one sentence.

"*Work*..."

As the apostle Paul lays it out here, there is a two-fold **Work** (effort, action) that is supposed to be going on; a work that we believers should be performing, and a work that God performs. We note that our work comes before God's work here, and this is significant. (The beloved Son of God has already shed his blood for us, and we have already accepted His sacrifice on our behalf—we *already* are believers in Jesus Christ! Therefore, this one sentence in Philippians 2:12-13 shows us a higher level of growth.)

The important lesson from the word "work" is that salvation is not a passive, invisible process. We should expect visible things to be happening in the lives of those who are being saved.

"Work out *your own salvation*..."

Again, the focus here is very personal, and it involves some type of effort on our behalf, and has something to do with our salvation. Salvation, in the Greek, carries the meaning to be saved or delivered. If we are to be delivered, then we need to understand; delivered **from** what? And delivered **for** what? We need to be delivered <u>from</u> sin, self, the world, and Satan. We need to be delivered <u>for</u> fellowship with God (1Cor 1:9). This is a personal and intimate walk with the beloved Son and His Father.

I have come to understand that <u>Salvation is the process of getting to know God</u>. More will be said of this as we continue in this article.

"Work out your own salvation *<u>with fear</u>*..."

Most of us understand that this means *reverence* for God. This is an action word; it is something we are to do. It is the awesome respect and honor for who God is; what He has done; and what He continues to do for His beloved children. That's you and me brethren.

In our natural state we have great difficulty appropriating who God **is** into our thinking and therefore our lives. But then God knew this from the beginning so He said that we should, at the very least, be able to show reverence for Him through the physical creation; "For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and divine nature, have been *clearly seen*, being understood through what has been made, so they are without excuse" (Rom 1:20).

Did you notice the words, "clearly seen" in this sentence? The problem is that the natural realm of our existence—the world, self, sin and Satan—obscures this clear vision, yes even for we believers.

If we could take a little time out of our busy schedules to focus on God's creation, then He might be able to reveal more of His eternal power and His divine nature to us. For example; recently I spent some time in a cabin in the Rocky Mountains. Sitting on the deck very early one morning, talking with my Father, I was able to see the full moon setting in the West. As the round white globe descended below the distant mountain range, it appeared to move faster than when it just hung over the top. At this same time the orange sun was coming up in the East, and it was reflecting upon a thin long layer of clouds on the ho-

rizon. At first the gray clouds were outlined with a brilliant light, then they changed from gray to light blue and then finally to a bright white. At that time I turned to the West just in time to see only a faint tip of the moon as it silhouetted the tree line on the top of the mountain.

I praised my Father for this experience, and I got to thinking about how this cycle of the sun, moon and the earth all continue to function since the beginning of our time? My thoughts went to the solar system and how all the stars and planets just seem to "hang" there in space in this orderly fashion.

As the sun began to warm me, it also touched the valley floor and I noticed how the leaves of the aspen trees shimmered in the slight breeze and reflected the rays of the early morning sun upon them, in turn giving off life sustaining oxygen. I left the deck and walked among the pine trees and touched the long sharp needles of one of the trees. I thought about the difference in size and shape between the pine needles and the aspen leaves, and marveled at how each performs the function that they are intended to perform for their particular tree, so that the cycle of life continues. Just like God designed them!

That afternoon I took time to watch the white puffy clouds begin to bundle together and turn dark gray, preparing to drop some rain drops upon the earth. The temperature suddenly dropped about 15 degrees and much to my surprise, pea size hail began to fall for about ten minutes. Then the much-needed rain came, for it was late August and the high country was dry. Twenty minutes later it was over, and the sun came back out to feed the living plants so that we humans might live to *clearly see our God*.

(John Muir, a geologist, naturalist, philosopher, and famous mountaineer back in the late 1800's loved to climb to the top of the mountains. He wrote of his feelings of reaching the top and "Touching the peak of the living rock, while dipping his head into the huge expanse of the sky.")

My thoughts went to the book of Job and how God said of him, "…there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8).

Most of us know the story and all that Job had to endure, including his *friends*. The question we should ask is, "Why did God do this to a 'blameless' man, who believed in the God he knew about?" Some have concluded that it was to purge out the self-righteous attitude that was within Job. That may have been part of the reason, but there is a higher purpose God had in mind for Job. *Job did not truly "know" God*. Oh yes, he knew a great deal *about* God and he did walk a blameless life before his God, but he did not know him personally. (The apostle Paul discloses his similar experience in Philippians 3). Beginning in Job 38, God begins to disclose Himself to Job as the God of all creation. He had to start with the basics before Job could finally be brought to the point of saying, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee…"(Job 42:5). How many of us can now say the same thing?

We don't have to be in the mountains to focus on God as the creator. A good book, perhaps with some photographs can help us "see" the creator in our mind's eye. But a concentrated effort on our part, is necessary to think about and draw close to Him, not only for what He has created but more importantly for who *He is and what He is doing with us today.*

"Work out you own salvation with fear and ***trembling***…"

The Greek carries the meaning, *quaking with fear*. Now our Father is not a tyrant who wants His beloved children to quake in fear of Him. Indeed His desire is oneness with His children. So then, who fits this category that we individual believers should hold in deep abiding fear? It is a quaking with fear of the *self, the flesh, the old man, the me myself and I.*

How well we understand who we are "in Adam," directly influences how much we will "tremble" of the self-life within us.

When you and I were born into this world, we inherited the *likeness* of Adam. We did not have any choice. Adam's self centered, rebellious nature automatically became part of our nature, imbedded deep within our heart, the very center of our being.

A distinction needs to be made here of the two trees in the Garden of Eden. Mankind inherited a knowledge of "good" and "evil" and depending on our upbringing, physical environment, etc., we can be either good or evil. Most Christians consider themselves pretty good people, not perfect or course, but basically good none-the-less. But what we need to recognize is that even in our best state of goodness, we cannot even *touch* the tree of life, which is symbolic of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at a few Scriptures that describes God's view of our base nature, which controls the self.

"The heart is more deceitful than all else, and desperately sick; who can understand it" (Jer 17:9). "…And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isa 64:6). "For the mind set on the flesh is

death (separated from God)…because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:6-8). And Paul, twenty years after his conversion said; "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" (Rom 7:18).

I don't know your reaction to these scriptures, but I suspect that it's similar to mine. I don't like to hear these words, and therefore have a great deal of difficulty accepting that they really do apply to me as a believer in Christ Jesus.

A Personal Example

Maybe a personal experience will help illuminate how subtle and powerful our self life is within us: I used to write many articles 'for God.' I had a small mailing list of about 50 people, and over the years people would express how they were helped by these articles. Then one day about two years ago, God shut down my writing ability. It was so sudden and complete that it boggled my mind. Actually, I was concerned that I may be losing my mind. As time continued, I began to share this experience with my family and other brethren; some would say that it was just writers-block and with prayer and fasting, it would soon go away and I would once again be able to write and share God's word with others. This I did, but to no avail.

Then one day I was expressing this problem to one close brother, and his reply floored me. I don't remember the exact words but he said something to the effect; "I understand Jerry, and you have a **pride** problem. I've seen it for sometime and have tried to get you to see it also. Even now, I feel very uncomfortable telling you this." The conversation went on for a little while and he related how God has actually taken mercy on me by shutting down my ability to write, for I was filled with pride. He related James 4:6 where it says, in part, that *God resists the proud*.

Through this brother, God got my attention, for who wants to be resisted by Him. However, I didn't see very clearly the magnitude of my pride problem. Upon arriving home, I fasted and prayed for God to enlighten me. I then turned to the Scriptures and researched on the word pride and other related words. I played over and over in my mind how I reacted when someone would compliment me on the articles. As near as I could recollect, I would not take the credit, but would tell them to praise God for what they saw. So my pride problem lay elsewhere. I spent much time in this endeavor, but still I could not recognize how 'pride' was working deep in me.

It took almost two years before I finally had a clear vision of what was going on so deeply within me. Because I was being used by God to write some good things, I also thought *I was something special in His sight*. This point of my pride was very dangerous for me and my relationship with God. As painful as this experience has been, I can now praise Him for His mercy in dealing with me. Now I'm being allowed to write again, and share what He is giving me. I've experienced the subtle power of my pride, and now know that if I take my eyes from Christ, I could be troubled by it again. This humbling experience has taught me to 'quake with fear' of the self-life within me.

Years ago there was a comic strip character called Pogo who often said, "I have met the enemy, and it is me!" More truth here than was understood.

By the time the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he had 'met' the enemy and knew how to overcome; he said, "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in <u>much trembling</u>" (1Cor 2:3). He had learned to keep the old man crucified, where Christ had already placed him.

The 'self' will never give God first place in our lives, it will only acknowledge a superficial reverence for Him—just enough to make us feel good about *ourselves*. All of us must come, some day, to understand the awful tyranny of the self-life within us, so that we too learn to truly 'quake with fear' <u>of our self</u>.

Transformed by the Holy Spirit

As we continue in this process, "Work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" we remain under the *transforming influence* of the Holy Spirit (2Cor 3:18), and this makes us ready for God to work in us.

This prepares us for the remaining portion of this powerful sentence, ***"For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*** (v.13).

Let's back into this sentence by unpacking what "His good pleasure" is for His children, who abide in fear and trembling.

God's purpose in creating mankind has never changed: In the beginning He created them in *His image*. (Gen 1:27) "This likeness was in the realm of personality, intellect, emotions and free will, etc."

We know that Adam and Eve made the wrong choice—rebelling against God's rule and command

and were thereby separated from God. In Scriptural terms, they were "dead in their trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). When you and I were born into the human Adamic family, we inherited the same rebellious nature as Adam and Eve had, and were also considered by God to be "dead in our trespasses and sins." We didn't have any choice in this matter.

But this didn't change God's purpose for us, and in Rom 8:29 God reiterates His purpose to create us into His family likeness—to have the same goals, purpose, desires and love. Only this time it's not through the first Adam, but through the second Adam, His beloved Son whom we call Jesus Christ. (1Cor 15:22,45-49; Heb 1:1-3)

We know from the Scriptures, that the sacrifice of His Son paid the penalty for man-kinds sins—past, present and future, and thereby cleared the way for us to be reconciled to the Father. Once this was accomplished the Father continued to select and call His children into a living encounter with the creator and redeemer of all life, who continues to hold the universe in His hands, for us.

First Corinthians 1:9 defines our "calling" and it is for the purpose of *fellowship with Jesus Christ*. Fellowship is on a higher spiritual level than relationship. In our new birth, we start out with a relationship, but the goal is mature fellowship in Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18), and this results in a growing and intimate walk—a oneness of nature—with the Son of God. This is *"His good pleasure"* for us—the called out ones, the Saints, the children of God. (This is what the new covenant [Heb 8:10-12] is all about, when properly understood.)

What then is the "Work" God is doing in us today? He is purifying a people for His own possession who will be zealous for His good works. (Titus 2:14). We begin as babes and grow unto full maturity in Jesus Christ. We human beings cannot produce anything worthwhile for God, nor are we expected to do so. For example, we cannot produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit within ourselves. *Our work* of salvation (deliverance) is one of yielding (Rom 12:1; 6:13,19) to the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, thus cooperating with God to do His Work of building His Divine nature (2Pet 1:4) within our new creature (2Cor 5:17).

From time to time, God uses a faithful servant to help others along the way. The apostle Paul's determined purpose for each of his converts was expressed in Galatians 4:19; "My little children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you."

Second Corinthians 3:18 gives us the overview of this process of Salvation; "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 from the Lord the Spirit*."

Therefore, brethren, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. 🕮

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