

HOPE Gazette



January 2022

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Verse of the Month

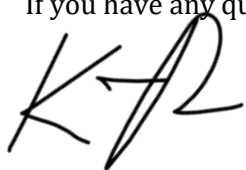
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good and what doth the LORD require thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with they God? Michah 6:8

Contents

Spiritual Formation Pastor Larry Mitchell	4
Nero—A History Lesson Isis Earnest	10
Discernment Rev. Candis Oswalt	12
Sin in Thessalonians Kasey Parrott	15
Figuring It Out Mark Pitman	20
Classifieds	23

This Gazette is intended to share ideas, discuss theology, and to inform. This is a volunteer-based publication. It is through the hard work of many people that we can produce and share this.

If you have any questions please reach out to us!



Kasey Parrott

A photograph of a long, straight asphalt path that stretches into the distance. The path is flanked on both sides by tall, slender trees with dense green foliage. In the foreground, the grass is tall and golden-yellow, suggesting late summer or early autumn. The path leads towards a vanishing point in the distance, creating a strong sense of perspective.

TRANSFORMATION OF A CHRISTIAN

PASTOR LARRY MITCHELL

BK35 "THE TRANSFORMATION OF A CHRISTIAN"

The QUESTION That We Will Try To ANSWER In This Issue is, "WHAT ARE The STEPS, That ONE MUST TAKE, . . To REACH The MATURITY Of "BEING IN – CHRIST ?" OR . . "WHAT DOES IT MEAN To "PRESS TOWARDS The MARK, For The PRIZE of The HIGH CALLING of GOD IN-CHRIST JESUS ?" [PHIL. 3:14]

1. In **MATT. 22:14** . . JESUS said; "MANY are CALLED, But FEW are CHOSEN."

SO, FIRST Of All, . . YOU MUST RECOGNIZE, "THE CALL !"

"WHAT "CALL," IS THAT ? . . .
THE "CALL," OF REPENTANCE UNTO SALVATION !"
. . . "MANY ARE CALLED, . . ."

The APOSTLE PAUL Writes in II COR. 7:10 says; "For Godly sorrow produces Repentance That Leads To Salvation; But Worldly sorrow produces Death."

JOHN 3:16 says; "For GOD So Loved the World, that He Gave His Only Begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER should Believe On Him, Should Not Perish, But Have Everlasting Life."

The TRUTH IS; . . THIS, "CALL" . . the "CALL of SALVATION" . . Goes Out to EVERYONE ! "MANY . . ARE CALLED, . . ."

>> **I THESS. 5:24** . . "Faithful is HE that "CALLS" You."

>> **PAUL says in I COR. 7:20** . . "Let Every Man Abide in the same "CALLING" Wherein HE was "CALLED."

>> **II PETER 1:10** says; " . . Give diligence to make your "CALLING" and Election Sure."

. . . So, ONE MUST RECOGNIZE That Their SPIRITUAL CONDITION, . . As Being

The PROBLEM and The NEED . . For SALVATION !

> **DO THIS MEAN That EVERYBODY Has To REPENT, TO BE SAVED ?**
ABSOLUTELY !!!!

> **ROM. 3:10** says; "As it is written, there is None Righteous, NO, Not One."

> **ROM. 3:23** says; "For ALL have Sinned and Come Short of the glory of GOD."

> **PRECEDING Their DISOBEDIENCE, [That LED To the FALL] In GEN. 1:28, . . GOD had told Adam and Eve to be Fruitful and to Multiply, . . to Fill the Earth and to Subdue it." . . . BUT in Their FALLEN, or SEPARATED State, . . AS ADAM and EVE REPRODUCED, . . as They Became Fruitful and Replenished the Earth, . . . THIS DEAD-SIN NATURE was ALSO REPRODUCED in Their Offspring, and Was Passed Along in Their Children, and in Their Children's Children,, and SO Forth ! . . AND SO, ALL of Mankind was Ultimately, BORN INTO SPIRITUAL DEATH !**

ROM. 5:12 says; "Therefore, through One Man, SIN entered into the world, and DEATH, came through SIN, and thus, Spread to all Men "

> The Writer of **PSA. 51:5** Tells US; "Behold, I was Shapen in

Iniquity; And in SIN, Did My Mother Conceive ME !"

**PAUL Tells US in EPH. 2:3 . . "All of US, We also, Use to Live just like the rest of the world; Gratifying the Cravings and Lusts of our Sinful NATURE; And Following the Desires And Thoughts of our FLESH; . .
... WE Were by NATURE, . . ALL BORN as Children of WRATH."**

> SO, in Understanding All THIS, . . Since GOD Had Withdrawn HIS SPIRIT From MAN, This Means That WE Were ALL BORN With a GOD- SHAPED EMPTY HOLE in Our HEART ! . . a VOID in Our HEART, That ONLY the SPIRIT of GOD Can FILL !

. . So, WE COME To GOD; . . . as DAVID said in **PSA. 51:17, . .
"The **SACRIFICES** of GOD, are a Broken Spirit; AND a Broken and a Contrite Heart, GOD will NOT IGNORE."**

2. AFTER WE RECOGNIZE and SEE OUR NEED For a SAVIOR, . . .

. . . GOD'S REMEDY For SIN, Or From the Curse of DEATH, is FOUND in

JOHN 3:3 Where JESUS is Explaining to Nicodemus, "Surely I say to you, Except a Man Be BORN-AGAIN, . . He Cannot SEE the Kingdom of GOD !"

**> JESUS was Explaining to Nicodemus, That UNLESS You REVERSE the Original CURSE or CONSEQUENCE for SIN, . . By Becoming SPIRITUALLY BORN-AGAIN, . . BY Being SPIRITUALLY RE-CONNECTED with GOD, . . YOU'LL Totally MISS the Kingdom of GOD All Together, Because You Won't Be Able to SEE IT, . .
. . YOU Won't Be Able to UNDERSTAND IT !**

> JESUS Continued to say in **Verse 5 – 6 . . " Except a man be BORN of the WATER and the SPIRIT, He cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is Born of the Flesh, is Flesh, And that which is Born of the Spirit, is Spirit."**

**JESUS was Explaining to Nicodemus, That to Be BORN of the WATER, Means to Be BORN of the FLESH, . . BUT You MUST BE "BORN-AGAIN" of the SPIRIT, . .
Allowing GOD'S SPIRIT to REGENERATE Your Spirit, . . Bringing the POWER of GOD, . . (the HOLY SPIRIT), INTO Your LIFE . . to Experience SALVATION !**

> **ROM. 5:8 says: "But GOD demonstrated His LOVE towards us, ... in that, while WE were YET SINNERS, . . CHRIST DIED FOR US !"
SO CHRIST DIED FOR US WHILE WE WERE at OUR WORST !**

WE ARE to BELIEVE That GOD, LOVED US So Much, . . That HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, . . JESUS CHRIST, . . to Take Our PLACE, . . IN DEATH !"

> AND **II PETER 3:9 says; "The Lord is Not slack concerning his Promise, as some men count slackness; BUT is Longsuffering to ALL of US, NOT Willing that ANY should Perish, BUT that ALL should come to REPENTANCE."**

> **ACTS 4:12 says; "Neither is there Salvation in any other; For there is NO other NAME . . under Heaven, given among Men, whereby WE MUST be SAVED !"**

> SO, SALVATION Comes as a RESULT of REPENTING and Looking to JESUS CHRIST and BELIEVING ON the FINISHED WORK of the CROSS !

ROM. 10:10 says; "For with the HEART, man BELIEVES unto RIGHTEOUSNESS."

3. ONCE YOU ARE BORN-AGAIN Through the POWER of GOD, . . .

JOHN 1:12 Says; " For as Many as BELIEVED On His NAME, and RECEIVED HIM, HE Gave Them POWER To Become the Sons of GOD !"

- > **OKAY, . . SO, Here's the TRICKY PART ! WHEN YOU Become BORN-AGAIN, . . WHEN YOU Get SAVED, . . . YOU RECIEVE a NEW BORN-AGAIN, Regenerated, [By the POWER of GOD,] . . SPIRIT,
.... BUT YOU'RE STILL STUCK WITH The SAME OLD BRAIN !!**
- ... AND HERE'S WHAT MOST People DON'T UNDERSTAND, . . And THEY FALL SHORT; . . OUR SPIRIT, IS MADE NEW, BY GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, . . . BUT . .
.. OUR MIND MUST BE RENEWED BY THE WORD of GOD !!
- > **THAT Is WHAT Is Meant When JESUS said in JOHN 4:23 . . "The hour will come, Yet now is, that the TRUE WORSHIPPERS shall Worship the Father in SPIRIT, . . [Being Born-Again] and in TRUTH; [Being Sanctified By the WORD of GOD] . . . "**
- > **PAUL Writes In ROM. 12:2 . . "Don't Be Conformed to This World; [Don't Live Like the WORLD, . . Like the Gentiles [or Heathen] Do !]
.. "But BE YE TRANSFORMED By the RENEWING Of Your MIND !"**

THIS IS a Major PART Of the MIRACLE, of LIVING a TRANSFORMED LIFE ! WE START THINKING DIFFERENTLY !!

**THIS IS WHERE WE TAP INTO The LIFE Of Being an OVERCOMER !
THIS IS WHERE WE BECOME MORE THAN A CONQUEROR !!
THIS IS WHERE WE MATURE, and OUR LIVES Are TRANSFORMED !!**

- > **GOD'S SPIRIT . . WITHIN US, . . STRENGTHENS US, . . And GIVES US the POWER To OVERCOME OUR FLESH, . . To OVERCOME the EVIL ONE !!**
- > **PHIL. 4:13 . . "I Can Do All Things Through CHRIST, Who Gives Me the STRENGTH, . . [the POWER] To DO IT !"**
- > **I JOHN 4:4 Says; "Greater is HE, Who Lives Within ME, Than HE, Who Lives in the World."**
- *****
- > **In the LATTER PART Of JOHN 10:10 . . JESUS Said; " I Have COME That YOU Might Have LIFE, And Have It MORE ABUNDANTLY !"**
- > **III JOHN 1:2 says; "Beloved, I Wish Above All Things, That You May PROSPER and Be in Good Health, . . Even as YOUR SOUL PROSPERS."**
- > **YOUR "SOUL," Is YOUR MIND, . . [Your FEELINGS and Your EMOTIONS, . . YOUR THOUGHT LIFE, . . It's WHERE YOU Make ALL Of YOUR CHOICES ! . . . AND AS The WORD Of GOD RENEWS OUR MIND, . . And WE BEGIN To BASE ALL Of OUR "LIFE CHOICES" On the PRINCIPLES Of GOD'S WORD, . . .
..... OUR SOUL WILL PROSPER !! ... "OUR LIFE CHANGES !!"**
- > **. . BUT THIS Doesn't JUST HAPPEN By Taking In An Occasional SUNDAY Morning Or An Occasional Wednesday Evening Church Service !! . .
"NO, . . DON'T FOOL YOURSELF !"**
- . . WE MUST Take Every Opportunity To Attend Every BIBLE STUDY, . . Every BIBLE CLASS, . . DO HOME STUDIES, . . AND HANG Around With FRIENDS and**

Teachers WHO Will MENTOR YOU and SHARPEN YOU; . .

. . . Friends That Will Challenge You and Encourage YOU, . . To STAY the COURSE, and KEEP the FAITH !!

. . AND I ALWAYS SAY, . . "DON'T BE So WORRIED About Giving Up Your OLD FRIENDS, . . YOU JUST STAY FOCUSED ON GETTING FULL Of JESUS, . .

. . AND THEY'LL GIVE YOU UP !" LOL

"AND IT'S NOT That YOU Can't Still Be FRIENDLY, . . IT'S JUST That YOU WON'T Have ANYTHING In COMMON ANYMORE !"

. . BUT HOPEFULLY, ONE DAY YOU WILL ! JUST DON'T BURN ANY BRIDGES, . . YOU JUST MIGHT WANNA COME BACK and SHARE SOME JESUS WITH EM' and SEE THEM GET SAVED ! I KNOW YOU WILL !!

> The Apostle PAUL, in the KJV said, In **I COR. 9:27**, "**I Buffet my Body, . . . (I DISCIPLINE My Body) . . I keep my Body under Subjection, . . . I Discipline Myself, . . .**"

The Living Bible says; "**Like an Athlete, I Discipline my body, treating it Roughly, TRAINING it to DO What it Should Do, and NOT Allowing IT To DO, WHAT it WANTS to DO !**"

> **WHY DO WE Have to "DISCIPLINE" Ourselves ?**
WHY Do We Have to Discipline Our Body's ? WHY is This So IMPORTANT ?

ROM. 8:5- 8 says, "Those who let themselves be Controlled by their Carnal Nature, (. . By the Desires and Appetites of their FLESH) . . Live Only to Please themselves. . . BUT those who follow after the Holy Spirit, find themselves doing those things that PLEASE GOD !"

"Following after the Holy Spirit leads to Life, But following after that Old Nature of the Flesh, leads to Death. Because the Old Nature, or the Carnal Mind that is within Us, is Enemies against the things of GOD. (It Doesn't Want to Do the Things of GOD)

"That's WHY those who are still under the control of their old Sinful Selves, . . Who are driven to follow their old sinful, evil desires, . . CAN NEVER Please GOD."

> **SO WE MUST Put Ourselves Under the DISCIPLINE of the HOLY SPIRIT, with ALL Subjection and Humility, . . (HOW DO WE THAT ?) . . By STUDYING and LEARNING the WORD of GOD, . (and VERY Importantly), . . PUTTING IT Into PRACTICE !**

JAMES 1:22 Says; "But BE DOERS of the WORD, NOT Just HEARERS Only, . . Lest You Allow Yourself To BE DECEIVED."

THIS is HOW WE DISCIPLINE OURSELVES, on a DAILY BASIS !

.....
SO, It's VERY IMPORTANT That WE Get In a GOOD, TRUTH of the WORD, BIBLE
.....
BELIEVING CHURCH, . . Submitting Ourselves To CHRIST, [TO the TEACHING of
.....
the GOD'S WORD] !
.....

> **JAMES 4:7 Says; "SUBMIT YOURSELVES, Therefore To GOD, . .**

[REMEMBER; You've TRIED To CHANGE On Your Own, MANY Times, . . Leaning On Your Own Understanding, BUT IT DIDN'T WORK !!

[PROV. 3:5-6 . . "TRUST in the LORD, with ALL Your Heart, and Lean NOT to Your Own Understanding; BUT Acknowledge the LORD In ALL YOUR WAYS, . . and HE WILL DIRECT YOUR PATHS."]

.. "RESIST The DEVIL, .. [YOU Can't DO THIS, Without FIRST Submitting to GOD; .. And IF You're NOT Submitted to the WORD, .. THEN You're NOT SUBMITTED to GOD !]

.. AND HE WILL FLEE ! ... "YAY !!" IT WORKS !!

[KJV] II COR. 3:18 .. "But We All, With Open Face Beholding as in a Glass, the Glory of the Lord, Are CHANGED Into the Same IMAGE From GLORY to GLORY, By the SPIRIT of the LORD."

The Living Bible Says it This Way; " But WE as Christians, We Have No Veil Over Our Faces; We Can Be Mirrors That Brightly REFLECT The GLORY of the LORD, And as the SPIRIT of the LORD WORKS Within US, .. WE Become More and More LIKE HIM."

> AND STEP [4] .. As YOU CONTINUE .. IN The WORD, .. IN JOHN 8:31-32 .. "JESUS Told His Disciples, .. "IF YOU CONTINUE .. In MY WORD, THEN, .. You Are My Disciples Indeed; And You Shall KNOW the TRUTH, .. and the TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE !!

**> BE ON YOUR GUARD THOUGH !!
REMEMBER, .. YOUR FLESH WILL ALWAYS BE LOOKING For AN EASY WAY !
WHAT AM I SAYING ? "DON'T SETTLE FOR "RELIGION !"
"WHAT'S THAT ?"**

**II TIM. 3:4 ... I'M TALKING ABOUT THOSE .. [CHURCHES]
"WHO HAVE A FORM OF GODLINESS, .. THOSE WHO DENY THE POWER OF GODLINESS ! .. PAUL Says; "FROM SUCH TURN AWAY !"**

**MY FIRST MENTOR TOLD ME 44 YEARS AGO, ..
REMEMBER; " IT'S HARD, .. TO SERVE GOD EASY;"
"BUT IT'S EASY, .. TO SERVE GOD HARD !"**

"STAY IN THE WORD !"

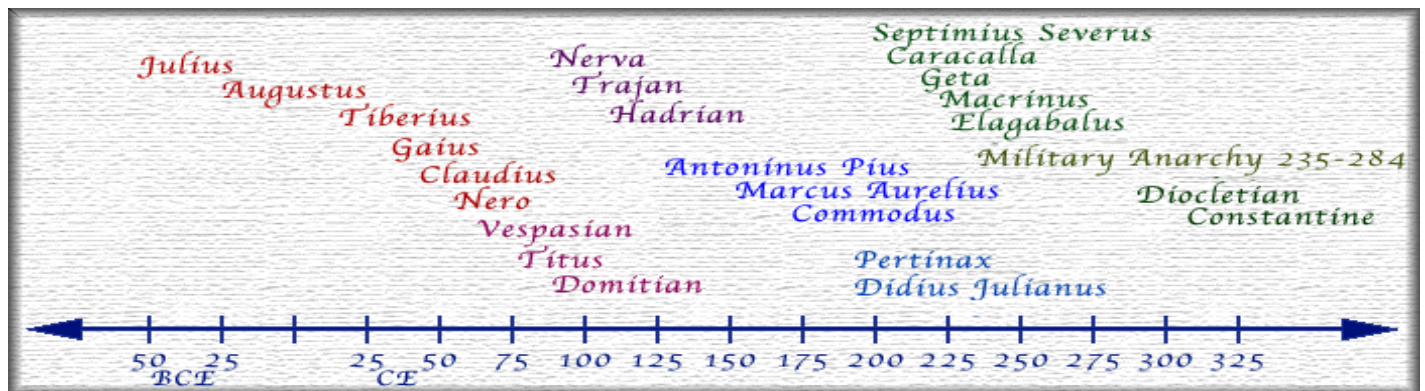


NERO— WHO WAS HE?

BY ISIS EARNEST

Nero is a name you might have heard along the way. He was a Roman emperor and is most often associated in the Christian community as he is portrayed in Hollywood – narcissistic and crazy. History remembers Nero as the one who blamed the fire of Rome on the Christians which in turn caused massive persecutions and the barbaric deaths of the Christians.

TIMETABLE OF ROMAN EMPERORS



BACKGROUND

- Nero was the great-great-grandson of Julius Augustus, the great-great-grandson of Augustus' sister Octavia and Marc Antony.
- He was the 5TH emperor of Rome, born in 37 A.D.
- He committed suicide on June 9, 68 A.D., when he learned that he had been tried in absentia and condemned to death as a public enemy. This made him the first Roman Emperor to commit suicide.
- Ruled from 54 to 68 A.D., – 14 years.
- His mother, Agrippina, married Claudius ensuring Nero's succession to the throne. His mother was implicated in the murder of Claudius, the Emperor. Like Claudius, Nero became emperor with the consent of the Praetorian Guard. She dominated Nero's early life and decisions until he cast her off.
- During the early years of his reign, Nero was content to be guided by his mother, and during the first 5 years of his reign, young Nero was very popular with the common people. He desired their favor and focused his attention on bringing more games for entertainment, giving gifts, trading, and cultural life to the Empire. He was known to promote theatrical plays and athletic games.
- Seneca, a writer of the time said he often made himself available to the common people, going to their regular spots and making public appearances as a poet, musician, and charioteer. This undermined the dignity and authority of his person, status, and office.
- His extravagant, empire-wide program of public and private works was funded by a rise in taxes, much resented by the people. Especially after the Great Fire of Rome in which he increased the taxes to rebuild Rome's buildings and his palaces.
- Five years into his reign, he had his mother murdered as well as his first wife to marry his mistress Poppaea Sabina.
- After he took his life in 68 A.D., the Roman empire went into a chaotic tumult. The succession was short

for those who tried to take control of the empire. This is known as the “Year of the Four Emperors”, (AD 69). Vespasian became emperor and started a new dynasty: the Flavians.

THINGS I FIND PECULIAR

Nero died in 68 A.D., the Book of Revelation was not written yet.

This is particularly interesting given that Nero is often associated with being the “anti-Christ” as written in the book of Revelation.

If we have dates approximately right, John wrote the book of Revelation in 92-96 A.D. " written during the latter part of the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian.

John was exiled to the island of Patmos during the reign of Domitian.

Domitian reigned between 81- 96 A.D., a cruel persecutor of Christians like Nero.

Eusebio concerning Domitian wrote Christians might have given Nero the ‘antichrist’ title but was pointing indirectly at Domitian who was the ruler at that time.

When the book of revelation was given to the churches of Asia and eventually to us today, many took Nero as “the” Anti-Christ of Revelation.

The number the “666” found in Revelation 13:17–18 is rumored to be a “code” that asserts 666 to be "**man's number**" or "the number of a man" (depending on how the text is translated) associated with the Beast. Many believe this to be Nero.

1 John 4:3 amp., “**and every spirit that does not confess Jesus [acknowledging that He has come in the flesh, but would deny any of the Son’s true nature] is not of God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and is now already in the world.**”

Jesus said in John 10:10 “**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy**”.

In my opinion, if anyone does according to the spirit of the beast: to steal, kill and destroy have a spirit of antichrist.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Today, we are familiar with the term conspiracy theories. The news and the internet have bombarded us with many of those. We are familiar with Elvis Presley, the king of Rock, and the claims that he is “alive”. Like this theory, many claimed that after Nero’s death they saw him alive. Some were acting as Nero, in areas close to Rome and as far as towns in Syria. Those apparitions or sightings were not of Nero that have come back to life or would come back to life.

Further, many others beyond Nero have been suggested throughout time to be the Anti-Christ. While we can see the horrors, they have caused too many Christians, Jews, and other peoples, we must remember all these people are precursors, forerunners of Antichrist.

Prayer:

Brothers and sisters, may the Lord of Heaven bless you, may the Lord keep you and may the Lord give you peace.

In the Name above all Names, Jesus the Lord.



DISCERNMENT

AS IT RELATES TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND DIRECTION

REVEREND CANDIS OSWALT

This article/devotion that I have been asked to write has been extremely difficult for me because there is just so much, and it is such a HUGE topic. So, I am doing my best to simplify and condense. First let us discuss this thing called discernment. We will start with a simple definition from the Merriam Webster Dictionary:

Definition of *discernment*

1: the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure : skill in discerning

2: an act of perceiving or discerning something

Everyone, and I do mean everyone, has some discernment of some sort. It may come through education or family background or training. However, what we are going to deal with in this article is spiritual discernment. The discernment that we as Christians obtain when we accept the absolute amazing grace of forgiveness of sins offered from our Saviour, Jesus Christ. This discernment is available to all who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their saviour. We must not confuse this discernment with the Gift of Discernment which only comes through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. (As I stated this is a HUGE topic and I cannot go into detail on baptism of Holy Spirit or the gifts thereof, so if you are wondering please do a study. You will learn so much.)

Let me explain a little bit. We are all made up of three components. Body, soul, and spirit. When we are physically born our soul is controlled by our body (the flesh) and given to sinfulness and worldly concerns. When we accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour then we surrender our soul to the will of the spirit which is in direct communication with the Holy Spirit. At that point we are given, by the grace of God, some spiritual discernment. Scripture bears this out in **John 14:26 (KJV)** ²⁶ *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* The Holy Spirit is literally all around us and in us to guide us to understanding of God and His Word and His Will. The Gift of Discernment is only obtainable through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and is an actual “seeing” into the spiritual realm and tied very closely with the Gifts of Word of Knowledge, Word of Wisdom and Prophecy.

I hope my endeavoring to lay a little explanation and groundwork has not just brought confusion but will bring a foundation to build on for the rest of the devotion.

As I stated earlier upon salvation our soul is no longer surrendered to the body/flesh but is surrendered to the things of the spirit. Yes, there are many times that that is a battle of our own making when we give in to temptation and once again try to go after things of the flesh but since we have the Spirit of the living God in us and around us the battle is won if we continue to surrender. That is where

discernment is comes in. Discernment will give us knowledge of whether what we are looking at, reading, taking in, hearing and so on is of the flesh or of the Spirit. Thus, discernment plays a HUGE roll in our spiritual formation. Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ for the glory of God and for the sake of others (II Corinthians 3:17-18). However, there are other factors that work on spiritual formation for those who do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why discernment is so crucial to us as Christians.

Let us go back to our scripture in John about the Comforter (Holy Spirit) bringing understanding and remembrance. First, we have to get the fact that the Holy Spirit cannot bring to remembrance or give us understanding of something we have not first read, seen, or heard. Two crucial factors are here. 1., We must spend time in the Word of God through reading studying, listening and teachings 2., Before we set out to study, read and so on it is imperative that we ask the Holy Spirit through prayer to Jesus Christ to bring us understanding of what we are reading and to bring these Words of life to our remembrance when we need them for guidance, inspiration, witnessing and daily living. This understanding of the Word of God then hones our discernment which grows our spiritual formation to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

I genuinely want to make this as simplified and “user friendly” as I can because it is so imperative in our walk with Christ. So, let us look at an illustration in the Word for more insight. Since I do not know who all is reading this article or the level of familiarity with the Word of God you might have, I will put the entirety of the scripture here and then we will pinpoint the one area that I believe is directly tied into discernment:

Ephesians 6:10-18 (KJV) ¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. ¹³ Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵ And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

If you have been “in church” for any length of time at all then you have heard various teachings and sermons on all or parts of this text from the Bible. However, again, since I do not know who is reading, I will state that this armour is spiritual armour and not actual physical armour. We do not go around with a helmet labeled salvation on our heads but sometimes I think we should. (A little comedy never hurts, right).

What I want to concentrate on now is the “loins girt about with truth” portion of this armour. We will call this the “Belt of Truth.” It is not a lasso like wonder woman uses, it is discernment from the Holy Spirit activated by our prayer and our studying the Word of God. These things work together. Let us examine the belt of truth and what I believe it means to us.

1. I want to know truth when I hear it. When we are listening to a sermon or a teaching from a Christian leader we are to do as the Bereans did in Acts. **Acts 17:11 (KJV)** ¹¹ *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and **searched the scriptures***

daily, whether those things were so. They studied the Word daily to be sure what they were hearing was the truth. Just as we must be in the Word of God if we are to KNOW / DISCERN the truth of what we are being taught. The leaders/pastors/teachers are to: **2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)** ¹⁵ *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* But that does not remove from us our responsibility to study the word to KNOW.

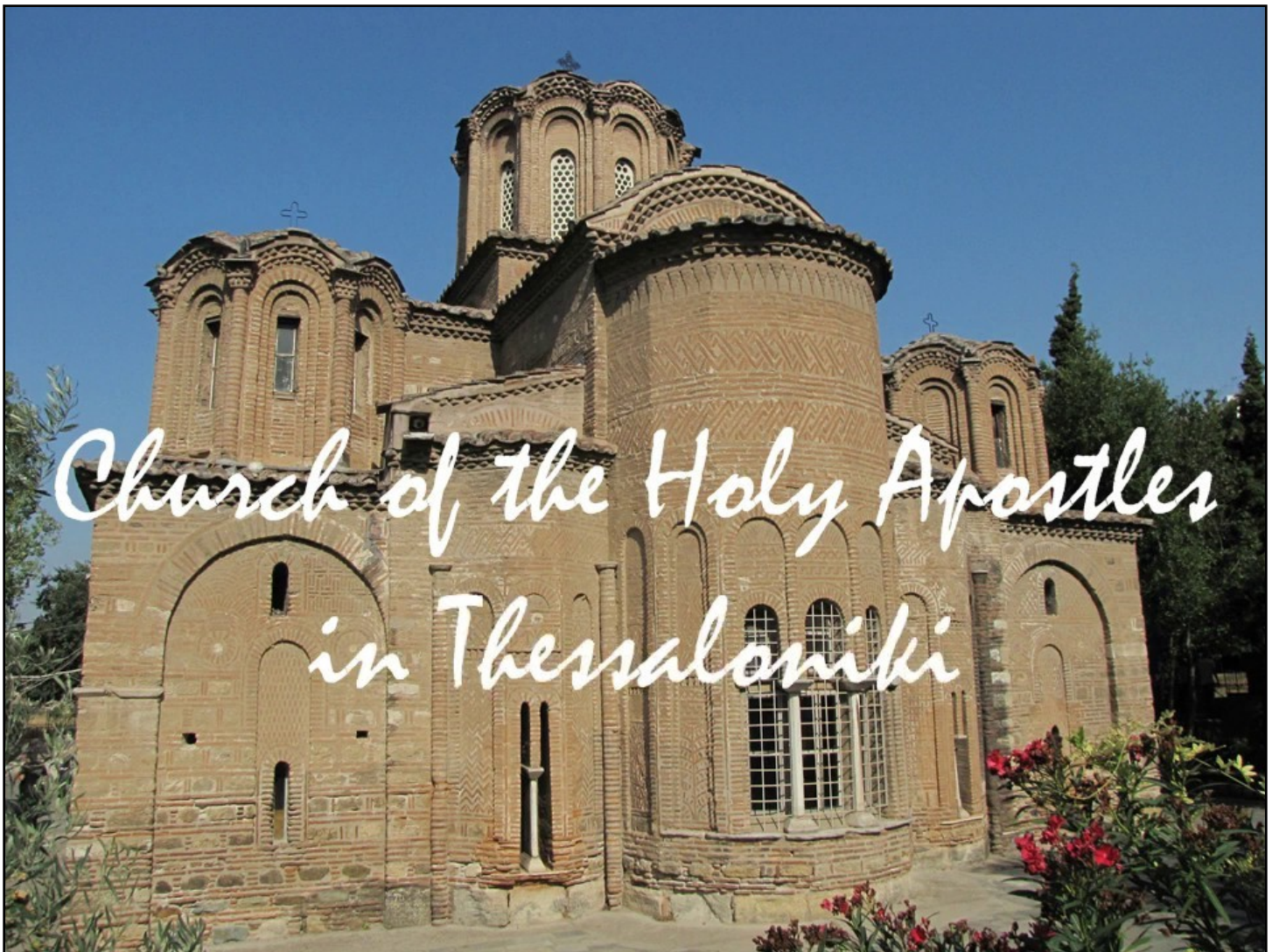
2. I want to know truth when I see it. With discernment from the Holy Spirit, I can know the truth of a situation or circumstance I am seeing because I see it through the lens of the Word. This is an invaluable tool of discernment for parents wanting and desiring to raise their children in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. Let us get off of social media and into the Word of God.

3. I want to speak truth! This strikes right to the heart of the matter of our soul now being surrendered to the spirit and not the flesh. No more lies or half truths or false doctrines or soft doctrines. We will speak the truth that is brought to our remembrance from the Holy Spirit. With discernment from the Holy Spirit, we will know what to speak and when to speak and when to keep our mouths shut and let our lives be the witness.

It is so obvious to me that the “belt of truth” is wholly about discernment through the understanding brought by the Holy Spirit and this discernment is vital to our Christian spiritual formation. We cannot in any way hope to be conformed/transformed into the image of Christ without the discernment/knowing/understanding of the Word of God.

I pray this article has brought some enlightenment and that you will go and study and judge what is being said is true.





Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki

SIN IN THESSALONIANS

BY KASEY PARROTT

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

*³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;
⁴ that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable,
⁵ not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no
one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those
who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. ⁷ For God did not call us to be
impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject
a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

Let us turn to the letter to the church at Thessalonica. The subject at hand is sexual immorality, sexual sin. It is obvious that we live in a sex-mad culture, indulging itself in every possible sexual activity. It would tax your imagination and mine beyond its ability to conceive of a more sexually perverted or immoral society than the one in which we live. Not only is sexual sin tolerated in any form by any one with anyone else any time, any place, in any way, but more than just being tolerated it is advocated, it is promoted, it is marketed through every media means possible. We won't waste valuable time giving illustration or statistics.

It is apparent that all of us have been living in a sexual revolution of sorts where it is not uncommon today to find people who call themselves Christians also engaging in every imaginable and unimaginable sexual vice. We live in a culture where there are absolutely no standards or rules about that kind of behavior. We've come to the point where we so totally are consumed with sexual behavior that we literally live with unspeakable, unthinkable consequences.

Many claim that sex is a function of the body, a drive similar to animals such as eating, drinking, and sleeping. "It is a physical demand that must be satisfied," is often quoted. That is the philosophy of the sexual revolution and the society we live in today. This isn't new. There is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9). This same society was found in Thessalonica, Corinth, and in the Greek culture in the Roman world.

It was this time in the Roman world that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians. They were in a sexual revolution which surpasses the one we are now living in. They were experiencing a revolution which included homosexuality, pedophilia, effeminate transvestitism, and other fornication and sexual perversions. The Greek language is so articulate and capable of expressing these fornications that little is left to the imagination.

In the society that Paul was living and to which he penned this letter there was an abundance of prostitution. It was legal and rampant. Like our

modern Red-Light District in Amsterdam, where sex is openly traded and celebrated, Thessalonica was the same way in Paul's time. Women sold themselves and there were many larger businesses which sold women as well.

Along with this there were concubines. A concubine was a slave whose primary function was to fulfill sexual desire. Literally you purchased the concubine, you added her to your fold of concubines, and you used her for sexual pleasure. That too was legal, that too was rampant in the Roman world. There was the one-time woman you purchased and the whole business of prostitution and then there was the long-term purchased woman, the concubine, the slave for sexual pleasure.

Beyond that there was a different type of woman available. This was different than the concubine, you didn't buy this woman. This was a friend. Typically, men and women had these kinds of friends outside their marriage. By the way, your wife was primarily to take care of the house, cook the meals, keep the clothes clean, and watch the children. The wife was not primarily the sexual partner. Sexual fulfillment was found in the one-time enterprise of a prostitute, the long-term responsibility of a concubine, or the now-and-then relationship to this friend who was both an intellectual friend as well as a sexual partner. And it was all going on, filling up the Thessalonian as well as the Corinthian as well as the whole Roman culture.

Unmarried young men were also allowed to have intercourse with mistresses, but those mistresses could not be daughters of families that had full citizenship in the Roman Empire. Those were considered significant families and these young men were not to touch those girls. But they could engage themselves with prostitutes and mistresses whose parents were not full citizens of the Roman Empire.

We need to add temple prostitutes. The Babylonian, cultic, mystery religions that filtered all the way down into the time of the apostle Paul and were the mythological religions of that time advocated prostitution. Why? Because they taught that if you have relationships with a priestess, prostitute, you are communing with the deity she represents. The way to

get in touch with the deity is by a sexual liaison with a priestess. The temple in Corinth, for example, had 3,000 temple prostitutes to get people in contact with the deity, by the way, a very popular and convenient form of religion.

Now you add to that homosexuality, pedophilia, whatever other kinds of deviant things were going on, and that was the culture in which Paul lived and to which he wrote. If you think it's bad today, you probably would have found it worse then. The difference would have been media. You wouldn't have to have been exposed to it sort of involuntarily to the degree that you do today, to the point now where young people think nothing wrong with it at all, even going so far as some Christian couples who think that because they're engaged, they can engage in anything they choose. We have been so desensitized to this sin but so had they in Paul's day.

Paul went into Thessalonica with his two friends Timothy and Silas. They went there to preach the gospel. They went there to found a church. In founding that church, they were rescuing people out of this pornographic culture. These people had lived a pagan lifestyle. They had a former religion in which they engaged in sexual intercourse with temple prostitutes. They probably were involved with concubinage. They no doubt had their mistresses.

Suddenly they come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And there's this little island of salvation in a sea of paganism. And Paul is very concerned about them because he knows **that old habits act as a very strong temptation to the new life.** You don't forget those habits easily if at all. And the apostle knew the pull of those old habits and he knows the push of that wicked culture is going to make this a major problem.

Now here's what he really wants to talk about. He wants to reiterate the commands of Christian living. Paul gave them principles of holy living. But he's been gone a few months. He knows the pull and the push, the pull of old habits, the push of a godless, sexually deviated culture. He is concerned and he wants to share this with them. He wants them to walk as they ought to walk so to please God. He wants them to excel still more and keep the commandments he gave them by the authority of the Lord Jesus. Paul

went in, preached the gospel, led these people to Christ and then he fulfilled the great commission, which is not only to go and not only to baptize, that is to get them saved, but to "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," (Matthew 20:20).

Paul is building on what he already told them. And he's going to clarify it and he's going to drive it home. The first subject on the list: Sexual sin. Why? Major problem, major issue; the desire is so strong, the temptation is so compelling, the past was so sinful, the society was so corrupt. Paul knows this is a major issue. By the way, no shame was attached to premarital intercourse. No shame was attached to extramarital intercourse. This had been their lifestyle. The Thessalonian culture was famous for sexual vice.

But Paul says, "In spite of cultural habits, in spite of your old patterns, the Lord does not tolerate sexual sin." The church can't live like the world. It doesn't matter how the world lives. Just because the world sinks deeper and deeper and deeper into the muck, doesn't mean we sink with it. Just because they lower their standards lower and lower doesn't mean we lower ours a little bit. This is not a relative morality; this is an absolute standard. It doesn't change. It doesn't fluctuate. All forms of sexual gratification may be indulged in by a society but not the church, not Christians.

Now we come to the passage. Three questions are invoked: What does God require? How can I fulfill it? Why should I?

Question number one, what does God require in this area of sexual behavior? Verse 3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is that you abstain from sexual immorality." Pretty clear, isn't it? Just to make sure nobody finds an escape hatch here, let's look more closely at it. "For this is the will of God."

It always amazes me how many people are stumbling around trying to find the will of God. You notice that? "For this is the will of God. You want to walk and please God? You want to excel still more? You want to do what God wants you to do? Well then this is it. The word "for" simply introduces the explanation of how to excel more, how to walk right,

how to please God, do His commandments. Paul assumes his readers are desirous of doing God's will and all they need to know is what it is. He assumes — Romans 7 — that you're going to desire to do what's right even though we don't always do it. So, he clearly states this is the will of God.

All problems that people have are strictly a result of not doing God's will. If people would just know God's will it would be the elimination of all the difficulties in life, not by all positive circumstances but by all positive attitudes under the grace of Christ.

Now what is God's will? I can give it to you very quickly. God's will is that you be saved. James 1:18, "By His will He begot you." By His will He begot you. God wants you to be saved. Secondly, He wants you to sacrifice. What do you mean by that? "To offer your body as a living (what?) sacrifice which is holy and acceptable and is the will of God." God wants you to yield up yourself to Him. He wants you to be saved and He wants you to make the sacrifice of yourself.

He wants you to be Spirit-controlled. "Don't be unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Be not drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18) God's will is that you be Spirit-controlled. God's will is that you be saved. God's will is that you make the sacrifice of your body continually to Christ. God's will is that you be Spirit-controlled.

God's will also is that you be satisfied. First Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you." Be satisfied. God's will is that you be satisfied. God's will is that you be submissive. First Peter says, "Submit yourselves to all those in authority." That's the will of God.

When you were saved you were saved unto sanctification. Paul says in Romans 6:19 and Romans 6:22, "You used to be the slaves of sin." Then he says, "You're now the slaves of righteousness which results in sanctification." The process of becoming holy is a direct result of salvation. You were saved and the process of becoming holy began and step one, abstain from immorality, simple.

What does that mean? **Stay away from sex sin.** Now young people always want to say, "How far away? How far away do I have to stay?" Which means, "How far can I go and still be okay?" Is it okay, you know, to hold hands and hug each other? Is it okay to kiss? Is it okay to touch each other? Is it okay to go beyond that as long you don't do the very act? What can I do? Is it okay if we're engaged? Is it okay if we've decided that we're really the ones and somewhere down the road we are going to get married? How far can I go?"

That isn't even the right question. ***That question betrays a sinful heart.*** The question isn't how far can I go and get away with it. The question is, how can I be sanctified, separated from sin and holy unto God? That's the question. How can I conduct my physical relationships so that I am holy, which means separated from sin? And as you begin to play with the emotions that God has designed to lead to consummation and intercourse, you begin to allow your mind to move into the area of thinking about that, you are in sin because if a man in his mind commits adultery, God's eyes, he's committed it, right? If a woman commits it in the mind, it's been committed before God because He sees the mind.

Sometimes some of us think, "Well I don't have those pulls. I didn't have an adulterous life before I was converted. I didn't fornicate before I was converted, or I got married as a virgin and I don't go to those kind of movies." We live in a society that is lowering the resistance continuously by overexposing us to all of this and laughing at it and treating it as triviality so that we no longer think anything of it. We can see a television show where a prostitute is a...is a comedic character and we can laugh about that because our senses have been so totally dulled to that and as that gets lowered and lowered even though we haven't had a wide exposure to that kind of behavior, we can become more susceptible to that kind of a temptation because of our resistance being broken down.

Paul knew that reality. And so he makes a very simple and direct command. It is not complicated at all. He says, "Abstain from immorality." *Apechomai*, complete abstinence, stay away from it all together. You say, "What is sexual immorality?" Any act that violates the principles of

God's Word, any thought that violates the principle of God's Word leading to that act. Whatever relationship you have with someone in the opposite sex other than your spouse, it had better not include any act or thought designed to culminate in sexual intercourse. God says total abstinence.

What is immorality? Immorality is the word *porneia*. It simply means illicit sexual behavior. It's a broad word. It covers all form of sexual sin. Anything other than a monogamous relationship in a marriage, anything other than husband and wife, any other sexual relationship to any degree is pornographic by God's standard. Now God isn't down on sex – he invented it to start with for man's pleasure, it even says in the Old Testament. Some people say, "Well it's just for procreation, it's just for having children." No, because even the Old Testament talks about one of the patriarchs sporting with his wife. Now I'm not going to go into a Hebrew definition of sporting, you can use your imagination. But the idea was it was for pure pleasure.

Now you come to Hebrews 13, in Hebrews 13:4 it says, "Marriage is honorable in all and the bed is undefiled." A marriage bed is undefiled; you can't defile a marriage bed. Two people who are married in bed, that is undefiled, the full expression of sexual pleasure there is by God's design. But fornicators and adulterers, God will judge, Hebrews 13:4. God draws the line at that point. The marriage bed, that's where the line is drawn. Any bed other than a marriage bed, God will judge.

Now some of you will remember when we first started talking about 1 Thessalonians, I told you that there were very likely critics who were accusing Paul of being like the rest of the false teachers, charlatans, frauds and people who came in seeking sexual favors from women followers. It was pretty typical of ancient times that these phony philosophers and religious leaders would come and they would seek women around them and their goal was to get prestige, to get some power, to make some money and to get sexual favors from women followers. They were accusing Paul of seeking sexual favors from women, so when he says this, that God's standard is total abstinence, he not only gives them a command

but he puts his own life on the line as subscribing to that very thing as well.

His attitude: Very simple, total abstinence. God has designed it for the marriage bed alone. In Ephesians 5:3 it says, Paul wrote, "Do not let immorality or any impurity even be named among you as is proper among saints. No kind of immorality, *porneia* again, sexual sin, no kind of impurity should ever be named among you because you are saints," *hagios*, same word, you are set apart, you're holy, you're in process of becoming like God. No kind of sexual sin should ever be so much as named among you. It is utterly inconsistent with sanctification.

Now the command is very clear, total abstinence from any sexual relationship outside the marriage bed. And I'll promise you that's God's design not to make your life unhappy but to make your marriage all the bliss that God could possibly intend it to be. Violate it and you will throw into your marriage a component that may result in a disastrous or divorced union. God has given His Word, that's the basic command.



Taken in Part From John MacArthur
Sermon Abstaining from Sexual Sin

Figuring It Out

By Mark Pitman

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

By Portia Nelson

I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place
but, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
my eyes are open
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

Think about this past year, has this been how your year has went ? Have you been walking down the same path over and over. They say that to keep doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is insanity. If this is the case with you then this year is the year to make some changes. We all make resolutions at the beginning of a new year but they never last. We start out great and we hold to it for awhile and then we fall back into our old ways. We feel like a failure, we beat ourselves up and wonder will I ever be able to kick this habit or whatever it may be we are trying to change about ourselves. If this has been the pattern in your life then its time to take a look at the root cause as to why you cannot make those changes in your life . We are to going to go to the source of the answer to all life's problems, that is the Bible. This is a life changing message to mankind on how to live your life to your full potential. The one that God had planned for you from the very beginning.

In Psalm 139: 13 -18

**13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.**

**14 I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;**

**your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.**

**15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the
earth.**

**16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your
book**

before one of them came to be.

**17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!**

**18 Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.**

You see, God's character goes into the creation of every person. When you feel worthless or ever begin to hate yourself, remember that God's spirit is ready and willing to work within you. We should have as much respect for ourselves as our Maker for us. So, when you have those thoughts of I will never be good enough or I will never be able to quit this habit, remember this, that God knows everything about you and He made you with the ability through Him to achieve anything you aspire to accomplish. Another thing God did when He created you was that He put the power in us to demonstrate to us our weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

The fact that God's power is displayed in weak people should give us courage. Though we recognize our limitations, we will not congratulate ourselves and rest at that. Instead, we will turn to God to seek pathways for effectiveness. We must rely on God for our effectiveness rather than simply on our own energy, effort, or talent. Our weakness not only helps develop our Christian character; it also deepens our worship, because in admitting our weakness, we affirm God's strength. The power of the Holy Spirit can help us overcome our fear of what some may say or do to us. Not only does God give us the power to overcome He is our helper in every situation of difficulty we encounter.

Isaiah 41: 10 (NIV)

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

We need not fear because God is with us and has established a relationship with us and He assures us of His strength, help, and victory over everything that may come between us or hinder us from accomplishing what we have set our mind on doing.

God is also our guide, He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake: Psalm 23: 3.

When we allow God to guide us, we have contentment. When we choose to go our own way we cannot blame God for the environment we created for ourselves.

If God is our guide then we must follow Him, our lives will reflect if we are following Him or not.

Proverbs 11- 13

11) At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. 12) You will say, “How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! 13) I would not obey my teachers or turn my ear to instructors.

At the end of your life it will be too late to ask for advice. When desire is fully activated, people don't want advice, they want satisfaction. The best time to learn the dangers and foolishness of going after anything that is harmful is long before the temptation comes. Resistance is easier if the decision has already been made. Don't wait to see what happens. Prepare for temptation by deciding now how you will act when you face it.

Temptation is the desire to do something, especially something wrong or unwise. Temptation is something you want to have or to do, even though you know you shouldn't. That bag of peanut butter cups on top of your fridge might be an example of a temptation. The thing that you want despite knowing it's not good for you — like the cool sneakers you really can't afford — is a temptation.

James 1:14 (NKJV)

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

You experience temptation when a thought comes to your mind and you are aware that to act according to that impulse would be wrong. How do we respond to temptation? It has to do with your attitude: What do you want more? Eternal life with Jesus, or the passing pleasure of sin? That always has to be in your mind, then you will never agree with the thought that is coming into your mind. Go to God in humility and pray, “God, give me strength to stand here and to not give in. I am weak, but You are strong! Give me grace to overcome.” You can't overcome without power from Him; without the power of the Holy Spirit. You need His grace to be victorious. And then of course He gives you that power. *“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout 2 Chronicles 16: the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”* . You can't stop a temptation from coming in to your thoughts, but you *can* disagree with it and stop it from coming in to and affecting your spirit, even when the temptation lasts for a long time. When there is something in you that fights for life, and wants the opposite of God's will, that is your flesh trying to assert itself. It can feel like the temptation is going on and on and on, but it is important to understand that as long as you are fighting it, you are not sinning. If you are consciously saying, “No! I will not do this thing I am tempted to do, I will not get angry, I will not be envious, I will not allow impure thoughts” then you are not sinning! No matter how long the temptation lasts. You can never take a moment to think, “Well, should I do it or shouldn't I? How far can I go? Is it really so wrong?” etc. Thoughts like that

prove that you are not serious about overcoming, and sooner or later you *will* give in to whatever it is you are wanting to change or overcome. It's allowing Satan to get your ear. Without delay you must say "Get behind me Satan!" And then he has to disappear. "*For it is written ...*" And then you throw God's Word at Him, just as Jesus showed us. Satan has no power against the Word of God. (Matthew 4:4-1)

A few years ago I wrote a poem that really helped me to face difficult situations and it may help you .

Sixty Seconds of Sanity

Give me sixty seconds of sanity to think this through,
Do I go forward with doubt?
Or do I back out?
Will there pleasure or pain?
From this experience what do I have to gain?
Sixty seconds is all I ask,
For my God that is a small task.
Keeping it simple is so easy to do,
You just ask yourself, what's it worth to you?
Sixty seconds can change my day,
Is it worth the price I may pay,
to keep from causing someone pain,
with something I may so or do?
So the next time I feel like I may shout,
I will take a sixty second time out,
To my God I will pray,
Please help me to make this a better day.

When you face a difficult situation and you give in to it don't think of yourself as a failure.

Henry Ford said :

" Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again more intelligently."

B.F. Skinner said :

"A failure is not always a mistake, it may simply be the best one can do under the circumstances. The real mistake is to stop trying."

The word of God says in (Romans 8:1) Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans chapter 8 is one of the pinnacles of Christian truth. The Apostle Paul begins by proclaiming that there is no condemnation **for those who are in Christ Jesus**. ... To be "in Christ Jesus" means that, for purposes of divine judgment, we do not stand before God alone, but with the righteousness of Christ himself.

I encourage you if you are a new believer or have been walking with God for years to read the whole chapter of Romans 8. Study it and meditate on it, for within those words are the key to victory over anything that seeks to defeat us. With that in mind let this year be the year you decide to make a change and start living in the freedom of knowing that with God as your helper, guide, and His power in you that nothing can get in your way of achieving your divine purpose in your life.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

If you haven't made that decision to turn your life over to God I encourage you to do that today. It is as simple as just asking Jesus to come into your heart and share your heart with Him. Then reach out to another believer and tell them of the Change in you.

Have a Happy Victorious New Year.

In His service

Mark Pitman



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