

The Nature of Man

I. The Secular View

From the time of Plato to Mao Tse-tung the secular view of man has been consistent, and that is that man not only has the power within himself to change himself for the better, but he also has the ability to change others for their own betterment. The problem with this perception is the criteria used to measure man's progress, as well as the perceived goals man is thought to be able to achieve.

A. Plato (ca. 428 –348 B.C.)

Plato believed that man, through the exercise of pure reason, could realize a utopian sort of society where justice and truth would reign supremely. In his *Republic* he outlined the ingredients for just such a society. This society would be divided into three parts according to what Plato viewed as the three basic personality types: (1) The ruling class who would be made up of philosophers because the philosopher was in command of the rational part of his soul. (2) The general population, governed by the basic appetites of life, would provide for the material needs of a society. (3) The third and final class was the militaristic which would help provide protection and order for the society. The division of the society into these three parts would come about through education and testing provided for by the state in order to determine where a person would fit. Those who would become the philosophical rulers would go through an extended time of rigorous training and education. This training would culminate in an even more intensive study of dialectic, which is the art of discussion whereby one learns how to pose questions and provide answers concerning the essence of being and life. Therefore, according to Plato, this training will equip the philosopher to rule and lead by his superior reasoning abilities and prepare him to pursue the ultimate Good for himself and all of society. Now although Plato did believe in moral accountability and the immortality of the soul, as well as its pre-existence, his view that man's reason was the avenue to secure the ultimate Good placed man as the final authority, through his reason, by which this Good would be determined.

One can clearly see that this is certainly an optimistic approach, but one that many people would think is possible, depending upon their view of man's inherent nature. However, such a system is at best a malaise of relative authority, limited and guided by the subjectivity of its various leaders and their response to the changing cultural mores of their society (e.g., the "politically correct" basis for determining morality in our nation today, and especially the guiding principle of the Clinton administration). At worst it becomes a tyranny of oppression based on a supposed moral code established by a dictatorial figure who sets himself up as a demigod, ruling and establishing moral principles according to his own capricious reasoning that he may see as "pure" (e.g., Adolf Hitler and his Aryan race beliefs, and Jesse Jackson and his hateful and bitter racism cloaked in religious and civil rights garb).

B. Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Marx enunciated as clearly as anyone the belief that man himself is his own god:

By appropriating all the creative energies, he discovers that "all that is called history is nothing else than the process of creating man through human labor, the becoming of nature for man. Man has thus evident and irrefutable proof of his own creation by himself." Understood in its universal dimension, human activity reveals that "for man, man is the supreme being." It is thus vain to speak of God, creation, and metaphysical problems. Fully naturalized, man is sufficient unto himself: he has recaptured the fullness of man in his full liberty. (*The*

New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vl. 23 [Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1989, 15th ed.], 578)

In addition, Marx did not believe that there are absolute moral values and principles upon which society is based and to which man is inescapably bound. Law, morality and religion are the products of man's own thinking as he encounters the real world around him through the efforts of his labor and attempts to define this encounter in terms relative to his material consciousness and needs. In other words, there is not a Supreme Being and consciousness from which existence proceeds, but ideas and concepts even of a Supreme Being proceed from what is already existing. Thus, for Marx, man produces his own reality in response to the circumstances around him, and man is himself the source of his own moral standards which befit his own individual needs and desires.

In examining Marx's beliefs, one needs only to look at the past seventy years of socialism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to see the tangible results of such a system of thought. Once again, Marx's views are

based on the premise that man is his own god and can, by his own initiative and energy, create his own utopian and egalitarian society where human effort reaches its zenith. In such a society man's efforts will be unhindered by the beggarly elements of religion that teach that man is a limited, finite creature accountable to and dependent upon an infinite and all powerful Creator God.

C. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

Freud took a somewhat more realistic view of man than did either Plato or Marx, but he left open the possibility that a true egalitarian society might be established if the conditions were right. However, before such a society could come into existence, Freud believed that coercion is the only way that positive things can be brought into a culture so as to bring about the total betterment for all mankind:

So one gets the impression that culture is something which was imposed on a resisting majority by a minority that understood how to possess itself of the means and power of coercion. . . . It seems more probable that every culture must be built up on coercion and instinctual renunciation; it does not even appear certain that without coercion the majority of human individuals would be ready to submit to the labor necessary for acquiring new means of supporting life. (Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* [New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1949], 10-11)

Coercion in this instance is so that the good of the people as a whole may be realized by the few who are the supposed enlightened leaders:

All is well if these leaders are people of superior insight into what constitutes the necessities of life, people who have attained the height of mastering their own instinctual wishes. But the danger exists that in order not to lose their influence they will yield to the masses more than these will yield to them, and therefore it seems necessary that they should be independent of the masses by having at their disposal means of enforcing their authority. (Ibid., 12-13)

This takes us back to Plato's idea of an elite group of leaders, but as I pointed out there the real result will be either a malaise of authority, or a rule of tyranny which is basically what Freud is suggesting. Freud admits that those who oppose his position will say that our present culture is merely "the result of defective cultural organization, through which men have become embittered, revengeful and unapproachable" (Ibid., 13). Generations subsequent to this, the opposition will argue, that are brought up respecting reason, educated as to the proper functioning of culture, etc., will appreciate culture and do whatever is necessary to preserve it. Such people will not need to be coerced as they are driven by a higher goal:

They will be able to do without coercion and will differ little from their leaders. If no culture has so far produced human masses of such quality, it is due to the fact that no culture has yet discovered the plan that will influence men in such a way, and that from childhood on. (Ibid., 13-14)

Freud admires those who would seek to accomplish this goal, but he also thinks that they will be "appalled at the stupendous amount of force that will be unavoidable if these intentions are to be carried out" (Ibid., 14).

Thus, Freud, with a combined cynical, idealistic realism, would hope that such an ideal society might come into existence, but he also knows that apart from some form of coercion, society as we know it today could not approach such an ideal state.

D. Mao Tse-tung (1893-1976)

Mao was also an idealist, but his idealism was even more brutal than that of Freud. Mao believed that war would be the means of establishing the ideal communist state where war would disappear as mankind progresses into true, communist egalitarianism:

War, this monster of mutual slaughter among men, will be finally eliminated by the progress of human society, and in the not too distant future too. . . . Mankind's era of wars will be brought to an end by our own efforts, and beyond doubt the war we wage is part of the final battle. . . . When human society advances to the point where classes and states are eliminated, there will be no more wars, counter-revolutionary or revolutionary, unjust or just; that will be the era of perpetual peace for mankind. (Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 1 [Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975], 182-183)

In addition, Mao also felt as Freud did that coercion was the only way to achieve this ideal state in which war and coercion would somehow give way to "perpetual peace":

Every communist must grasp the truth, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party. Yet, having guns, we can create Party organizations, as witness the powerful Party organizations which the Eighth Route Army has created in northern China. We can also create cadres, create schools, create culture, create mass movements. Everything in Yenan has been created by having guns. All things grow out of the barrel of a gun. (Ibid., vol. 2, 224-225)

As we know from history, both past and present, the above listed concepts have proven false, but there are people who still hold to them and advocate them because of their belief structure concerning man's nature. That view succinctly stated is that man is basically good and has the power within himself to perfect himself, as well as perfect the society in which he lives. It is this view that is the foundation of political, educational, social, and anthropological theories that affect, guide and direct policies of the social and governmental institutions of our cultures, as well as many religious institutions.

What is most interesting is that the biblical view of man's nature is in stark contrast to the above mentioned views, and it is this very difference that is the key to understanding man's struggles, both before and after one becomes a Christian.

II. The Biblical View

As we look to Scripture to analyze the biblical view of man's nature, we will see two deeply contrasted positions. The first is the absolute, total, thorough and unmitigated depravity of our nature, both before and after Christ. The second, however, is the simultaneous, all-inclusive magnitude and depth of God's grace and mercy that is bestowed upon us and beyond our full comprehension. It is this grace that makes possible His life in Christ to be lived in and through us by the power of His Holy Spirit. We in turn as human beings are enabled through His gift of faith to overcome the passions of our depraved nature and experience the "abundant life" Christ came to give us.

A. The Old Testament

The passages we will be looking at in the Old Testament are dealing with man's guiltiness before God for which, apart from God's grace, there is no forgiveness, nor hope of deliverance from the consequences of that guilt. As we examine the New Testament, however, we will focus on us as believers, our position in Christ, the reality of our daily struggles and why we have those struggles.

1. Genesis 6:5-9

These verses contain the account of God's decision to destroy mankind because of mankind's wickedness, as well as the first specific mention of God's appraisal of mankind as a whole. Now although we see God's heart of mercy toward man demonstrated in His grace covering Adam and Eve after their fall, as well as extending to Abel and Enosh (Genesis 3:21; 4:4 and 5:24 respectively), the first direct use of the word *chen*, "grace," in describing God's heart of mercy reaching out to man is not used until this portion of scripture in describing His response to Noah:

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. And the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are *the records of the generations of Noah*. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.

a. The phrase "every intent" is a very powerful and all-inclusive term. The noun

"intent" is from the Hebrew verb *yatzar*, which means "to form, fashion, devise, produce and create."

The noun *yetzer*, therefore, carries the idea of the very formation of a thought; i.e., everything that goes into the very outline and framing of a thought in our imagination. In other words, according to the Bible, the very inception of our thoughts is rooted in evil, and even before our thoughts are cognitive to us, their motivation is evil! And not only that, but "every intent . . . was only evil continually." The adverb "only" means that "evil" and "evil" alone was the driving force behind their thoughts and actions: "*only = nought but, altogether*, Gn 6:5 . . . is *only evil*, i.e. *exclusively evil, nought but evil*" (Francis Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979], 956). Thus, even what they thought was "good" was rotten to the core in comparison to God's standard of righteousness.

b. In verse eight we find the first, direct mention of the word "grace" being extended toward someone, although others were indeed recipients of God's grace prior to Noah (Adam and Eve, Abel and Enosh as I previously stated). The wording might be confusing to some in that one might assume that it was because Noah was such a good person that he was deemed "righteous," and thus, deserving of God's salvation. However, nothing could be farther from the truth. The definition of "righteous" is found in Genesis chapter 15 where God tells Abraham that He will multiply his children as the stars of heaven. It was then that Abraham believed in the Lord, and that belief was the basis of his righteousness: "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). The same is also true for Noah as we read in Hebrews 11:6: "By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7). Therefore, Noah's "walk" with God was based on faith, as is everyone's walk, and his "blamelessness" was not because of his works of perfection, but rather because of God's righteousness residing within him that made him *complete*, and that is what the word "blameless" means. This is further delineated in the book of Romans:

For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." (Romans 4:3-8)

Consequently, Noah's "finding favor with the Lord" was based on one thing and one thing only, God's grace being extended toward him through Noah's trusting and believing in the Lord!

2. Genesis 6:11-12

These verses reaffirm the fact that Noah was as corrupt in his flesh as everyone else was: "Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Genesis 6:11-12).

- a. The word "corrupt" is used three times in this passage.
 1. The first is with reference to the earth as a whole in verse 11, including its inhabitants. In addition, the phrase "was corrupt" is in the passive voice, indicating that something or someone contributed to its corruption, and in this case it was clearly Adam and his fall.
 2. The second usage is once again referring to the earth as a whole, and it too is in the passive voice, indicating the same as above.
 3. The third and final usage in verse 12, however, is somewhat different in the way it is worded. A literal translation would be, "for all flesh caused its way to be corrupted upon the earth." In this instance, it is not the passive voice that is being used, indicating that it was being acted upon by someone or something else. Rather it is in the causative mode, indicating that "all flesh" was doing it to themselves!
 4. Thus, we have two very important truths presented here: The first is that the sin of Adam was passed on to his prodigy, so that every man and woman has an innate sin nature that corrupts them thoroughly. The second is that because of that sin nature, mankind voluntarily chooses to sin and rebel against God, versus choosing to follow and serve God of his own free choice. Thus, we see the passive element of "corruption" being caused by our innate sin nature that we have inherited from Adam, and we also see that we voluntarily choose to sin and compound that corruption many times over within ourselves through that choice.

b. The other thing to be noted in this passage is that the word "all" is used in verse 12 in referring to the number of people who had "corrupted" themselves. Thus, that "all" would also include Noah and his family. The only difference, therefore, between Noah and the rest of humanity is that his righteousness was derived from God through faith, and the rest of the world stood condemned in its own rebellious and unrepentant sin which, consequently, did not have the covering of God's grace.

3. Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3

These two passages are virtually identical. They point to the incontrovertible truth of mankind's pervasive and all encompassing sin throughout his total being:

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:1-3)

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God," they are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice; there is no one who does good. God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there is anyone who understands, who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 53:1-3)

Some misunderstand these passages to be referring only to the atheist. However, that is not the case. In Romans chapter 3, Paul is quoting from these passages in referring to not only the atheist, but also everyone else in the world:

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."

Therefore, these two passages in Psalms are both referring to the whole of the human race. For the purpose of continuity, we will refer to only one of these Psalms for our analysis, and that will be Psalm 14:1-3.

- a. In verse 1, a very dogmatic declaration is made: "there is no one who does good." Clearly this is not just referring to the "fool" who overtly says "there is no God," but rather it is referring to the whole of mankind as is confirmed in Romans 3:9-12. However, what is even more interesting is the play on words in the actual Hebrew text. The word used for "no" in the fool's response that "there is no God" is *`ain*, which is the most intense negative particle in Hebrew. In essence it means "there doesn't exist" whatever it is modifying, and in this instance it is referring to God. The Lord, through the Psalmist, in turn replies in the same verse that "there is no one who does good." Here too, the word used for "no" is *`ain*, thus the Lord is saying "there doesn't exist anyone doing good," and this encompasses the whole of mankind.
- b. Verse 2 asks the question if there is anyone who "understands" (i.e., who cause themselves to have godly insight), and the implication is, no, there is not. In addition, is there anyone who is truly "seeking after God" (i.e., who is truly wanting to inquire of godly wisdom and insight), and here too, the implicit answer is no.
- c. Verse 3 makes it quite clear that the indictment of sin and corruption includes the whole of mankind:
 1. "they have all turned aside"
 2. "together they have become corrupt (i.e., as one unit, all mankind shares the same depraved condition from the fall, and in addition they exacerbate this sinful condition in one another through their attitudes, choices and actions toward each other on a small scale [person to person], as well as a large scale [community, city, state, nation to nation])"
 3. "there is no one who does good, not even one (here again the Hebrew word *`ain* is used in the two places I have underlined, stating categorically that there doesn't even exist one person who does good in themselves according to God's standard of righteousness)."

4. Isaiah 64:6

In this passage, Isaiah uses the analogy of what levitical uncleanness to describe the depth of our corruption:

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

- a. As mentioned above, the phrase, "like one who is unclean," is referring to the levitical law of uncleanness which covered a wide variety of things, from dietary laws, to unclean animals, to illnesses, etc. The person who became unclean, therefore, had to go through certain steps before he could be declared clean again, such as sin offerings, to periods of separation from the populous.
- b. The English translation of the phrase, "and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment," does not convey the impact of the actual Hebrew wording. The words translated "filthy garment" are Hebrew *beqed 'idim*, and this literally means "a used menstrual cloth." In Leviticus 15:19-30 we are told what a woman is to do during her menstrual period, as well as what others must do who may come in contact with her:

When a woman has a discharge, *if* her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue in her menstrual impurity for seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. 'Everything also on which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean, and everything on which she sits shall be unclean. 'And anyone who touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. 'And whoever touches any thing on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. 'Whether it be on the bed or on the thing on which she is sitting, when he touches it, he shall be unclean until evening. 'And if a man actually lies with her, so that her menstrual impurity is on him, he shall be unclean seven days, and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean. 'Now if a woman has a discharge of her blood many days, not at the period of her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond that period, all the days of her impure discharge she shall continue as though in her menstrual impurity; she is unclean. 'Any bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her like her bed at menstruation; and every thing on which she sits shall be unclean, like her uncleanness at that time. 'Likewise, whoever touches them shall be unclean and shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. 'When she becomes clean from her discharge, she shall count off for herself seven days; and afterward she shall be clean. 'Then on the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and bring them in to the priest, to the doorway of the tent of meeting. 'And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. So the priest shall make atonement on her behalf before the LORD because of her impure discharge.' (Leviticus 15:19-30)

As you can see from this passage, whoever might touch her bed, or anything she sits on had to wash their clothes, bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. Consequently, if merely touching an area where she had sat, or laid down made one unclean, how much more so would one be defiled by touching the actual menstrual cloth she used during her menstrual cycle! Thus, the very best our "righteous deeds" can come up to is a used menstrual cloth that would have been considered the apex of uncleanness by Jews at that time.

- c. The verb "to wither" (*nabel*) in Isaiah 64:6 is also the same form for the word "foolish" (*naba*). Thus, the idea of a leaf "withering" and dying as it is separated from the tree, which is its source of life and nourishment, is also true of mankind when we are separated from God who is our source of life and nourishment. Indeed, for the unregenerate man, he becomes more and more foolish until he destroys himself through his foolishness, which destruction is also what ultimately happens to a leaf after its separation from the tree.
- d. The last phrase of Isaiah 64:6 challenges some of the popular concepts of free will. As a withered leaf has absolutely no say as to where the wind will carry it as it is blown here and there, so we too, apart from Christ, have no say as to where our iniquities will carry us. People who think they are free to choose and do whatever they wish do not understand the depth of the depravity of their natures, nor how completely sin rules and controls their lives. What one chooses to do as an unregenerate individual is actually a choice based on a predetermined course of action. This course is set in motion by one's own sin nature, and the unregenerate person is not consciously aware of. And even for those of us who are believers, we can at times be unaware and imperceptive of the source and motives of our thoughts and actions. In fact, it is not until the Lord exposes our motives to us through His Word by means of His disciplining process (Hebrews 12:4-11) that we can even begin to see our sin in the light of His truth. And then, and only then does real freedom of the will come when we as believers submit to His truth in the area He is dealing with us and say, "Yes, Lord, I believe and trust you and submit to what your Word says." It is at this point that we begin to experience the life of Christ living in and through us, versus our own flawed, skewed and distorted perspective based on our carnal reasoning and motives: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

5. Jeremiah 17:9

This too is a very important verse that graphically depicts man's heart being deceived by sin: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

- a. The adjective "deceitful" comes from the Hebrew verb *'aqab*, and its basic meaning is to take hold of someone's heel so as to trip them up or throw them down; thus, to supplant, circumvent, or deceive. From this perspective, therefore, the picture of our natural, corrupt and depraved heart is that it is constantly moving in the direction of deceit and fraud so as to cause us to fall.
- b. The word translated "desperately sick" comes from the Hebrew verb *'anash*, which means "to be sick or weak." In addition, what is absolutely fascinating is that an alternate word for man, *'enosh*, comes from the same basic root. The root *'anash* also carries the meaning of "to be inclined, to be friendly, to be social." In two verses in particular, this alternate word for man, *'enosh*, is used in an adjectival manner to indicate commonality and weakness respectively:

Then the LORD said to me, "Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary (*'enosh*) letters: Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey. (Isaiah 8:1)

I will make mortal man (*'enosh*) scarcer than pure gold, And mankind than the gold of Ophir. (Isaiah 13:12)

This is very significant for an understanding of the passage in Jeremiah 17:9, because the verb *'anash* is describing a deeply sick and weakened heart from the ravages of sin, and this is indeed where all men are today. Therefore, we are each a "mortal man" (*'enosh*) facing the consequences of sin, that is death, both physical and spiritual, and the only thing that can redeem us from this spiritual death is the righteousness of Jesus received by grace through faith. Therefore, the word *'enosh* carries the idea of a man who is weak, mortal and inclined toward sin by his very nature. Consequently, when Jeremiah speaks of man's heart being "desperately sick," he is speaking of that which is the very essence of the meaning of "mortal man" (*'enosh*).

- c. The last point to be made about this passage is that humanly speaking, we cannot begin to see, nor comprehend the depth of our sin and corruption. It is not until the Holy Spirit begins to convict us that we even start to see a glimpse of our sin, and then it is really not until we are born again that the enormity of our sin in the light of God's holiness and truth is seen and understood, and that understanding is even by degree as we grow in Christ.

A. *The New Testament*

In this section we are going to focus on the believer in Christ. I am convinced that one of the key areas of misunderstanding concerning the struggles we have as believers has to do with our not understanding the nature of man, both before and after Christ. Our Old Testament analysis makes it quite clear that man's nature is corrupt and sinful to the core. And as evangelical believers, who believe the Bible to be the Word of God, we would agree with Paul's assessment of man's inability to save himself by his works because his works are wholly imperfect and skewed in every way:

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:9-20)

We would also resolutely affirm that is only through the sacrifice of Christ, the just for the unjust, and His shed blood that we have any hope of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath *of God* through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:8-10)

We would also boldly proclaim that God's love, mercy and grace are at the very heart of our salvation in Christ: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We accept these truths for our conversion and coming to Christ, but I have found that on the whole we as believers tend to approach our daily life with Jesus from a different perspective.

Performance has been and is a major part of our society and every society for all ages. Performance is the basis of our acceptance and approval by others in families, relationships, school, jobs, careers, athletics, etc. As human beings, our personal identity, self-esteem and self-acceptance are all based in large part on how we feel others accept and approve us. Thus, we gear our lives toward proving our self-worth to others, as well as to ourselves. Unfortunately, when we come to Christ, this thought process is still with us. Consequently, it is only through the lifelong process of sanctification by the Holy Spirit that God delivers us from this bondage into the glorious liberty of accepting our full standing in the righteousness of Christ, and that righteousness alone!

However, as we go through this process of growing in Christ, we soon discover that even though we are now born again, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and minister and share the Gospel to others, we still have a tremendous spiritual, mental and emotional struggle going on inside of us. This struggle is focused between our flesh and the indwelling Holy Spirit in which our flesh is wanting to do everything that is contrary to the life of Christ within us, and the Holy Spirit is calling us to follow Christ. Unfortunately, we find ourselves giving in to our carnal desires, and when that occurs, quite often condemnation occurs. Our inner reasoning and desire is to "perform for God" in order that He might accept us. Our pride and ego are deflated because we have experienced failure in our lives, and we like to think of ourselves as succeeding. But more importantly, the condemnation we experience frequently brings with it a sense of being rejected by God and separated from Him. This can be mentally and emotionally quite overwhelming as we also feel that He can no longer love and use us because of our failures. The question that needs to be posed to us at this time is, where did we derive such concepts? I believe they come from our carnal nature which is influenced, guided and directed by the "elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8c). And one of the key elements of these "elementary principles" is the notion of performing in order to be accepted by God in the same way we perform in order to be accepted by men. That is, if we don't perform well enough for men, they will reject us, and so too, if we don't perform well enough for God, He will also reject us.

Have you every prayed, or heard someone pray in this manner: "Oh Lord, I am so unworthy to come before you because of my sin, failures, etc. In fact, I don't even know how you can hear me, let alone love me because of the sin and inconsistency in my life." This is indeed a wonderful place to be with regards to someone either first of all realizing the depth of their sin, its ugliness, and, consequently, the incredible depth of God's grace through the atoning death of Jesus alone being the basis of a relationship with Him. And secondly, it is a wonderful place to be with regards to a believer who has fallen in some sin through perhaps pride and hardness of heart in some area. Through the Holy Spirit doing His work of brokenness in that believer's life, he realizes to an even greater depth that the only reason for his being a recipient of God's love is due to the unmeasurable depth of God's grace and mercy toward him through Jesus' sacrifice. Such brokenness produces first of all a saving relationship with God when one first comes to Christ. And secondly, in the life of a fallen believer (and that fall may consist of someone seeing the ugliness of pride, bitterness and gossip in their life and turning from it, to repenting and turning from sexual sin, addiction, lying, stealing, murdering, etc.), it brings about a restoration of fellowship with God and a life of peace, joy and rest.

However, there is also another aspect of this type of prayer that may not be so positive, and that is when such a prayer is based on the "performance perspective." All of us, to one degree or another, have had to deal, or perhaps are still dealing with this deceptive, destructive and misleading thinking. But it may be said among us who are believers in Christ that we have one of the two basic personality types that struggle with this "performance perspective." The first type is that individual whose "performance mentality" often fosters and encourages a sense of self-righteous pride and a false sense of spirituality. Such a person's confidence is far more in their own strength. Their measure of the worthiness of their life, and usually that of others as well, is based on their own self-determined criteria of "certain works" that they deem is the "higher level" of attributes that people should have. Many believers have this "performance perspective," and normally it takes some major failure in their life before they can see this sin of "self-righteousness and pride." Quite often there are deeper issues in a person's life, such as bitterness and unforgiveness, that lead to a "self-righteousness" attitude. Issues such as those that remain unresolved

can in turn can be the root of other sins. And these other sins, although on the surface they don't appear to have any direct relationship with those unresolved issues, are in fact the result of those issues not being recognized and resolved in the light of biblical truth.

The second type of believer who suffers with this "performance perspective" is the one who is filled with insecurity and fear and is enslaved by the concept that their self-worth is measured by the approval or disapproval of other people. Consequently, such a person is always desiring and desperately looking for acceptance from others. However, if this acceptance is not achieved in the manner they are desiring, they can become very unstable emotionally and quite erratic in their thinking and actions. They tend to think they are always being persecuted by others, and everyone else is in the wrong, but they are always in the right. The reason for this type of thinking is normally because they are too insecure to be honest with themselves and face the truth about themselves.

Thus, in either case where you might find yourself, your reasoning and logic might be described in the following thought process: "When I sin, Oh God, I don't have any right to come and ask of You anything. Nor can I expect anything from you because I don't deserve anything as a result of my actions. On the other hand, Oh God, when I am performing well, keeping my act clean according to my standard, and not falling to temptation like so many others around me, then I know I am worthy to not only petition you, but also to receive my requests. The reason for these blessings is that now I truly deserve them because of my performance and what it merits." Now although none of us have probably ever actually articulated the above in a conscious manner, this is indeed what we have thought if we were to be honest with ourselves and reflect on our attitude. If our prayers and God's response to our prayers and life were based on the latter, then the death of Jesus Christ was totally superfluous because God's response to us would be based on our works, not His grace. And if we can perform well enough to gain God's approval by that performance, then again, our relationship with Him is not based on His grace, but on the quality of our works!

There is another aspect of this issue of "performance" in the life of a believer, and that is the condemnation of the devil. There is a major difference between the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the condemnation of the devil. The former points out the sin or sins specifically, leads us to repentance and brokenness over the sin, ministers God's mercy and forgiving grace to the heart of the penitent, and in turn causes His fruit of genuine repentance to be born in the life of the repentant believer.

On the other hand, the condemnation of the devil not only focuses on the guilt of the sin, but it does so to the neglect of any real hope of forgiveness. The believer is made to think he has no more hope because of his sin and failure, and he can never be blessed by God again because of the egregiousness of what he has done before God. However, at the very heart of Satan's success in rendering a believer useless through condemnation is the element of "pride over one's performance." This sense of "pride over one's performance" runs deep in the heart and mind of that believer with regards to how he sees himself, as well as how he perceives others see him because of his "performance." Based on this measure of self-evaluation, therefore, he draws his sense of self worth and identity from his own self-acclamation, as well as from the acclaim he assumes he is receiving from others.

Unfortunately, all of this is a great self-deception. Satan in turn exacerbates this deception in us as believers by exploiting our innate insecurity and need for self-worth by means of establishing within us a false sense of security and self-worth. As has already been stated, this false security and self-worth is based on our own, self-established, legalistic criteria. We in turn use this criteria to evaluate our own "performance" in our own eyes, and we also use it to measure how we think others will evaluate our "performance." The truth is, any such measured criteria that we might manufacture in our own minds, regardless if it includes some biblical standards (e.g., "I don't drink, cuss, chew, or go out with the girls/boys that do"), is *always* going to come short of the full reality of who we actually are. The reason this is so is because we are using ourselves as our standard of measure in a legalistic manner, versus seeing ourselves as we actually are (permeated through and through with our corrupt, sinful nature) in the light of God's truth and realizing His grace, and His grace ALONE is what gives us worth, security, meaning and purpose in this life!

As a result of this dichotomy in our lives (i.e., the thorough corruption of our own righteousness, but God's abundant, unmerited grace toward us in Christ), we would, as evangelical believers, unswervingly and intellectually affirm that salvation and our relationship with God are by grace through faith alone. However, emotionally, as we have just seen above, we quite often live as though our salvation was based on our performance and "works of righteousness." The truth of the matter is that before we can enter into God's rest of faith, we must go through a veil of brokenness. In addition, there is no circumventing this veil if we truly want to cease from our works in order that God may do His work in and through us "which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10c). Furthermore, the veil we must go through has many layers, and each layer is woven into the previous one so

that a distinct pattern is formed in our lives by the Master Weaver, and this pattern is nothing less than the life of Jesus within us.

1. II Corinthians 4:7-11

This has to be one of the most powerful passages in the New Testament concerning the reality of our life in Christ:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (II Corinthians 4:7-11)

Clearly we see the pattern of brokenness in our lives as believers in order that the life of Christ may be manifest in and through us. For it is only as we come to the end of ourselves, time and time again, that we really begin to experience the "power of His resurrection."

2. Philippians 3:8-11

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:8-11)

The statement in verse 8 is the kind of statement that can only be made after one has begun his trek through the veil of death to self. It does not happen overnight, and in fact, it may be a long time in coming from our perspective of time, but God will bring His children to this place of relinquishment according to His plan and purpose for their lives.

The phrase in verse 9, "the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith," is the joy of our salvation and our liberation in Christ! Jesus took upon Himself the guilt of our flesh – past, present and future – because our flesh is completely, unalterably and inescapably corrupt, depraved and hopeless to the core, not only before we come to Christ, but afterwards as well! Thus, for us to try and perfect ourselves in the flesh as believers is like a child sitting on the beach in Atlantic City, trying to empty the Atlantic ocean with a measuring cup. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE!
!!!

Once again, there is a distinct difference between the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the condemnation of the devil. The conviction of the Holy Spirit points out our sin in order to bring about a genuine remorse and brokenness over that sin, or sins, which ultimately results in the fruit of God's righteousness in our lives. The condemnation of the devil, on the other hand, can lead to hopelessness and immobility in our lives, which ultimately results in no fruit of God's righteousness in our lives. This latter affect of condemnation can have an incredibly subtle result in the life of a believer in whom the "performance mentality" is exacerbated. This exacerbation is due to the fact that their emotional security is so intricately enmeshed in "doing" in order to have a sense of worth in their own eyes, as well as how they think others will perceive them. Consequently, in their own mind and thinking, they have no other recourse but to "perform" in order to secure God's love and the favor of others!

But what this passage in Philippians 3:8-11 is saying is that we never could have been accepted or loved by God on the basis of our performance, and neither are we now loved as believers on the basis of our "outstanding performance" for God. The acceptance, approval and love we received from God when we became a Christian, and which we receive now that we are Christians, and which we will receive tomorrow and the days after, in fact, throughout all eternity, **IS NOT BASED ON OUR PERFORMANCE, BUT ARE BASED ON HIS PERFORMANCE FOR US IN CHRIST!!!!** This is very hard to accept that someone could love us that much; surely we must have to do something. Yes, we do, and that something is to confess and acknowledge our sin for what it is, trust in Jesus' shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins and by faith acknowledge Him as our Lord and

Savior. At that moment, we enter from death to life and become recipients of eternal life in Christ. The only thing we now stand in before God is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but in His righteousness, and His righteousness alone, we stand fully, totally and completely! When this is done, there will be a metamorphosis in our lives that will supernaturally compel us to choose to "die to self." This metamorphosis is brought about as we grow in choosing to trust and obey the Lord by faith in all things. And in spite of the fact that this growth at times is slow and intermittent, it is persistent as the Lord is continuing to work within us: "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

. In addition, as was stated above, the means by which we stand in this righteousness is faith, and that in itself is a gift and the work of God within us. Paul firmly asserts this in Philippians 3:9 in which he says he has no righteousness of "my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith." The phrase, "through faith in Christ," may also be read, "through *the* faith of/from Christ," implying that the faith by which we are saved is not something we produce, but rather it is the faith which comes from Christ, through His Word, by the Holy Spirit. That is why we cannot even take credit for saving faith, otherwise we could boast "in our great faith," and our salvation would be of us! There are several other passages in the New Testament which also deal with this all important truth concerning faith being a gift from God (Acts 3:16; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 12:2; Galatians 2:20; and Ephesians 2:8-9).

Because of the righteousness of Christ within us, we have now been enabled to experience verse 10: "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10). Throughout Scripture, a literary technique is used to express truth in a powerful way, and that technique is parenthetical statements containing parallelisms, or more simply put, explanations of truths in expanded definitions. Verse 10 contains just such a structure. The phrase, "that I may know Him," is the purpose clause of this verse, and the rest of the verse is the expanded, parallelistic way in which we come to know Him: "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Thus, we come to truly know Christ as His life is emerging within us through our being conformed to His "death."

But how is our "knowing Christ" in this manner practically achieved? Is it through years of formal education, or perhaps through seminars of the easiest and best ways to grow a church? Or better yet, is it through classes where we are taught how to harness the power of the Holy Spirit in order to see the manifestation of His gifts in our midst? The true answer that we find given in verse ten is probably not what we are looking for, but it does result in "joy unspeakable" and the true knowledge of Jesus Christ that Peter refers to:

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge; and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness; and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (II Peter 1:4-8)

Therefore, the way in which we truly come to know Christ and see His life lived out in our lives as described in II Peter 1:4-8 is by the means of "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10). However, what many of us have perceived the "power of God" to be is in fact quite different from what it truly is.

In II Corinthians chapter 12, Paul describes his experience of being "caught up to third heaven." What a powerful and exhilarating experience that must have been. Yet, because Paul was a human being with the same depraved and corrupt flesh we have, God allowed Paul to have a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him from exalting himself, or from being exalted by others as being something other than what he was. Paul cried out to the Lord three times for this "thorn" to leave him forever! But God's response was different from what Paul expected. It was God's liberating truth concerning the nature of His "grace" in which Paul would see the genuine power of Christ, versus his own carnal strengths and abilities:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (II Corinthians 12:9-10)

This is a painful, but glorious truth, that in our absolute weakness, not our strength, God's power is perfected. Thus, we must die to our strengths in order for the power of Christ to truly be manifested within us!

3. II Corinthians 1:3-10

This passage is the foundation of our qualification for ministry to others. This is God's school, and He arranges the curriculum according to His plan and purpose for each of us. But the end result is the same, and that is that we may truly share, empathetically and from our hearts, the grace of God out of our brokenness that brings Christ's life to the hearers. And what is the nature of that life? Is it found through the fulfillment of all our carnal and selfish desires? No indeed, but rather it is found in our darkest hours, when we see no human light at the end of the tunnel. At such times our spiritual, mental, emotional and physical pain may be so great that we would prefer to die rather than live any longer. It is at this point, having come to the end of our own strength and abilities, that we then discover, GOD IS FAITHFUL:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort. For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a *peril of death*, and will deliver *us*, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us. (II Corinthians 1:3-10)

This is God's means by which we are equipped to truly share His joy, peace, faith and victory to other hurting and confused believers. These believers are desperately wanting to here genuine truth from someone who knows what they are talking about because they have "been there"! It is when we have learned, out of our abject weakness, "that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead," that we are then ready to share, in truth and reality, the depth of God's grace and mercy with others.

4. Romans 7:14-8:11

This passage is one of the most important in Scripture in coming to understand the struggle we have with our flesh as believers, our guiltless stand in the righteousness of Christ and the process by which Christ's life is formed within us:

For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that it is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is not*. 19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 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*; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. (Romans 7:14-8:11)

Clearly, in this passage, Paul is echoing the cry of all of us as believers concerning the struggle we have between our flesh and the Spirit of God living within us. We may not feel very comfortable in admitting this struggle to others, but as long as we are honest with ourselves, we will find God's answer and liberating truth in Christ through His Word. But in so doing, it is always hard to believe and accept the magnitude of God's grace, mercy and love toward us in Christ, which He bestows on us not AT ALL BECAUSE WE DESERVE IT, but SOLELY because He loves us in Christ!

This struggle described in Romans 7:14-24 can be so intense at times that we feel we are suffocating spiritually and emotionally under the pressure of the temptations besetting us. We attempt to resist them, but instead we find ourselves failing by giving in to the temptations. The conflict we immediately have in our hearts and minds is that we didn't think we were supposed to have these kind of feelings and thoughts, let alone the actions we find ourselves as believers carrying out. We thought that once we became believers, we would be thinking, feeling and doing only pure, wholesome and spiritual things. Instead, we find that we are battling the "garbage dump" of life in our minds and emotions. But why? The reason is that even as believers who may speak in tongues, pray for the sick and see them healed, preach and teach and see the lost get saved and believers strengthened, reach out and give of ourselves to others in need, "that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh; . . . I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good." It seems to be at this point that a great many believers get stuck, and God wants to unstuck you!

But you may be saying to yourself, "I am trying to do all the right things that I think I am supposed to do, and NOTHING is helping!" The truth of the matter is, the way you get unstuck is by realizing that you cannot unstuck yourself, but that God has already unstuck you in Christ. God has taken the guilt of your flesh and placed it TOTALLY on Jesus, and you are free in the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST! Paul describes the pain of his struggle, but then he rejoices in the freedom he has from the guilt of his sinful flesh because of his standing in the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. It is this recognition of our standing in Christ's righteousness alone that brings about our deliverance from the debilitating weaknesses of our flesh and enables us to walk victorious in the fruit of God's holiness and purity, NOT OUR OWN!

However, it must be said, just as Paul delineates, that coming to this point of recognition is not an easy, nor simple journey, but rather it comes through failure in our lives and the ensuing brokenness over that failure that "godly repentance" brings about. Indeed, this repentance is itself the work of God's Spirit within us, as Paul describes:

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (II Corinthians 7:9-10)

And why is it that God brings about this repentance in His children? Precisely because we are His children, and He loves us with a love that is beyond our ability to fully comprehend. But we do find the reason behind this work of His in our lives to bring about His holiness within us, and it is contained in the glorious and merciful truth concerning His discipline of those who are His children:

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment

seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:4-11)

The word "discipline" does not mean "to punish," which is what most of us might think it means, but rather it means "to instruct and train." Jesus took our punishment on the Cross for our sin, and now, for His children, God is in the process of continually "instructing and training" us so that "we may share His holiness." The result of "His holiness" in our lives will be "the peaceful fruit of righteousness," that is, His righteousness in our lives. And that "fruit" is nothing less than the "fruit of the Spirit" delineated in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

Therefore, when we read in Romans 8:4 that the promise of this victory is for those "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit," we need to understand what the difference is between the two. These two statements are not qualitative, that is, they are not describing "how well we walk in our Christian life." If that were the case, then whose arbitrary standard of measure would we use to measure the acceptability of our walk? On the other hand, we do have a biblical standard that points out the characteristics of a life style that rejects Christ. These characteristics are referred to as the "works of the flesh," and Paul in Galatians 5:19-21 delineates them for us:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

The key phrase in this passage is referring to "those who practice such things." That is, those whose entire life style is consistently characteristic of these actions and attitudes. That is turn equates to being someone who, although they may profess faith in Christ, their relationship with Jesus as their Lord and Savior is seriously in question.

As believers, there is not a ONE OF US who hasn't seen one or more of these things in our lives at one time or another. However, the difference with us as believers is that the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, and we "cannot continue to practice" such sin. The reason we "cannot continue to practice sin" is because of the fact that we are children of God. Consequently, His Holy Spirit, Who is living within us, will not allow us to do so: "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (I John 3:9). Notice this does not say we will not commit acts of sin, but that we as true children of God "cannot" continue to live in a life style that completely denies the fact that Jesus is living within us. It is impossible to do so according to God's Word. What is possible, however, and is also a reality in our lives, is the fact that as believers we do commit acts of sin, and we can even develop debilitating habits of sin that we struggle with over what seems to us long periods of time. But if indeed we are children of God, God is continually at work within our lives to "conform us to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:28-29). The very essence of that process is His continual "discipline" in our lives that we read about in Hebrews 12. The changes may appear to be slow and, as stated above, encompass a long period of time, but nevertheless, He is working to bring the changes about, and our heart will bear witness with what He is doing.

Therefore, the terms, "according to the flesh" and "according to the Spirit" in Romans are referring to a quantitative position in Christ, versus how well we walk in our Christian life. That is, we are either in Christ, or we are not in Christ. We are either born again by His Spirit, and Christ is living within us, and, therefore, we are walking "according to the Spirit," or we are not born again, and Christ is not living within us, and we are walking "according to the flesh." The question you must be certain of is, Which one describes you? Have you accepted Christ and been born again by His Holy Spirit? Do you know, despite your sin and failure, that you are a child of God, and God is continually working in your life, even though at times you don't necessarily sense His presence? Do you see Him continually changing and conforming you to His Son, even in your times of rebellion, which perhaps have been over an extended period of time? Do you have that sense of conviction of His love for you, no matter what, as well as His conviction of the sin in your life and His continually drawing you to Him and His holiness and separation from that sin? If so, then you are His child and He is working in you to "discipline" you that you may "share His holiness." However, if you answer in the negative to the above questions, then you should seriously examine your relationship and "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you" (II Peter 1:10).

In conclusion, the finished work of Christ in our lives by means of the Holy Spirit sealing Christ's righteousness within us is something we can intellectually accept and affirm. But on the other hand, because of our failed and sinful performance, it is very difficult at times to accept emotionally that God could love us that much when we are

so COMPLETELY UNDESERVING. But that is the key, we are COMPLETELY UNDESERVING, and it is not because of our "performance" that He loves us, but rather it is because of His "performance" in Christ that He love us:

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

(Titus 3:5-7)

This is the Good News of Jesus Christ, and it is absolutely true! My prayer is that God will make this real in your life, and that you will continue to grow in the knowledge and fullness of Jesus Christ, always remembering that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6)!