



Truth or Dare?
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Introduction

Prior to salvation humans are completely helpless and hopeless without Christ. In Ephesians chapter 2, the apostle Paul says that we are completely dead in our sins and we walked according to the course of this world and the prince of the power of this air. The only actions we conducted were the lusts and the desires of our flesh. Paul also explains how lost we were in Romans 3. Prior to salvation not one person was righteous, no one understood the things of God, no one sought after God, no one did good, their ways were only destruction and misery, and no one feared God. Every one of us did what was right in our own eyes; we lived by our desires and not God's. Just like the nation of Israel we lived as if there was no King.

Praise the Lord that God is rich in mercy, grace, and love! Paul put it best in Ephesians 2:4-5 when he said, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved." God demonstrated His love towards us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Even while we were enemies of God, He reconciled us to Him through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. God's mercy, grace, and love are amazing. There is no way we would have ever chosen God, because we were dead. Think about it, if you had a choice to go to the mall tomorrow but you died, you couldn't make that choice. The same is with salvation, we cannot choose God because we are dead, and we are dead in our

filthy rotten sin. But God by His grace chose to save us and make us alive from our sins. Not only did God save us from our sin but also gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we now have the power to overcome sin in our lives. Unfortunately we still live in our sinful flesh, but by the power of the Holy Spirit we can overcome our flesh and say no to sin and say yes to God. We will get into this later on in the book.

Prior to salvation the only thing we chose was rebellion against God, but God called out our sin and empowered us with His Holy Spirit to live holy and blameless lives for His glory. Even as Christians it is very hard to live lives that glorify God. There is a constant struggle between our flesh and the Holy Spirit, and so many times we are selfish and we choose to live by our desires and not God's. So many times we are deceived by the devil and we become discontent and we seek to find satisfaction in this world and not in God. So many times we walk in the flesh instead of walking in the Spirit, and as a result we do the works of the flesh. After reading this book hopefully we will be able to defend ourselves from the devil and our focus will be off ourselves and the things of this world, and they will be on eternity and Jesus Christ. Hopefully we will put our desires on the shelf in order to glorify God.

Satisfaction— Can I find it?

As humans, we try to find satisfaction in so many different areas apart from Christ. We try to find satisfaction in our jobs, hobbies, and our relationships, and those are just dead end roads. God gave us our jobs, hobbies, and relationships to glorify Him, not to satisfy us. Unfortunately that is the nature of the devil. The devil cunningly lies to us by making the good look bad and the bad look good. The devil's plan is to turn people away from Jesus Christ and ultimately from salvation by leading people to embrace his lies rather than God's truth. When Christ was talking to the Pharisees he described Satan this way in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." The devil is liar and nothing but a liar. There is no truth in the devil whatsoever, and he will make anything, whether it is our jobs, friends, or sports, look better than our relationship with Jesus Christ. When we find satisfaction in this world and not Jesus Christ then we have fallen into the devil's lies.

We need to realize that the devils main job is to steal, kill, and destroy us and he has been like this since the beginning of our existence. Satan was in the Garden of Eden to cast doubt on, deny, and ultimately distort the Word of God. In the creation account God told Adam that he may freely eat from every tree in the Garden of Eden

except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said that if you eat of that tree you will surely die. Then in chapter 3 of Genesis, Satan distorts God's words and casts doubt on God's word to Eve, and she listened to him. Satan started by asking the question, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree in the garden'?" Instantly Satan changes what God had said and Satan goes on to tell Eve that she will not surely die if she eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but that she will be like God. Eve fell into Satan's lies and ate from the tree and what God said is exactly what happened. Eve thought the devil wanted what was best for her because she thought that the devil liked her, but she thought wrong. The bad news is the devil has not changed. Satan is our enemy and not our friend; he only wants what is worst for us and not what is best. The only thing that Satan does is lie to us and he never tells the truth; he is the exact opposite of God. Christ depicts Satan and himself perfectly in John 10:10 when He says, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Satan comes as a thief only to kill and destroy us, but Christ comes as a Savior to give us life. Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walk about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." The devil is our adversary and not our friend and he is definitely like a lion seeking anyone devour. The bad thing about Satan is the fact that he will use anything in our lives to destroy and that is why Peter tells us to be self-controlled and aware. We need to have self-control in all areas of our lives: our thoughts, words, and actions and we also need to be aware with what is going on around us. We need to be aware and we need to know about the devil's attacks and sin. As Christians we need to realize that Satan is going to attack us and the arena of conflict is our minds. The deception of our minds is the main way the devil turns people away from

Jesus Christ. The devil will deceive us to think that we always need more, just like he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan deceived Eve and he seeks to deceive us into finding satisfaction somewhere other than Jesus Christ.

We need to realize that the area of attack from Satan is in our minds and that is what we need to be working on. We need to constantly be working on our minds and we do that by renewing our minds through the Word of God. In 1 Peter 1:13-16 one of the first things that Peter says regarding holiness is the fact that we need to gird up the loins of our minds or prepare our minds for action. Each and every day we need to prepare our minds for action because that is where the battle occurs. Sin happens in our mind and not just in our actions, and that is why we need to prepare and renew our minds. Paul says in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” One way to not be conformed to or act like this world is to renew our minds and the only way to renew our minds is through the Word of God. Paul mentions this same thing to the people of Ephesus and Colosse when he told them to put off the old man, renew your mind, and put on the man. The most important step is renewing our minds; the only way we can put on the characteristics of Christ is by renewing our mind through the Word of God. There are a lot of people in this world that are duped and do not see the importance of the Word of God. The Bible is important because it sanctifies us; it sets us apart from sin. When Christ prayed for Christians in John 17, He prayed that God would sanctify them by Your truth, and then right after that He said Your Word is truth. God’s Word is absolute truth and by that truth we are being more set apart from sin. Christ also said to the Jews who believed Him in John 8, “If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the

truth shall make you free.” Again God’s Word is truth and truth will make us free from sin if we apply our lives to it. Paul talks about the Word of God in 2 Timothy and he says that it is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, rebuking our sin, correcting our sin, and training us to live righteous lives. If we apply our lives to the Bible we will be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work, which God prepared beforehand. The only way we can be set apart and free from sin and the only way we can be equipped for every good work is by reading and applying our lives to the Bible.

Discussion Questions

1. Read John 8:42-47

Who are the two types of fathers mentioned in this passage?

If God was our Father how would we act?

If Satan was our father how would we act?

2. Read John 10:10a and 1 Peter 5:8

What is the devils main job?

3. Read John 10:10b-11

What does Christ do for us?

4. Read John 8:32 and John 17:17

What do these passages say about God's Word?

Take time to examine yourself right now...

1. Are you a child of God or the devil?
2. Do you find satisfaction in God and His Word or do you seek other things to satisfy you?
3. Do you renew your minds in God's Word daily or just at church?

What is Contentment?

Before we look at what contentment is, we should understand what discontentment is. A quick definition of discontentment is longing for something better than the present situation. To be honest we can always have the mindset of “If I only had more,” or “I just need this or that to be happy,” or “Someday when things are better.” We are all in the danger of having those mindsets and when we do have those mindsets we are being discontent. When we think about sin, we need to realize that there is not a sin that we commit that is not influenced by discontentment and a lie that we believe is that this sin will somehow make us happier when in all reality it only leads to unhappiness and misery. James reminds us that sin when it is full grown brings forth death. Sin directly contradicts the purpose for which we were created, thus we can never be joyful when sin is in our lives. Our only purpose on this earth is to glorify God and when we are discontent we are definitely not glorifying God, and instead of having joy in this life we will have misery. Solomon says in Proverbs 13:15 that “Good understanding gains favor, but the way of the unfaithful is hard”. When we live in sin we will be miserable and our lives will be hard. Our lives will be hard because of the guilt and burden that we will hold because of unconfessed sin.

Contentment on the other hand means that we have happiness with our situations and we seek to find satisfaction in life. In Philippians 4:10-13 Paul says that he learned to be content in whatever state he was in, whether he was

without or he had plenty. Paul also said that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Meaning he can find contentment not matter what trials or difficulties he is going through. We will get more into contentment in chapter four, but we need to realize that all of our hope, joy, and strength comes from the Lord and not on our situations here on earth. Jesus Christ says in John 15:9-11 (NLT), “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow.” As Christians we need to be focused on obeying Christ and when we do we will be filled with joy; in fact our joy will overflow. As I said before our joy comes from the Lord, it is not dependent on our circumstances, so there is no need for us to not have joy. God is the source of our joy and of all our blessings, both physical and spiritual, but we need to realize that the Giver is greater than the gift. So our joy in God ought to be greater than our joy in the gifts He gives. In fact, it is an offense to God to find more delight in His gifts than in Him. In doing so, we exchange the Creator for the creature. God needs to be our top priority and we need to praise and glorify Him instead of the blessings He bestows upon us.

Discussion Questions

What do these verses teach us about contentment?

1. Read Proverbs 15:16 and Proverbs 23:17

How should we be living according to these verses?

2. Read Proverbs 14:30 and Proverbs 24:19-20

What happens to people who are not content with what they have?

3. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-8

What equals great gain?

What did we bring into this world, what will we take out?

What are the only things that we need?

4. Read Hebrews 13:5-6

Why should we be content?

5. Read Psalm 37:4; 16-17

What should we be concerned with?

Take time to examine yourself right now.

Are you walking in the Spirit on a daily basis?

Do you have joy, or are you usually complaining most of the day?

Are you characterized by patience, or do you get aggravated easily?

Do you find satisfaction in Christ or do you seek other things to satisfy you?

Low Maintenance? or High Maintenance?

The question that we need to ask ourselves is, “are we low maintenance and easily contented, or are we high maintenance and always complaining?” What drives us and what do we need in order to survive? A high maintenance person is characterized as unsatisfied, moody, and living their life from one crisis to the next. The reason why a high maintenance person lives from one crisis to the next is because nothing satisfies them and everything is a crisis in their lives. One reason we can be considered to be high maintenance is our desire for prestige. Prestige is our status, reputation, or distinction that is based on what is known of our abilities, achievements, or associations. The majority of Christians want people to know them by their abilities or achievements instead of as child of God. People with a desire for prestige place importance on their position in their environment and their material possessions. They feel special when others are jealous of them. This desire for prestige is evidence of discontentment because they only want more money, a bigger house, faster cars, or cooler toys to make themselves look better or to make others jealous.

In order for us to get over our desire for prestige we need to fear God instead of fearing man. Fearing God means that we have a reverence for God, and that we have a holy awe towards God and He is the only One we worship. So many times we choose to fear man instead of God be-

cause we care what man thinks of us a lot more than we care what God thinks of us. If we choose to fear man we will disobey God's commands in order to try to fulfill other men's desires. If we choose to fear man we will be under the deception that fulfillment is found in impressing others, but it in all reality that only brings discontentment and confusion. James 3:16 says, "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice." When we seek worldly wisdom and worldly gain we will only find disorder in our lives. If we choose to fear God then we will live our lives in order to please God, despite what others think of us. God needs to be our top priority and we should not worry about anything else, especially worldly things. Paul says in Colossians 3:1-2, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." Since we are Christians our thoughts need to be set on eternity and pleasing God instead of this world and pleasing men. If we choose to fear God then we will definitely find contentment. Proverbs 14:26-27 says, "In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and if we have complete reverence for God then we will have confidence in the life and a place of refuge. When we are fearing the Lord and walking in the Spirit then we will definitely find contentment in all circumstances.

Before we move on to the next chapter here some vital points to remember. It is vital to remember that sin offers only temporary pleasure. We need to think of Moses who could have enjoyed all the worldly pleasures of Egypt, but instead he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures and passing pleasures of sin of Egypt and he

looked to his eternal rewards. Another point we need to remember is the fact that sin will not last and it will always end in great misery. 1 John 2:17 says, “And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” So the question we need to ask ourselves is, “do we want temporary pleasure or lasting joy?” Unfortunately in this life we seek worldly temporary pleasure over lasting joy because we fear man over God and we love this world more than God. The last point to remember, we must have a desire to seek approval from God over approval from man.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Hebrews 11:24-25

Who is the example given in the passage and how should we be living according to this passage?

2. Read Matthew 6:19-21

Where should we be storing our treasures?

3. Read Proverbs 14:26-27

Whom should we fear and what are the benefits of fearing the Lord according to this passage?

4. Read Proverbs 21:16 and James 3:16

What should we not do and what are the results according to these verses?

Take time to evaluate yourself right now...

Who do you fear, God or man?

What does it mean to fear God?

Are you seeking lasting joy or temporary pleasure?

Four Keys to Contentment

Throughout this book we have looked at the definitions of contentment, discontentment, low maintenance and high maintenance, and satisfaction. Throughout Scripture we are commanded to be content in all situations and we are also told that godliness and contentment equals great gain. Unfortunately we are not born with the mindset of contentment. In this chapter we are going to see four keys of living satisfied in an unsatisfied world from Paul's writing in Philippians 4:10-13.

The first key to contentment is gratitude, or having a thankful heart. Paul says in verse ten that he rejoices greatly in the Lord. Earlier in verse four Paul commands the Philippian church to rejoice always in the Lord. If anybody had the right to complain it was Paul. In 2 Corinthians Paul lists the terrible trials he had to endure. Paul was whipped beyond measure, was in prison more than anybody else, and he faced death many times. Paul was beaten with rods three times; he was shipwrecked and spent a whole night and day in the open water. Paul was in danger from robbers, Gentiles, and even his own countrymen. Paul went without clothes, food, water, shelter, and sleep. But Paul realized that God's grace was sufficient for him, and that when he was weak God is strong and for that he was grateful. Paul realized that his joy came from the Lord and the object of his rejoicing was the Lord Himself, not people, himself, or his surroundings. In order for us to be content, we need to be grateful for everything the Lord does for us. We need to be thankful for the fact that God's grace is sufficient for us

and that when we are weak, God is strong. There is no reason for any Christians to not have joy because our joy comes from the Lord, and if we are not joyful then we are being self-centered. Our rejoicing needs to be vertical before horizontal. Contentment is achieved by first being grateful, living with an attitude of gratitude. When we feel the need to complain, we need to stop and think about everything we can thank God for, and there are a lot of things God has done for us.

The second key to contentment is the fact that it has to be learned. Contentment is not a natural mindset. The apostle Paul had to learn and we need to learn it. In Philipians 4:11-12, Paul said that he learned to be content in whatever state he was in. Even though Paul met the Source and Supplier of sufficiency and strength on the Damascus Road, it was thirty intervening years that he gained contentment. So the question we have to ask ourselves is, "How can we learn to be content like Paul?" First of all, we need to have our focus consistently on Christ and eternity. Paul says in Colossians 3:1-2, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." We need to have an eternal perspective. We need to realize that the things of this world can't even compare to our relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul did not see his life on this earth as significant and we need to have that same mindset. The apostle Paul also realized that his life on this earth was not reality because he knew it was temporary and his real home was in heaven. Philipians 3:20-21 says, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to

Himself.” We need to realize that our home is in heaven and our lives here on earth are temporary. We need to be eagerly waiting for the coming of the Lord because when that happens we see Christ, our bodies will be transformed, and we will be like Christ. Once we start thinking about and living for eternity, and once we realize that Jesus is all we need, we will learn to be content whatever our circumstances are.

The third key to contentment is adaptation. Contentment is based upon knowledge which manifests itself in an “I know how” attitude during any experience. The apostle Paul knew how to adapt to any situation whether good or bad and mentions this attitude twice in Philippians 4:12. Paul says, “I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound.” Paul’s composure was not only within circumstances, but rising above them as well. Paul was going to rise above any situation, he was going to be content whether he was hungry or full, whether he was in need or not. The reason why he could adapt and rise above his circumstances was because he was more focused on Christ than his material possessions. Paul did not lay up for himself treasures on earth, but he laid up for himself treasures in heaven because that is where his heart was. In order for us to adapt to our circumstances, and in order for us to have spiritual abundance we need to have treasures in heaven, because where our treasure is, our hearts will be there also. Paul was going to adapt to his circumstances and not fall into the sin of complaining and discontentment and that is how we need to live. We need to do all things without complaining, so that we may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. We need to be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known to God. We need to apply our lives to Paul’s writings and Christ’s teachings,

because when we do we will find contentment and true wisdom.

The last key to contentment is realizing that we have victory in Christ. Paul says in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” The source of contentment for Paul and every Christian is Christ. Christ is the source for all of our hope, joy, comfort, and peace; and we receive strength when our focus is on the vertical (Jesus Christ) rather than on the horizontal (ourselves). We need to realize that we, as humans, are not all-capable, but the good thing is that our Savior, Jesus Christ, is all-powerful. Christ says himself, “with man salvation is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” That is so true. Because of God’s saving grace, we are able to be in a right relationship with God, and because of God’s enabling grace we are able to live the righteous lives that God gave us. It is only through our relationship with Jesus Christ that we can become master in every situation that we are in. We need to have complete faith in God that He will allow us to overcome any circumstance. Because of Jesus Christ we are more conquerors of all sin and even death. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, “Death is swallowed up in victory. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul goes on to say that we need to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. In light of what Christ has done for us, we need to live every moment to magnify Him. As Christians we say that we need to put our faith in God. The question is what is faith? George Macdonald says that faith is “the leaving of your way, your objects, your self and the taking of His and Him; the leaving of your trust in men, in money, in opinion, in character and doing as God tells you.” We need to be completely obedient to Christ and put our faith in Him and not on anything in this world. Even when we are at our

weakest moment we still have victory in Christ. The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” We are made strong through Christ in our worst times. So instead of complaining about our needs, sufferings, and our persecutions, we need to take joy in those times because God is at work in our lives.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Philippians 4:4-7

According to this passage how can rejoice always?

2. Read Romans 12:9-13

What should rejoice in and how else should we be living according to this passage?

3. Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-29

What did Paul go through for the sake of Christ?

4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

What did Paul realize about his weaknesses?

5. Read Ephesians 3:20

What does this verse say about the power of Christ?

Take time to examine your life right now...

Do you have an attitude of gratitude for what God has done for you? Do you rejoice in the Lord always?

In what ways do you still need to learn to be content?

Have been adapting to your circumstances or do you just complain about your circumstances?

Do you go to God for strength or do you look to yourselves and the things of this world to give you strength?

The Subtlety of Sin

We need to realize that the devil is cunning, subtle, and deceiving. One of the things the devil wants us to believe as Christians is the fact that our sin might have an ill effect on the people around us, but it doesn't affect us at all. Solomon says in Proverbs 29:5-6, "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet. By transgression an evil man is snared, but the righteous man sings and rejoices." When we join the nice club and seek to flatter and please people instead of God, we fall into a trap and by sinning with our eyes wide open, and we are completely snared. Our sin definitely affects us, whether it is gossip, laziness, self-righteous, or whatever sin we commit we put ourselves in a trap. The Bible teaches us that sin is so powerful that without supernatural powerful of God, we are its slaves and remain in the bondage to its rules. Without the power of the Holy Spirit we are totally depraved. The word depravity means that we fail to pass the test and a better definition is the fact that sin fills every nook and cranny of our lives. Depravity is a term used to describe impure metal, considered useless or worthless because it carries too many impurities and is rejected or discarded. Without the power of the Holy Spirit we are useless, helpless, and hopeless. Before we are saved we are completely depraved, meaning that nothing good dwells in us (Romans 3:10-18). Even as believers, depravity is a powerful force within us, and the apostle Paul testifies this from his own experience in Romans 7:14-25. Even the apostle, the man who planted many churches and wrote the majority of the New Testament struggled with depravity. Paul states, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I

will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” In order to not let sin reign in our lives we need to walk in the Spirit. We need to live in constant confession of sin; we need to deal with the sin that is in our lives right away because it will destroy us.

So many times we don't even realize that we have sin in our lives because it is so subtle. The most common deception among Christians is self-deception. We deceive ourselves in many ways, but one way we are guilty of deceiving ourselves is when we compare our sin with others. We can always find someone that is worse than us, and our sin doesn't look as bad when we compare with others. Instead of comparing our sin with others we need to compare our lives to Christ, and when we do that we will see how sinful we truly are. Sin also fools us into making us feel quite happy with ourselves. In all reality sin brings forth death. The author of Hebrews says that sin ensnares us instead of making us happy and setting us free. We need to confess sin right away, because spiritual delay is deadly. The longer sin remains without confession and repentance, the harder it is to recognize because of habitual behavior. The longer you and I cherish a lustful or sinful attitude, the more ingrained in our nature it becomes, the less noticeable it becomes, and our resistance to sin grows weaker. When sin remains in our lives not only do we become numb to it, but Psalm 66:18 says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.” Proverbs 13:15 says, “The way of the unfaithful is hard.” The apostle Paul says that if we have sin in our lives we will be a utensil for dishonor and not honor. If let sin remain in our lives, we will become numb to it, the Lord will not hear us, our lives will be hard, and we will be a utensil for dishonor.

So how can we get rid of sin in our lives and glorify God? Well first we need to be in daily confession. Confession and repentance lead to the joy of reconciliation with God. Confessing sin and being granted repentance is the only way to purity. We need to be confessing our sins regularly because there is no other way to be pure. We also need to be vigilant. John Owen said, "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you, there is not a day but sin prevails or is prevailed on and will live in this world as we will this world." Sin is always around and we need to be alert. To defeat sin we must be armed for warfare. The Bible commands us to be aware of sin and strive with might against it. We need to realize that freedom from sin comes from the Truth of God's Word. Christ says in John 8:31-32, "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." To live lives free from sin we need to be reading and applying our lives to the Word of God. Sadly, many people who have bought the lie that they can deal with sin apart from Christ find themselves hopelessly trying to cope with the despair of depravity. The end result is that they give up the good fight and surrender to sin. We need to be centered on the finished work of Jesus Christ and the subsequent peace with God that He offers.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Matthew 7:3-5

What does Jesus Christ tell us that we need to do with our sin?

2. Read James 1:13-15

What does sin lead to?

3. Read Galatians 1:10

Who should we seek to please and why?

4. Read Ephesians 6:10-20

What kind of armor do we need; and what does each piece of armor do?

Take time to examine yourself now...

In what ways has your sin affected you?

What have you been doing in order to fight sin?

What sin is in your life that you need to kill?

The Power of Christ

When we read Romans 6-8 we cannot help but to see the power over sin we have through power of Christ's blood. If we have been truly born again, then that means that our old man of sin was crucified with Christ, so that our body of sin might be done away with in order for us to never be slaves of sin again. If our old man truly died with Christ then we have been freed from sin. The good thing is the fact that Christ has raised from the dead, so if we died with Christ, then we better believe that we also live with Christ. Old things have passed away and behold all things have become new. Paul says that we need to realize that we are now dead to sin, and alive to God; so we shouldn't live in our sin anymore, but we should live for Jesus Christ.

In order for us to please God and not ourselves we need to walk in the Spirit. "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds according to the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds of the Spirit." In order for us to do the things we want to do and not do the things we don't want to do, we must walk according to the Spirit. Through Christ's power we have deliverance from sin and sin no longer has the power to hold us or keep us in chains. Jesus Christ gave us the power through the Holy Spirit to break through those chains of sin that once kept us prisoner. Since Christ remains in us we should never fall into sin. 1 John 3:9 says, "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." We now have the power of God living inside of us who is way stronger than sin, and because of that we cannot live a life of regular sin. With the power of Christ living inside of us it is impossible for us to live in continual sin. We are com-

pletely free from the law of sin and death. Instead of being slaves to sin we are now slaves to righteousness and we have great help from the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers us to fulfill God's law and bear good fruit. God indwells each of us with His Holy Spirit and we can overcome sin as we yield to Him. But for those times we want to please ourselves instead of Christ and those times we walk in the flesh and not in the Spirit, we better be disgusted about sin, we better hate our sin like God does, and we better have godly sorrow which leads to repentance.

There is a big difference between Christians and unbelievers, and the world should see a difference in those who call themselves Christians. When people look at Christians they should see Jesus and they should glorify Him. Unbelievers are controlled by the flesh and are carnally minded; they set their minds only on the things of this world. Their thoughts, words, and actions only produce unrighteousness. Unsaved people live in sin, which means that sinning is a regular way of life. Christians, on the other hand, are controlled by the Holy Spirit and are spiritually minded; they set their minds on things above and not on things on this earth. Christians are free from the law of sin and death because of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately true believers still make mistakes after they are saved, but they do not practice sin. The big difference between a Christian and an unbeliever is the fact that Christians will confess their sins and be granted repentance. As we read this chapter, we need to take some time and examine our lives. Are we characterized as an unbeliever or a Christian? Are we controlled by the Spirit or the flesh? Are our minds set on things on this earth or things above? Do we live a life of continual sin and ignore it or do we confess our sin and get granted repentance?

To end this chapter I would like to discuss the power of sanctification. When we are saved the Lord sanctifies us and sets us apart from sin and to holiness as His children. That is the power of positional sanctification, being declared righteous by God. As we live on this earth we are involved in progressive sanctification, which means we are to continue to grow closer to Christ, continue to become more holy, and continue to become more Christ-like in everything we say and do. True Christians will be doing those things just mentioned and the good news is we have the help of the Holy Spirit. In order to be more Christ-like we need to be involved in Bible reading, memorization, and incarnation- living out the truths of God's Word in our lives. We also need to put on the full armor of God so that we fight in this spiritual battle that we are in each and every day. We need to completely trust in the Lord. We need to humble ourselves before God and give up trying to resolve or overcome daily trials on our own. In order to be more like Christ, we must confess and repent of our sins. We must say the same thing God says about our sin and we must change our way of living. There are a lot of people who think they can deal with sin apart from Christ, but they find themselves hopelessly trying to cope with the despair of depravity. We are hopeless apart from Christ. If we trust in the Lord to help us overcome sin we will live with peace of mind. Paul says in Romans 8:6, "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." When we are walking in the Spirit and relying on God, we will have life and peace. The only way we can overcome sin is by walking in the Spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Romans 8:5-7

Write out what this passage means...

2. Read Romans 6:5-14

Write out how you can apply your life to this passage...

3. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

What does Christ do for us to overcome temptation in our lives?

Take time to examine your life right now...

Are you controlled by the flesh or by the spirit?

In what ways are you not presenting your members as instruments of righteousness?

Has your life changed since you received Christ as your Lord and Savior? If yes, how? If no, how hasn't it?

A Christian's Constant Conflict

Judges 21:25 says, “In those day there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” To be honest there really seems to be no difference in this day and age as well. The sad thing is, even Christians have a tendency to live like this and they like to do what is right in their own eyes. That is the problem; when we do what is right in our own eyes, the inevitable result is sin. And that is our constant conflict, the conflict to please ourselves or to please God. When we seek to please ourselves, we will go through three different cycles as a result of our sin. These three cycles are found in Romans 7:13-25, where the apostle Paul was in the conflict of walking in the Spirit and pleasing God or walking in the flesh and pleasing himself. Like I said before, every Christian struggles with this conflict. If the apostle Paul, the man who wrote Scripture and planted many churches, struggled with this, then we will as well.

The first cycle is the source of conflict, and it comes from our sin nature. One of the truths we need to realize is the fact that we are all born with a sin nature. We are totally depraved and nothing good dwells within us. Paul makes it very clear in Romans 7:14 that he is completely carnal and sold under sin. The Greek word for carnal means to be rooted in the flesh or made of the sin nature. Before Christ we were completely made of the sin nature. Once we receive Christ, a new nature is placed within us and wars against the sin nature. Both natures are present in the believer but the struggle is to be brought under the control of

the sin nature and perform acts of sin. The proof of this struggle is found in Romans 4:15-16. Paul's proof is the experience of his life, not doing the things he wants to do and doing the things he actually hates. That is the conflict Christians face. True Christians will have a desire to please God, but because the strength of the sin nature, we don't do those things. Instead we do the things we hate, sin. Paul states in Romans 4:17 "it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." When we sin as Christians, it is not the new nature or the new man that sins, but it is the old nature or sin nature that sins. We have to realize that we are not two different people but we are one person with two natures.

Cycle number two is the fact that the new nature is powerless before the sin nature. Paul says that in him, that is his flesh, nothing good dwells. Any good we perform as believers cannot come from the sin nature. We as believers have the power to desire to do good, but we are powerless to perform the good that we desire to do. That previous statement is proven by every Christian's experience, including Paul's. Paul didn't do the good that he wanted to do, but he did the evil that he didn't want to do. The same is with each one of us. We don't do what we desire to do, but we all do what we hate. The conclusion of this cycle: the believer is not master of himself. Paul reasons that sin does not originate in the new nature because the new nature desires to do good which the believer cannot perform. Therefore sin originates from the sin nature which indwells and expresses itself in the evil that is done through every believer.

Cycle number three is the constant conflict with sin. The experience with sin in the believer is a constant conflict. There is a law in each believer which states, "that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good." Unfortu-

nately the will to do good is not sufficient to enable the believer to do the good that he wants to do. The problem is that the believer's sin nature is always with him and whenever the new nature wishes to act, the sin nature is there to resist and demand obedience. The bad thing is that the sin nature is present and there is no way that the believer can escape it. The proof of this is the fact that every true believer delights in the Law of God (righteousness of God) but cannot do it. The new nature is not strong enough to perform the good of which it approves. The sin nature is warring against the new nature and brings the believer into captivity to the law of sin which is in his members. The believer is powerless to perform the deeds of the new nature because the old nature imposes its will upon him and he performs the evil that he doesn't want to do.

The conclusion to these helpless cycles is the cry of desperate help that leads to deliverance. Paul says in Romans 7:24-25 "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The mortal body humiliates the believer because it continually performs the bidding of the sin nature rather than the desires of the new nature. Deliverance from this conflict of sin is possible only through the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. We need to cry out to God in complete humility for deliverance from our sin. Christ proves himself over and over again; just think of the nation of Israel who fell into sin many times. Psalm 107:6 says, "They cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses." Three other times throughout that Psalm Israel cries out to God in humility and desperation and Christ rescues them from their sin. Christ is our only answer and our only hope.

Well let's summarize what we have discussed in this chapter, because it is a lot to wrap our minds around. The believer is not a split a personality; rather he is one person with two natures. One nature is the flesh (sin nature) which always serves the law of sin. The second nature is the mind (new nature), which always serves the law of God. Both of these natures express themselves through the believer's body. Unfortunately what it comes right down to is, we love our bondage to the sin nature because we like the easy life and we are convinced that we cannot live without the things of this world. The key to solving this is the fact that we need to confess the conflict of sin in our lives (1 John 1:9). Those Christians who submit to God and confess sin find it difficult, but survivable and very profitable. Christ even says in Matthew 7:14, "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few that find it." The Christian life is tough, but it leads to life, and we can have great joy because in Christ we have victory. We need to let Jesus be king of our lives and not ourselves. If Jesus is not our king we will do what is right in our own eyes and that is definitely sin.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Romans 7:14-25

What is the apostle Paul saying in this passage?

2. Read Psalm 1; Psalm 119:9, 11

What do these verses say about the Word of God?

3. Read Colossians 3:1-17

What is the apostle Paul saying in this passage?

Take time to examine your life right now...

What sinful desires are you fulfilling?

What Godly desires are you not fulfilling?

How often do you examine your life and confess the sin
that is in your life?

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Fighting the Backwards Battle

Our greatest hunger as Christians should be Christ's righteousness but unfortunately we have to deal with devil's lies. So the question that we need to ask is, "How can we defeat the lies of the devil?" In essence this is what the devil is saying: "all your attempts at transformation are useless; you have sinned too much already! In fact, you have already committed the unpardonable sin, so you might as well live it up, because you are way beyond saving." The devil wants us to live for everything down here on this earth and forsake our chances for eternal life with God in heaven. The devil does a great job with making the bad look good and the good look bad.

Our only defense against the devil is the Word of God which grounds us and protects us from being led astray by every wind of doctrine. We need to be reading the Word of God because in Bible contains everything pertaining to life and godliness. The Bible is profitable for doctrine, exposing sin, correcting sin, and training in righteousness. The Bible is our only weapon to fight Satan. We have to resist the devil's lies, and not allow him to increase our guilt by tempting us to abandon hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Like I said before, our greatest hunger needs to be Christ's righteousness, but Satan will do his best to make us hunger after our own selfish desires.

Last chapter we look at the constant conflict we have with our sin nature. We need to realize that when sin is in our lives we need to confess it right away. When we

are talking about sin, we need to ask ourselves if there is any sin in our past that hasn't been confessed, and if so we need to confess it to God and to the appropriate people and make restitution if necessary. Why is this necessary? Because of the effects of a guilty past, because the Bible teaches confession, and because the Bible teaches restitution. Some people ask the question, "What if I don't remember my sin?" If we truly are being poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and truly seeking to please God with our lives, we will know when we have sinned against God and other people and it should drive us to our knees in confession. People also might be wondering why confession is so important. One answer to that question is because fellowship with God is at stake. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." That is huge reason why we need to confess our sins. I don't know about you but I want to have fellowship with the almighty God. Another reason why we need to confess our sin is because there is joy in repentance. When David kept his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah quiet he felt God's heavy hand upon him. Basically he was feeling completely miserable because of it. David says in Psalm 32:1-2, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." When David confessed his sins, he felt incredible joy and blessed, and that is what forgiveness does, it brings joy.

As Christians we need to make sure we are not wallowing in the darkness of our past. The word wallow means to live or indulge oneself to an immoderate degree in a specified thing or condition (wallowing in self-pity). When we wallow in the darkness of our past that tells a few things about how we think. The first thing it tells us is the fact that we have a wrong view of sin. When we wallow in our past sin it means we haven't truly forsaken our sin. The second

thing it tells us is the fact that we are proud. When we wallow in our past sin, we think we can deal with it on our own, but the only way we can deal with our sin is through the blood of Jesus Christ. When we wallow in our past sin it tells us that we seriously doubt God's forgiveness. Paul makes it very clear that Christ has forgiven us when he wrote in Colossians 2:13, "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." Christ has forgiven our sins, and we need to believe that. So instead of wallowing in our past what should we do? The first thing we need to do is rejoice in God's forgiveness. We need to learn all the lessons we can from our guilty past but we cannot keep looking back; we need to move on. We need to realize that the door of grace is open to all who come through Jesus Christ. The only way to deal with our sin is by the grace of Jesus Christ, we cannot deal with it on our own. If we try, we will end being miserable.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." If we are truly saved, then we are new creations in Christ Jesus, and we need to live like it. We need to seek transformed lives. The Bible is not an appeal to moral living, but rather it is an appeal to supernatural transformation. As Paul says in Romans 12, we cannot act like this world, but we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through the Word of God. The devil wants counterfeit rather than authenticity; he wants fans rather than players; he wants people to have a desire to fit in with the world rather than have a desire to win the prize. As Christians our priority has to be knowing God personally, so that we can be players and not fans, and so that we can have transformed lives.

We need to live transformed lives in such a way that when our time here on earth is done, we will receive the prize. Paul tells Timothy that he fought the good fight and he finished the race and he is going to receive the prize. How do we live our lives in such a way that we receive the prize? We need to exercise self-control in

all areas of life. We need to have self-control when it comes to relationships, what we listen to, and what we watch, because the devil will use anything to destroy us. We must avoid definite sin, as well as anything that hinders spiritual progress. We need to be disciplined to compete. When it comes to discipline, we need to do everything for the sake of the Gospel. We need to have godly mindset. We need to own our body through the power of the Holy Spirit instead of letting our sin nature own us. Our flesh must be controlled, and we need to practice what we preach. Our lips will lie, but our lives won't. When we encounter obstacles in our lives, we should never create solutions out of thin air to solve them, but we need to go directly to God. When we think of running the race of faith with endurance, we need to think of what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 12:1-2. We need to lay aside every weight and sin which so easily ensnares; we need to practice holiness. We also need to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Jesus Christ is the only answer to anything in life. He is our only source of joy, strength, comfort, and hope.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Matthew 4:1-10

How did Christ defeat the temptations from the devil?

2. Read Proverbs 28:13; Psalm 32

What do these passages say about sin and confession of sin?

3. Read Psalm 103:8-14

What does this passage say about our God?

4. Read Romans 12:1-2 and Hebrews 12:1-3

What should we be doing in order to live transformed lives and run the race of faith effectively?

Take time to examine your life...

What areas in life do you wallow in?

Do you renew your minds through the Word of God?

Do you have your eyes on Christ?

Who do you go to, to solve your problems?

Conclusion

We need to realize the constant conflict of sin we are in. There is war going on and it is going on in our minds. We all have to deal with the sin of discontentment. Every one of us struggles finding satisfaction in other things besides Christ. Hopefully as a result of this book, we will see that true satisfaction, joy, and contentment only come from a relationship with Jesus Christ. In order to be content we need to be grateful for what Christ has done for us and we need to realize that victory is found Jesus alone. The main thing we have to realize as Christians is the only way to overcome sin and living in the flesh is by walking in the Spirit. The only way we can walk in the Spirit is by living in constant confession of our sin and daily renewing our minds through the Word of God. We must all run to the foot of the cross with our sins, because that is the only place we find forgiveness. We also must be grounded in the Word of God, because the Bible is the only source to find everything we need pertaining to life and godliness.