

Spiritual Health Check-Up



The Forum Terrace Church of Christ

Sunday Morning Adult Class Winter Quarter 2026

Workbook by Daniel R. Vess

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Necessity for Self-Diagnosis of Spiritual Health

What you habitually do becomes the new you. If you drink you are a drunkard. If you are promiscuous then you are a fornicator. Our habits need checking on a regular basis. Daily spiritual exams will help us break these habits before they can take root in our lives. *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified"* (2 Cor. 13:5). This will also help us strengthen and initiate good habits.

Remember, removing bad habits is like pulling weeds in the garden. If you pull them up when they are young it is easy. Wait until the weeks have well rooted themselves in the soil and you will have a much harder task. Furthermore, when you finally do pull them out it will cause a great deal of damage to the rest of plants in the garden. In contrast, good plants take more time and have more easily threatened by the weeds. Daily examination and weeding out bad habit is essential.

A young boy walked into a drug store and asked if he could use the telephone. Upon receiving permission to he took the receiver dialed and said, "hello, Mr. Flanders? ...Do you want to hire a boy to cut the grass, clean your window, and deliver packages?" There was a pause as the boy listen to the answer. "Oh, you already got a boy? Mr. Flanders, are you perfectly satisfied with you current employee's job performance? ... very well then. Good-bye sir?" As the boy thanked the druggist and started out the door, the druggist called to him, "just a minute son. If you are looking for work I could use a boy like you." "Thank you, sir" said the boy, "But I've already got a job." "Didn't I just hear you trying to get a job from Mr. Flanders?" "No, sir," replied the boy, "You see, I'm the one who is working for Mr. Flanders now, I was just checking up on myself."

Every occupation needs a job evaluation. Christians are commanded to evaluate their efforts to work out their own salvation (Phil. 2:12). It is our responsibility to be right in the sight of God. Self-examination is the means to give our souls a daily check up



Procedures in Self-Examination

√ Use The Right Standard

You can't make yourself a saint, by comparing yourself to sinners. To say, "I'm just as good as another" doesn't prove you to be as good as you ought to be. We don't examine a car by looking at a manual on psychology, so we need to examine the soul by the spiritual manual. The only way one is approved of God is by a study of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Far too often Christians want to use other Christians as the standard to check up their spiritual health. They think all they have to do is compare themselves with the average Christian and assign themselves a clean bill of health. Paul told the Corinthians that his was not wise. *"For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. Bu hey, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves,*

are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12). Jesus is the only one we need to be comparing our lives to see if we really are measuring up spiritually. Andrew Murray wrote, "It is when we face ourselves and face Christ, that we are lost in wonder, love and praise. We need to rediscover the almost lost discipline of self-examination; and then a reawakened sense of sin will beget a reawakened sense of wonder."

√ **Consider Self**

Jesus announced to the Twelve disciples *"one of you shall betray me,...they were exceedingly sorrowful and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord?"* (Mt. 26:22). They didn't ask, "Lord is it Peter? James? Judas?" They each examined self.

It is impossible to examine self without looking to self. A mirror is designed to allow a person to examine his physical appearance. If someone looks into a mirror and finds a spot on their clothes, they usually remove the spot or change their clothes. In James 1:21-25 the Bible is compared to a mirror. Unless we are *"doers of the word,"* we are like those who look in the mirror and do nothing. A stain on our clothes may not ruin our lives, but a stain on your soul will cause us to lose our lives eternally.

√ **Take Responsibility For Our Actions**

Many try to blame sin on someone or something else. Passing the buck is as old as Adam and Eve when they fell to temptation. When man sinned in the garden and God required concerning it, the man blamed the woman, the woman blamed the serpent (Gen. 3:11-13). The Bible places the responsibility for sin upon the individual, not his environment, race, education, spouses, peers, culture, etc. (Rom. 14:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:15). Noah and Lot lived surrounded by a very wicked generation of men, but this didn't give them reason to be irresponsible for their own actions.

Confession makes us stronger (1 Jn. 1:8). Like the publican we are exulted and acceptable by crying *"God be merciful to me the sinner."* Like the Prodigal son: *"I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight"* (Lk. 15:18). Like David, *"I have sinned"* 2 Sam. 12:9-14 and *"For I know my transgressions"* (Ps. 51:1-3).

√ **Do it Regularly**

We are to *"pray without ceasing"* (1 Th. 5:17) and be *"searching the scriptures daily"* (Ac. 17:11); therefore we need to also examine ourselves daily. Salvation of the soul doesn't depend upon how one's spiritual condition was yesterday or how it will be tomorrow. Salvation is determined on our present spiritual condition.

When it comes down to examining ourselves we are too often tempted to allow our egos to blind us to reality. Once a well to do and famous executive who headed a large corporation had to stand in a very long line at the DMV to renew his driver's license. In frustration he turned to his wife and said, "Don't these people know who I am?" She replied, "Yeah, you are a plumber's son who got lucky." So the next time your ego interferes with an honest self-examination just remember who you are. You are a sinner who was became a Christian by the grace of God.

Diagnostic Tests

The Priority Test: Do you put God first? (Mt. 6:33). Are we a living sacrifice to God or living selfishly for self (Romans 12:1,2)?

The Personal Test: Will doing it make me a better or worse Christian? (Heb. 5:14).

The Influence Test: Will doing it influence others to be better or worse Christians? (1 Cor. 11:1). Are people surprised when they find out that we are members of the Lord's Church? Or, have people

ever guessed you were a member by your speech and conduct? Am I letting my light shine or am I hiding it? Has our conduct hindered the Gospel of Christ?

The Universal Test: Suppose for a moment that everyone did it? (I Tim. 2:3,4).

The Scriptural Test: Is it authorized in the Word of God? (I Pet. 4:11). Are we doing things that we do not have scripture to support?

The Stewardship Test: Will doing it involve a waste of God's talents invested in me? (Mt. 25:14-30).

The Missionary Test: Will doing it likely help or hinder the progress of the kingdom of God on earth? (I Cor. 9:19). Do we share the gospel with others or do we selfishly keep it to ourselves? Do we realize the consequences of not sharing the gospel? Paul wrote "that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also" (Romans 1:13b-15).

The Character Test: Will doing it make me stronger or weaker morally? (Col. 3:1). Do I have any character or am I just a character?

The Publicity Test: Would I be willing for my friends to know about it? (I Pet. 2:11-12). Do I realize that God already knows, Christ knows, and when He comes again in judgment everyone will know?

The Obligation Test: Are we leaving undone things that we know we should be doing? (Js. 4:17).

The Performance Test: Are we "always abounding in the work of the Lord?" (I Cor. 15:58). Are we a people who are "zealous for good works?" (Tit. 2:14). Am I a worker of a shirker? Are we working fervently in God's construction crew or are we now busily engaged in Satan's demolition gang?

The Integrity Test: Are we guilty of saying and not doing? Is our word our bond?

The Word Test: Do we read the Bible? Do we Study so as to be approved unto God? Can we say "I am set for the defense of the gospel"?

The Growth Test: Are we adding to our faith, virtue, knowledge, etc.? (2 Pet. 1:5f). Are we as spiritually mature as we ought to be? *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Hebrews 5:12-14).

The Communication Test: Do we pray daily? (I Th. 5:17). Do we expect to win over temptation and the wiles of the Devil if our lines of communications to our heavenly headquarters go unused? (Eph. 6:10-18).

The Devotion Test: When we sing do we make melody in our hearts? Do we do it with understanding? Do we sing to be heard of men, or God? Do we give grudgingly, of necessity or do we give cheerfully? Do we give as we have prospered or do we just give a few dollars thinking that is sacrificial giving? Would we give the same if it was Christ if it was Christ with nail scared hands the passed the plate? Have I attended every service I could? If absence makes the heart grow fonder than a lot of people must really love our church?

The Final Test: Are you prepared to meet God? (Amos 4:12). What if you were to die this very night and your soul was required of you? (Lk. 12:20,21). When Jesus comes again will He find you ready?

Questions:

1. Why is it important to change bad habits early instead of later?

2. What are some foolish standards used for self-examination?
3. What standards should be used in self-examination?
4. When Jesus announced one of the Twelve would betray him what did the Disciples ask?
5. Who or what do some try to blame for their short-comings instead of taking personal responsibility?
6. Give Bible examples of those who demonstrated personal responsibility for their faults?
7. Why is it so important to do daily check-ups on your soul?

Match the Test with the Scripture

8. ____ The Communication Test
9. ____ The Missionary Test
10. ____ The Performance Test
11. ____ The Obligation Test
12. ____ The Final Test
13. ____ The Growth Test
14. ____ The Priority Test
15. ____ The Scriptural Test
 - a. 1 Pet. 4:11 - If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.
 - b. Romans 1:13b-15 - "that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also"
 - c. Hebrews 5:12-14 - For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word

of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

- d. James 4:17 - Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.
- e. Lk. 12:20-21 - But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."
- f. Mt. 6:33 - But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.
- g. 1 Thess. 5:17 - Pray without ceasing
- h. 1 Corinthians 15:58 - "always abounding in the work of the Lord?"

Application & Discussion:

1. Once you find an area during your spiritual check-up that is a problem for your spiritual health what sort of things should you do next?

2. Have you prayed, studied the Bible or encourage a brother or sister today? Have you said an unkind word, thought evil of God or coveted, today? If so, what do you plan to do about it in the near future.

Homework: Using this workbook for ideas, start making a Spiritual Check-Up List for your daily use.

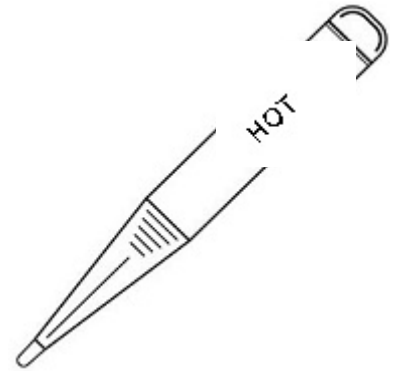
Taking Your Spiritual Temperature

When I was still quite small about three or four years of age. My mother was checking me for a temperature. She was using one of those glass mercury filled thermometers. Some how I bit it in two. When my grandfather saw what I had done he jumped up and grabbed me. Pulled the remaining part of the thermometer out of my mouth and checked to see, if I had swallowed any of the dangerous mercury.

Regardless of the dangers of mercury poisoning, body temperature is one of the many vital signs for a healthy life along with pulse rate, blood pressure, and rate of respiration. Spiritually speaking there are vital signs of life. One does not need a thermometer for these, but it does require self-examination. Paul wrote, *“examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified”* (2 Corinthians 13:5)

The right temperature for a body is about 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. So what is the right spiritual temperature for the soul? Well, it is not like the Laodiceans who were lukewarm. *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth”* (Rev. 3:15-16). One definition of lukewarm is “serving God in such a way as to not offend the devil.”

According to Romans 12:11 we are to be boiling hot: *“fervent in spirit”* (NASB). The Greek word for “fervent,” *zeo*, means “to boil with heat.” Apollos was said to have a fervent like spirit (Acts 18:25). In the Old Testament Phineas is said to have had a God-like zeal. One might refer to this as being passionate. What should a Christian be passionate about? C. S. Lewis said, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important.”



How to Take Your Spiritual Temperature?

What does a Christian use to take their spiritual temperature? What are the spiritual thermometers one can read to assess whether they are hot or cold or lukewarm?

■ Praying

One means of determining a soul's temperature is to look at one's prayer life. “It is hard to stumble when you on your knees.” So the more you pray the less you will stumble and fall into sin. Oswald Chambers put it bluntly: “Prayer is the vital breath of the Christian; not the thing that makes him alive, but the evidence that he is alive.” Three things are necessary to have a fire: fuel, oxygen, and a spark. The Bible is our fuel; a decision is our spark (Joshua 24:15); prayer is our oxygen. Jesus taught that *“men ought always to pray”* (Luke 18:1). Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, “I know of no better thermometer to your spiritual temperature than this, the measure of the intensity of your prayer.”

■ Studying

Before the printing press the Catholic Church could control the production of the Bible to a certain extent. All Bibles were in Latin, a dead language, and not in the language of the people. Then again most

common folks were illiterate. Many copies of the Bible were confiscated and burned during this period. Especially, those Bibles written in the living languages of the average man.

Today, with digital Bibles on our phones and tablets, we have the Word at our fingertips at all times in all languages. No one has an excuse not to read, memorize, meditate, and apply God's Word today. The Psalmist wrote, *"I will not neglect your word"*? (Ps. 119:16). If your habit of Bible Study is low you need to get back in the Word like the disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, *"And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'"* (Luke 24:32). We need to be fervent in our search for Truth like Ezra who *"set his heart to study the Law of the Lord"* (Ezra 7:10)

■ **Attending**

Can you say like the Psalmist: *"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'"* (Psalm 122:1). Or do you have to force your soul to go worship God kicking and screaming. Your habit in attendance is a good measure of your spiritual fervor. *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25).

■ **Singing**

The one hundred and fifty psalms in our Bible are actually songs to be sung to God. *"I will sing to the Lord, Because He has dealt bountifully with me"* (Psalm 13:6). *"To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises; For God is my defense, My God of mercy"* (Psalm 59:17). *"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations"* (Psalm 89:1). Do you sing to God? Do you sing even when alone with God? When at worship to you sing with the understanding (1 Cor. 14:15)? You may not have the best singing voice in the church, but you can have a fervent voice in worship.

■ **Partaking**

Another measure of one's fever for the Lord is the Christian's manner of partaking the Lord's Supper. Paul wrote to Corinth, *"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep"* (1 Cor. 11:27-30).

■ **Giving**

How much zeal is there in giving back to the Lord when the collection plate comes around? Are you a "cheerful giver"? One day a woman poured \$20,000 worth of ointment on Jesus and was criticized by others but complimented by the Lord (Mark 14:3-8). One day a poor widow observed by Jesus in the Temple gave all she had. The Macedonians gave out of need and not abundance.

■ **Repenting**

Humans are amazing creatures, but they cannot feel enthusiasm and guilt at the same time. David said, *"Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me . . . I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long"* (Psalm 38:4-6). John wrote, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

■ **Sharing**

Do you enjoy being with people of like faith? Do you like to share your faith with others? There is nothing more exciting, in my opinion, than leading a person to faith in Christ. Yet statistics show that ninety-seven percent of Christians have never led one soul to salvation. John Wesley wrote, "get on fire for God and men will come and see you burn." George Gallop surveyed 13,000 people in 130 countries who once attended church but no longer do. One question he asked was, "What would need to happen for you to return to church?" The number one answer was, "Passion in the lives of the members and leaders." People want to see enthusiasm—they want Christians to take religion seriously.

The Northside Church of Christ in Newport News, Virginia, lost their church building to a fire caused by a lightning strike in July of 1999. Their response to the fire was seen on their church sign a few days later: "We're still on fire." May that be true of us!

Questions:

1. What was wrong with the Laodiceans when made the Lord say he wanted fo vomited them out of His mouth?
2. What does "fervent in spirit" mean?
3. What is the fuel, spark, and oxygen of out spiritual fervor?
4. How available is the Bible to the average person of today compared to those who lived before the printing press?
5. True False One's habit in attendance is a good measure of your spiritual fervor.
6. Can one sing hymns without understanding or paying attention to the meaning of the lyrics? Why is this a spiritual health problem?
7. When Paul claims that some are weak and sick when they do not partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner, does he mean physically weak and sick? Explain.
8. Give examples of those who gave fervently back to God?
9. True False Our passion and fervor for the Lord has little or no influence on the lost.

10. Why is our personal spiritual zeal important when it comes to sharing the Gospel with others?

Application & Discussion:

1. How would you assess your spiritual temperature at this time? What can be done about it if it is too cold or lukewarm?
2. What sort of scriptural things can be done to put more spiritual zeal in our public worship to God?

Homework: Set your soul on fire for the Lord.

Preparations for a Heart Transplant

If anyone was to be known as the “King of Hearts” it would have to be King David. When Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint a new king over Israel to replace King Saul, he was surprised at God’s rejection of David’s older brothers. *“The Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’”* (1 Sam. 16:7). God said of David: *“I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will”* (Acts 13:22).

Unfortunately, David’s descendants upon the throne did not always have his heart. His grandson, Rehoboam, *“he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord”* (2 Chronicles 12:14). Of another descendant the Bible says, *“King Abijam walked in sin and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God as was the heart of his father David.”* (1 Kings 15:3). However, King Jehoshaphat was one of the exceptions. Of him God said, *“Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God.”* (2 Chronicles 19:3). His success in his reforms were hampered because *“the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers”* (2 Chronicles 20:33).



When it comes to serving God faithfully, Biodun Fatoyinbo said it well, “The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.” It is with our hearts that we reason (Mark 2:6). Actions and words first begin in the heart. They cannot be changed without first changing the heart. When Satan wants to bring a man down, he aims for the heart.

The Bible speaks of good hearts and bad hearts. There are hardened hearts (Ex. 17:15); evil hearts (Gen. 6:5; Heb. 3:12); deceitful hearts (Jer. 17:9); corrupt hearts (Eph. 4:18); and even blind hearts (Eph. 4:18). In fact, all sin originates from the heart. Jesus said, *“but those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies”* (Matthew 15:18-19).

One of the first steps in preparation for a heart transplant is to purify the heart of these defiling thoughts. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus implies that the guilt for murder does not begin just when the victim dies. Murder begins in the heart. *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment”* (Matthew 5:21,22). There are many who have enough hatred in their heart to murder their neighbor, but do not out of cowardice or fear of getting caught. Should such haters be considered righteous men and women. Those who feel secure in their goodness by bragging, “I’m not so bad a person, at least I have never killed anyone” are challenged to rethink their possible guilt. To understand that all haters of men are murderers shatters one’s self-illusions concerning their righteousness. Jesus also warned, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matthew 5:27,28). Like all sins, hatred, jealousy, envy, anger, etc., adultery begins in the heart before it is manifested in the flesh. As the hatred of the heart is murder, so is the unbridled lust of the heart considered adultery. Mere external obedience by lusting and not “going all the way” is in fact the disobedience of fornication in the mind. The heart is the spring from which all the thoughts, words, and deeds of man flow. Like it or not lusting after

a woman who is not your wife is mental adultery. As Paul explain to the Romans, circumcision must be of the heart, not the flesh (Romans 2:29).

If someone has a bad heart, it may require a heart transplant to save their life. The same is true of the spiritual heart. If it is bad, a heart transplant is necessary. In preparation for a new heart there are several things one must consider. First, **provide a place for only God**. Too many want to keep their own heart and have a new one as well. Others crowd their heart with many worldly desires and leave no room for God. If the heart is not exclusively for God, it is not a good heart. You have seen the bumper sticker which reads, "God is my co-pilot." If that is the case - move over. Unless He is the pilot, you are going nowhere. Samuel told Israel, *"If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines"* (1 Samuel 7:3). All sin must be removed for a heart transplant. And one must *"...love the Lord thy God with all thy heart..."* (Mt. 22:37).

Next, **pray for God's help** in transplanting a new heart within you. Zophar told Job, he needed to pray with a prepare heart to be restored to God's favor. *"If you would prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward Him"* (Job 11:13). A new heart involves stretching out our hands to God in prayer. *"Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; you will prepare their heart; you will cause Your ear to hear"* (Ps 10:17). King David prayed, *"O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward You"* (1 Ch. 29:18).

For a new heart one must **purpose in the heart** to avoid sin and serve God. As a young man this is what Daniel did when faced with a moral dilemma. *"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself"* (Daniel 1:8). It is with the heart that man purposes (2 Corinthians 9:7). The Psalmist sang, *"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise"* (Ps. 57:7).

A good heart will **prize the things of true spiritual value**. If one appreciates those things in heaven his heart will be there as well. *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:19-21). The "heart" is the mind. Our mind dwells on what is most important. If our investments are in earthly wealth our minds are carnal and earth bound. If our minds are focused on spiritual blessings our hearts are focused on Heaven. Paul told the Christians of the first century to *"set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Col. 3:2). One's attitudes and priorities concerning material possessions and spiritual blessings are strong indicators where their heart already has taken up residence.

"Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). A prepared heart is one that **pursues the knowledge and wisdom of God**. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding"* (Proverbs 3:5).

It does little good for one to just hear God's Word, they must also perform God's Will (Js. 1:22-25). Paul wrote, *"God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered."* (Romans 6:17).

To know the Truth, to obey God's Will is still not enough. A good heart will **present God's Will to others**. Ezra was a *"skilled scribe in the law of Moses"* and *"expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel"* (Ezra 7:6,11). Jesus shared the Truth in His parables. Some would never understand the mysteries of the kingdom. Why? It was a matter of unprepared hearts. *"But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience"* (Luke 8:15).

In time there arose a king who had a heart like David. It is said of Hezekiah that *"before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him"* (2 Kings 23:25). His heart was

totally given to God. *"And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered"* (2 Chron. 31:21). Hezekiah prayed once, *"The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God,..."*

Questions:

1. Why did God chose David to be anointed as king instead of his six older brothers?
2. What is said of King David's grandson, Rehoboam's heart?
3. What king stands in contrast to the heart of King David?
4. Why is the spiritual heart of a man the heart of the matter?
5. List the types of bad hearts mentioned in the Bible?
6. Can one be guilty before God of murder without killing someone? Explain.
7. Can a man or a woman become a spiritual adulterer without ever being with another person sexually outside of marriage? Explain.
8. Why must God have first place on the throne of one's heart?
9. How does a prepared or renewed heart influence our prayer life?
10. What does it mean to purpose in one's heart?

11. How can one keep his heart focused upon heaven?
12. How did Ezra prepare his heart?
13. Why did some of the disciples of Jesus fail to understand his parables?

Application & Discussion:

1. List the names of other Kings of Judah how had a heart like David's heart. What was their reign and relationship with God like?
2. What things need to be "circumcised" from a deviled heart? How?

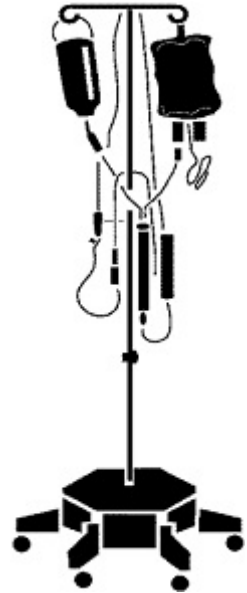
Homework: Work at transplanting the heart of Christ into your soul.

Have a Blood Transfusion

In recent years the power of the blood atonement as part of the Gospel message has been down played by several progressive denominations. They have gone so far as to remove many of the hymns from their hymnals which mention the blood.

The Wesleys founded the Methodist denomination. Out of 80 hymns the Wesleys wrote that were considered to be included in their hymnals, the word 'blood' appears 31 times. 25 of the hymns have a clear reference to the atonement; i.e.: 'His blood can make the vilest clean', 'There is a fountain filled with blood', 'What can wash away my sins, nothing but the blood of Jesus'. The Baptists and many other denominations use the Methodist's atonement hymns. Yet, a survey has shown that the Presbyterian (USA), Episcopal, Disciples, United Church of Canada, and United Church of Christ hymnals have now deleted songs about the blood atonement. Though many Methodists still sing these old hymns about the blood, the atonement is no longer preached from their pulpits. (Loren Davies).

Yet the Bible is clear that there is power in the blood and that nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ can atone for our sins.



The Power of Salvation is the Blood of Christ

The blood of the Son of God brings redemption. *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"* (Eph. 1:7 cf. Rom. 3:24,25; 1 Pet. 1:18,19). Redemption means "to loose,...of prisoners released by the payment of a ransom." It was also used of the price paid to buy a slave's freedom. Without the redeeming blood of the cross man is enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:17,18).

Remission of sin is found in the blood. Vine says remission is "a dismissal, release..." Christ had our debt of sin remitted by payment of His blood. *"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt. 26:28). Remission is another way of saying that one is forgiven by the Christ *"in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins"* (Col. 1:14).

To be justified is "to vindicate, to free from blame; declare guiltless; absolve" (Webster 766). God has justified man of his sins. The means of this justification is the blood of Christ. Paul wrote, *"much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him"* (Rom. 5:9). Man is guilty of sin (Ezek. 22:4; Rom. 5:8). He is under the sentence of death (Rom. 6:23). Justification frees man of condemnation (Rom. 8:33,34). We were acquitted of guilt by Christ's just offering of His blood for justice. Justification is an "acquittal by which God acquitted men of their guilt, on the conditions" (Vine, 614).

Sin separated man from God (Is. 59:1,2). Through sin man becomes a friend of the world and an enemy of God (Js. 4:3). He needs to find a way to be made friends with God once more. This is called "reconciliation" in the Bible (Eph. 2:13,16; Col. 1:20; Rom. 5:10). It means "to bring back to friendship after estrangement" (Funk & Wagnall's Standard Desk Dict., Vol. 2, p. 555). *"For if when 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. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:10,1).

Sin makes many unclean and defiled before God. He needs to be sanctified that is to be made holy and clean unto God. Sanctification means "to separate or to set apart" according to Young's Analytical Concordance. Just as the tabernacle, utensils, and priest were made holy by animal blood we are made holy by Christ's blood. *"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate"* (Heb. 13:12).

The blood of Christ is essential for washing away the sins of man. *"To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood"* (Rev. 1:5). This takes place at baptism (Acts 22:16).

According to the Hebrew writer the blood of Christ is necessary for man to have a good conscience before God. *"For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* (Heb. 9:13,14). Again this takes place at the point of water baptism (1 Pet. 3:21).

The Power to Purchase the Church Christ's Blood

Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus to *"take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"* (Acts 20:28). Every man of the church has been brought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20). The church of Christ is composed of a bunch of people belonging to Christ. Therefore, the church has been purchased with the blood of Christ. All Christians are blood brothers in Christ's Church.

Many today want to have Christ without His church. They want a relationship with the Head without being a part of the body. They do not believe the church is essential to their salvation or their way to Heaven. Denominational preachers continue to tell their members that they can be saved without ever becoming a member of the church. If they are talking about a denomination (church) which is man-made and purchased by mere mortal men, then they are correct. But the church in the New Testament is valuable because of its great price to purchase it. If one believes in the blood of Christ he must believe in His church. To make or be a part of a church not purchased by Christ's blood is to cheapen His blood. Christ only promised to purchase one church with His blood (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:4; cf.). Many work hard trying to separate the church from salvation saying that the church has nothing to do with salvation. Trying to be saved without the church is trying to be saved without Christ's blood.

The Power of the Covenant is the Blood of Christ

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed He was at the last supper with His disciples. He took the cup and said, *"for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt. 26:28). The New Covenant was ratified with the Blood of Christ as was the earlier covenants of God, such as, the Noahic covenant (Gen. 8:20), the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15), and the Mosaic covenant (Heb. 9:18-21; Ex. 24:8). Concerning the New Covenant the Hebrew writer adds *"now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant"* (Heb. 13:20).

To belittle the New Covenant is to belittle Christ's blood (Heb. 10:29). Some say it does not matter what doctrines one believes as long as he accepts the blood of Christ. If what one believes and practices in religion is not in the covenant of Christ, if it is not authorized by Christ in the New Covenant, and it is not under the blood of Christ, it is therefore wrong. Trying to be saved apart from the teachings of the New Covenant is trying to be saved without the New Covenant. Trying to be saved without the New Covenant is trying to be saved apart from the blood of Christ.

The Power of Continual Cleansing is the Blood of Christ

Since the Bible does not teach “once saved, always saved” the Christian can so sin as to be lost in sin once more. If he repents and confesses his sin, God will forgive him. *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn. 1:7). The problem: all men sin even Christians (Rom. 3:23). The solution: blood of Christ continually cleansing those who repent and confess their sins. Cleansing by the Blood of Christ is conditioned upon: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us”* (1 John 1:8-10).

Blood has a continual cleansing ability in the body. Not only does blood provide oxygen and nutrients to body tissue, but it also cleans the tissue. Red blood cells absorb carbon dioxide, uraea, and uric acid from the body and take away these dangerous substances to places in the body where they can be disposed. Carbon dioxide is exhaled through the lungs and the other substances are filtered out through the kidneys. Without the cleansing action of the blood, our muscles would experience cramps that would incapacitate us. The white blood cells in our body help to destroy things foreign to our bodies that would injure us. In like manner the blood of Christ takes away sin, destroys things contrary to the life of the Christian, and bathes us in spiritual nutrients to take their place.

Application of the Blood of Christ

To be saved one must come into contact with the Blood of Christ. We cannot come in contact with His literal blood. His blood was shed in His death (Jn. 19:34). However, we can be baptized into His death to come in contact with His blood. Those who feel they do not have to be baptized into Christ's death to be saved do not believe one must come in contact with the blood of Christ which was shed in His death in order for them to be saved. Consider the comparison between what the blood of Christ does and what water baptism does in the list that follows:

- Christ's blood gives remission or forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14). Baptism gives remission or forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).
- Christ's blood purchased the church (Acts 20:28). Baptism purchased Christians adding them to the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rev. 5:9).
- Christ's blood washes away sin (Rev. 1:5; 7:14). Baptism washes away sin (Acts 22:16).
- Christ's blood gives a good conscience (Heb. 9:13,14) Baptism gives a good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21).
- Christ's blood provides sanctification (Heb. 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:2). Baptism provides sanctification (1 Cor. 6:11).
- Christ's blood provides justification (Rom. 3:24,25; 5:9). Baptism provides justification (1 Cor. 6:11).
- Christ's blood provides reconciliation to God (Eph. 2:13,16; Rom 5:10). Baptism provides reconciliation (Gal. 3:27).

Faithful Christians must believe in the blood, others do not. Those who reject the blood bought church of Christ do not respect the blood. Those who reject the blood inaugurated Covenant of Christ don't believe in the Blood Those who teach once saved always saved reject His blood's continual cleansing power. Those who reject baptism reject the saving power of His blood. Hence, they reject salvation. These need to be careful lest they have *“counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”* (Heb. 10:29b).

Questions:

1. True False Nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ can atone for our sins.
2. ___ Remission a. "to bring back to friendship after estrangement"
3. ___ Sanctification b. baptism
4. ___ Reconciliation c. "a dismissal, release..."
5. ___ Redemption d. "to vindicate, to free from blame; declare guiltless; absolve"
6. ___ Wash Away Sins e. "to loose,...of prisoners released by the payment of a ransom."
7. ___ Justify f. "to separate or to set apart"
8. How did Christ purchase the church?
9. True False A church purchase with the blood, sweat and tears of men is just as good as the church of the New Testament which was purchased with the blood of Christ.
10. What did Jesus mean when he mentioned "my blood of the new covenant"?
11. How does a Christian cleanse himself of sin by the blood of Christ? Does he have to be re-baptized? Explain.
12. List the purchasing power of the blood of Christ?

Application & Discussion:

1. What do you think some denominations are removing songs about the atoning blood of Jesus from their hymnals?
2. How is the blood of Christ superior to that of animals blood when sacrificed?

Homework: Think about the power of the blood of Christ when you partake of the Lord's Supper, witness a baptism, and study the Word.

Develop a Healthy Appetite

To have no appetite for food is every dieters dream. However, it has meant death for those who are starving. A medical missionary in a refugee camp during one of the great famines in China was taking simple medicines to the sufferers; and as she made the rounds of the miserable straw matt shelters, within which the starving people hungered on the cold ground, she turned to a colleague with a startled expression and said, "Do you know what most of them are saying? They complain of a lack of appetite! Even when they get a bowl of rice from our relief station, they have no appetite." These famine victims were not hungry, because they were starving. They had passed the stage of desire for food. This story portrays very accurately the state of many souls. Some people are starving to death spiritually and unaware that anything is wrong with them. Just like the starving people in the camp it is a blessing just to have an appetite for righteousness as well as, food. When coming to the kingdom of God an appetite for righteousness is a must. Those with such a hunger or thirst will not be sent away famished or parched. Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:6).



The Urgency of Appetite

Few Christians in America today truly know of the kind of hunger Jesus is speaking about. It is not the hunger satisfied by a mid-morning snack or a midnight glass of milk. A sip from the drinking fountain will not satisfy the thirst of which He speaks. When we talk about hunger it is because it is lunch time. When we talk of thirst it is because of a little bit of dryness in the mouth. The words used by Jesus describe a man who is painfully hungry and agonizingly parched. The Greek terms mean "to suffer hunger, to be famished, to crave after" (Liddell-Scott) and "to suffer thirst, suffer from thirst" (Thayer).

Hunger and thirst are possibly the two strongest feelings in the human experience. A good appetite is usually a mark of good health. They are signs of life. Dead men need no food; they crave no water. Without the righteousness of God we are spiritually dead. A sick person or one who is emotionally disturbed often refuses nourishment. A healthy baby instinctively has strong desire for milk. Healthy Christians should also have a strong appetite (1 Pet 2:2). As a man crossing a desert in the heat of the summer sun crawls with a feeble cry for "water, water". The Psalmist captures the meaning well *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God"* (Ps. 42:1) and *"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water"* (Ps. 63:1).

Working up an Appetite

How can you assess your appetite for spiritual food? Thomas Guthrie gives us some warning signals to be on the alert for: "If you find yourself loving any pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than the Bible, any house better than the house of God, any table better than the Lord's table, and persons better than Christ, or any indulgence better than the hope of heaven - take alarm."

What can be done to work up an appetite for righteousness?

■ **Come to Christ**

When the Samaritan woman came to Jacob's well to draw water one day she had no idea she was about to receive spiritual water from the Son of God. She had several husbands and the man she was with at the time she met Jesus was not her husband. Only Jesus could have given her that living water. Only by coming to Him and learning of this water did she cultivate a thirst (John 4:1-26).

The prodigal son wasted his inheritance on iniquitous delights. A rich Jewish boy reduced to being a feeder of swine. Facing starvation he longed for the pig's food. At this point he came to himself. Realizing his desperate condition without his father he headed for home. His needs were fulfilled finding himself fed a fatted calf feast (Lk 15:14-18). Only Jesus is *"the Bread of Life"* (Jn. 6:35) and the *"living water"* (Jn. 4:10). By following Him we will develop an appetite for His righteousness. Like the 5000 He will not send us away fainting from hunger.

■ **Get Moving**

Nothing will work up an appetite like hard work. Busy people have better appetites. Jesus said, *"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him"* (Jn. 6:27).

■ **Develop a Taste for Truth**

A pile of hot steaming broccoli with a little bit of butter and salt and no cheese. Sounds delicious if you have a taste for it like I do. As a child I hated it. It was the only thing my dad would not eat. How did I come to love it? My mom tricked me into loving broccoli. She would put a small portion on my plate and say "Just eat a little bit of it. Try it you might like it." In time a taste for broccoli was developed.

God does not thrust the truth down our throats. The character of the Gospel is not coercive, but convincing. That is why some brethren have cabinets full of Bibles, workbooks, commentaries...but no appetite. However, sometimes God will urge us to give it "a little taste." Perhaps, a loss, a conflict, a health problem or a tragedy will spark our interest in spiritual matters. A man one day was blinded by an explosion on his job. He could not read. No one could read to him because he was left deaf by the blast. Braille was out the question because the blast destroyed the nerves in the ends of his fingers. In his dark, silent and maimed world he longed for comfort. He was given a braille Bible which he learned to read with the tip of his tongue. And for the next sixty-three years of his life he read the Bible from cover to cover with the tip of his tongue. Surely, he developed a taste for God's Word. Jesus said, *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'"* (Matt. 4:4).

■ **Worship Him**

If you hang out in a donut shop you will most like eat a lot of donuts. If you work at delivering pizzas you will eat a lot of pizza. We tend to eat what is available. We also tend to be interested in the food others are enjoying. The same is true about our spiritual appetite. If you attend worship services you are more likely to develop a hunger and thirst for righteousness. One seeking righteousness would not have to be begged to worship (Ps. 122:1). Those who long to being with the "Bread of Life" and the "Living Water" will be at services because that is where Christ has promised to be (Matt. 18:20). To miss worship is to feel empty and dry. People who attend church only on Easter and Christmas are not hungry for righteousness.

■ **Desire for the Word Like a Baby Desire Milk**

One man began by saying, "I'm so hungry I could eat a cow." The second man, joined in "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse." "I'm so hungry I could eat a bear", countered another. Not to be out done the fourth man said, "I'm so hungry I could eat two alligators and an anaconda." A woman who over heard the conversation said, "I think I just lost my appetite."

How can we rid ourselves of spiritual junk food and come out of wicked spiritual anorexia and emaciation? Cultivate an appetite for the pure milk of the Word. After first putting off the malice, deceit and hypocrisies of our former life we must replace our appetite for sin with an craving for God's Word.

Our appetite for spiritual food must be like the desire that a newborn would have for real milk. *“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious”* (1 Peter 2:2-3). Many mistake this passage as referring to new converts. However, we are to have a desire for God’s Word like babies crave milk. You have been around a newborn who is hungry. There is only one thing you can do to stop the crying - give it milk. When you hunger for God’s Word like that you will grow. Even grown Christians must continue to cultivate this intense appetite for the Scriptures.

If a baby loses its appetite and stops eating you know something is wrong. The same is true of the Christian. Often the appetite can be dulled by gobbling up spiritual junk food. We fill our souls with TV, magazines, sports, etc. Even preaching that tickles the itching ears of the audience can be spiritual junk food which only nourishes self-centeredness.

On the menu is the Word of God. The spiritual manna from Heaven. Keep in mind that Peter is not referring to the *“milk of the Word”*, that is, the fundamental facts of Christianity. The Psalmist found the Word of God sweet, *“How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way”* (Psalm 119:13,14).

The purpose of a baby’s intense appetite for milk is for it to grow physically. The reason we need such an appetite is to grow spiritually toward salvation. Salvation refers not to our present condition but to the hope of eternal life in the future. Through the Word the Christian grows toward his goal - Heaven.

If your mother has ever placed a new dish on the table you will be encouraged to taste it with these words, “Try it, you’ll like it.” Peter’s argument is not: “try the Word to see if you like it”. Instead He is saying, if you have already in the past experienced the gracious heavenly gift you will naturally have an appetite for the Word. It is a taste that excites the appetite. “Since you have tasted that the Lord is good, continue to feed on His Word.” Someone has said that Christianity is like Campbell’s soup it is “mmm, mmm, good”.

Reward for a Good Appetite

The term *“filled”* is a very strong and graphic word, originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals in a stall. The root of the Greek term means “fodder” or “grass”. We will become so spiritually satisfied that we will be like hefty, well-fed cattle. It implies a complete satisfaction. One who is filled to the point of having to loosen their belt or not able to take another sip.

If a man dies of spiritual starvation, it will not occur because God did not prepare the meal. God’s buffet table is never empty. His wells never run dry.

Questions:

1. How powerful of a hunger or thirst is represented by the Greek terms used in Matt. 5:6?
2. How does the Bible illustrate the hunger and thirst saints are to have?
3. List those things which spoil one's spiritual appetite.

4. What can one do to work up an appetite for righteousness?
5. What does the word "*filled*" mean in this context?
6. True False If a man dies of spiritual starvation, it will occur because God did not provide spiritual food to satisfy his needs.
7. True False Verse two of 1 Peter chapter two is talking about the newborn Christian not the mature Christian.
8. What are some things a Christian can do to cultivate a strong spiritual appetite?
9. What is the "pure milk of the Word"?
10. What is the end result of a healthy spiritual appetite?

Application and Discussion:

1. What goodness have you tasted from God's Word?
2. What personally helps you work up a spiritual appetite?

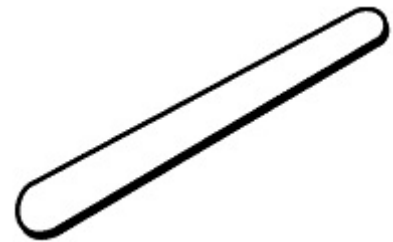
Homework: Skip a meal (fast) and read your Bible/feed your soul. Is this too radical? Think of how often you starve your soul and stuff your belly.

Stick Out Your Tongue

Have you heard the fable of the king and the menu? A king once asked his cook to prepare for him the best dish in the world, and he was served a dish of tongue. The King then asked for the worst dish in the world, and again was served tongue. "Why do you serve me the same food as both the best and the worst?" the perplexed monarch asked. "Because, your majesty," the cook replied, "the tongue is the best of things when used wisely and lovingly, but it is the worst of things when used carelessly and unkindly."

Remember the children's song:

Be careful little tongue what you tell,
For the Father up above
Is looking down in love,
So be careful little tongue what you tell.



Once more James warns the saints of the proper use of the tongue. First, it has the power to direct others in teach. Not everyone should be a teacher because of their inability to properly communicate (3:1). Teachers of God's Word will affect many lives. Therefore they must speak the truth in love, live what they teach. While teaching others they must realize they themselves will be judged by others and by God. An effective teacher will present reliable content, demonstrate competence, and exemplify godly character (2 Timothy 2:2).

Teachers can stumble in their words just like anyone else. Many fail to control their tongues. James compares the controlled tongue to that of a bridled horse. *"Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body"* (3:3). Secondly, he compares it to the rudder on a large ship (3:4). In World War II slogans were posted to remind people that "Loose lips sink ships." Giving information out about a ship's departure time to just anyone could allow a spy to give away the location and time to a u-boat and sink the ship. *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue"* (Prov. 18:21).

Tongues also have the power to destroy like a fire (3:5). A little fire can destroy a city. Consider the great Chicago Fire on October 8th, 1871. It all started when a milk cow kicked over a lantern. The tongue is a world of iniquity – sum total of unrighteousness. It defiles the entire body – small muscle corrupts whole body. It sets on fire the course of our life – corrupts one's entire life. It is set on fire by Hell – fire punished with fire. One hundred and twenty-five lives were lost per each word written in Hitler's Mein Kampf. Control the tongue by not feeding the fire. *"Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife"* (Prov. 26:20-21).

The tongue has power to destroy like a wild animal. Until it is tamed it is dangerous (3:7).

The tongue has the destructive power of poison like that of a snake (3:8). *"They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips"* (Ps. 140:3). Man cannot control the tongue on his own. The problem with the tongue begins in the heart. *"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life"* (Prov. 4:23). God can tame the tongue by changing the heart. *"With God all things are possible"* (Matt. 19:26).

The tongue can bring forth both blessings and curses. *"With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed*

blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so" (3:9,10). The tongue has both the power to destroy and provide blessings like a fountain of fresh water (3:11). *"The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked"* (Prov. 10:11). *"The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook"* (Prov. 18:4). *"The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death"* (Prov. 13:14).

Like a fruit tree the tongue has the power to provide goodness to others who hear encouraging words (3:12b).

Fiery Tongues

It is said that for every word in Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*, 125 people died in World War II. Solomon was right: *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue"* (Pr. 18:21). And *"Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles"* (Proverbs 21:23). The Bible warns of the types of tongues that are a danger to the spiritual health of those who possess it.

- **Flattering Tongue**

The English word "flatter" comes from a French word that means "to stroke or caress with the flat of the hand." It is used as a tool to obtain something from someone else by appealing to their sense of pride. What makes the flattering tongue so dangerous is that the motive of the speaker is self-center and deceitful *"He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue"* (28:33). To put it simply, flattery is a form of lying.

All of us love to hear something go about ourselves coming from the mouth of someone else. However, out of the mouth of a flatterer, compliments bring ruin and do not help build us up. A true friend will give criticism as well as compliments.

- **Fault-Finding Tongue**

After Job had lost everything, his friends came to help him make sense of it all. However, all they could do is search for the faults in Job (Job 32:10-18). With friends like that who needs enemies. The truth was Job was innocent. His so-called friends did not even want to allow that as a possibility.

Find fault is easy. Fixing problems can be very difficult. Dealing with fault finders is even more difficult. The following story demonstrates how one man dealt with a fault-finding tongue.

Two Christian men "fell out." One heard that the other was talking against him, and he went to him and said: "will you be kind enough to tell my faults to my face, that I may profit by your Christian candor and try to get rid of them?" "Yes," replied the other, "I will." They went aside, and the former said: "Before you commence telling what you think wrong in me, will you kneel with me and pray, that my eyes may be opened to see my faults as you cite them? You lead in prayer?" It was done, and when the prayer was over, the man who had sought the interview said: "now please proceed with your complaints of me." "After praying over it, it looks so little that it is not worth talking about," the other replied "The truth is I have been serving the devil myself, and have need that you pray for me, and forgive me the wrong I have done you."

On the other hand consider the poem "When to find Fault", which be aid the man who struggles with a fault finding tongue.

Don't find fault with the man who limps
Or stumbles along life's road,
Unless you have worn the shoes he wears,
Or struggled beneath his load.
There may be tacks in the shoes that hurt,
though hidden away from our view.
The burden he bears, if placed on your back
Might cause you to stumble, too.

Don't be too hard on the man who errs,
or pelt him with wood or stone,
Unless you are sure-yea, double sure,
that you have no fault of your own.

- **Factional Tongue**

"The Lord hates . . . one who sows discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16,19). Why is this type of tongue listed among seven things which God hates and considers an abomination. First, arguments and striving tear down relationship between men. Some even argue out of habit. The tongue has the power to separate marriages, children from their parents, nations from nation, friends from friends, etc. In contrast, the tongue can be used to heal instead of hurt. *"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"* (Prov. 15:1).

- **Foolish Chattering Tongue**

Gossip is one of the greatest problems some folks have is taming the tongue. Oh, how they "love to tell the story". I read once about a church in Red Cloud, Nebraska, which listed the sermon topic as "Gossip." Right after that on the program was the song, "I Love To Tell The Story."

"Talebearer" is the translation of Hebrew word that means "to go about," and is probably derived from a word meaning "merchant." Thus, the gossip goes about like a merchant with his wares trying to find an eager ear to hear his tales. However, the consequences can be grave *"An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire. A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends"* (Prov. 16:27,28).

Remember, to gossip does not mean to lie. Just because it is true doesn't mean it has to be said. Just because it is true does lessen the seriousness of the sin of gossip. In a small town there was an obnoxious busybody who made life miserable for her neighbors by constantly prying into their affairs. She was the cause of much ill will and grief in the one church of the town, which most of the people attended. What a problem when was to the preacher. He finally tried to show her the harm she was doing. Defensively she said, "What I do isn't half of the bad as Mrs. _____ does. She gets high at cocktail parties." After expressing his disapproval of cocktail parties, the preacher courageously said, "God's Word classes one who constantly meddles with murderers, thieves and evildoers" (1 Peter 4:15).

So live that you won't be afraid to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.

- **False Tongue**

Nothing is more destructive and hurtful to others than lying. *"The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. ...Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight"* (Prov. 12:19;22). This type of tongue can be found on false teachers, salesman, "lovers", etc.

The problem with those little white lies is that they tend to grow into big black ones.

A Faithful Tongue

Finally the type of tongue we have all been longing for, the faithful tongue. It is easily identified by its wise counsel and sound advice (Prov. 15:7); its reproof, rebuke, and spiritual exhortation (Prov. 15:31,32; 27:6); its words of encouragement (Prov. 16:24) and even a good sense of humor (Prov. 15:13,14). When we speak our words are to be chosen well in order to build one another up. Just as a man builds a house of cards. His careful choices and moves determines how high the paper edifice will rise.

Have you ever been to the doctor and they ask you to stick out your tongue? Some use a tongue depressor so they can look at the back of your throat. Years ago doctors could look at the condition of your tongue to assess your overall health. As a doctor has the patient stick out their tongue because it can reveal their state of health, so the way we use our tongues reveals the health of our heart and soul. Christians need to examine their tongues to see how healthy they are or whether they are spiritually ill.

Questions:

1. What are the qualities of a "*perfect man*" in James 3:2?
2. What two small things are used to control that which is more powerful and larger? How does this relate to the tongue?
3. What is used to illustrate the dangerous power of the tongue in verse five?
4. What are the consequences of an out of control tongue?
5. Is James saying it is impossible to control the tongue? Explain.
6. Why should the tongue not be used to curse our fellow man according to verse nine of James chapter three?
7. What five illustrations from nature does James use to show the folly of blessings and cursings coming from the same tongue?
8. Why do we love the flattering tongue?
9. What should a Christian do before finding fault with another?
10. What kinds of damage can a factional tongue do?

11. Give a good Biblical definition of "gossip"?

12. When is lying acceptable before God?

Application and Discussion:

1. List things involved in taming the tongue?

2. What are some good/positive uses of the tongue?

Homework: Whenever you catch yourself this coming week misusing and failing to use your tongue properly stop and pray about it.

Eye Exam

Elisha and his servant were surrounded by a Syrian army which had been sent to arrest them. Elisha's servant was horrified when and saw them. The prophet was not afraid for he could see that *"the angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them"* (Psalm 34:7). *"And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, open his eyes that he may see. Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and Chariots of fire all around Elisha'"* (2 Kings 6:17). God then struck the Syrians with blindness and they escaped.

God has perfect vision. He can see what we do not. Hagar called God El Roi, *"the God Who Sees"* (Genesis 16:13). Solomon observed, *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good"* (Proverbs 5:3). Our vision is imperfect. *"... What is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God"* (Luke 16:15).

Men and God do not see eye to eye. We are blind to many of the things which are evident to God. The solution to this problem is to trust God's vision. A blind man realizes that he cannot see, so he chooses one he trusts to be his eyes. A wise man knowing the limitations of his spiritual sight, puts his trust not in his own eyes, but walks *"by faith and not by sight"* (2 Corinthians 5:7). If only we could see this world through the eyes of God.

Seeing Sin as God Sees it

Humanity has had the long standing habit of considering sin a sickness. The famous attorney Clarence Darrow delivered the following address to the prisoners in the Cook County Jail.

There is no such thing as a crime as the word is generally understood. I do not believe there is any sort of distinction between the real moral conditions of the people in and out of jail. One is just as good as the other. The people here can no more help being here than the people outside can avoid being outside. I do not believe people are in jail because they deserve to be. They are in jail simply because they cannot avoid it on account of circumstances which are entirely beyond their control and for which they are in no way responsible...If you look at the questions deeply enough and carefully enough you will see that there were circumstances that drove you to do exactly the thing which you did. You could not help it...

Thus, to man sin is not a choice, but a circumstance beyond his control.

God, on the other hand, sees sin as an abomination. He sees how ugly sin is and thus hates it (Proverbs 6:16-19). The only way we can truly *"Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good"* (Romans 12:9) is to see sin for the dark, grotesque horror that it really is.

Seeing Money as God Sees it

Christopher Winans, in his book, Malcolm Forbes: *The Man Who Had Everything*, tells of a



motorcycle tour that Forbes took through Egypt in 1984 with his Capitalist Tool motorcycle team. After viewing the staggering burial tomb of King Tut, Forbes seemed to be in a reflective mood. As they were returning to the hotel in a shuttle bus, Forbes turned to one of his associates and asked with all sincerity: "Do you think I'll be remembered after I die?" Forbes is remembered. He is remembered as the man who coined the phrase, "He who dies with the most toys wins." Although most would say they reject this philosophy of life, the way they spend their lives betrays them. Jesus warned that one's life does not consist in his possessions (Luke 12:15). He asked, *"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"* (Matthew 16:26). Many people think money is security, but I Timothy 6:9 warns that it can be just the opposite. *"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."* A godly view of money would result in the worshipers of the dollar in which they trust to turn to trusting in God instead.

Seeing Our Body as God Sees it

When you look into the mirror at your body what do you see? Obviously, most people don't see what God sees. A modern woman views her body as her own. An unwanted fetus is merely an unwanted growth of tissue. Abortion is the simple solution. However, God sees a living soul. Others see nothing wrong with exposing their half naked bodies. God sees the shame of nakedness. Whether it be drinking, drunks or fornication modern man perceives nothing ugly or sinister. Paul warned the Corinthians, *"Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Where man sees a toy for pleasure or a possession of his own, God sees the body as a temple. All must thus view their bodies as a gift from God and part of their stewardship to care for properly.

Seeing Marriage as God Sees it

Our perception of marriage has changed over the years. During the 1920's adultery could be punishable by imprisonment in the state of California. Now, states are struggling with the idea of marriage between homosexuals.

From the beginning God has set forth the guidelines for the marital relationship. He made ONE man and made ONE woman for that man. They two become ONE flesh in marriage (Gen. 2:24). They are joined for ONE life-time not to be separated, save ONE exception and that is adultery (Mt. 19:6-9). Divorce is something that God hates. When we see divorce, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, adultery, through the eyes of God and not via the glamorizing of Hollywood, we too will hate all these perversions.

Seeing the Church as God Sees it

Premillennialists see the church as a mere afterthought on the part of God when His Son failed to establish the kingdom the first time He was here. Yet, the Bible declares that it has been an important part of God's eternal plan (Eph. 3:10,11).

Others consider the church as non-essential to salvation. They argue, "I don't need a church so long as I have Jesus". In contrast, God sees...

- Jesus as the Head of the Church and the church as His body, Col. 1:18.
- Jesus as the bridegroom and the church as His bride, Eph. 5:22ff.
- Jesus as the Redeemer and the church as the redeemed.
- Jesus as the sacrifice and the church purchased with His blood, Ac. 20:28.

To have Jesus without the church is to have a head without a body; a bridegroom without a bride; a

Redeemer who has no one to redeem; and a sacrifice without blood.

One of the most popular modern arguments is that the church's mission is to minister to the whole man his spiritual, social, emotional, mental, and physical needs. Adherents to this social gospel see a church kitchen and Fellowship Hall, whereas God sees a spiritual meal with our own homes to be used to eat our common meals (1 Cor. 11:17ff). They see a gym for edification and He sees Apostles, prophets, elders, teachers, preachers for the building up of the saints and the perfection of the body (Eph. 4:8-16). If Jesus returned to some churches today he would make a cord and drive out the ball teams and cooks, saying, *"My father made this a house of prayer and you have turned it into a country club and glorified restaurant."*

Seeing with the eyes of God would result in many taking a new look at the importance of the church in the scheme of redemption.

To see with the eyes of God requires you to do nothing more and nothing less than to look into His Word. If you do, it may give you a whole new outlook on life.

Questions:

1. How good is God's eyesight?
2. Why is it important for us to see like God does?
3. How will we react when we see sin as God does?
4. What is your most valuable possession? Why?
5. Men and women see their bodies as theirs to do with however they choose. How do a Christians view their bodies?
6. What are the difference between how modern man views marriage and how God does?
7. What does God think of divorce?
8. Contrast the Premillennial view of the church with God's view?

9. Is the New Testament church essential to salvation? Explain.
10. How is the Social Gospel in conflict with God's vision for the New Testament church?

Application & Discussion:

1. How does God see worship vs. how the world sees it (John 4:23-24; Lev. 10:1-3)?
2. How do men see truth vs. how God does (John 17:17)?
3. How do men view the importance of the Bible vs. God's view (2 Timothy 3:16-17)?

Homework: Start looking at everything through the eyes of God and see how well your spiritual vision will improve.

Strength Assessment

Today, is the day of muscle worship. Physical strength, financial might, and intellectual potency are very appealing. With strength comes a sense of security and power. Which of these are the most appealing depends on personal ambitions. There is another type strength: spiritual strength. Just as physical strength is necessary for physical labor, the child of God needs spiritual strength to render service to God.

The Source of Spiritual Strength

Man cannot be the source of our strength. Strength can only be of service to God when it is wisely directed. Human efforts no matter how powerful necessitate Divine guidance. Whatever strengths a person has, he tends to direct them against God (Job 17:25) by strengthening himself in wickedness (Ps. 147:13).

Ancient man trusted in the strength of his weapons. The horse was seen as the strongest weapon (Ps. 147:10). Today, it is the gun. Carnal weapons are not the source of a godly man's strength.

The Psalmist said, "*God is my strength*" (Ps. 18:1,2). God is the only source of true strength (Is. 40:29). This strength is everlasting (Is. 26:4). Samson's physical strength came from God. Yet he did not always use it to glorify God (Judges 15:17-19).

Christ is the source of our strength as Christians. Paul claimed, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" (Phil 4:13). It is found in His name (Acts 3:16). We wear his name as "Christians."

Even the Holy Spirit is said to be a source of our strength as Christians (Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11). After all, The Holy spirit is God.

As a result of the saints' fellowship with God they are in fellowship with one another. Christians can strengthen one another. In a moment of weakness Peter denied the Lord three times. Jesus prophesied that this would happen and had told Peter "*I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren*" (Luke 22:32). Paul "*went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples*" (Acts 18:23).

The means by which we are strengthened and can strengthen others is through the Word of God (1 John 2:14; 1 Pet. 5:8). Jesus demonstrated the power of the Word in defeating the temptations of Satan (Matt. 4:1-11).



Necessity of Becoming Strong

Strength is necessary In order to lead God's people. God told Moses, "*be strong and of good courage*" (1 Chron 22:13). Moses told Joshua, "*be strong and of good courage*" (Deut 31:7). The phrase "*be strong and of good courage*" is found three times in the first chapter of Joshua. "*Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them...Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go...Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and*

of good courage" (1:6,9,18). Joshua also told the people *"be strong and of good courage"* (Josh 10:25). David told Solomon *"be strong and of good courage"* (1 Chron 28:20). Hezekiah told Israel, *"be strong and courageous"* (2 Chron 32:7). Paul told the Corinthians, *"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong"* (1 Cor 16:13). Being strong is a command of God to all saints.

To live the Christian life requires strength. We are to love God with all our strength (Mark 12:30). It takes strength to adjust to the circumstances of life. Paul knew many discomforts (2 Cor. 11:23-29). He knew about hunger and thirst; cold and inadequate clothing; on the other hand, he knew about the strength and courage from the Lord. Regardless of the circumstance in which he found himself, it was by the help of God he could accomplish what God wanted him to do. Paul said, *"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content"* (Phil 4:11). He needed the courage and boldness to preach the Gospel (Phil. 1:19,20). Without Christ man is without strength against sin (Rom. 5:6). As Christian we have the strength to overcome the bondage of sin.

One of the greatest needs for strength is dealing with temptation. Joseph demonstrates the strength to overcoming trials and temptation. Rejected by his brothers he was sold into slavery. He rose to chief steward in the household of Potiphar. When tempted to have sex with Potiphar's wife who would not leave him alone, he as a young man found the strength to consistently say "NO!" He went to prison for being strong and brave in the face of temptation. Another man of strength who said no when faced with trials was Nehemiah. He was tempted by his enemies to be led away from the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Several times he was asked to meet them in the valley of Ono. He knew they meant to hinder the work of the Lord. He was strong enough to say "OH NO!" to Ono. Today, God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength (1 Cor. 10:13). He can deliver us from temptations (Matt. 6:13).

Building Up Spiritual Strength

Proper evaluation of our strength is important to knowing where we are weak and need strengthening. Courage is an important part of one's strength. Cowards may be just as physically strong as the brave, but they use their strength to run away. The brave use their strength to standfast. The term *"stand"* is found three times in Ephesians six (verses 11,13,14). To make this possible the Christian is told to put on the whole armor of God, so they can stand: the shield of faith; the belt of truth; the helmet of salvation; breastplate of righteousness; feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; and finally the sword of the spirit. With these a Christian will have the strength to make his stand against the enemies of God. The phrase *"that you may be able"* also appears three times in the context (Eph. 6:11,13,16). The courage never to enter this battle with a defeatist attitude. The victory is to be expected. The victory is the Lord's. However, without His armor which is the best, it will be of little value if there is a coward inside. In addition to this armor is the Christian soldier's ability to communicate with Heavenly headquarters through prayer. *"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"* (Eph 6:18).

Paul found it through suffering with a thorn in the flesh. Jesus would not remove it even after three prayers, but told Paul, *"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 distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Cor 12:9-10). Later, Paul reminds Timothy of their spiritual relationship as father and son and commands you to *"be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:1).

There are many other ways strength can be found. Worship is an hour of power which can strengthen the saint throughout the week. God is not locked up inside church buildings on Sunday night. The Word of God is the source of great strengthening. Lifting the Bible up and studying it will build strength. The Psalmist wrote, *"my soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word"* (Psalms 119:28).

Questions:

1. What is the worldly man's source of strength?
2. What is God the only true source of Spiritual strength?
3. How did Samson misuse his God given strength?
4. What can a Christian do with the strength that comes from Christ?
5. List some men in the Bible who used their strength to lead others.
6. For what does a Christian need to use his strength?
7. What is the Christian soldier to put on to make his stand?
8. True False Prayers are not a good source of spiritual strength.
9. What strengthened Paul when dealing with the thorn in his flesh?
10. How does the Word of God empower us?

Application & Discussion:

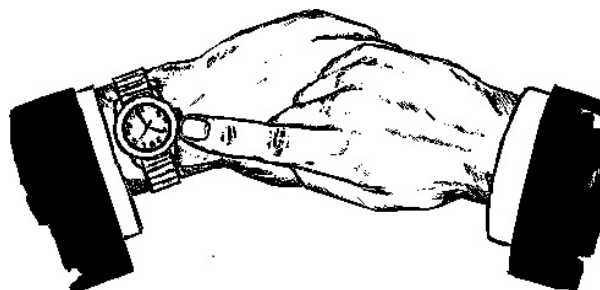
1. What are some things you can do to strengthen your fellow brethren?
2. How do the five acts of worship strength us?

Homework: Access your strength in resisting temptations, knowledge of the Word, etc. Find ways to strengthen areas of personal weakness.

Becoming More Regular

If you are an average adult of average height and weight there are several things your body must accomplish every twenty-four hours:

- Your heart beats 103,689 times
- Your blood travels 168,000,000 miles
- You breathe 23,040 times
- You inhale 438 cubic feet of air.
- You eat 3.25 pounds of food
- You drink 2.9 quarts of liquids
- You move 750 muscles
- You exercise 7,000,000 brain cell.
- You speak 4,800 words, including some unnecessary ones



No wonder men and women feel tired just existing day to day. However, you cannot take a day off. If you didn't do these things every day with proper regularity you would die.

When a small boy my mother would taking me to the doctor's from time to time when I was too sick to get well with home remedies. Every time I would go to an appointment the nurse or doctor would ask me when the last time I had a bowel movement. I had no idea what they were taking about. So I whispered the question in my mother's ear. She whispered back what they were really asking about. Since my mother had been a nurse before she got married I asked her on the way home why they need to know about my personal business. She informed me that being regular informed them of my health. Well, we need to be regular in our spiritual life in order to be sound of spirit.

Regular in Attendance

Roman soldiers were required as far as possible, to return to Rome once a year from wherever garrisoned to renew the oath of allegiance to the Emperor. Attendance at the Lord's Supper is the Christians's salute of allegiance. As a member of a local congregation one has promised to commit his money, time, houses, automobiles to the Lord and His church. This requires us to show up and to show up on time. If Christ is first in the life of a Christian, not only will he show up on time, but he will show up with his lesson prepared. Not only will he show up to worship, but he will be ready to give of his means. Cheerful and liberal giving requires one to first give themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Because of this attitude many Jewish Christians were willing to sacrifice even their lands and houses in order to meet the needs of their brethren (Ac. 4:34,35).

Why make the time to attend the services of the local church? First, because there is authority from God commanding us to attend every service. A Christian is *"not [to be] forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25). Just think what you might miss by forsaking just one service. When Christ appeared to His disciples on the evening of the first day of the week on which Christ had risen. Thomas was absent. What joy! In one day their despair had been replaced by overwhelming joy. But Thomas wasn't with them. Thomas didn't believe because he missed. Thomas was present the Lord's Day following and witnessed the risen Lord Himself, thus having evidence to

believe. He exclaimed, *"My Lord and my God"* (See Jn. 20:19-25). Since Heaven is a place of continuous worship, worship on earth is a rehearsal for Heaven. Attendance therefore helps prepare us for heaven. The decision to attend does not have to be made each Sunday or Wednesday, because that decision had been made already when I decided I was going to do all I can to get to heaven. If you do not have time to worship God here you will not be given the opportunity to worship Him there. Those who do not want to face God in church will not have a choice whether or not they face Him in Judgment. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10).

Regular in Bible Study

As in most things you only get out of Bible study what you put into it. God is more impressed with a well used and worn out Bible than He is a well kept, but unused Bible. The apostle Paul gives us the following piece of advice concerning the proper use of our Bibles. *"Study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed but rightly dividing the word of truth"* 2 Tim. 2:15. If you want the approval of God concerning your Bible all you must do is use it and use it properly. Just how did the Noble Bereans find time to search the scriptures every day (Ac. 17:11)?

Redeem the Time

Paul commanded the Ephesian brethren *"see then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (Eph. 5:17). "Redeem" means- to buy up for one's use or benefit. Margin in the American Standard version is "buying up the opportunity." Redeeming the time means that we buy up and seize the opportunities that are presented us. Time is not something you find. Time is something you have already to be used prudently.

The Bible can be read in much less time than you might think. "How much time does it take to read from Genesis to Revelation? If you would read the Bible at a standard pulpit speed (slow enough to be heard and understood), the reading time would be seventy-one hours. If you would break that down into minutes and divide it into 365 days, you could read the entire Bible, cover to cover, in only twelve minutes a day. Is this really too much time to spread reading about God?" (The Almanac of the Christian World, Tyndale House Publishers).

A daily Bible reading schedule may help. After all, the Muslims have divided up the Qur'an into thirty sections for reading the whole book each month. Believe it or not, the whole New Testament can be read in about seventeen hours. If a Christians can read a newspaper or Facebook one hour a day for a week and skip an hour of television watching an hour each day, they could read the New Testament each week. It may help to wake up a ten minutes earlier or read it right before bed.

Teach a Bible Class

Nothing can motivate a Christian to study like the need to teach others. If one has the ability to teach they can begin with the children's classes. These do not involve intense lessons, but simple ones. If they do not feel they are able to teach, they can team up for a few months with a seasoned teacher and learn how. The church is to develop new teachers and put them to work (2 Tim. 2:2).

Conduct a Family Devotion

There are many books available to aid in having a weekly Bible study with the family. Or even a daily Bible reading. To help get started you can invite the preacher or another experienced couple to join you.

Share the Gospel

As a fisher of men a Christian must be prepared to catch lost souls from the sea of sin. To get started find someone to work through a Bible Correspondence course or watch the Jule Miller series. The best way to learn is to go with an experienced and skilled personal worker. Think you cannot find someone to begin with. Just invite a Jehovah's Witness or Mormon elders into your home when they

come knocking.

☺ **Study While You Eat**

Jesus told the Tempter, *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"* (Matt. 4:4). Man will not live long without physical nourishment and his soul will not grow without the Word. Begin by cultivating a spiritual appetite. *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled"* (Matt. 5:6). So every time you feed your belly pick up the Bible for a few minutes and feed your soul.

☺ **Listen While You Travel**

With the expense of a family meal one can purchase the whole Bible on CD to listen to in the car while they travel to work each day. Better yet they can listen to it by over a cell phone or other device by downloading a digital audio copy of the Bible for free from the internet.

● **Watch a Bible Program While You Sit**

DVDs of Bible books can be found in various translations. Many Bible study lessons can be found online from trustworthy sources.

● **Keep a Bible Handy**

Like most things when the Bible is out of sight, it is out of mind. Carry a Bible in your purse or brief case. Keep a Bible in your car's glove compartment. Have a Bible on laptop or I-phone or computer pad. Never go on a trip without a Bible. Have one ready to read when you are waiting in the Dentist office or for your tires to be rotated. Read it when someone has you on hold.

☺ **Take a Day of Vacation or a day off to just read the Bible**

Regular in Prayer

Being persistent and consistent in prayer is one of the most difficult disciplines for a Christian to master. However, Islam has its Minarets where the call goes out to Muslims to pray five times a day. Paul calls Christians to *"pray without ceasing"* (1 Thess. 5:17). Jesus encouraged His disciples to be consistent and persistent in prayer by giving them the Parable of the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-10). A man had guests one night and no bread to serve them. He went to his neighbor's door and knock until the man got out of bed to give him bread. Jesus also told the parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8). She was wronged and went to a judge for justice. Her persistent petition for help wore him down and he gave into her pleas.

Jesus Christ the Son of God was a very busy man during His ministry. Not only did Jesus begin His ministry with prayer, but He found it expedient to begin the day's work by praying (Mk. 1:35). He prayed at the close of day (Mt. 14:23). He prayed all night before the selection of the 12 (Lk. 6:12). He prayed all night in the Garden of Gethsemane before He was betrayed by Judas. He prayed while dying on the cross (Lk. 23:34,46). David prayed, *"Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and he will hear my voice."* (Ps. 55:17). Daniel was second in charge of the Persian Empire yet found time to pray, even when he knew it was illegal, three times a day (Daniel, 6:10). The early church began by continuing steadfastly in prayer (Ac. 2:42). The apostles were given to prayers as a top priority (Ac. 6:3,4). Paul often wrote of his unceasing prayers (1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Cor. 11:28; Eph. 1:15,16; Phil. 1:3-5; Col. 1:3,9; 1 Ch. 1:2,3; 2:13; 2 Th. 1:3; 11,12; 2:13,15). Christ commanded His disciples to pray for their daily bread (Mt. 6:11).

Some will claim, "I just don't have enough time to pray to God." If one is too busy to pray he is too busy for God's blessings, promises, and preparing for heaven. If you are too busy for prayer you are perhaps too busy in things that are unnecessary. How busy is not so important as why busy. The busy bee is congratulated and the pesky mosquito is swatted. God is not too busy to listen so don't be too busy to talk to Him.

Questions:

1. What did Thomas miss one Sunday night? What did he gain by being with the disciples the next Sunday night?
2. Is faithful attendance commanded? Where?
3. What does regular attendance have to do with spending eternity in Heaven and Judgment Day?
4. Why did the Bereans search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11)?
5. What are the chance of one making it to Heaven without using the Bible as their guide?
6. How long does it take to read the New Testament?
7. List some things one could do in improve and increase their Bible study.
8. How do you know when you have had a good Bible Study experience?
9. What two parables of Jesus encourage persistence in prayer?
10. Give examples of Bible characters who were consistent in their prayer life?

Application & Discussion:

1. Make of list of what you miss when you do not attend on Wednesday night.
2. Did you study this lesson? If not, why not? What might be done to motivate you to study more?
3. List some of the blessings of which we rob ourselves when we do not pray.

Homework: Strive to read the Bible thirty minutes a day, pray three times a day, and attend every service this week.

Heart Check-Up

When Sir Walter Raleigh was led to the block, his executioner asked him if his head lay right. Raleigh answered, "It matters little, my friend, how the head lies provided the heart is right."
What about your spiritual heart? Is it in good shape before God?

Do You Have A Kind Heart?

Once there was a man who carried a little can of oil with him everywhere he went, if he passed through a door that squeaked, he poured a drop of oil on the hinges. If a gate was hard to open, he oiled the latch. He passed through life lubricating all the creaking places, reducing the friction and rust that would weaken and destroy a hinge or latch. He made it a bit more pleasant for those who followed him. Oh, that there were more men on earth that left little drops of kindness where ever they went. Jesus told a parable about such a man in Luke 10:25-37. One day a lawyer ask Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus did not answer the question the way the man had posed it. Instead Jesus answered a more appropriate question. One the man should have asked, "Who should I show kindness to?"



The road between Jerusalem and Jericho is some seventeen miles long which winds and zig-zags down from the hills to 1,300 feet below sea level. This provided an ideal place for robbers to ambush passerby. According to the story a man fell victim to thieves. First, a priest came across the victim and passed by on the other side then a Levite came and did the same. Finally, a Samaritan found the man and took care of him. Jesus ironically selected a Samaritan to be the hero of this parable. The Samaritans, a kind of half-breed Jew were despised by the Jews.

As in most of Christ's parable we see here a great contrast between the various characters. First, the robbers had the attitude of what is yours is mine if I can take it. The Priest and Levite wanted to keep what was there's so they did not get involved. The Good Samaritan demonstrated that the willingness to share whatever he had.

What was it that made the Good Samaritan good? He was willing to show compassion. This was not just a sympathetic feeling. He did not pass by and say "Oh, what a pity that poor man". He actually became a part of the situation and the solution to the man's problem. Furthermore, he took a risk. The robbers could have been still in the area waiting to make him their next victim. He did not show prejudice against the man because he was a Jew.

It would be a beautiful day in the neighborhood, if all of us were good neighbors like this Good Samaritan. Do you look for ways to be kind to those in need? Do you take notice of people have trouble? Do you stop your busy life to offer aid? Do you help anyone in need no matter who they are? What is your heart's condition?

Do You Have A Forgiving Heart?

In a remote garbage dump in the foothills of the Colorado Rockies, a grizzly bear would often rummage through the trash looking for food. He jealously guarded the dump site as his own personal domain and would quickly chase away all intruders. Yet, there was one small animal that the bear

allowed into the dump: a skunk. Although the grizzly could have easily won a fight with his smelly, two-toned companion, he didn't even try. Why? Because he knew the high cost of getting even.

Far too often, modern man is not as smart as the average bear. No matter how much stink we raise we are willing to avenge ourselves of every little offense suffered.

We could learn the lesson of forgiveness from Jacob's favorite son, Joseph. Favoritism plays an unhealthy roll in the story. Jacob favored Joseph with a prized coat of many colors. Joseph's dreams did help matters either. One day while his brethren were in Shechem where they were to be tending the family flocks. Yet, they were found in Dothan instead.

At first, Joseph's brothers conspired to slay him. Reuben, the oldest brother, persuaded them to cast him into a pit, intending to rescue him and send him back home. In the absence of Reuben the others sold Joseph to a caravan of merchantmen, who took him to Egypt. Then dipped Joseph's coat in the blood of a kid and carried it to Jacob who assumed his favorite son had been killed by a wild animal.

Why in Egypt Joseph was sold to Potiphar. Although things went well and Joseph became chief steward of his master's house. The master's wife falsely accused him and he was sent to prison. It wasn't until he was summoned to interpret Pharaoh's dreams that he was promoted to second position over all Egypt (Gen. 41:33-44). In this new position Joseph was in charge of the gathering of the grain during the seven years of plenty and then in charge of distributing it during the seven years of famine.

When famine hit Palestine Jacob sent his sons down to buy food. They came into Joseph's presence. He recognized them, but they did not know him, and he did not make himself known to them. He accused them of being spies and threw them into prison.

On the third day of their imprisonment Joseph proposed that one be bound as a pledge that they would bring their youngest brother down. Simeon, the next oldest, was bound before their eyes and kept as a guaranty that they would bring Benjamin (Gen. 42:1-25). When they returned with Benjamin Joseph had their many returned to each one's bag and his cup placed into Benjamin's. They were accused of thievery. Judah defends his youngest brother. Judah's speech revealed Joseph's brethren in a new light. They were no longer cruel and heartless, as they were when despite his pleading and anguish of soul, they had sold him as a slave (Gen. 44:19-22; 45:1-8). Joseph spoke kindly to his brothers that had treated him so badly. When they came to buy corn, he returned their money (Gen. 45:24). Joseph took care of his father and his brethren (Gen. 47:12).

All the years that he had to suffer, yet Joseph chose to forgive and be kind. His was the kind of healthy heart we all must work toward. Do you harbor a grudge against a brother? Do you speak ill of someone because of a mistake they made? Do you allow yourself to wallow in self-pity over someone's mistreatment of you? Do spend time think about revenge against an enemy? What is your heart's condition?

Do You Have An Obedient Heart?

Listen to God's estimate of David's heart: *"And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'"* (Acts 13:22). From David onward all the good kings after him were extolled for their similarity to David (2 Ch. 17:3,4) and bad kings were exposed in contrast to him (1 Kg. 15:3). This statement does not mean that God approved of all his actions. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah her husband killed. Later David married many wives. And sinned in the numbering of Israel (2 Sam. 24).

Consider all the ways David demonstrated an obedient heart. David showed his obedience when he prepared himself to confront the giant Goliath (1 Sam. 17:41-52). His was an obedience motivated by faith in God's promises. Though in conflict with King Saul who sought David's life, David would not fall into the temptation to kill Saul when he had the chance. He would not harm God's anointed (1 Sam. 24:1-19). Belief that David was destined to displace the rule of Saul, and occupy the throne. Jonathan

made David promise to show kindness to his descendants. David vowed to honor his request. After Jonathan's death, David sought out Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan, the sole survivor of that famous father, and restore him to the honor that his vow required, (1 Sam. 20:12-17; 2 Sam. 9:1-8). He was being obedient to God's Law which required a man to fulfill his vows made before God and man (Dt. 23:21-23).

What about your heart? Is it obedient? Does your will align with the will of God? Do you worship according to God's Will? Do you attend faithfully according to God's Will? Do you give as you have prospered on the first day of every week? Do you share the gospel with others in need of salvation? Do you pray without ceasing? In what condition is your heart?

Do You Have a Humble Heart?

Humility is an elusive virtue. Once you start bragging about how humble you are, you are not. Because of man's natural tendency to be self-centered, obtaining humility is like trying to nail jell-O to a barn door.

#1 Beware of False Humility

There is nothing closer to true pride than false humility. The Pharisees were proud of their humility. While they preached humility, they practiced mere self-abasement.

"Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'" (Matt 23:1-7).

Long prayers, giving of alms, wardrobe fashions, etc. are not evidence of a humble heart. Humility is not the ability to look ashamed when you tell or show others who humble you are.

Neither is true humility merely looking down on one's self. The rule on the wall of a boy's club house: "Nobody act big. Nobody act small. Everybody be medium."

#2 Suffer Trials and Temptations

Paul was tempted to be proud, yet God sent a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. *"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. (2 Cor. 12:7-10).*

#3 Be Clothed with Humility

Peter wrote, *"likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Peter 5:5).* Humility is to be put on and worn like a garment. The proud man must first be stripped of self before clothed in humility.

#4 Walk Humbly

The prophet Micah wrote concerning what God requires of His children, *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you. But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).* God does not take walks with the proud. Those who are proud are out of step with God. The king of Babylon was lifted up with royal pride. God taught him how to walk humbly after he was forced to crawl around on all fours for months. Afterward he said, *"now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down" (Dan 4:37).*

#5 Become Like Little Children

Walk as if you were holding the Father's hand trusting in Him. Not tugging, fighting, pulling away from Him so you can go your own way and do your own thing. Jesus reversed man's concept of greatness. In His Kingdom, citizens must have a childlike disposition. *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt 18:3-4).

#6 Show Love

Paul gives an excellent description of what love is and is not in 1 Corinthians thirteen. *"Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up...does not seek its own"* (1 Cor 13:4,5a). Love puts the other person above self and God above love of self.

#7 Exalting and Serving Others

An great conductor of an orchestra was once asked what was the hardest instrument to play. He answered, "second fiddle." Pride looks out for one's own interest. *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Phil 2:3-4). Pride finds it hard to put up with others. Humility is *"bearing with one another in love"* (Eph 4:2). Pride honors self. *"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another"* (Romans 12:10).

#8 Obtain Knowledge

True wisdom comes from God and God's wisdom reveals that man is not great. The closer a man gets to God the further away he will be from his egotistical self. Knowing the greatness of God makes a proud man humble. Knowing the lowliness of man keeps one humble. Paul recognized the truth that he was *"chief of sinners"* (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul also said, *"for I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith"* (Romans 12:3). Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, "humility is to make a right estimate of one's self." It is the recognition that God has punished us sinners less than we deserve (Ezra 9:13).

#9 Submit to God's Will

Man does not know how to direct his own way. Jeremiah admitted, *"O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps"* (Jer. 10:23). Humility is a willingness to do whatever God commands of us. Isaiah told the Lord, *"Here am I send me."*

#10 Depend Upon God

Pride declares "I do not need God." Ego says, "I can do it myself." Conceit claims, "I did it my way." *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death"* (Prov 16:25). *"Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us"* (2 Cor. 1:9,10).

The Lord remained humble until He accomplished His mission on earth. And we must remain humble until we finish our days on earth.

Sometimes when a man's physical heart is in bad shape there is nothing medical science can do for him. His days are number. He has no hope. In contrast, no matter how bad of shape your spiritual heart is, there is hope. Why not start getting your heart in shape today?

Questions:

1. How did Jesus answer the question: *"Who is my neighbor?"*

2. In Jesus' parable in Luke 10 why did the Priest and Levite just pass by on the other side?
3. Why was it ironical that a Samaritan was the one who stopped to render aid?
4. Contrast the attitudes of the robbers, the priest, the Levite and the Good Samaritan?
5. What was it that made the Good Samaritan good?
6. What role did favoritism play in the story of Joseph?
7. What did the brothers of Joseph do to him?
8. How did Joseph respond?
9. List the examples of when David was disobedient to the will of God?
10. What made David's heart so much like God's heart?
11. What did God allow Satan to do to Paul to help humble his heart?
12. In what ways are little children a great example of humility?

13. How does serving others help promote in us a humble heart?

Application & Discussion:

1. Why is it essential for the well-being of our heart to being forgiving to others?

2. How does our self-reliance promote pride and hinder the humble heart?

Homework: Start living a spiritually heart health life by being kind and forgiving to others, obedient to God, and humbling self.

Curing Spiritual Leprosy

While driving down the road and scanning through the variety of various radio stations I happened upon a song by Joe Nichols called, *Tequila Makes Her Clothes Fall Off*. It is to no surprise that drinking will lower a person's inhibitions and impair their ability to make good judgments. People under the influence have been known to pick fights they cannot win, drive in a way that is insanely dangerous, and even shed their clothes in public. These are very good reasons to stay sober.

Not only does the Bible clearly warn of the dangers of drinking (Prov. 29:23ff), it tells of a disease that has some rather nasty symptoms: leprosy. Often it will manifest itself with a bright red spot (Lev. 13:2,24). Next, the skin will turn white (Ex. 4:6; 2 Ki. 5:27) and the hair in the affected area will turn either white or yellow (Lev. 13:3,10,30). In time, their flesh would begin to fall off of his body, sometimes in large portions—fingers and toes first, perhaps an ear or part of the nose. Lepers would begin to emit a foul odor. The voice would become hoarse and the breathing wheezy, and death was around the corner. The average life-span in Bible times was less than a decade. It was an incurable disease (2 Ki. 5:7).



Health regulations were set forth in the Law of Moses to help curtail the spread of this noxious disease. When a spot on his hair line or hand was suspected and did not go away on its own the law required the priest to have the man quarantined for fourteen days. If it proved to be leprosy he was banished from society. If he had been serving as a priest he would be excluded from the priesthood (Lev. 22:2-4). Lepers were to have their heads bare, clothes rent, and lip covered (Lev.13:45). They were to cry out to warn anyone approaching by calling out "Unclean, Unclean." The life of a leper was a very lonely, painful existence walking at a distance from the living while slowly awaiting death among the walking dead.

It is not uncommon in the Old Testament to see God use leprosy as a punishment for sin. This disease became an appropriate metaphor for sin. Sin is spiritual leprosy. Sin is filthiness, rottenness to the soul as leprosy is to the body. Sin begins small in the life of a man and next thing he knows his fingers and toes and noses are metaphorically falling off. Like leprosy, sin will cost the sinner his family, his home, his health, his livelihood, and being able to serve God in the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9) of the New Testament. Just as leprosy could only be cured by God in the Bible times, God is the only One who can at any time cure sin.

In the Old Testament there are three sinners who were cursed by God with leprosy for their sinful rebellion against God. First, there is Moses' sister, Miriam. She and her brother, Aaron, started giving Moses a hard time because he had married an Ethiopian woman. Ethiopians were known in Bible times for their very black skin. God cursed Miriam's sin of prejudice by making her suffer with the ugly white skin of a leper (Num. 12:1-15). God has a sense of humor. In effect, He was saying, "Miriam, if you hate black so much I'll give you some white." Through the intercession of Moses Miriam was spared.

Next, Elisha's prophetic side-kick, Gehazi, suffered for his sin of greed. The Syrian Commander, Naaman, had come to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy. After dipping seven times in the Jordan his flesh was cleansed of the disease. He came back to God's prophet to shower him with riches. Elisha refused. Gehazi chased after Naaman and lied to obtain the riches out of greed. Elisha confronted Gehazi, "Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever. And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow" (2 Ki. 5:27).

The final example is that of King Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:15b-21). Out of royal pride he went into the Temple to burn incense. All the priests confronted the king's sinful, rebellious trespass against God. *"Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house,"* (vv. 19-21a). The preeminent problem for Uzziah was *"as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him"* (v. 5). He stopped seeking the Lord and started seeking his own will.

When we come to the New Testament, Christ performs several miracles to show His divine power over leprosy. *"And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' And immediately the leprosy left him. And He charged him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.'"* (Luke 5:12-14). Likewise, we have been healed of sin through Christ and never to go and sin more but to become obedient to the Will of God. Just as the leper could not go back to his home and have a new home, as former sinners we are blessed with new clothes, a new name, a new family, a new reputation, a new priesthood, and a perfectly innocent soul.

On another occasion ten lepers approached Jesus and requested that He heal them. Out of His mercy he cleansed them and sent them to show themselves to a priest. Only one of them, a Samaritan, stopped to thank Jesus for saving his life. *"So Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well'"* (Lk. 17:17-19). When sinners truly grasp the value of God's gift of salvation through Christ they too will demonstrate the genuine gratitude that is due to God.

Sin is like leprosy. Sin does its worst damage by eating away at us, penetrating deep inside, causing us eventually to lose all feeling toward those things that are good and right. Sin will lead to our separation from God's people and from God himself. Eventually, sin can destroy our souls forever. There is no human cure for our sins. There is nothing we can do to rid our soul of sin by ourselves.

Only Jesus has the power to cleanse us of all sin. By coming to him while rejecting our pride we can have all our sins washed away just as sure as Naaman's leprous spots were cleansed when he obediently immersed in the Jordan. Afterward, we should live a life of gratitude, living faithfully according to God's Word.

With the "miracle" of modern medicine there is a cure available for all lepers. No one needs to tolerate being locked away in a leper colony or watch their fingers, noses or toes fall off. Better yet, because of the grace of God no one has to suffer the consequences of sin. Salvation is available to all who will come to Jesus.

Questions:

1. Why was leprosy such a terrible disease to contract in Bible times?
2. What was to be done with those who had leprosy according to the Law of Moses?

3. List three sinners whom God punished with leprosy?
4. Why was Miriam struck with leprosy?
5. Why was King Uzziah punished with leprosy?
6. Why was Gehazi given the leprosy of Naaman?
7. How is sin like leprosy?
8. When Jesus healed ten lepers what did one of them do that was different from the others? What lesson does this teach us today?
9. How was Naaman cleansed of his leprosy in 2 Kings 5?
10. True False Jesus would never touch a leper for that would make Him unclean via the Law of Moses.

Application & Discussion:

1. What became new when a leper was healed? How does this correspond to the sinner how is made clean?
2. When contracting leprosy ones fingers, toes, and noses would often fall off? What sort of things does sin cause the sinner to lose?

Homework: Check your soul for the spots of spiritual leprosy and turn to the only known cure - Jesus.

Healing Spiritual Blindness

Galileo Galilei was an Italian scientist of the Renaissance who challenged the Catholic church's view of geocentrism. Galileo claimed the sun was the center of the solar system. He was tried for heresy. In his defense he challenged the judges, "here is my telescope; look through it and you shall see the moons of Jupiter." This was to no avail. So blind were they to the truth, they refused to even look.

Total or partial blindness is a common malady in the natural world. Its spiritual counterpart is far more prevalent. Those who suffer with spiritual blindness cannot perceive or comprehend the Truth. This is not due to some disease or disaster. It is a self imposed condition of the mind brought on by one's own prejudices. What is the most difficult thing in the world to open? It is the closed-mind.



Causes of Spiritual Blindness

- **Devil**

Paul says of those who have spiritual blindness " *whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them*" (2 Cor. 4:4). The Devil's plan is to keep men in darkness so as to keep them out of the light of Christ. To control Samson the Philistines put out his eyes and bound him. Hiding the truth keeps sinners from becoming free from the darkness (Jn. 8:32). If man thinks he can see just fine he will not seek help. Years ago in India a gang would still children and make them blind so they could beg for money on the streets for them.

- **Unbelief**

Another cause is mentioned in the above passage: *who do not believe*" (2 Cor. 4:4). Atheist argue that faith is just a blind leap in the dark. However, unbelief results in blindness to the truth and a life of darkness. To "walk by faith and not by sight" is not saying that faith is a blind leap in the dark, but faith brings sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

- **Pride**

In the middle of "pride" is "I". Spiritual blindness is caused by "I" trouble. When a man becomes so big in his own eyes he cannot see God's will. Naaman the leper came to Elisha the prophet of God to be healed. He went away not seeing the value of following God's plan. He explained his decision "...behold I thought" (2 Kings 5:11). Pride blinded him to the will of God and in turn would have cost him his life to leprosy. He did change his mind when someone helped open his eyes.

- **Forgetfulness**

Peter mentions another cause of spiritual blindness. "*For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins*" (2 Pet. 1:8,9). Forgetfulness of our changed condition will leave many Christians in a state of darkness. Like the man who woke up and started screaming to his wife that he was blind but he simply forgot to take off his sleeping blinds. Peter is saying that they are short of sight, because their memory is short.

- **Stubbornness**

In His great chapter on Kingdom parables Jesus explains why so many are blinded to the Truth.

"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them" (Matt. 13:15). No man is as blind as a man who had two good eyes and simply refuses to see. The Jews would remain blind because they refused the new Testament and the evidence of the old Testament (2 Cor. 3:14). It has been shown that hardening of the arteries results in blindness among the aged. Surely hardening of the spiritual heart will blind a man's soul.

- **Sin**

To become blind all a man has to do is live in darkness for a few months. By depriving his eyes of the light he will continue to live in darkness. Jesus said, *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed"* (John 3:19,20). The darkness of sin has a blinding effect that is self-perpetuating. The more a man loves sin the more he will continue in sin. In a true spiritual sense, you are what you see. Loving evil or darkness is to court blindness.

Symptoms of Spiritual Blindness

- **Leads to all Kinds of Evil**

If we could see sin the way God sees it we would all scream with revulsion. Those who view sin with rose colored glasses will soon be so color blind he will view any sin as acceptable.

- **Lack of Love**

Have you ever heard someone who is really mad say, "I am so mad I can't see straight." There seems to be scriptural precedent for such a condition. *"He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now"* (1 John 2:9,11). Hate will cause a blind rage which cannot see a fellow human being as an object of love. The Galatian saints were accused by Paul of spiritual cannibalism.

- **Self-Righteousness**

Jesus observed that the Pharisees shut their spiritual eyes to their true condition. *"Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."* (Matt. 15:14). Several times Jesus condemned them for their blindness. *"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? ... Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?... Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also"* (Matt. 23:16,17,19,26).

The church at Laodosea was also blinded to the fact they were not who they claimed to be. *"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"* (Rev. 3:17). The blind can think they are beautiful without ever looking into the mirror of truth.

- **No Discernment**

The Pharisees and Lawyers were seeking signs from Jesus. They no longer had the ability to see any of the signs because they were spiritually blind. *"No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light. The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light"* (Luke 11:33-36). Truth does not change its nature. What is true is true no matter how many times one looks at it. The problem is not with the truth but with those with eyesight which cannot discern it. Truth is not visible to the unhealthy eye.

Prognosis of Spiritual Blindness

- **No Fellowship**

If a child of God continues in darkness of sin, he will not have fellowship with God. *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 Jn. 1:6,7). God is no respecter of persons, but He does not commune with those who are spiritually blinded by walking in the darkness of sin. As light dispels darkness, so God, who is light, cannot fellowship with the spiritually blind.

- **Stumbling Block to Others**

Jesus told His disciples concerning the Pharisees, *"Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch"* (Matt. 15:14). No one would think of giving a blind man an eye-seeing dog that was also blind. Yet men are willing to follow false teachers who are not able to see the truth and walk in darkness. False teachers and their doctrines cause men to stumble. Jesus insists his disciples not only be aware of this but avoid them with open eyes.

- **Rejection by Christ if Impenitent**

"Oh, Lord, may we always be right." once prayed a Scottish preacher, "For thou knowest we will never change our minds." So it is with those who are so blind to their condition of spiritual blindness that they will not turn to the Lord in repentance and be cured. The Lord said to the church at Laodoea, *"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"* (Revelation 3: 16-17). Sometimes the spiritually blind are unaware of their condition. Thus, the call to repentance requires the Gospel to call men out of darkness into the light.

Cure for Spiritual Blindness

- **Christ's Eye Salve**

Jesus went on to tell the blind saints at Laodoea, *"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne"* (Rev. 3:18-22). The city of Laodoea was world famous for its eye-ointment. The ancient healers of Laodoea "on the principle that compound diseases require compound medicines, began a strange system of heterogenous mixtures. Two of the most famous were an ointment from spice nard for the ears, and an eye salve made from 'Phrygian powder' mixed with oil" (Mounce 107).

- **Delivered from Darkness and Translated into the Kingdom of Light**

Saul of Tarsus was blind to the truth that Jesus was truly the Son of God. He persecuted the church until one day the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus. *"As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do'"* (Acts 9:3-6). Saul went to Damascus and waited in darkness for three days when God sent Ananias to tell him what to do. Saul received his physical sight. *"Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized"* (Acts 9:18). Then he was baptized into the kingdom of darkness. Paul later told the Colossian saints: *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and*

conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13).

- **Continue to Walk in the Light**

Previously John gave the command to keep on walking in the light (1 John 1:6,7). Those who have been walking in darkness need to come to repentance. *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us"* (1 John 1:7-10).

All spiritual blindness can be cured for the obedient heart which turns to God in faith. Samson was blind, but he sought God's help, so can you (Jg. 16:28).

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.

No one has to live a single day longer in darkness. Come to the Light!

Questions:

1. Define "spiritual blindness"?
2. Why does Satan blind us?
3. How does faith eliminate spiritual blindness?
4. How does pride cause spiritual blindness?
5. According to 2 Peter 1:8,9 what leads to spiritual blindness?
6. In Matthew 13:15 what is a cause of spiritual blindness?
7. True False Loving evil or darkness has nothing to do with spiritual blindness.
8. Why does a lack of good spiritual vision lead one into all kinds of sin and evil?
9. How is self-righteousness a form of blindness?

10. Why were did Jesus refuse to give the Pharisees and Lawyers the sign they were seeking?
11. What are the terrible consequences of living a life in spiritual blindness?

Application & Discussion:

1. How did the physical blinding of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus help cure his spiritual blindness (see Acts chapters 9 and 22)?
2. Jesus healed many who were physically blind during His earthly ministry, how does He heal the spiritually blind today?

Homework: Locate and eliminate all the blinds spots in your spiritual life.

Fill Out Your Organ Donor Card

No, I have not donated any organs lately, but there was that time I gave away an old piano. However, I am sure that does not count. Many lives have been saved and health restored because someone filled out an organ donor card. A tragic accident for one poor soul leads to another being blessed with a new heart, a healthy lung, a liver replacement or a kidney. It is great to be an organ donor, the only thing is in most cases you will not live to see the beneficial results of your act of kindness to strangers. One of the last things you want to hear before undergoing surgery is: "Nurse, did this patient sign an organ donor card?"

Perhaps you remember a vice president from a previous administration. He became the target of late night monologues. After being told a man who saved several lives by donating his heart, lungs, eyes, liver, and kidneys, the vice president showed his sincere concern by asking, "Well, how is the donor?" Who ever heard of donating an organ, like a heart, while still alive? Yet, you might want to consider doing just that. While we are alive and well we need to donate our organs to God.

Donate your HANDS to work so you can give to those in need. *"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need"* (Eph. 4:28). We are to work not just to accumulate toys, but to acquire tools to assist others. Also, donate your hands to God by lifting them up to Him in prayer. Paul wrote, *"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting"* (1 Tim. 2:8).

Donate your MOUTH to speak edifying words to others. *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. ...And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you"* (Eph. 4:29,32).

Donate your LIPS to praise God in song and thanksgiving. *"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name"* (Heb. 13:15).

Donate your BACK to bear your own burdens and those of others. *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ... For each one shall bear his own load"* (Gal. 6:2,5). Although there appears to be an apparent contradiction, the burdens we help others bear are the heavy loads they cannot carry on their own, while our burdens are the lighters ones we should be able to take care of ourselves.

Donate your FEET to the spreading of the Gospel of peace. Part of the armor of God is *"having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace"* (Eph. 6:15).

Donate your HEART to a loving God. Jesus said, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."* (Matt. 22:37).

Donate the LOINS or your mind to be holy. *"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:13). We do not often use the word "loins" except when referring to a particular cut of meat such as sirloin or tenderloin. In humans it refers to the area above the hip and below the ribs. From "gird" we get our word "girdle." "Gird up" is metaphorical from the tucking of flowing garments into one's belt so one's legs were not impeded from movement on a journey. When it refers to your mind it means, "Pull your thoughts together or have a disciplined mind" or "gather up the loose ends of the mind." This is to



help us be holy before God.

Donate your TONGUE to confess Jesus as Lord. According to Paul this will result in salvation. *"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation"* (Rom. 10:9,10).

Donate your BLOOD as a martyr for Christ. In the Book of Revelation, John saw Babylon, the mother of harlots *"...drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus"* (Rev. 17:3). Yes, we do not often think about dying for our beliefs. In China, where they have permitted families only one child, second children are to be aborted. A god-fearing woman who refuses may be forced to, and in some rare cases, imprisoned, tortured and killed. What would you do if your wife or you were forced to either abort or face a firing squad? After all, you may reason with your wife and say, "Get the abortion, the child will die anyway." Being a Christian requires tough choices.

The donation of our EYES are greatly needed to focus and honor the righteous. *"In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the Lord; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change"* (Psalm 15:4). Our eyes need to be devoted to God's Word. *"My eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on Your word"* (Psalm 119:148). We must turn our eyes and focus on God in times of need. *"But my eyes are upon You, O God the Lord; In You I take refuge; Do not leave my soul destitute"* (Psalm 141:8). Far too many give their eyes in looking for aid from the world or money.

Using a parable Jesus challenged His disciples with a question. *"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'"* (Luke 15:4-6). Donate your SHOULDERS to carry the weak and the lost back to safety.

Not every one can stomach this one but Paul commanded the saints at Colossae to *"put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering"* (Col.3:12, KJV). Yes, we are even to donate our BOWELS.

After Jesus resurrected from the grave, He appeared to the Apostles behind closed doors on that Sunday night. They believed but Thomas who was absent did not believe. At least, he would not until he put his finger into the nail prints of Jesus' hand and touch His side. Jesus appears again that next Sunday and Thomas, who still had doubts, was there. Jesus said to him, *"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."* And Thomas answered and said unto him, *"My Lord and my God"* (John 20:27,28). We too must donate your fingers to investigate the evidence to believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

This is not something balding men would like to hear, but how about donating you HAIR to be numbered by Jesus. The Savior said, *"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows"* (Luke 12:7). Or like the sinful woman who came to the house of the pharisee named Simon. While Jesus was his guest this woman can and donate her hair to wipe the feet of Jesus with hair and tears (Luke 7:36-50).

Finally, donate your HEAD to wear a crown of life in Heaven when your faithful life is over. *"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10).

In fact, every Christian should donate their entire body to be a temple for the Holy Spirit. *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"* (1 Cor. 6:19-20),

Don't wait to be an organ donor when you are dead. Do it now, give your whole body, heart, and soul to the Lord, today.

Questions:

1. What can be done with donated hands?
2. What should we lend our mouth to do for others and God?
3. What can our lips do?
4. What is to be worn by the soldier of Christ upon his feet? Why?
5. How much of one's heart is to be donated?
6. What does it mean to grid up the loins of the mind?
7. How shall one donate his tongue to God?
8. How can we donate blood?
9. For what purpose should one donate their head?
10. Why donate our whole body?

Application & Discussion:

1. List some ways you can volunteer yourself to serve God and His family.
2. List various reasons why it is necessary for one to make these donations to God.

Homework: Start filling out your organ donor card for the Lord today. Start donating while you are still alive.