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**The Spiritual Formation Process:
the Apostle Peter's Outline**

Peter Briggs

The Spiritual Formation Process: the Apostle Peter's Outline

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PREFACE

Personal Introduction & Welcome

Personal Introduction & Welcome

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Welcome to this study of *The Spiritual Formation Process: the Apostle Peter's Outline*. My hope and prayer is that you will find this study as motivating in your experience of spiritual formation as I have in mine.

Prior Consideration of 2 Peter 1:3-15

I first became impressed with 2 Peter 1:3-15 shortly after leaving my engineering career at Honeywell in October of 1992 to enter into full-time ministry. In the fall of 1994 I joined the staff of what was to become Trinity Southwest University in Albuquerque, and in the 1995-1996 time frame I developed a discipleship manual entitled *The Seven Realities of Discipleship (The 7Rs Manual* for short) somewhat based upon this passage. I say “somewhat” because I ranged far afield exegetically from the text in 2 Peter. However, an important factor that I endeavored to weave into *The 7Rs Manual* was representational thinking, to which I had been exposed in the summer of 1994. To regard the Bible as a representational system which defines reality for the saint was a life-transforming insight that I set about to incorporate into my own teaching from that point onward.

The Upper and Lower Story Syndrome

Beginning in 1975, I had become concerned over the apparent gap between theory and practice among those who professed to be Christians. In 1976, the keynote speaker at a missionary conference made a statement I have never forgotten: “You only truly believe that which activates you.” As I reflected upon passages that define the kind of faith that brings salvation, principally the 11th chapter of Hebrews, I became convinced that this was, in fact, a valid and powerful biblical insight. As I brought to bear other insights derived from Francis Schaeffer, I was motivated to conclude that the majority of professing Christians relegated religious ideas to an “upper story” which was entirely divorced from the “lower story” where they lived and worked. By the early 1990s, research by Charles Colson and George Barna had documented the fact that there was little difference between the moral and ethical behaviors of churchgoers and non-churchgoers. Extended research carried out by the Wall Street Journal beginning in 1976 produced the shocking conclusion that 90% of Americans, and therefore a substantial fraction of professing Christians, compromised their moral and ethical behaviors in such matters as obedience to traffic laws, payment of taxes, misappropriation of their employer’s assets, and so forth.

The Forgetfulness of the Church

From what does the upper and lower story syndrome – the gap between the theory and the practice of the Christian life – arise? In the section of this study entitled *Background: The Importance of the Apostles’ Kerygma and Didache*, I place in evidence the fact that the preaching and teaching of the apostles were impelled by and subject to the full weight of the authority of Jesus Christ himself as expressed in his Great Commission mandate, Matthew 28:18-20. The apostles repeatedly and emphatically enjoined upon the churches of the 1st century careful obedience to and rigorous teaching of the commands, the instructions, and the traditions which they had handed down. ***Such careful obedience and rigorous teaching was to be non-negotiable and normative.*** Only by the older generation of believers imparting to the next generation these commands, instructions, and traditions would the distinctive Christian life style be maintained; namely, one characterized by faith and devotion toward God, righteous behavior, and self-sacrificing love toward one another. However, the churches in America have forgotten the preaching and teaching of the apostles insofar as life style is concerned. They have segregated the ***act of believing*** from the ***act of behaving***, and thereby they have emasculated biblical faith.

An Abiding Concern Thus, God has given me an abiding concern for discipleship and disciple-making which has motivated much of my work and ministry over nearly thirty years. In this present work, I have endeavored to combine that abiding concern with careful exegesis of the text in 2 Peter and a continuing commitment to representational thinking. My hope and prayer is that God would be pleased to use this consideration of *The Spiritual Formation Process: the Apostle Peter's Outline* in your life as a tool to motivate spiritual formation toward the ultimate goal that you might become a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust [2 Peter 1:4, NASB].

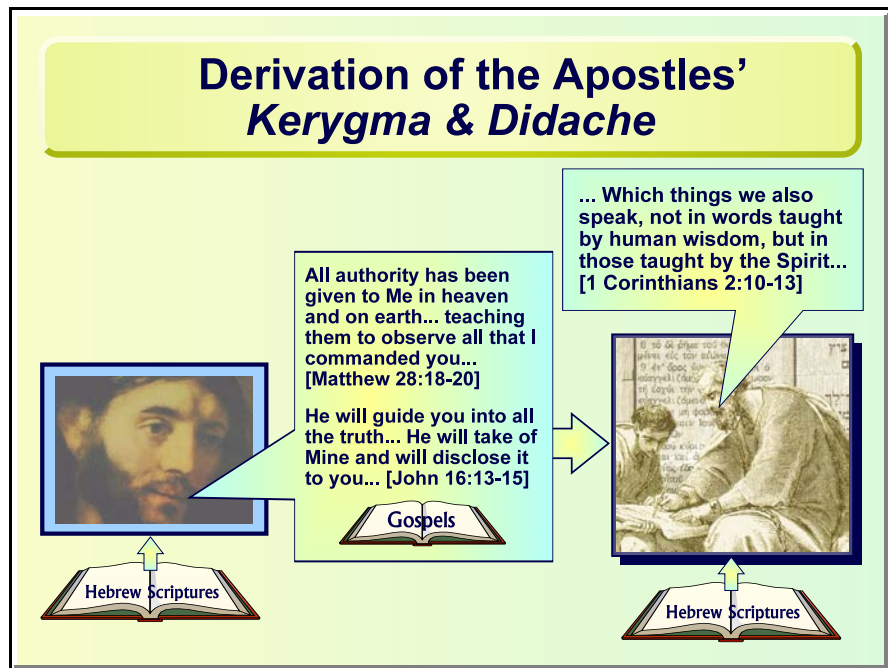
Your fellow servant,
Peter Briggs

The Spiritual Formation Process: the Apostle Peter's Outline

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. [2 Peter 1:5-7, NASB]

1. BACKGROUND: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE APOSTLE'S KERYGMA AND DIDACHE

The Mandate of the Great Commission



The adjoining figure represents the delegation of teaching authority from Jesus to his apostles. In his Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), Jesus mandated a disciple-making process that his apostles were to carry on after the model of their own experience with him. The single command in this passage is embodied in the imperative verb, *matheteuo*, which means to make disciples. The biblical definition of a disciple is one who is a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. The apostles were to integrate the proclamation of the gospel of salvation through Christ into their life styles. Those who responded in faith to that proclamation were to be baptized into the covenant community “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Moreover, to ensure that the distinctive Christian life style characterized by faith and

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

The Mandate of the Great Commission – Cont.:

devotion toward God, righteous behavior, and self-sacrificing love toward one another was sustained from one generation of believers to the next, the new disciples were to be taught “to observe all that I commanded you.” The word translated ‘teaching them’ in Matthew 28:20 is *didasko* which means to teach or instruct. The content of the teaching and instruction is designated by the Greek word *didache*. The word translated ‘observe’ is *tereo*, which means to secure as a precious asset by keeping the eyes upon. Thus, we find inherent in the Great Commission mandate of our Lord a strong affirmation that his teaching which was delivered to the apostles and thence to us was ultimately important and had the full weight of his authority behind it.

The Ministry of the Paraclete

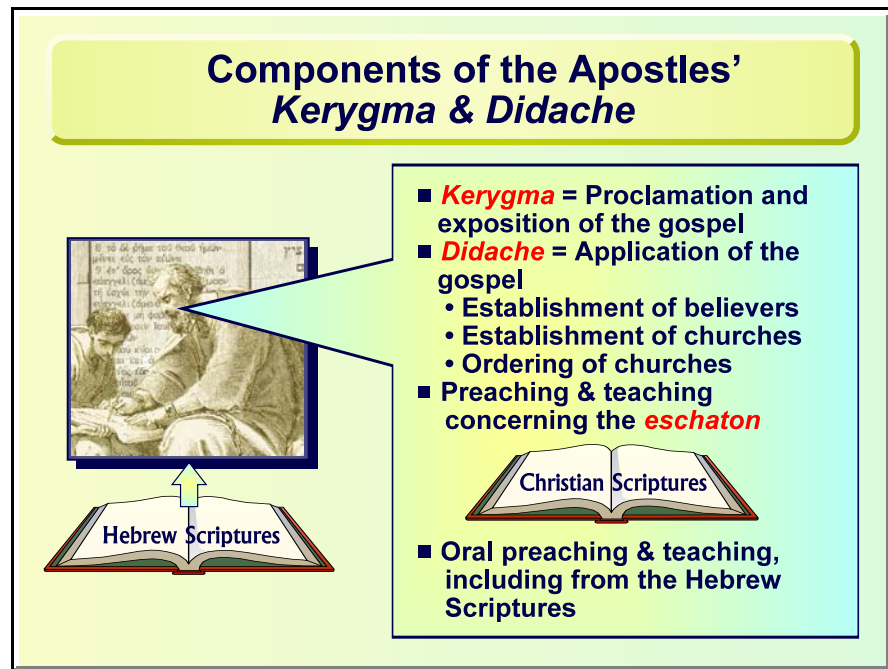
In John 16:13-15, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit who would guide the apostles “into all the truth.” According to John 21:25, the volume of Jesus’ teaching and ministry far exceeded that which is recorded in the Gospels. Moreover, it far exceeded that which the apostles could absorb in three years. Therefore, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to effectively continue the teaching ministry that he had begun. Paul testifies concerning this ministry in 1 Corinthians 2:10-13 where he describes the process by which the inspired writings of the New Testament were produced. According to this process of continuing revelation, the Holy Spirit unfolded truth to the apostles and superintended the selection of words to express that truth¹. ***Therefore, the body of teaching and the deposit of doctrine that we have in the Scriptures of the New Testament is that which the Holy Spirit determined was both necessary and sufficient for the building of the church of Jesus Christ and the establishment of believers in his commandments.***

Components of the Apostles’ Preaching & Teaching

The figure below outlines the principal components of the apostles’ preaching and teaching, which, as I stated above, directly emanated from the Great Commission mandate of Jesus Christ, and were therefore subject to the full weight of his authority.

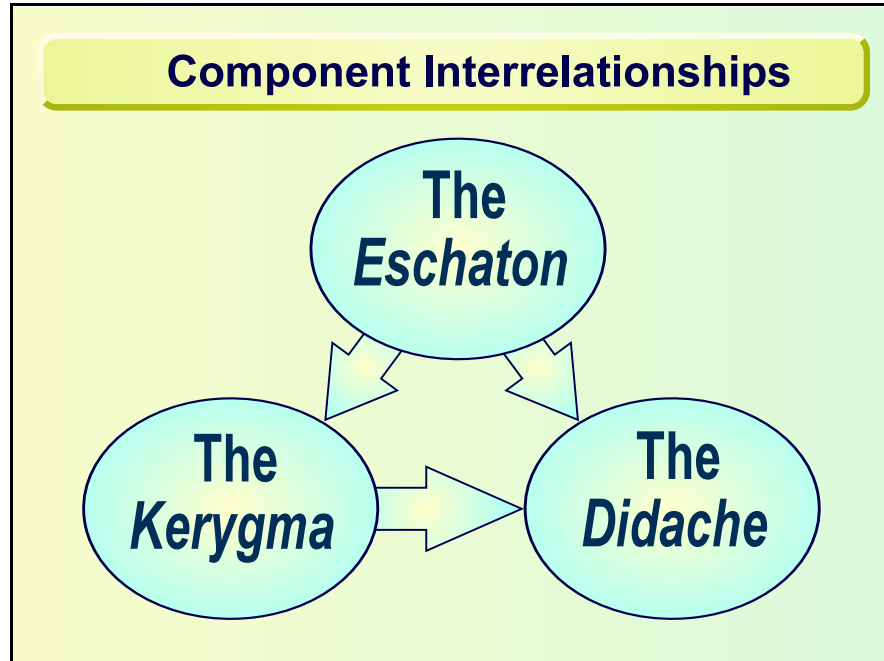
1 While some scholars interpret Paul’s assertion in 1 Corinthians 2:10-13 as being tantamount to dictation of the very words of Scripture by the Holy Spirit, thereby attenuating the role of the human author to that of a stenographer, such an interpretation goes beyond what the Greek text indicates. The fact is evident from even a cursory reading of Scripture that the personal backgrounds and styles of the human authors have added significant coloration to the biblical documents.

Components of the
Apostles' Preaching
& Teaching – Cont.:



These are the three components:

- ◆ **The kerygma.** The New Testament word that designates the act of proclaiming or heralding forth the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is *kerusso*. The content of that which is proclaimed is designated by *kerygma*. Thus, the *kerygma* of the apostles can be defined as the content and method of delivery of the gospel proclamation that is exhibited in the Book of Acts and spoken of by Paul in Romans 16:25, 1 Corinthians 1:21, 2:4 & 15:14, 2 Timothy 4:17, and Titus 1:3. In Romans 1:18-11:36, Paul expounds the theological content of the gospel.
- ◆ **The didache.** We have already seen how the concept of a body of sanctifying teaching emanates from the Great Commission mandate of our Lord in Matthew 28:18-20. The *didache* of the Apostles can be defined as this body of sanctifying teaching which the apostles delivered or handed down to the churches of the 1st century and which is distributed throughout the epistles of the New Testament, especially those of Paul.
- ◆ **The eschaton.** In his Olivet Discourse (see Matthew 24 & 25 and parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21) Jesus emphasized the importance of his return to sit as judge and bring human history to its divinely appointed conclusion. The theme of the *eschaton* is unfolded and applied by the apostles, especially in Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians, Peter's second epistle, and The Revelation.

Component Interrelationships


Comments are in order concerning the interrelationship among the three major components of the apostles' preaching and teaching, as discussed above. The adjoining figure highlights the components and provides a basis for summarizing their interrelationships as follows:

- ◆ **The eschaton**, that is, the preaching and teaching concerning the imminent return of Christ to bring judgment upon the earth and to establish his millennial kingdom, powerfully motivates both the *kerygma* and the *didache*. That is, apart from the ultimate reality of our facing the Infinite Personal God sitting in judgment, there would be no motivation for responding to either the *kerygma* or the *didache*. Examination of the *kerygma* of the apostles distributed throughout Acts reveals that their preaching generally included at least mention of Christ's coming in judgment, that is, eschatological preaching.
 - ◆ **The kerygma** motivates the *didache* in the sense that the *didache* constitutes the practical application of the *kerygma* to life and ministry.
-

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Simplified Two-Part Outline

The Apostles' Preaching & Teaching

Definitions of Technical Terms

- ◆ **Preaching of the Apostles (*Kerygma*)**
 - Exposition and proclamation of the gospel of salvation in Christ
 - Preaching concerning the *eschaton*.
- ◆ **Teaching of the Apostles (*Didache*)**
 - Application of the gospel to establishment of believers and churches
 - Teaching concerning the *eschaton*.

As set forth in the adjoining figure, we shall consider the deposit of New Testament doctrine under the following two headings:

- ◆ The *preaching of the apostles* is a technical term that designates the exposition of the gospel of salvation in Christ and actual examples of its proclamation distributed through the Book of Acts *plus* preaching concerning the *eschaton*.
- ◆ The *teaching of the apostles* is a technical term that designates the sanctifying teaching distributed through the epistles, especially those of Paul, *plus* teaching concerning the *eschaton*.

However, this structural simplification for the sake of ease of presentation and discussion in nowise diminishes or dilutes the importance of the eschaton as the focal point and motivating force for the life and ministry of the Christian.

The Way of Christ and the Apostles

To simplify things even further, we adopt the technical phrase, *the way of Christ and the apostles*, to designate the whole body of preaching and sanctifying teaching distributed throughout the New Testament documents with special emphasis upon their practical application to life and ministry. *The way of Christ and the apostles was a way of life, not simply a way of belief.*

The Importance of the Apostles' Preaching & Teaching

Importance of the Apostles' Preaching & Teaching

- ◆ ... They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' **teaching**... [Acts 2:42]
- ◆ Pauline exhortations:
 - ▶ Concerning the **commandments**
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:1ff
 - ▶ Concerning the **traditions**
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:15 & 3:6
 - ▶ Concerning **sound or good doctrine**
 - 1 Timothy 4:6, 6:3; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9, 2:1
 - ▶ Concerning **establishing**
 - Colossians 2:7, 1 Thessalonians 3:2

The adjoining figure outlines the stress which the apostles laid on faithfully observing and teaching the commandments, instructions, and traditions which they had delivered to the churches of the 1st century. First mention of the teaching of the apostles occurs in Acts 2:42. The fact that the gathered church was continuously devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching places in evidence the importance they attached to it. As we move through Paul's epistles, we discover the various ways in which he referred to the teaching; namely, as commandments, traditions, and sound or good doctrine. The adjoining figure lists a number of passages where each of these words is employed. Also of great importance is Paul's concept of *establishing*. The adjoining figure cites two passages which place in evidence the stress which Paul laid on bringing new disciples to the point that they were firmly grounded in their understanding of doctrine, that is, the way of Christ and the apostles, and had become resolute in putting it into practice.

The Concept of Doctrine

In our day doctrine is often considered to be a set of beliefs to be embraced. However, the concept of doctrine in the 1st century was markedly different; that is, doctrine was sanctifying teaching to be practiced. *In other words, there was an essential connection between belief and behavior according to the way of Christ and the apostles.*

**Conclusions
Concerning the
Apostles' Preaching
& Teaching**

The Apostles' Preaching & Teaching

Conclusions

- ◆ **The preaching & teaching of the Apostles were...**
 - ▶ **Subject to the Great Commission mandate of Christ himself.**
 - ▶ **Normative for all people, periods, and places.**
 - ▶ **To be faithfully taught, reproduced, and practiced from one generation of believers to the next.**

As summarized in the adjoining figure, we conclude that the apostles delivered to the churches of the 1st century a *non-negotiable body of teaching and deposit of doctrine* that flowed from the Great Commission mandate of Jesus Christ. This was the way of Christ and the apostles. It was normative to the degree that it applied to *all people, periods, and places*. Thus, when missionaries have taken the gospel into a new culture, the way of Christ and the apostles still applies; it is non-negotiable. Once the way of Christ and the apostles is introduced into a cultural context, it is to be faithfully taught, reproduced, and practiced from one generation of believers to the next in order that the distinctive Christian life style be maintained; namely, a life style characterized by devotion to God and his word, righteous behavior, and self-sacrificing love toward one another within the community of the saints.

**Questions for
Reflection &
Discussion**

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of the content and importance of the apostles' preaching and teaching. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Explain the content of the apostles' preaching and teaching and why they are important.
2. Discuss in your own words the phrase, *the way of Christ and the apostles*, including its significance and importance.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Questions for
Reflection &
Discussion – Cont.:

3. Explain the significance of the apostles' preaching and teaching concerning the *eschaton*, including the relationship of this preaching and teaching to the way of Christ and the apostles.
 4. From what source does the authority of the preaching and teaching of the apostles derive?
 5. What benefits result from learning and applying the way of Christ and the apostles to your life? What liabilities result from not doing so?
 6. Summarize your progress in learning and applying the way of Christ and the apostles to your life. Identify the action steps needed to further your understanding and application of the way of Christ and the apostles.
 7. You may insert pages as necessary to record further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of the apostles' preaching and teaching and the way of Christ and the apostles.
-
-

2. THE APOSTLE PETER'S OUTLINE OF THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROCESS

Relationship
Between Petrine and
Pauline Teaching



While I have become convinced that the Pauline Epistles should dominate our understanding of the *didache*, I find in 2 Peter 1:3-15 much more than simply a listing of Christian virtues. In verses 8 through 15, Peter affirms the normative importance of the every-increasing development of the seven qualities identified in the adjoining figure as follows:

- ◆ They cause a person to be fruitful in the Christian life.
- ◆ They keep a person from being forgetful of the essence of salvation; namely, that he has been cleansed from his past sins.
- ◆ They contribute powerfully to assurance.
- ◆ Peter has enjoined upon his disciples the practice and development of these qualities and will continue to do so until his departure to be with Christ.

For these reasons, I regard 2 Peter 1:3-15 as a ***normative outline of the spiritual formation process***. Not only is it normative in the sense of applying to all people, periods, and places, but it is a concise presentation of essential components or phases of spiritual formation that is mnemonically appealing.

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Relationship Between
Petrine and Pauline
Teaching – Cont.:

It is instructive to note the correspondence between the Petrine outline of the spiritual formation process and the Pauline *didache*, which can be outlined as follows based upon the work of Perotta ² and Dodd ³ :

- ◆ ***The Christian is enjoined to reform his conduct*** in terms of putting off the vices of the flesh ⁴ .
- ◆ ***The Christian is enjoined to reform his conduct*** in terms of putting on the virtues that reflect the likeness of Christ.
- ◆ ***The Christian is enjoined to develop and maintain proper relationships within the family*** as the fundamental unit of society.
- ◆ ***The Christian is enjoined to develop and maintain proper relationships within the Christian community***, that is, the local assembly or church.
- ◆ ***The Christian is enjoined to develop and maintain proper relationships with respect to the pagan community***, especially with a view toward sharing his or her hope in Christ.
- ◆ ***The Christian is enjoined to develop and maintain proper relationships with respect to civil authority***, including obedience to laws and payment of taxes.
- ◆ ***The Christian is enjoined to live a godly life*** with respect to reverent devotion toward God and the things pertaining to him, including study of Scripture, prayer, and the practice of *koinonia* ⁵ within the covenant community; vigilance with respect to our adversary, the devil; and watchfulness with respect to the coming of our Lord.

**A Roadmap for
Spiritual Formation**

It seems to me that Peter’s outline presents a scriptural model for the process of spiritual formation toward the goal that we increasingly “become partakers of the divine nature” according to 2 Peter 1:4. As such, it enables us to assess progress and identify those areas upon which we need to concentrate on account of particular moral and spiritual weaknesses. To aid in this process of assessment and continuing development, I present a set of questions associated with faith and each of the seven qualities that are to be layered onto faith. While using these questions as a self-assessment tool is valuable, even

2 Perotta, K. (1987). Leading Christians to Maturity, chap. 7. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Faith & Renewal Publishers.

3 Dodd, C. H. (1951). Gospel and Law, chap. 1. New York City: Columbia University Press.

4 As employed here, ‘flesh’ is a technical term that refers to the morally corrupt human nature. Refer to the discussion under *Moral Excellence* for clarification of this term.

5 *Koinonia* designates the distinctive kind of fellowship experienced by Christians in community. It includes the dimensions of partnership and mutual burden-bearing enjoined by the Apostle Paul. Refer to the discussion under *Brotherly Kindness* for clarification of this term.

A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation – Cont.: greater value derives from enlisting the help of others in the community of faith for the sake of objectivity. For example, if you are married, you could work through this study as husband and wife. Or, a small group of believers could work through the study together. In Appendix 2 I have distilled the essential assessment questions from this study and have packaged them as a *Spiritual Formation Assessment Tool*.

A Word of Caution Spiritual formation is not like acquiring skill in mathematics or tennis. As soon as we begin to seriously address ourselves to the disciplines of the Christian life, the fact becomes evident that powerful forces are arrayed against us. Chief among these is our own nature. (I discuss the three enemies that resist our progress along the path to spiritual formation under *moral excellence*.) In Romans 7:14-25 Paul casts himself in the role of a person who is struggling to achieve the virtues of the Christian life without the aid of the Holy Spirit. His cry in Romans 7:24 testifies to the fact that the perverseness of his fallen nature is more powerful than his will to obey and please God. What is the point of this cautionary discussion? While I may be able to identify and articulate areas of needed moral and spiritual development where I am weak, ***I will need to avail myself of all the means of grace in order to overcome these areas of weakness.*** Following is a short list of three action steps that you will need to consider as you seek to make progress along the path toward spiritual formation:

- ◆ ***Confession.*** Any aspect of my character that falls short of the biblical standard for the Christian life constitutes *sin* (= *hamartia* = a falling short of the standard). As noted, the core meaning of the Greek word which is translated ‘sin’ is to fall short. What do we do when God enables us to recognize sin? We need to ***confess*** (= *homologeō* = to speak the same words) it in accordance with 1 John 1:9. The Greek word translated ‘confess’ means that we use the same language to describe or represent our shortcoming as God does. Without confession, no progress in spiritual formation is possible.
- ◆ ***Appropriate the promises.*** According to Peter, God has furnished us with all the assets that we possibly could need in order to succeed in our journey toward goal of spiritual formation, that is, becoming partakers of the divine nature according to 2 Peter 1:3. In order to find and appropriate these promises, we must be diligent students of the Bible. We appropriate and apply the promises of God through prayer coupled with obedient faith. When we find a promise in the Bible that fits an area of need or weakness, it is like a check to be cashed. We cash the check through believing prayer. That is, we recite God’s very words back to him ***in the form of a request for him to actualize in our lives those things which he has promised.***

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

A Word of Caution –
Cont.:

If there is a condition attached to the promise, we need to ask the help of his Spirit in fulfilling that condition.

- ◆ **Live in community.** God has ordained that Christians should live in community. In regard to moral and spiritual weaknesses, we may need to confess them to one another within a small group in which a climate of trust has been developed. Associated with acknowledging areas of my weakness to someone I trust is the opportunity to enlist his or her prayer support as I strive to overcome that weakness. Moreover, I can submit myself to an accountability bond such that I give that other person the right to check on my progress in overcoming the weakness.
-

**Questions for
Reflection &
Discussion**

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of Peter's canonical outline of the spiritual formation process. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. What is meant by the phrase ***normative outline of the spiritual formation process?***
 2. What do you find appealing about Peter's formulation in 2 Peter 1:5-7?
 3. Read carefully 2 Peter 1:3-4. Summarize Peter's rationale for the formulation in 2 Peter 1:5-7?
 4. Read carefully 2 Peter 1:8-15. Summarize the benefits that Peter promises for those who practice the seven qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7. Summarize the liabilities that result from not practicing them.
 5. Assess and summarize your overall progress in practicing the seven qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7.
 6. Identify and describe the kinds of action steps needed to further your practice of these seven qualities.
 7. You may insert pages as necessary to record further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of Peter's normative outline of the spiritual formation process.
-
-

3. FAITH

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply...

Biblical Definition of Faith

Faith

***Pistis* = The act of trusting, relying upon, and appropriating**

- ◆ The means by which...
 - ▶ The gospel of God is revealed
 - ▶ The righteousness of God is received
 - ▶ The benefits of the gospel are appropriated
 - ▶ The Christian life is experienced
- ◆ Peter's journey of faith
- ◆ The relationship between faith and works

Faith is the means by which persons, events, and things are represented according to the power, character, and promises of God...

The adjoining figure presents an outline of our consideration of faith. In his two epistles, Peter is concerned with the practice and experience of faith but not its definition. Instead, he relies upon a communal understanding of the concept of the kind of faith that brings salvation. Such a communal understanding is distributed throughout the writings of the New Testament, of which a selected set of readings will be the focus of this study.

The word translated 'faith' in 2 Peter 1:5 and generally throughout the New Testament is *pistis*. This word designates an act of mind and will by which we trust, rely upon, and appropriate the gospel of salvation in Christ and its indescribable benefits. Faith is the core quality of the Christian life without which none of the other qualities is possible. Consider the following Scriptures:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "but the righteous man shall live by faith."
[Romans 1:16-17, NASB]

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Biblical Definition of Faith – Cont.:

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe... [Romans 3:21-22, NASB; see also Philippians 3:7ff]

For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” [Romans 4:3, NASB]

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. [Galatians 2:20, NASB]

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. [Hebrews 11:6, NASB]

Hebrews 11:7ff presents a summary of the exploits of the Old Testament heroes, “who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” [Hebrews 11:33-34, NASB]

Peter’s Journey of Faith

Peter’s first encounter with Jesus is described in John 1:42. In Matthew 4:18-20, Peter responds affirmatively to Jesus’ call into discipleship. In Matthew 16:16, Peter offers his great confession. In John 13:37-38, Peter states his willingness to die for Jesus, but Jesus responds with a prophecy of Peter’s imminent denial. In John 21:15-17, Jesus commissions Peter to a pastoral ministry. In Acts 2:14ff, we find Peter’s Pentacostal Sermon, and in Acts 4:8ff we find his defense before the Jewish Sanhedrin. In particular, in Acts 4:12, Peter proclaims, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” In Acts 10:43, he testifies to Cornelius that in the Name of Jesus forgiveness of sins is available to all who would believe.

Relationship Between Faith and Righteous Behavior

According to the writer of Hebrews, the kind of faith that brings salvation always produces a distinctive life style characterized by devotion toward God and obedience to his commandments. Skim the Epistle of James and note the passages that address the relationship between saving faith and righteous behavior.

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Representational Thinking

To *represent* means to describe as having a specific character or quality, or to bring clearly before the mind by serving as a sign, symbol, model, or image. The Bible is a *representational document* in the sense that through its narratives, poetry, prophecies, and didactic⁶ passages it declares what is real for the Christian, thereby defining the Christian world view.

Summary of Faith

The kind of faith that brings salvation enables the Christian to represent, and thereby relate to, persons, events, things, and circumstances in his or her actual world according to the power, character, and promises of God rather than his or her own intuition. This is the essence of a Christian world view. As exhibited by the lives of the heroes of Hebrews 11, the operation of faith within the human personality inevitably and necessarily produces a distinctive lifestyle that is characterized by the qualities listed by Peter in 2 Peter 1:5-7 and discussed in the following paragraphs. *As will be placed in evidence through this study, the representation of persons, events, things, and circumstances in our actual world according to the power, character, and promises of God lies at the heart of and is the necessary precondition for advancement in spiritual formation according to the normative outline of the Apostle Peter.*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of the nature of the kind of faith that brings salvation. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Based upon your readings from Scripture, how would you describe biblical faith?
 2. Explain how a person is declared righteous before God.
 3. How would you describe the relationship between faith and righteous behavior?
 4. Does the operation of faith in the life of a Christian stop with the receiving of the gift of righteousness according to Romans 3:21-22, or does it continue throughout life? Include in your answer reflection upon Paul's meaning in Romans 1:16 & 17 and Galatians 2:20.
 5. Summarize your progress in practicing faith with respect to the "great and magnificent promises" mentioned in 1 Peter 1:4.
 6. Identify and describe the action steps needed to further your practice of faith with respect to the promises of God.
 7. You may insert pages recording further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of faith.
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⁶ That is, teaching or instructional passages. Such passages are really commentaries on the narrative or storyline of the Bible.

4. MORAL EXCELLENCE

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence...

Biblical Definition of Moral Excellence

Moral Excellence

- ◆ **Righteousness (= *dikaiosune*)**
 - ▶ **Putting off the corruption of the flesh, and...**
 - ▶ **Putting on the virtues of the Christian life (Galatians 5:16-22)**
 - ▶ **Embracing of divinely ordained authority structures**
 - Within the family (Ephesians 5:22-6:4)
 - Within the church (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 1 Timothy 3:1-13)
 - Within the sphere of employment (Ephesians 6:5-9)
 - With respect to civil authority (Romans 13:1-7)
- ◆ **Holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16)**
- ◆ **For church leaders, unimpeachable character (1 Timothy 3:1-13)**

At its core, moral excellence involves submitting to God's authority and embracing the authority structures that he has ordained for our good.

The adjoining figure outlines the components of moral excellence. The Greek word translated moral excellence is *arete*. In 2 Peter 1:3, Peter applies this word to God. The state of being morally excellent is closely allied with that of being righteous (= *dikaios* = morally upright). The moral excellence of God is inherent to his character; ***he is righteous absolutely***. However, the moral excellence of the believer is dependent upon the operation of God's grace; our righteousness (= *dikaiosune*) is contingent upon and derived from the righteousness of God. First, he declares us to be righteous (= *dikaios*) on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ and through the intermediate agency of our faith. Second, he causes his Holy Spirit to operate within us in such a manner to impart both the desire to be righteous and the power to do so. Thus, ***at the heart of the biblical representation of human righteousness is the concept of submission to the authority of God and the embracing of the authority structures that he has ordained and set in place for our good***. The believer is commanded to practice moral excellence in the following specific ways:

- ◆ Put off the corruption of the flesh and put on the virtues of the Christian life in accordance with Galatians 5:16-22.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Biblical Definition of Moral Excellence – Cont.:

- ◆ Embrace and submit to the God-ordained authority structure within the sphere of the family in accordance with Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and Colossians 3:18-21. This entails men assuming and graciously discharging their headship role as husbands and fathers, women assuming and graciously discharging their role as wives and mothers in submission to the authority of their husbands, and children assuming and graciously discharging their role in submission to the authority of their parents.
- ◆ Embrace and submit to the God-ordained authority structure within the sphere of the local church in accordance with 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15. This entails leaders fulfilling the qualifications for leadership in accordance with 1 Timothy 3:1ff and their assuming and graciously discharging their leadership responsibilities. And it entails members of the local church graciously submitting to the authority of their leaders.
- ◆ Embrace and submit to the God-ordained authority structure within the sphere of one's employment in accordance with Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22-25, and 1 Peter 2:18-20. This entails those who are employers, managers, and supervisors assuming and graciously discharging their leadership responsibilities, fully aware of the fact that they are accountable to God. And it entails the employees graciously submitting to the supervisory authorities that are placed above them.
- ◆ Embrace and submit to civil authority in accordance with Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. This entails those who are magistrates in the political arena assuming and graciously discharging their leadership responsibilities, fully aware of the fact that they are accountable to God. And it entails citizens graciously submitting to the authority of the magistrates.
- ◆ Practice a life of holiness in accordance with 1 Peter 1:15-16.
- ◆ In the case of the leaders of the local church, practice a level of moral excellence that is unimpeachable in accordance with 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

Exceptional Cases

The Bible presents a few examples of non-submission to properly constituted authority. The classic one is recorded in Daniel. When Nebuchadnezzar commanded Daniel's three friends to commit an act of idolatry, they refused. Their disobedience to the king was based on the fact that he had transgressed his divinely ordained role by commanding an act of disobedience to the law of God. Daniel found himself in a similar situation during the reign of Darius. In the narrative of Acts, the apostles repeatedly refused to submit to the Sanhedrin who was commanding them not to preach and teach in the Name of Jesus.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

**Representational
Issue**

In order to properly handle cases in which our allegiance to God's authority is being compromised by the demands of a lesser authority, ***we must be very careful to precisely represent both the requirements of the Law of God and the demands of the human authority.*** The episodes in Daniel exemplify cases where a civil authority is demanding disobedience to a clearly articulated command of God to worship nothing or no one except him. A similar situation arose at various times during the 2nd century AD when the Roman magistrates demanded that Christians worship the emperor. As a rule, those who refused were executed. However, the persecution under Diocletian (ca. 303-305) was different. In that case, the magistrates demanded of Christians that they hand over copies of the Scriptures. Although extremely distasteful, this demand was morally neutral. Hence, Christians were counseled by their church leaders to comply rather than resist. ***Thus, we are to submit to the properly constituted authorities unless they demand our disobedience to the law of God.***

Holiness

What does Peter mean by requiring us to be holy as God is holy in 1 Peter 1:15-16? How is this possible? In 1 Peter 1:16, Peter quotes from Leviticus (see Leviticus 11:44ff, 19:2, & 20:7) where the holiness of God is manifested through the tabernacle and the Levitical worship rituals. The most succinct New Testament representation of holiness is set forth by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. From this passage, as well as from Leviticus, the fact is evident that the core concept of holiness is ***separation***, including separation from all forms of moral and spiritual uncleanness and from alliances and relationships that induce moral compromise. However, holiness entails more than simply righteous behavior. Jude places in evidence the attitudinal and emotional aspects of holiness by the phrase, "hating even the garment polluted by the flesh (Jude 1:23)." In this passage, Jude possibly alludes to the filthy garment worn by a leper or to a woman's menstrual cloth. The psalmist makes a similar statement as follows: "Hate evil, you who love the LORD..." [Psalm 97:10, NASB] In the Old Testament, God commanded Israel to remain separate from all of the surrounding nations. The people of Israel were to be a testimony to them, but they were not to intermarry with them nor were they to enter into close alliances that might lead them into immorality. The same is true of the Christian; we are to form our close alliances and intimate friendships within the community of faith while presenting a clear and unblemished testimony to those outside.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Representational Thinking Applied to Holiness and the Use of Time

In Exodus 31:12-13, *Yahweh*, the God of Israel, enjoins upon his people the keeping of the sabbath, and he connects sabbath-keeping to his Name, *Yahweh M'Qadash* = the LORD who makes you holy. In other words, the process of sanctification, that is, progress in holiness, is linked to sabbath-keeping. The English word sabbath derives from the Hebrew *shabbat*, which means a period of rest or the non-use of time. From the seventh day of creation week, God set apart and consecrated the sabbath for the benefit of man to be a day of rest, prayer, reflection upon God, and worship; it is also to be a day of characterized by the enjoyment of fellowship with family and friends. As we contemplate our eternal state as presented to us by the Apostle John in Revelation 21:1ff, the fact becomes evident that eternity is an endless *shabbat*. And so our setting apart one day in seven on a regular basis as a day for reflection upon God, worship, and enjoyment of fellowship with one another is tantamount to the practice of a microcosm of our eternal state. Sabbath-keeping is therefore an expression of our submission to the authority of God over time and the way he has structured it for our good, and it is an appropriation of his representation of the sabbath as a day of delight rather than a day of duty. The prophet Isaiah speaks to the issue of sabbath-keeping in Isaiah 56:2ff and Isaiah 58:13-14; the second passage is especially noteworthy:

If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. [Isaiah 58:13-14, NASB]

The Practical Side of the Pursuit of Holiness

In our fast-paced, technology-driven culture of the 21st century, the regular setting apart of one day in seven as *shabbat* in the manner defined by Scripture is radically counter-cultural. However, as we continue our reflection on the discipline of pursuing holiness and moral excellence, the fact becomes evident that apart from sabbath-keeping we cannot progress in this foundational area. To paraphrase from the old hymn, ***"It takes time to be holy."*** According to the apostle Peter's normative outline of the spiritual formation process, moral excellence is the prerequisite to progress in the other six qualities of the Christian life. Therefore, I believe we can draw the following conclusion with respect to sabbath-keeping: ***apart from our submitting to God's authority over the use of time through the regular keeping of shabbat, we cannot progress in any of the seven qualities of the Christian life. Sabbath-keeping is a foundational discipline to experiencing progress in holiness and moral excellence.***

Summary of Moral Excellence

How should we sum up the concept of moral excellence? Because our righteousness is contingent upon and derived from God's, we can affirm that for us *submitting to the authority of God and embracing the authority structures that he has ordained for our good lies at the heart of moral excellence. The moral qualities of the Christian life are the fruit of such submission.* God's authority over us is all-encompassing, including especially our use of time. Moreover, the character of God himself, rather than other persons, represents the standard of moral excellence.

Representational Thinking Applied to Authority and Submission

Submitting to authority is problematic for many in our contemporary American culture because the act of submission has been grossly misrepresented. Sometime in the early 1980s I was listening to Dr. James Dobson's program, *Focus on the Family*, and he made a statement that has remained fixed in my memory ever since: "Chain-of-command is a value-free vehicle for getting things done." In other words, submission to authority implies nothing with respect to essence; it is simply a practical arrangement for ordering society. As we study the New Testament, the fact becomes evident that authority and submission is modeled in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Clearly, Jesus Christ intentionally placed himself beneath the authority of the Father for the accomplishment of his earthly ministry. Astonishingly, submission to the Father's authority is an eternal dimension of the relationship of the Son to the Father, as witnessed by the New Testament Scriptures. Consider, for example, the following statement by Paul:

When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. [1 Corinthians 15:28, NASB]

Therefore, moral excellence is based upon a biblical representation of authority as modeled in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

Representational Thinking Applied to Self

Moral excellence is contradicted and resisted by a misrepresentation of self in relation to God and others. A misrepresentation of self is *pride*. Pride engenders a spirit of insubordination, stubbornness, and self-sufficiency with respect to God and his commandments. *A prideful person cannot even begin to achieve or experience moral excellence.*

How is Moral Excellence Achieved and Maintained?

By this point, it should be abundantly clear that the lifestyle of the Christian is to be distinctive with respect to moral excellence; that is, our behavior is to be righteous, and the network of associations and alliances that we enter into are to contribute to edification in holiness rather than moral compromise. We have asserted that our righteousness derives from the absolute righteousness of God, and that it entails a submission to God's authority and the authority structures that he has set in place for our good. However, the question remains as to what practical tools and assets has God provided to enable us to actually live in a morally excellent way? A Scripture that always comes to mind in this regard is the following:

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. [Joshua 1:8, NASB]

From Joshua 1:1ff, we find that the 8th verse is part of a set of commissioning instructions delivered personally and directly to Joshua by *Yahweh*, the God of Israel. How did *Yahweh* speak to Joshua? Perhaps Exodus 33:11 provides a clue. During Moses' lifetime *Yahweh* communed with him in the tabernacle or the "tent of meeting" as a man communes with his friend. Evidently, on at least some occasions Joshua stood with Moses when he communed with God. After Moses' death, Joshua undoubtedly sustained the pattern of communing with God by presenting himself before the ark of *Yahweh* in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. This is where we find him in Joshua 7:6ff after Israel's defeat at the hands of the men of Ai. On the basis of these scriptural clues, I conclude that Joshua received the instructions of Joshua 1:1ff by the voice of God speaking directly to him from between the cherabim that overlooked the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place.

Content of *Yahweh's* Instructions

What did *Yahweh* instruct Joshua to do? We can parse Joshua 1:8 into the following three commands.

Habitually Verbalize the Book of the Law

First, he was to habitually verbalize "this book of the law." According to Deuteronomy 31:26, the scroll on which Moses had written the law, that is, the Pentateuch as we know it today, was placed beside the ark of *Yahweh* in the Most Holy Place. According to Deuteronomy 17:18, the future kings of Israel were instructed to make a copy of the book of the law. According to Joshua 8:32, Joshua himself inscribed a copy of the law on stones as part of the covenant ceremony that took place near Shechem after the conquest of Ai. Thus, the scriptural data suggest that Joshua made a personal copy of the book of the law so that he could commit it to memory; by this means he was able to verbally review it for the benefit of himself and others.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Habitually Meditate Upon the Book of the Law **Second, he was to meditate on the book of the law;** that is, he was to mentally reflect upon it and ponder it. According to David in Psalm 19:7ff, the law of *Yahweh* is exceedingly precious and rich. By turning it over in our minds, we derive from it deep insights that impart wisdom for life and ministry.

Habitually Obey the Book of the Law **Third, he was to diligently obey it.** Through actual practice of the moral principles of the law, they would become more deeply ingrained to the extent that our immediate and seemingly natural response to circumstances increasingly comes into consonance with the righteous requirements of the law.

Applicability of *Yahweh's* Instructions to Joshua Are the instructions of *Yahweh* to Joshua applicable only to certain people, such as leaders, or are they normative for everyone? The following Old Testament passages affirm that anyone who desires to live in a morally excellent way must follow *Yahweh's* instructions to Joshua: Psalm 19:7ff, Psalm 40:6-8, Psalm 119:9-11, and Proverbs 4:23. In the New Testament, we have already noted Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-20 which includes "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..." Consider the following passage from Paul:

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [Colossians 3:16, NASB]

The following are additional New Testament passages that relate to moral excellence: Matthew 6:10, 7:21 & 26:42; John 6:38 & 13:17; Romans 2:13 & 8:4; and James 4:17. It is noteworthy that in a number of these passages subordination of the human will to the will of the God is explicitly addressed.

Conclusion Concerning the Acquisition and Maintenance of Moral Excellence Thus, the instructions concerning the word of God found in the Old Testament are carried over into the new. And so we conclude that to acquire and maintain a morally excellent lifestyle requires study of God's word, that is, the Bible; memorization of passages of Scripture; frequent verbalization of those passages to keep the memory of them fresh; meditation on the word of God; and habitual obedience. These are the timeless and normative keys to prosperity and success in the eyes of God.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Factors That Impede Progress in Moral Excellence

As we pursue moral excellence as defined above, we inevitably encounter resistance emanating from within our own personalities. Moreover, we often encounter resistance brought to bear by other people, even those who profess to be our friends and associates. The biblical narrative is full of stories of godly people struggling to behave righteously in the face of such resistance. Therefore, as we address ourselves to the pursuit of moral excellence, it is essential that we acknowledge that the path is not easy and that there are enemies lurking along the way.

Enemy #1: the Flesh

We have encountered this term already. As employed by Paul, *flesh* (= *sarx*) is a technical term that refers to the sin-corrupted human nature. We can define the flesh as everything that we are and have according to our genetic heritage and according to our life experience up to the point of Christian conversion, that is, the point at which we acknowledge our sinful condition before God and receive his forgiveness by embracing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. **Therefore, flesh is what we are apart from salvation in Jesus Christ.** We have already addressed the problem of pride which is the misrepresentation of self in relationship to God and others; pride is the fountainhead of all other kinds of sin. According to Paul in Romans 8:1ff and Galatians 5:17ff, the flesh is morally corrupt beyond remedy and set in implacable hostility toward God. In other words, the flesh is beyond reformation; it is like a wild dog that cannot be housebroken. God's solution to the problem of the flesh is extreme, but absolutely effective; namely, death by crucifixion. According to Paul, all that we are according to our human nature apart from Christ has been united with Christ in his death so that we have actually died in Christ. This teaching is briefly summarized by Paul in Galatians 2:20 and unfolded in detail in Romans 6:1ff.

The Problem of Sin

In the foregoing discussion of the flesh, I used the phrase, "sinful condition." According to Paul, *sin* (= *hamartia*) is a technical term for the principle of iniquity that permeates our personality and which motivates attitudes, appetites, and behaviors that are offensive and unrighteous. In other words, sin represents everything about my character that causes me to fall short of the righteousness of God.

Putting Off the Flesh

According to Paul in Colossians 2:8-15, the Old Testament rite of circumcision is a figure of what God has done for us through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even as the foreskin was excised and removed from the bodies of Jewish males, in like manner God has excised and removed the "the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:11, NASB)..." However, there are differences between the Old Testament rite and the circumcision of Christ in the New Testament. Whereas the Old Testament rite actualized a physical change in the individual, the circumcision of

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Putting off the flesh – Cont.:	Christ effects a spiritual change. Whereas the Old Testament rite was accomplished through a physical operation, the circumcision of Christ is accomplished by a forensic decree of God.
A Representational Issue	The term “forensic decree” refers to a declaration such as in a court of law. God has declared that the sin-corrupted flesh has been removed from our personality just as the Old Testament rite surgically removed the foreskin from the male anatomy. However, our experience is different from that of the Jewish male of the Old Testament. His physical experience corroborated with the physical operation. However, our experience seems to contradict the spiritual operation of the circumcision of Christ. We sense that the principle of iniquity still remains. To briefly summarize Paul’s teaching in regard to this paradox, as we embrace and appropriate the circumcision of Christ as true, God progressively unleashes the power of his Spirit to actualize that circumcision within our personality, enabling us to put off the corruption of the flesh and to put on the virtues of the Christian life ⁷ .
Enemy #2: the World	Paul and the other apostles employ <i>world</i> (= <i>cosmos</i>) as a technical term for the morally corrupt world order in which we are called upon to live and minister. The more we strive to live righteously, the more we come to recognize that the surrounding world order constantly resists our progress, being permeated by the same principle of iniquity and hostility toward God that we find lurking within our own personalities.
Enemy #3: the Devil	According to 2 Corinthians 10:3ff, Ephesians 6:10ff, and 1 Peter 5:8, the Christian is engaged in a life-and-death struggle with a powerful spiritual adversary. Only by deploying the spiritual weapons provided by God are we able to defeat this foe.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of moral excellence. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Based upon your readings from Scripture, how would you describe moral excellence?
2. Explain how a person develops and experiences moral excellence. Explain the role of the community of faith in the development and experience of moral excellence.
3. Explain the relationship between your development of moral excellence and your embracing and submitting to the authority structures that God has ordained for our good. Identify and briefly discuss the authority structures that exist in your life and how you relate to them.

⁷ Paul unfolds this teaching in Romans 6-8 and refers to it elsewhere in his writings.

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

4. Explain the relationship between moral excellence and holiness. Discuss the connection between sabbath-keeping and progress in holiness based upon your study of relevant Scripture passages. Discuss the significance of God's character representing and modeling moral excellence rather than the character of other persons.
 5. Summarize your progress in experiencing and practicing moral excellence.
 6. Identify the action steps needed to further your experience and practice of moral excellence.
 7. You may insert pages recording further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of moral excellence.
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5. KNOWLEDGE

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge...

Biblical Definition of Knowledge

Knowledge

- ◆ Knowledge of the *kerygma* (Matthew 28:18-20)
- ◆ Knowledge of the promises in the gospel (2 Peter 1:4)
- ◆ Knowledge of the *didache* (Matthew 28:18-20)
- ◆ Knowledge of God (Philippians 3:7-11, 2 Peter 1:3 & 8)

The kind of knowledge of which Peter speaks is derived from observation and experience in relationship.

The adjoining figure outlines the components of knowledge. According to 2 Peter 1:5, we are to layer knowledge (= *gnosis* = knowledge derived from observation and experience) onto the combination of faith and moral excellence. This is significant, for the prerequisite for the kind of knowledge of which Peter speaks is both faith and submission to authority, which lies at the heart of moral excellence. Without both of these qualities, we cannot acquire knowledge, which includes at least the following elements:

- ◆ **Knowledge of the gospel** as preached by the apostles⁸. It is essential that we embrace the gospel for ourselves in the sense of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, and that we devote ourselves to the reproduction of the gospel in the lives of others. Knowledge of the *kerygma* lies at the heart of obeying Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

8 See Appendix 1, entitled *The Kerygma: The Bridge Model*. Paul's canonical form of the *kerygma* in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 is employed as a mnemonically appealing outline of the essential components of the gospel. On this basis, a graphically supported narrative of a gospel presentation is formulated that includes all of the essential components.

Biblical Definition of Knowledge – Cont.:

- ◆ **Knowledge of the promises.** Peter writes, “He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” [2 Peter 1:4, NASB] The promises to which Peter refers are those to which we have access through the gospel as set forth by Paul in Romans 3:21-11:36; namely, deliverance from the penalty, power, and, ultimately, the very presence of sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ.
- ◆ **Knowledge of the teaching,** that is, the way of Christ and the apostles. In his Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), Jesus commanded his followers to go forth and “make disciples... teaching them to observe (= *tereo* = to keep secure as a precious asset) all that I commanded you...” As we discussed in Section 1 of this study, the teaching of the apostles is the product of their obedience to the command of our Lord in Matthew 28:18-20; that is, the teaching of the apostles is equivalent to the commands of Jesus himself. Because the word translated ‘observe’ is *tereo*, our obedience to the commands of Jesus but goes far beyond mere intellectual knowledge and external behavior. ***It involves a heart attitude of considering the commands of Jesus a precious asset to be guarded at all costs.***
- ◆ **Knowledge of God** through Jesus Christ. The kind of knowledge that Peter has in mind in 2 Peter 1:3-15 is personal and relational as indicated by the 3rd and the 8th verses. However, we must emphasize that knowledge of persons that is rooted in experience and relationship is bilateral. It is possible for persons to display all manner of religious behavior and yet not ***know*** Jesus Christ, nor be ***known*** by him according to Matthew 7:22.

Peter’s Journey in the Knowledge of God

In 2 Peter 1:3 & 8, Peter emphasizes that the kind of knowledge he has in mind is experiential knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. Peter had walked and lived with Jesus Christ for three years, and through that experience he had come to know God. We can trace Peter’s knowledge of God through Jesus Christ from his great confession in Matthew 16:16, to Jesus’ post-resurrection interaction with him by the shore of Galilee in John 21:15ff, to his testimony before the Sanhedrin that salvation was only available through the Name of Jesus Christ in Acts 4:12, to his testimony before Cornelius that all who place their trust in the Name of Jesus Christ receive forgiveness of sins in Acts 10:43. The Gospel of Mark is really a record of Peter’s experience with Christ as recorded by John Mark. Peter places in evidence his eyewitness contact with the life and ministry of Christ as an authenticating factor in support of his teaching in 2 Peter 1:16ff.

“*You only truly believe that which activates you...*”

Summary of Knowledge

The kind of knowledge of which Peter speaks in 2 Peter 1:3-15 is derived from observation and experience in relationship. While we cannot reenact Peter's experience of relationship with Jesus Christ in the flesh, we can experience a relationship with him through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of knowledge. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Reflect on the logic of Peter's order; that is, faith is the basis for moral excellence, and moral excellence is the basis for knowledge. Discuss the significance of this order with respect to knowledge.
 2. After having surveyed the flow of Mark's Gospel, summarize the aspects of Peter's experience with Christ that were the most life-transforming according to your evaluation.
 3. Since you cannot reenact the kind of personal and relational experience Peter had with Jesus Christ, discuss the components of knowledge that you need to develop and pursue that approximate Peter's experience with Christ.
 4. Discuss the method and approach by which you will seek to develop the kind of knowledge that Peter had in mind when he wrote 2 Peter 1:5.
 5. Summarize your progress in developing this kind of experiential knowledge.
 6. Identify the action steps needed to further your experience of the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.
 7. You may insert pages recording further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of knowledge.
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6. SELF-CONTROL

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control...

Biblical Definition of Self-Control

Self-Control

- ◆ **Patience (= *makrothumia*) as in Galatians 5:22**
- ◆ **Self-control (= *egkrateia*) as in Galatians 5:23**
- ◆ **Temperance (= *nephalios*) as in 1 Timothy 3:2 & 11 and Titus 2:2**

Self-control includes mastery of the emotions and the appetites of the body such that the Christian remains calm under stress and engages in eating, drinking, and sexual activity with discipline and moderation.

The adjoining figure outlines the components of self-control. According to 2 Peter 1:6, we are to layer self-control (= *egkrateia*) onto the combination of faith, moral excellence, and knowledge. The following passages reinforce Peter's teaching and provide additional insight:

- ◆ The fruit of the Spirit is... patience (= *makrothumia*) ... gentleness, self-control (= *egkrateia*) ... [Galatians 5:22 & 23, NASB]
- ◆ An overseer, then, must be above reproach... temperate (= *nephalios*), prudent, respectable... not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. [1 Timothy 3:2 & 3, NASB]
- ◆ Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain... [1 Timothy 3:8, NASB]
- ◆ Women must likewise be... temperate (= *nephalios*)... in all things. [1 Timothy 3:11, NASB]
- ◆ Older men are to be temperate (= *nephalios*)... [Titus 2:2, NASB]

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Biblical Definition of Self-Control – Cont.:

A number of key words are employed in these passages, which, together, expand our understanding of the quality of self-control as follows:

- ◆ Patience = *makrothumia* as in Galatians 5:22 means literally to be “of long temper.” It is defined as emotional tranquility in the face of adverse circumstances. Other passages where patience is enjoined are Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 6:5, Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 1:11 & 3:12, 1 Timothy 1:16, 2 Timothy 3:10 & 4:2, Hebrews 6:12, and James 5:10.
- ◆ Self-control = *egkrateia* as in Galatians 5:23 means literally to be “of inner strength.” It is defined as mastery of desires and appetites, especially with regard to sexuality.
- ◆ Temperate = *nephalios* as in 1 Timothy 3:2 & 11 and Titus 2:2 literally means to be “holding no wine.” Therefore, more generally, it can be defined as sober, disciplined, moderate, and abstinent with respect to physical appetites, especially in the arena of eating and drinking.

Summary of Self-Control

How can we summarize the meaning of self-control for the Christian? ***Self-control includes mastery of the emotions and the appetites of the body such that the Christian remains calm under stress and engages in eating, drinking, and sexual activity with discipline and moderation.*** An essential aspect of self-control with respect to sexuality is that ***sexual activity is never engaged in outside the context of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.*** In particular, the following five categories of perverse sexual activity are clearly, emphatically, and repeatedly prohibited in Scripture:

- ◆ ***Fornication*** = sexual activity between unmarried persons.
- ◆ ***Adultery*** = sexual activity engaged in by married persons outside of marriage.
- ◆ ***Incest*** = sexual activity between close relatives.
- ◆ ***Homosexual activity*** = all forms of sexual intercourse between individuals of the same sex.
- ◆ ***Sodomy*** = sexual activity between a human and an animal.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of self-control. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Reflect on the logic of Peter’s order; that is, faith is the basis for moral excellence, moral excellence is the basis for knowledge, and knowledge is the basis for self-control. Discuss the significance of this order with respect to self-control.
2. After reading all of the Scripture passages cited above, present your own summary of the meaning of self-control.

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Questions for
Reflection and
Discussion – Cont.:

3. Reflect on your own experience in this area of spiritual maturity, and identify the specific issues that present a challenge to you, including the circumstances that you have found to be difficult to handle in regard to self-control.
 4. How will you seek to develop in your perceived areas of weakness in regard to self-control? In particular, identify those action steps that you can take in order to make progress toward the goal of self-control. Also, identify the areas in which you need to ask God to energize such progress. Can you identify biblical promises and assets that are there for you to appropriate in regard to the development of self-control?
 5. You may insert pages recording further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of self-control.
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7. PERSEVERANCE

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance...

Biblical Definition of Perseverance

Perseverance

- ◆ ***Hupomone* = Patient endurance**
 - ▶ **Perseverance in a course of action in spite of countervailing circumstances**
 - ▶ **Fortitude or endurance in the face of adversity**
 - ▶ **An attitude or frame of mind characterized by patience and steadfastness**
 - ▶ **Patient endurance with anticipation of good outcome**

Perseverance is the result of representing adversity, not as something evil, but rather as something good.

The adjoining figure outlines the components of perseverance. According to 2 Peter 1:6, we are to layer perseverance (= *hupomone*) onto the combination of faith, moral excellence, knowledge, and self-control. The meaning of this word in the context of the passage in 2 Peter is as follows: a steadfast adherence to a course of action in spite of countervailing circumstances and difficulties; fortitude or endurance. In other passages where the word is employed, the following meanings also apply: an attitude or frame of mind of patience and steadfastness; patient endurance with a component of hope or expectation. Following are passages in which this word is used and which reinforce Peter's teaching and provide additional insight; in each passage, the English word which translates *hupomone* is shown in bold italics:

- ◆ But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with ***perseverance***. [Luke 8:15, NASB]
- ◆ By your ***endurance*** you will gain your lives. [Luke 21:19, NASB]

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Biblical Definition of Perseverance – Cont.:

- ◆ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about *perseverance*; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope... [Romans 5:3 & 4, NASB]
- ◆ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through *perseverance* and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives *perseverance* and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus... [Romans 15:4 & 5, NASB]
- ◆ ... Strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all *steadfastness* and patience (= *makrothumia*)... [Colossians 1:11, NASB]
- ◆ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us... [Hebrews 12:1ff, NASB]
- ◆ Additional passages in which *hupomone* is employed with the sense of steadfastness or endurance in the face of adversity are 2 Corinthians 6:4 & 12:12, 1 Thessalonians 3:5, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 3:10, Hebrews 10:36, James 1:3-4 & 5:11, and Revelation 13:10 & 14:12.
- ◆ Another passage in which *hupomone* is employed with the sense of a frame of mind of patience or steadfastness is Titus 2:2.
- ◆ Additional passages in which *hupomone* is employed with the sense of patient endurance with hope are 2 Corinthians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, and Revelation 1:9, 2:2-3, 2:19 & 3:10.

Summary of Perseverance

In a few of the passages considered above, *hupomone* is employed with the sense of a frame of mind of patience or steadfastness; however, even in these the presence of countervailing factors or circumstances that test the genuineness of that patience or steadfastness is implied. In most of the passages, the presence of adversity is overtly part of the context. In fact, Paul in Romans 5:3ff and James in James 1:2ff directly link the pressure of adversity with the production of the fruit of perseverance. Thus, we conclude that *perseverance is a supernatural quality of the Christian life that is imparted by the Holy Spirit whereby the believer is enabled to resolutely press on in the face of even severe adversity*. He or she does so with an abiding joy and hope based upon the promises of God.

The Importance of Representational Thinking

The consideration of perseverance in the Christian life highlights the importance of representational thinking, which we introduced in connection with faith. The operation of the kind of faith that saves in reference to adversity is to represent that adversity, not as something evil, but rather as something good. Because of this manner of representing adversity, the Christian is enabled to maintain an attitude of steadfastness, hope, and joy, “knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us [Romans 5:3-5, NASB].”

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of perseverance. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Reflect on the logic of Peter’s order; that is, faith is the basis for moral excellence, moral excellence is the basis for knowledge, knowledge is the basis for self-control, and self-control is the basis for perseverance. Discuss the significance of this order with respect to perseverance.
 2. After reading all of the Scripture passages cited above, present your own summary of the meaning of perseverance.
 3. Reflect on your own experience in this area of spiritual maturity, and identify the specific issues that present a challenge to you, including the circumstances that you have found to be difficult to handle in regard to perseverance.
 4. How will you seek to develop in your perceived areas of weakness in regard to perseverance? In particular, identify those action steps that you can take in order to make progress toward the goal of perseverance. Also, identify the areas in which you need to ask God to energize such progress. Can you identify biblical promises and assets that are there for you to appropriate in regard to the development of perseverance?
 5. You may insert pages recording further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of perseverance.
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8. GODLINESS

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness...

Biblical Definition of Godliness

Godliness

- ◆ ***Eusebeia* = Piety or devotion**
 - ▶ **A distinctive way of life characterized by reverent devotion toward...**
 - God
 - Study and practice of Scripture
 - Ministry of prayer
 - Practice of *koinonia* within the community of faith
 - ▶ **Vigilance with respect to the Adversary**
 - ▶ **Watchfulness with respect to the coming of the Lord**

At its core, godliness is the fulfillment of the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27).

The adjoining figure outlines the components of godliness. According to 2 Peter 1:6, we are to layer godliness (= *eusebeia*) onto the combination of faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance. Peter implies that the order of the layering of these qualities is important such that each one contributes to the attainment of those following. The meaning of *eusebeia* includes at least the following elements: a distinctive way of life characterized by reverent devotion toward God and diligent observance of the beliefs and practices related to him; a theocentric worldview, that is, one characterized by a fear of God and a resolute trust in his promises; a character which is godlike. Following are passages in which this word is used and which reinforce Peter's teaching and provide additional insight; in each passage, the English word which translates *eusebeia* is shown in bold italics:

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

- Biblical Definition of Godliness – Cont.:
- ◆ But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or *piety* we had made him walk?” [Acts 3:12, NASB]
 - ◆ First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all *godliness* and dignity. [1 Timothy 2:1-2, NASB]
 - ◆ By common confession, great is the mystery of *godliness*:
 He who was revealed in the flesh,
 Was vindicated in the Spirit,
 Seen by angels,
 Proclaimed among the nations,
 Believed on in the world,
 Taken up in glory. [1 Timothy 3:16, NASB]
 - ◆ But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of *godliness*; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but *godliness* is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. [1 Timothy 4:7-8, NASB]
 - ◆ ... Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and *godliness*, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. [2 Peter 1:3, NASB]
 - ◆ See also 1 Timothy 6:3-11, 2 Timothy 3:5, and 2 Peter 3:11.

**Commentary on
Biblical Passages**

In Acts 3:1 ff, Luke records the miracle of the healing of the lame beggar by Peter and John. Because this miracle occurred at one of the gates to the temple, it immediately attracted a crowd of astonished onlookers, to whom Peter addressed an evangelistic message (see Acts 3:11 ff). What confusion was Peter endeavoring to overcome by his statement in Acts 3:12? The philosophy of Stoicism taught that personal virtue was attained through reason and discipline. In the hellenized culture of the 1st century, as even in our day, a miraculous healing might be represented as the product of extraordinary saintliness in the Stoic sense. However, Peter sharply counteracts this misrepresentation of the miracle just performed. While power and godliness had been placed in evidence through the miracle, these were not inherent to the character of Peter and John, but rather *they were derived from Jesus Christ*.

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Commentary on
Biblical Passages –
Cont.:

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul implies that godliness flourishes in a political environment characterized by domestic tranquility, and he enjoins Christians to prayer for their political leaders toward the end that such an environment might prevail. The passage in 1 Timothy 3:16 is an ancient confessional hymn that defines the essence of the Christian religion in which the life and ministry of Jesus Christ provides the normative model of godliness. In 1 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul teaches that godliness can be developed through the application of discipline.

In 2 Peter 1:3, part of the introduction to our focal passage, Peter teaches that through the Christian gospel God has provided to us all the resources needed for *life and godliness*. He continues in the following verse by affirming that through the “precious and magnificent promises” contained in the gospel we have all that we need to “become partakers of the divine nature.”

Summary of Godliness

How can we summarize the dimensions and content of godliness? It seems to me that the Bible represents this quality in subjective and relational terms, especially as we reflect upon the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures in which the lives of godly people are described. As was true in the case of faith, Hebrews 11 provides portraits of godliness through the lives of the heroes of old. What then are the parameters and aspects of godliness? I would respond with the following:

- ◆ A godly person fears and loves God.
- ◆ Because the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, a godly person represents persons, events, and things in accordance with God’s perspective and with a view toward God’s glory.
- ◆ A godly person is devoted to Scripture, including study, memorization, meditation, and, most importantly, practice in accordance with Joshua 1:8.
- ◆ A godly person is devoted to the ministry of prayer.
- ◆ A godly person is devoted to the community of faith expressed through a particular local church. This aspect of godliness entails the diligent practice of *koinonia* within that particular local community, including fellowship, partnership in the work of the ministry, and mutual burden-bearing⁹.
- ◆ A godly person is vigilant with respect to the schemes and devices of our adversary, the devil.
- ◆ A godly person is watchful with respect to the imminent return of our Lord to bring history to its conclusion through judgment and to establish his millennial kingdom.

9 The meaning of *koinonia* is discussed further in the next section in connection with *brotherly kindness*.

Summary of
Godliness – Cont.:

- ◆ In sum, a godly person is one who loves God with all his heart, mind, and strength and his neighbor as himself in accordance with the Great Commandment expressed in Matthew 22:37 and parallel passages.
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**Questions for
Reflection and
Discussion**

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of godliness. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Reflect on the logic of Peter's order; that is, faith is the basis for moral excellence, moral excellence is the basis for knowledge, knowledge is the basis for self-control, self-control is the basis for perseverance, and perseverance is the basis for godliness. Discuss the significance of this order with respect to godliness.
 2. After reading all of the Scripture passages cited above, present your own summary of the meaning of godliness.
 3. Reflect on your own experience in this area of spiritual maturity, and identify the specific issues that present a challenge to you, including the circumstances that you have found to be difficult to handle in regard to godliness.
 4. How will you seek to develop in your perceived areas of weakness in regard to godliness? In particular, identify those action steps that you can take in order to make progress toward the goal of godliness. Also, identify the areas in which you need to ask God to energize such progress. Can you identify biblical promises and assets that are there for you to appropriate in regard to the development of godliness?
 5. You may insert pages recording further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of godliness.
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9. BROTHERLY KINDNESS

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness...

Biblical Definition of Brotherly Kindness

Brotherly Kindness

- ◆ ***Philadelphia* = Love for one another within the community of faith**
- ◆ ***Koinonia* = practical demonstration of *philadelphia* in terms of...**
 - ▶ **Enjoyment of communion**
 - ▶ **Mutual respect and honor of others above self**
 - ▶ **Extension of mutual forgiveness**
 - ▶ **Mutual accommodation in regard to disputable matters**
 - ▶ **Collaboration in the work of the ministry**
 - ▶ **Tangible acts of mutual burden-bearing**

At its core, the practice of brotherly kindness involves the fulfillment of the Golden Rule.

The adjoining figure outlines the components of brotherly kindness. According to 2 Peter 1:6, we are to layer brotherly kindness (= *philadelphia*) onto the combination of faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, and godliness. Peter implies that the order of the layering of these qualities is important such that each one contributes to the attainment of those following. The meaning of *philadelphia* includes at least the following elements: the representation of one another within the community of faith as fellow members of God's household (= *oikeios*; see Ephesians 2:19ff), that is, as brothers and sisters in the family of our heavenly Father; and a distinctive way of life characterized by a kindhearted attitude toward one another within the community of faith. The unfolding of the concept of *philadelphia* together with the related concept of *koinonia* are major themes in the Pauline corpus. Paul repeatedly and emphatically enjoins upon us a level of commitment to one another that is so deep and strong that we are able to overlook and work

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Biblical Definition of Brotherly kindness – Cont.: around all of the quirks and offensive attitudes and behaviors that inevitably spring forth from the flesh ¹⁰.

Before considering a number of biblical passages in which the word *philadelphia* is used, it is necessary that we carefully define some terms. I have already mentioned the word *koinonia* in this study as the New Testament word that is often translated ‘fellowship’ (see Acts 2:42 and 1 John 1:3ff, for example). *Koinonia* and *philadelphia* are tightly interlinked. I am inclined to assert that of the two, *philadelphia* is the more fundamental characteristic of the redeemed human personality and that *koinonia* is the product of *philadelphia*. However, it is also true that *philadelphia* is deepened and strengthened by the practice of *koinonia*. Whereas *philadelphia* represents the kindhearted attitude that we are enjoined to sustain toward one another as brothers and sisters within the community of faith, *koinonia* represents the overt and tangible practice of that kindhearted attitude in terms of the following: meeting together for communion, worship, and mutual edification; collaboration in the work of the ministry; and mutual burden-bearing in terms of rendering aid, encouragement, and support to one another during times of need. ***In other words, koinonia represents the practical demonstration of philadelphia.***

Following are passages in which the word *philadelphia* is used, and which reinforce Peter’s teaching and provide additional insight; in each passage, the English words which translate *philadelphia* are shown in bold italics:

- ◆ Be devoted to one another in ***brotherly love***; give preference to one another in honor... contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality... [Romans 12:10ff, NASB]
- ◆ Now as to the ***love of the brethren***, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more... [1 Thessalonians 4:9ff, NASB]
- ◆ Let ***love of the brethren*** continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. [Hebrews 13:1-3, NASB]

10 The definition of the technical term *flesh* and the related technical term *sin* are presented and discussed under *moral excellence*. The sin-corrupted human nature is one of the three factors identified that resist progress toward moral excellence, and therefore toward all seven of the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 and spiritual formation in general.

Biblical Definition of
Brotherly kindness –
Cont.:

- ◆ Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere *love of the brethren*, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. [1 Peter 1:22-23, NASB]
- ◆ See also Romans 14:1ff, Ephesians 4:1ff, Philippians 2:1ff, and Colossians 3:12ff.

**Commentary on
Biblical Passages**

It is noteworthy that in the Pauline passages the Apostle associates brotherly kindness or love with the practical and tangible demonstration thereof in terms of the display of mutual respect and honor, the extension of mutual forgiveness, the practice of hospitality, the provision of financial support during times of crisis, etc. Our handling of offensive behavior and disputable matters are two areas in which brotherly kindness is often sorely tested, and therefore the application of brotherly kindness in these two areas deserves further discussion.

In Matthew 18:15ff, Jesus addresses the manner in which offensive behavior should be handled within the community of faith, and in Matthew 18:21ff he deals forcefully with the subject of forgiveness.

The point of this entire passage is that we are commanded to represent offensive behavior within the overall context of God's having forgiven us on the basis of Christ's atonement. Forgiveness as employed in the New Testament is a judicial term involving a formal release from moral liability, that is, an act of acquittal. Our moral guilt before God is actual and immense, like the great debt of ten thousand talents owed by the first servant to his master. However, on the basis of the infinite merit of Christ's atoning sacrifice of himself, God has declared us to be forgiven; the infinite debt of apology and satisfaction that I owe to God on account of my sin has been paid in full by Christ, and on that basis I am released from that debt. ***If I have truly accepted from God his forgiveness of my great debt to him, then my willingness to forgive my fellow servants follows as a matter of logical necessity.*** I am commanded to properly represent the relatively minor offenses done by others to me in the light of the immense debt from which I have been released, even as the first servant in the story should have forgiven the relatively minor debt of one hundred denarii owed to him by the second servant. My unwillingness to forgive my brother or sister places in evidence the fact that I have not truly embraced God's forgiveness of me, and therefore the full weight of the infinite debt of apology and satisfaction owed to God on account of my sin actually remains. ***In other words, I effectively ratify and actualize God's forgiveness of me by forgiving my brother and sister in the sense that***

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Commentary on
Biblical Passages –
Cont.:

such acts of mutual forgiveness place in evidence the genuineness of my faith in God's having forgiven me.

Paul deals with the handling of disputable matters within the community of faith in Romans 14:1ff. He enjoins upon us the practice of an attitude of mutual respect and accommodation relative to such matters. In Paul's day the eating of meat sacrificed to idols was a matter of great controversy. Some Christians held that such meat remained morally neutral despite the fact that it had come from animals that had been sacrificed in the pagan temples. Others held that such meat had become morally corrupted by the pagan sacrifices. Paul affirmed that the substance of the meat was absolutely unaffected by whether it had come from sacrificial animals or not. However, ***it could become corrupted in the mind of the consumer of the meat depending upon how he or she represented it.*** Note the importance of representational thinking in the arena of disputable matters.

In our day, the consumption of wine is a disputable matter in many religious circles. Some Christian groups hold that total abstinence is the only course for a godly person to follow. Others hold that the consumption of wine in moderation is entirely biblical based upon the example of Christ himself. In 1 John 3:20ff, John teaches that ***the determining factor is the manner in which we represent a certain behavior in our conscience.*** According to my conscience, the consumption of wine in moderation is entirely acceptable. However, according to the conscience of my brother or sister it may be represented as an evil behavior. Therefore, when my wife and I are dining by ourselves, we may enjoy a glass of wine with our meal. However, if we are dining with the brother or sister whose conscience condemns this behavior, we will abstain so as not to create an offense. Thus, our conduct in regard to disputable matters tests and demonstrates the depth of our brotherly kindness towards one another.

**Summary of
Brotherly Kindness**

How can we summarize the dimensions and content of brotherly kindness? I would respond with the following:

- ◆ Brotherly kindness means that I immediately and automatically forgive my brother or sister of offensive behavior done to me. As a consequence of such forgiveness, he or she is released from moral liability with respect to the offense. Once I have forgiven, the offense is gone, out of view, never to be remembered or brought up again.
- ◆ Brotherly kindness means that I treat my brother or sister with respect regarding disputable matters. While my conscience may give me liberty with respect to a behavior, such as consumption of wine in moderation, his or her conscience may not. Therefore, I will limit my behavior out of respect for the conscience of my brother or sister.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Summary of
Brotherly Kindness –
Cont.:

- ◆ Brotherly kindness counteracts pride in the sense that it motivates a biblical representation of self in relationship to others. That is, it motivates a humble representation of self and respect and honor for one's brother or sister in the family of God.
- ◆ Brotherly kindness motivates a host of behaviors that are subsumed beneath *koinonia*, which means that I delight in the communion of the saints for worship and mutual edification, I rejoice over the opportunity to collaborate with my brothers and sisters in the work of the ministry, and I eagerly step in to help bear the burdens of my brothers and sisters by tangible acts of kindness and hospitality.
- ◆ In sum, the practice of brotherly kindness means that I love my brother or sister in Christ as I love myself, and I behave toward others as I would desire them to behave toward me in accordance with Matthew 7:12 & 22:39 and parallel passages.

**Questions for
Reflection and
Discussion**

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of brotherly kindness. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Reflect on the logic of Peter's order; that is, faith is the basis for moral excellence, moral excellence is the basis for knowledge, knowledge is the basis for self-control, self-control is the basis for perseverance, perseverance is the basis for godliness, and godliness is the basis for brotherly kindness. Discuss the significance of this order with respect to brotherly kindness.
 2. After reading all of the Scripture passages cited above, present your own summary of the meaning of brotherly kindness.
 3. Reflect on your own experience in this area of spiritual maturity, and identify the specific issues that present a challenge to you, including the circumstances that you have found to be difficult to handle in regard to brotherly kindness.
 4. How will you seek to develop in your perceived areas of weakness in regard to brotherly kindness? In particular, identify those action steps that you can take in order to make progress toward the goal of brotherly kindness. Also, identify the areas in which you need to ask God to energize such progress. Can you identify biblical promises and assets that are there for you to appropriate in regard to the development of brotherly kindness?
 5. You may insert pages recording further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of brotherly kindness.
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10. LOVE

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love...

Biblical Definition of Love

Love

- ◆ **Agape = Self-sacrificing love of godlike quality, related to...**
- ◆ **Charis = The lavish self-giving character of God; his unmerited favor towards us.**
- ◆ **Love...**
 - ▶ **Is a supernatural quality energized by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22)**
 - ▶ **Enables us to love unconditionally (1 Corinthians 13:1ff)**
 - ▶ **Engenders unity, one-mindedness, and obedience to Christ's commands (John 14:15ff & 15:9ff)**

Love is the consummate quality of the Christian life that enables us to represent God — that is, to serve as a sign or symbol of God.

The adjoining figure summarizes the components of love. According to 2 Peter 1:7, we are to layer love (= *agape*) onto the combination of faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, and brotherly kindness. Peter implies that the order of the layering of these qualities is important such that each one contributes to the attainment of those following. Thus, love is the crowning or consummating quality toward which we are to strive. Even as love dominates the nature and character of God, it is that quality which most significantly causes our character to correspond with that of God. In other words, as we increasingly become partakers of the divine nature in accordance with 2 Peter 1:4, love will increasingly dominate our character. *Therefore, love is that quality which causes us to be a sign and symbol of the nature and character of God; namely, that which causes us to represent God.*

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Commentary on
Agape

Agape occurs 116 times in the New Testament, and the verb *agapao* occurs 145 times. These words signifies the kind of self-sacrificing love that God has for us. This love flows **unconditionally** from the giver to the receiver; that is, it is a function of the giver rather than the receiver. In contrast, human love is contingent upon the receiver. For example, a woman may love her husband even though he mistreats and abuses her, but there comes a point when the abusive behavior of the husband affects the ability of the wife to continue to love him. As Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:43ff, it is relatively easy for us to love those who love us, but hard for us to love our enemies. Thus, the quality of love that we are enjoined to practice is supernatural, having its origin in God. Our practice of this godlike love is the result of God causing his love to flow through our personality. **According to Paul in Galatians 5:22-23, this godlike love is the crowning fruit of the Holy Spirit.**

Commentary on
Charis

A related concept is embodied in the Greek word *charis*, which is translated grace. The corresponding Old Testament word in Hebrew is *chesed*, which is often translated ‘loving kindness’. *Charis* is usually defined as unmerited favor. While this is technically correct, it fails to embrace and do justice to the grace of God. Consider carefully Paul’s words in the following passage:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, **to the praise of the glory of His grace**, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. [Ephesians 1:3-6, NASB; emphasis added]

According to Paul, the grace of God is the motivating force behind his plan of salvation for the human race, and the purpose of that plan is to showcase the glorious grace of God. While the unspeakable grace of God is most clearly and graphically manifested in the death of Christ on our behalf, according to Paul it actually began when God fastened his great love upon us while we were sinners, and he determined to draw us into his family. That is what Paul means by his statement, “In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself...” The concept of our salvation being motivated by the love of God is unfolded further by Paul in Ephesians 2:1ff.

Biblical Passages

The sheer number of biblical passages that contain the words *agape* or *agapao* testify concerning the importance and manifold character of love. Following are the principal teachings concerning love:

- ◆ We are commanded to love our enemies (Matthew 5:42ff, Luke 6:27ff, and Romans 12:18-21).

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

- Biblical Passages – Cont.:
- ◆ We are commanded to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matthew 19:19, Mark 12:31, Galatians 5:14, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, and James 2:8).
 - ◆ We are commanded to love one another within the community of faith (John 13:34-35, 1 Peter 1:22 & 2:17, and 1 John 3:11ff & 4:7ff).
 - ◆ Our love for one another is linked with our unity and one-mindedness (John 17:20ff and Colossians 2:2).
 - ◆ Our love for Christ is demonstrated through obedience to his commands (John 14:15ff & 15:9ff).
 - ◆ Our love for Christ motivates and energizes ministry (John 21:15ff).
 - ◆ Jesus’ love is a model for our love (John 13:1ff and Ephesians 5:2).
 - ◆ Our love is a response to God’s love for us (Luke 7:42ff and 1 John 4:8ff).
 - ◆ Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25ff and Colossians 3:19).
 - ◆ Love is a godlike in quality and is energized by the Holy Spirit; it is the consummate virtue of the Christian life (Romans 5:5, 1 Corinthians 13:1ff, Ephesians 3:14ff, and Galatians 5:22ff).
 - ◆ The practice of love fulfills the law (Romans 8:4 & 13:8ff and Galatians 5:14 & 6:2).
 - ◆ God causes all things to work for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

The Importance of Representational Thinking A prerequisite for godlike love that is unconditionally self-giving is that we represent *all persons* according to the power, character, and promises of God rather than according to the manner in which those persons treat us. This requires that we correctly understand the scope of the love of God as being unconditional and embracing all persons. The Apostle John is especially clear in his teaching with regard to the love of God in passages like John 1:29, John 6:51, and 1 John 2:2.

Summary of Love How can we summarize the dimensions and content of love? I would respond with the following:

- ◆ The love of God flows from his lavishly self-giving and self-sacrificing character.
- ◆ Even as the love of God is that aspect of his character that dominates his interaction with mankind, in like manner self-sacrificing love should dominate the nature and character of the Christian.

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Summary of Love –
Cont.:

- ◆ The love which the Christian is commanded to practice is godlike and supernatural in quality, being modeled by the love of Christ; it is energized in the life of the Christian by the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Within the community of faith, love engenders unity, one-mindedness, and obedience to Christ's commands.
- ◆ With respect to the surrounding pagan culture, the Christian is enabled to love his or her enemies, even those who are overtly hostile and injurious.

**Questions for
Reflection and
Discussion**

Answering the following questions will facilitate your understanding of love. Except for quoting Scripture passages to substantiate your answers, please use your own words.

1. Reflect on the logic of Peter's order; that is, faith is the basis for moral excellence, moral excellence is the basis for knowledge, knowledge is the basis for self-control, self-control is the basis for perseverance, perseverance is the basis for godliness, godliness is the basis for brotherly kindness, and brotherly kindness is the basis for love. Discuss the significance of this order with respect to love.
 2. After reading all of the Scripture passages cited above, present your own summary of the meaning of love.
 3. Reflect on your own experience in this area of spiritual maturity, and identify the specific issues that present a challenge to you, including the circumstances that you have found to be difficult to handle in regard to love.
 4. How will you seek to develop in your perceived areas of weakness in regard to love? In particular, identify those action steps that you can take in order to make progress toward the goal of love. Also, identify the areas in which you need to ask God to energize such progress. Can you identify biblical promises and assets that are there for you to appropriate in regard to the development of love?
 5. You may insert pages recording further reflection and additional Scripture passages on the subject of love.
-

11. CONCLUSION

... *For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

The Imminence of
the *Parousia* of Jesus
Christ

Conclusion

- ◆ The *parousia* (that is, the coming) of Jesus Christ is imminent
- ◆ Our preparing for Christ's coming is the motivating force for all of life and ministry:
 - ▶ Harnessing and applying his assets for the good of the household of God.
 - ▶ Applying ourselves with diligence to spiritual formation.
 - ▶ Investing the assets with which Christ has entrusted us for maximum ROI.
 - ▶ Devoting ourselves to acts of kindness and self-sacrificing love.

The adjoining figure presents an overall summary of this study of the canonical *didache* of the Apostle Peter. Note that in the 11th verse of our focal passage Peter directs our attention to that imminent and consummate event of human history, the *parousia* of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. *Parousia* means an arrival followed by an abiding presence. In explicit response to the questions of his disciples concerning the signs that would precede his coming, Jesus sets forth in his Olivet Discourse the chronological sequence of the major events that comprise that period to which theologians refer as the *eschaton*, that is, the times of the end. Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:1-25:46 is the most comprehensive; parallel accounts of this discourse are recorded in Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:5-38. In all three accounts, the gospel writers unfold the paradox of a prolonged absence and an imminent return. That is, ***although our Lord will be physically absent from us for a substantial period of time, we must constantly maintain a posture of watchfulness and diligent preparation for his imminent return.***

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Parables of the Day of the Lord

In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus unfolds the teaching that his coming will be dominated by a sequence of judgments whereby he will *accept the righteous and banish the wicked*. The righteous are destined to be embraced by Christ and ushered into eternal life, whereas the wicked are destined to be sent away into eternal punishment. In Scripture, the period of judgment associated with Jesus' *parousia* is designated by the technical term *day of the Lord*. In Matthew's gospel, the judgments which comprise the day of the Lord are described in terms of a sequence of four parables as follows:

**Parable of the Stewards
(Matthew 24:45-51)**

In this parable Jesus likens his return to the return of the master of a household after a prolonged absence. Prior to his departure, the master of the household designates one of the servants to perform the role of *steward*. The function of the steward was to dispense the master's assets so as to maintain and provide for the household during the master's absence. One steward in the parable performs his role with integrity and faithfulness, whereas the other misappropriates his master's assets for his own pleasure and mistreats his fellow servants. When the master returns, the first steward is rewarded and the second one is punished and banished. *The judgment criterion in this parable is faithful allocation of the master's assets for the good of the household.*

**Parable of the Virgins
(Matthew 25:1-13)**

In this parable, Jesus likens his return to the return of the bridegroom to his own home with his bride in accordance with the ancient near eastern marriage custom. Ten virgins are invited to attend the wedding banquet that will take place after the bridegroom's arrival. Five of them are wise and bring extra oil for their lamps, while five are foolish and bring only their lamps with no extra oil. The period of time consumed by the bridegroom's fetching his bride from the home of her parents and bringing her in joyful procession to his own home is longer than expected to the extent that the reservoir of oil in all of the virgins' lamps is exhausted. Only the five wise virgins with the extra supply of oil are able to enter the banquet hall when the bridegroom arrives. The five foolish virgins are away trying to buy extra oil, and when they finally return they are shut out of the banquet hall. In Scripture, olive oil is a metaphor for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian, and the oil lamp serves as a metaphor for the life of the Christian being on display to a watching world (see Matthew 5:14-16). Therefore, the five wise virgins in the parable represent those who are diligent in the lifelong enterprise of spiritual formation and being filled with the Holy Spirit, whereas the five foolish virgins failed to give attention to these essential matters. Therefore, *the judgment criterion in this parable is diligence in spiritual formation and being filled with the Holy Spirit.*

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) In this parable, Jesus likens his return to the return of the master of a household after a period of prolonged absence. Prior to his departure, the master entrusts his assets to three of his servants, apportioning to each a share according to his ability. To the first he entrusts five talents, the second he entrusts two talents, and to the third he entrusts one talent. The first two servants proceed immediately to do business with their master's assets; by the time of the master's return, they each have gained a 100% return on the master's investment. However, the third servant simply goes off and buries his talent in the earth. The first two servants are congratulated and rewarded with added responsibility while the third servant is punished and banished. ***The judgment criterion in this parable is investment of the master's assets for maximum return (ROI).***

Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46) Theologians argue over the precise meaning of this parable. Who are the sheep, who are the goats, and who are the "the least of these My brethren" to whom Jesus refers in the 40th and again in the 45th verses. There are two principles that are set forth in this parable with great clarity. First, the criterion for judgment set forth in this parable is the performance of acts of kindness and self-sacrifice toward people that Jesus describes as his brothers, which means members of the family of God or the community of faith. Second, the destiny of the sheep, those who performed acts of kindness and self-sacrifice is eternal life, whereas the destiny of the goats, those who failed to perform acts of kindness and self-sacrifice, is eternal punishment. From other passages in the New Testament we know for certain that we cannot ***earn*** eternal life through acts of kindness and self-sacrifice, no matter how frequent and magnanimous they may be. Paul is very pointed in his teaching leading up to the statement in Romans 6:23 that eternal life is a free gift of God's grace received through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the message of the parable of the sheep and the goats is that ***acts of kindness and self-sacrifice toward those brothers and sisters who are in need is a diagnostic indicator of the kind of faith that brings salvation.***

Preparation for the Parousia of Jesus Christ As we have noted, there is a strong eschatological focus in our focal passage, 2 Peter 1:3-15. According to Peter, if we are diligent to develop and practice the seven qualities that he lists and which we have studied in some depth, then our entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be abundantly supplied to us. Therefore, according to Peter, the seven qualities address the judgment criteria that Jesus sets forth in his Olivet Discourse. Allow me to clarify the connection between Peter's seven qualities and the four parables of the day of the Lord as follows:

Parable of the Stewards In our practice of ***godliness*** and ***brotherly kindness***, we should be devoted to the harnessing of the Master's assets for the good of the household of God.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

Parable of the Virgins	We should be diligent in our pursuit of spiritual formation, which embraces all seven qualities.
Parable of the Talents	Our <i>godliness</i> should strongly motivate us to invest the Master's assets for maximum ROI.
Parable of the Sheep and the Goats	Our <i>brotherly kindness</i> and <i>love</i> should be constantly and tangibly manifested in the form of acts of kindness and self-sacrifice towards those in need.

The Terror of Christ's Judgment

The following words of Paul form a fitting conclusion to our study of the canonical *didache* of the Apostle Peter:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men... [2 Corinthians 5:10-11a, NASB]

The reality of our facing our Lord Christ in judgment should shape, direct, and motivate all that we do and are. Our entire lives and ministries should be focused upon his imminent return.

Amen, may it be so. Even so come, Lord Jesus!

APPENDIX 1 — THE *KERYGMA*: THE BRIDGE MODEL

... Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand... [1 Corinthians 15:1-8, NASB]

A Canonical Form of the *Kerygma*

In our consideration of *knowledge*, we identified the *kerygma*, that is, the gospel preached by the apostles, as an essential component of the knowledge to be possessed by the Christian. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, especially the 3rd through the 8th verses, we find a canonical form of the *kerygma*, that is, a succinct, mnemonically appealing outline of the essential components of the gospel. The pattern of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 suggests that Paul might have been quoting from a 1st century confession. Note the essential components of the *kerygma* as follows:

Essential Components of the *Kerygma* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time...

Commentary on “Christ died...”

The death of Jesus Christ is an actual historical event that took place in approximately 31 AD according to the prophecies of the Old Testament. In fact, the historical narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures motivates the sacrificial death of Christ by placing in evidence the problem of evil, sin, and death. This problem invaded the cosmos at the dawn of human history, and it has universally impacted the human race. Apart from the Old Testament narrative, Jesus’ death could only be regarded as absurd and pointless.

Commentary on “He was buried...”

Jesus’ sacrificial death was actual. He did not simply faint on the Cross and later recover. He really died in the presence of a multitude of witnesses, his body was tenderly prepared for burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, and he was sealed in rock-cut tomb for three days and three nights. According to John 19:32-35, Pilate explicitly commissioned soldiers to verify the death of the three crucified individuals, and one of them thrust a spear into Jesus’ side to ensure that he was really dead.

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

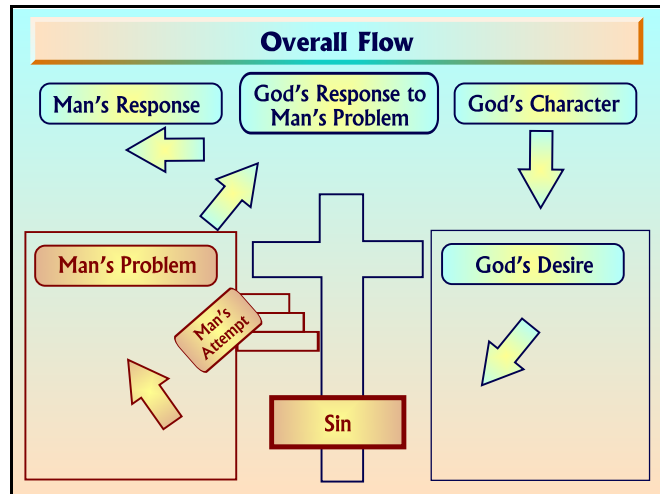
- Commentary on “He was raised...” While details of the four gospel accounts seem to differ in regard to the fine-grained detail of exactly what took place on the morning that Christians celebrate as Easter Sunday, with regard to the empty grave they all agree. In fact, according to Matthew 28:11-15, the Jewish leaders bribed the Roman soldiers to spread abroad the incredible story that his disciples had stolen Jesus’s body while they were asleep. Imagine a soldier publishing such a report! By it he would have declared himself guilty of dereliction of duty for which he would have been liable to execution. The point of Matthew’s account is clear: even Jesus’ enemies confirmed that the grave where he had been sealed, and which had been placed under guard by Roman soldiers, was now empty.
- “... According to the Scriptures...” According to Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was in accordance with the prophecies of the Old Testament, in particular, Psalm 16:10-11 and Isaiah 53:10-11.
- Commentary on “He appeared...” Paul concludes this outline of the *kerygma* by enumerating the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. In order to verify the historical factuality of the event, the members of his audience in Corinth could have interviewed literally hundreds of individuals who had seen the risen Christ. According to Paul in Romans 1:4, the resurrection demonstrates that Christ is the One he claimed to be; namely, “the Son of God with power...” Moreover, according to Romans 4:25, the fact of the resurrection confirms that Jesus’ sacrificial death was adequate to procure for us justification and the gift of eternal life.
- Summary of the essential components of the *kerygma* Following Paul’s canonical outline, any proclamation of the gospel must include at least the following essential components:
- ◆ The fact of human sin, which separates us from God and which made the sacrificial death of Christ necessary. Our sin is an offense to the nature and character of God. On account of the infinite apology and satisfaction that we owe to God on account of our sin, we are liable to eternal death.
 - ◆ Jesus has taken our guilt upon himself, as if it were his personal responsibility. By virtue of his sacrificial death, he has obliterated the debt of apology and satisfaction that we owe to God on account of our sin.
 - ◆ Jesus’ resurrection confirms the fact that he is God and his atoning sacrifice is adequate to deal with our sin problem. By our placing our trust in and appropriating Christ’s death in our behalf, we can be justified and receive the gift of eternal life.
 - ◆ Having received the gift of forgiveness from sin through our faith in Jesus Christ, the only appropriate response is for us to devote ourselves to learning and obeying Jesus’ commandments as his disciples.

Kerygma Narrative What follows is a narrative of the *kerygma* according to the outline established by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1ff.

Dear Friend:

May I share with you what the Bible has to say about our having a relationship with God?

The overall flow of what I have to share is outlined in the accompanying figure. This should only take about thirty minutes of your time.

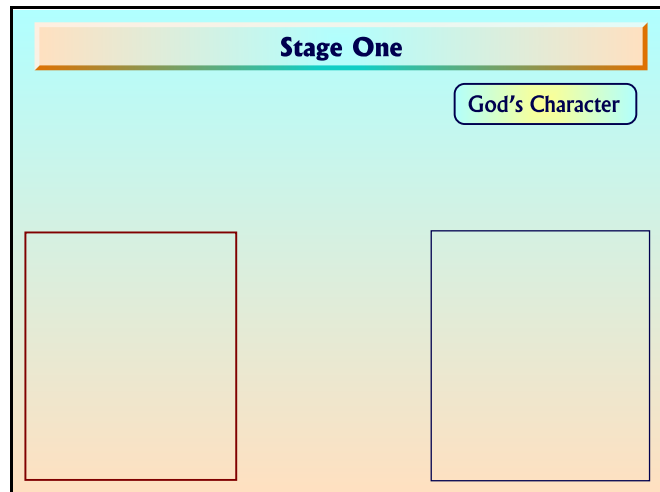


God's Character

First, we must consider God's character.

Genesis 1:1 — In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

According to the Bible, the Infinite Personal God is Creator of everything. He is before all things, and all His creatures are dependent upon Him and accountable to Him. While only a few of us have opportunity to actually create or build things from scratch, most of us use things that others have designed and built. We have every right to expect that our computers, cars, appliances, and tools would serve us faithfully according to their designed purpose. In the case of those that do not because of flaws and defects, we attempt to have them repaired, and if they continue to malfunction, we replace them. Our relationship with the things that we use helps us to appreciate God's relationship with us as His creatures. ***He has every right to expect that we will live and***



relate to Him and one another according to His purpose and design.

1 Peter 1:16b — You shall be holy, for I am holy.

God's holiness includes His transcendence and separateness with respect to His creatures, but also His ***moral perfection***. This is the absolute and inflexible standard that He has set for us.

"You only truly believe that which activates you..."

God’s Character – Cont.:

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 — ... The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...

The Bible clearly and explicitly reveals that God’s justice demands that those who rebel against Him will be punished.

1 John 4:8 — ... God is love.

However, because of God’s perfect love, He desires to provide a way for us as His creatures to be restored to a proper relationship with Him. ***Because God is perfectly loving as well as absolutely just, He desires to give us something.***

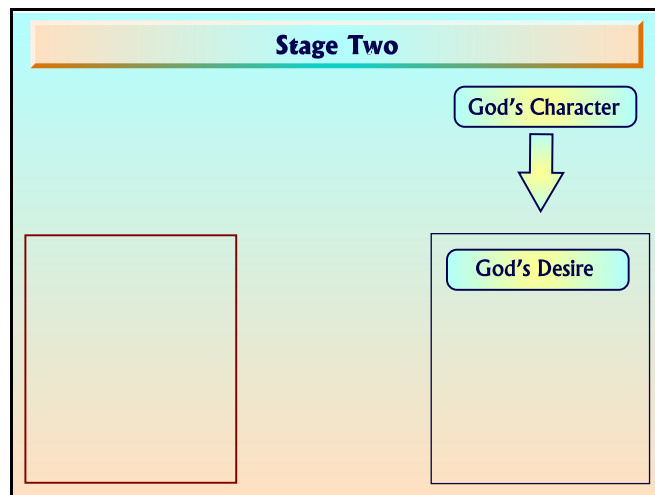
God’s Desire

Romans 6:23b — ... The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is not God’s desire that we perish away from His presence and from the glory of His power, but rather that we enjoy relationship with Him forever.

John 10:10b — I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.

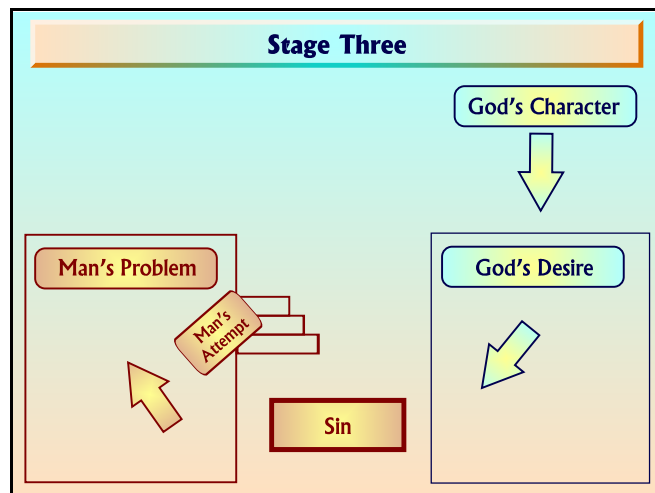
Jesus states here that He came to not only give us life which is eternal in its extent, but also abundant in terms of quality.



Sin

Isaiah 59:2 — But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you...

According to Scripture, there is something that we have brought into the picture that separates us from God and which prevents Him from blessing us as He desires. The Bible identifies that ‘something’ as ***sin***, which means a falling short of the standard of righteousness that God has set for human personalities.



“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Man's Problem

Romans 3:23a — ... For all sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

The Bible teaches us that sin is a universal problem. It has impacted the life of everyone. While we may not be as evil and depraved as we could possibly be, with respect to God's absolute standard of moral perfection we fall short. ***Our sin is an offense to God.***

Romans 6:23a — For the wages of sin is death...

From the beginning, God has defined human sin as a capital offense, that is, one which deserves death. Thus, all of us have the sentence of death hanging over our heads. To illustrate, imagine the situation of a judge who is called upon to administer justice in the case of his son who is accused of murder. While the love of the judge for his son would motivate leniency, justice would demand that the appropriate penalty for the crime be paid if the son is found guilty.

At a more personal level, suppose your neighbor and his family enjoy setting off fireworks in their yard on the 4th of July. However, suppose they set off a rocket that falls on your roof and sets fire to your house. While you may love your neighbor, he needs to take responsibility for the damage done to your house. ***While God perfectly loves us, our sin remains as a capital offense. His justice must be satisfied in order for Him to lavish upon us the love He desires.***

Hebrews 9:27 — It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment...

One aspect of the sentence of death is ***physical death***. In fact, every time a person dies physically, God's righteous sentence of death is placed in evidence. However, the Bible teaches that physical death does not end our existence, but rather it is the gate through which we pass into an eternal existence, one which is either in God's presence or away from His presence. ***All of us must pass before God's bar of justice.***

Man's Attempt

Isaiah 64:6 — For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment...

Ephesians 2:9 — [Salvation is] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Men and women around the world, of every nationality, ethnicity, and religious tradition, manifest a consciousness of God, however feeble and misguided it may be. Because of this, we engage in various behaviors that are intended to placate God and cause Him to regard us with favor. That is, we attempt to engage in behaviors that are good, charitable toward others, and religious with respect to God. In fact, we must affirm the awesome nobility and heroism of which man is capable. ***However commendable human acts of nobility and heroism may be, they by no means compensate for our sinfulness before God.***

God’s Response to Man’s Problem

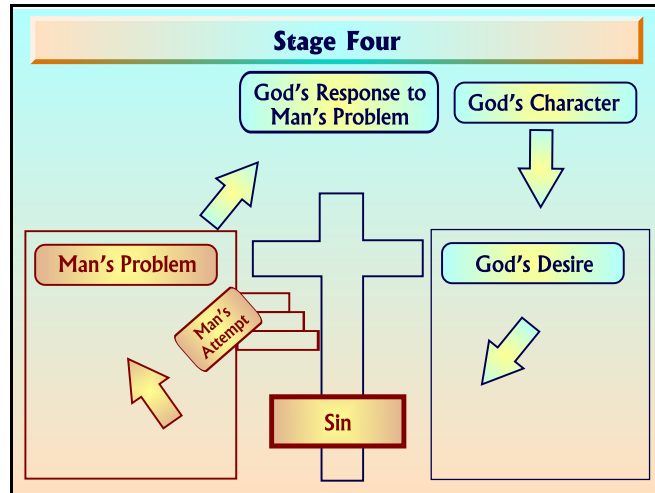
God’s perfect love and absolute justice are both expressed in the solution to man’s problem that is the centerpiece of the Christian gospel.

1 Peter 3:18a — For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God...

God Himself, in the form of Jesus Christ, has suffered the penalty of sin, which was our due. By this means, God has paid back to Himself the infinite apology and satisfaction that we owe to Him on account of our sin.

Because His absolute justice has been satisfied, He is now free to lavish His love upon all those who embrace the gospel in faith.

Romans 4:24b-25 — ... Who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.



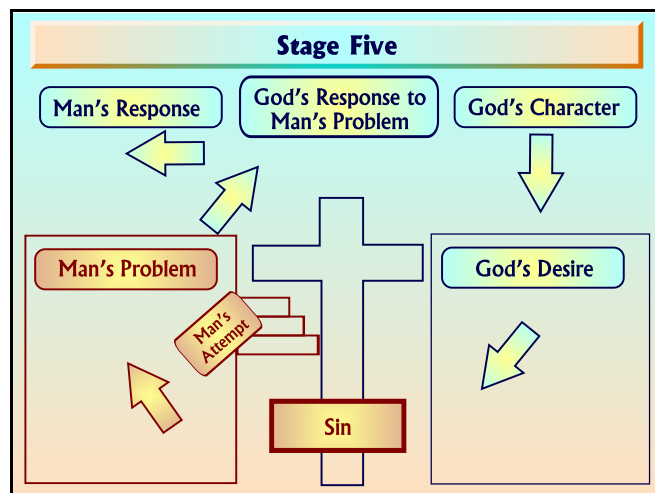
Romans 1:4 — ... Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord...

The fact that Jesus Christ rose from the grave on the third day is put forward as a testimony to the fact that He is the Son of God with power to save completely and for all time all those who come to God through Him.

Man’s Response to God

According to the Bible, God bestows salvation from sin and death upon all those who embrace Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Consider the words of the Apostle John in two passages from his gospel:

John 5:24a — ... He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life...



“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Man’s Response to God – Cont.:

John 1:12 — But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name...

Not only is God ready and able to forgive us, but He actually embraces us as members of His family, as adopted children.

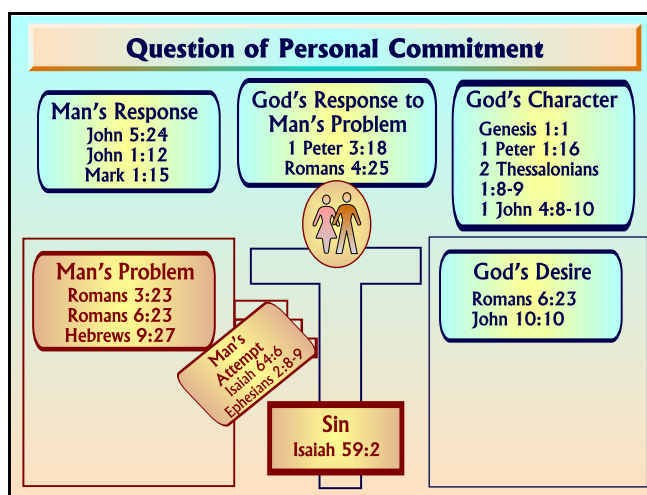
Mark 1:15a — Repent and believe in the gospel...

As a natural byproduct of our faith, we should turn away from and totally forsake the sinful ways of our past life. This is the essence of *repentance*. In place of a life of sinful rebellion against God, we are to strive to be holy. God does not leave us to pursue holiness on our own, but rather He sends His Spirit into our hearts to motivate, strengthen, and establish us in a lifestyle of holiness.

The Gospel

There you have the Christian gospel. The question that you must answer for yourself is this: “Where am I located in the diagram?” Many people respond by putting themselves in the middle, which seems like a safe answer, but actually it is one that is unworkable, like being half born or half married. The Bible states very clearly that we are on one side of the diagram or the other, either a member of God’s family or not. Receiving the Christian gospel is very much like marriage. We are not married until after we say, “I do.” In like manner, receiving the gospel and entering into relationship with God requires a definite, intentional response, “I do.”

If you sense God drawing you to Himself through what we have shared, then it would be good for you to respond to Him as outlined above, that is, by embracing the gospel in faith and full reliance, by trusting Jesus Christ that He has died for you and will save you from sin and death, and by confessing and forsaking your sins and submitting yourself to Christ’s lordship in your pursuit of a life of holiness. I know that this is a monumental and life-



changing decision that you presently face. Based upon what the Bible says as confirmed by my own experience, I can assure you that this is a good decision, and one that you will never regret. I would love to help you with this decision if you would care to meet or correspond with me.

Yours in Christ,
Peter Briggs

Phone: (505) 294-0016
Email: Daystar@swcp.com

APPENDIX 2 — A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Introduction to Qualitative Assessment	<p>What follows is a set of statements derived from our study of 2 Peter 1:3-15 that you can employ to assess your own progress in spiritual formation, and therefore to identify those areas in which further attention and development are needed. They can also be employed for assessment of you by your spouse or a close friend. In response to each statement I would suggest that you select one of the following two assessment options: <i>satisfactory</i> or <i>development needed</i>.</p>
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ gives evidence of having placed his/her trust in the gospel; that is, of having received God’s gracious gift of righteousness through repentance and faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. ◆ _____ consistently represents persons, events, things, and circumstances of life in accordance with the power, character, and promises of God.
Moral Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ consistently lives in submission to God’s authority and the authority structures that he has established for our good¹¹ : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ In the sphere of family ▶ In the sphere of the church ▶ In the sphere of employment ▶ With respect to civil authority ◆ _____ consistently manifests a putting off of the corruption of the flesh and putting on of the nature and character of Christ. ◆ _____ consistently conducts himself/herself in accordance with the holiness of God. ◆ _____ gives evidence of employing the means of grace to make forward progress in moral excellence.
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ manifests a knowledge of the gospel, including the ability and motivation to share it within his/her network of family, friends, neighbors, and work associates. ◆ _____ manifests a knowledge of the promises of God, including the ability and motivation to rely upon, appropriate, and apply them to practical issues of life and ministry. ◆ _____ manifests a knowledge of the way of Christ and the apostles, including the ability and motivation to live skillfully in all the arenas of life. ◆ _____ manifests an experiential and relational knowledge of God.

11 In this context, to “live in submission to” means to embrace and to live accordingly as explained in Section 4.

“You only truly believe that which activates you...”

Self-Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ manifests the ability to control his/her emotions under stress. ◆ _____ manifests the ability to control and resist temptation with respect to his/her physical appetites.
Perseverance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ manifests the ability to patiently endure with a spirit of hope under pressure of adversity or persecution. ◆ _____ consistently represents adversity and suffering as something good rather than something evil.
Godliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ fears and loves God. ◆ _____ is devoted to God and his word. ◆ _____ is a prayerful person. ◆ _____ is devoted to the people of God.
Brotherly Kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ consistently manifests the ability to deal with offensive behavior according to the biblical pattern, including confession of his/her offenses toward others and forgiveness of others for offensive behavior toward him/her. ◆ _____ consistently treats others with respect and grace in the sphere of disputable matters. ◆ _____ esteems others and manifests a humble attitude toward self. ◆ _____ treats others as he/she would want to be treated by them. ◆ _____ practices <i>koinonia</i> in the sphere of the ministry, including willingness to share his/her material assets with those in need.
Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ manifests a love for Christ to the extent that he/she sacrifices for the sake of advancing the kingdom of God. ◆ _____ demonstrates in tangible ways a self-sacrificing love for brothers and sisters in Christ.
Spiritual Formation for Deacons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ _____ dignified, sincere, disciplined in life habits, and moderate in eating, drinking, and sexuality. ◆ _____ is devoted to the word of God and demonstrates wisdom with respect to the profound truths of Scripture. ◆ _____ is devoted to his/her marriage partner and is exemplary in the discharge of responsibilities within his/her household.

**Spiritual Formation
for Overseers**

- ◆ _____ dignified, sincere, disciplined in life habits, and moderate in eating, drinking, and sexuality.
- ◆ _____ is devoted to the word of God, demonstrates wisdom with respect to the profound truths of Scripture, and is a skilled teacher.
- ◆ _____ is devoted to his marriage partner and is exemplary in the discharge of responsibilities within his household.

Conclusion

The foregoing represent a reasonably comprehensive set of twenty-five parameters for qualitative assessment of progress in spiritual formation and the development of Christian character based upon the normative outline provided by the apostle Peter. In addition, three spiritual formation and assessment parameters are provided for deacons and and three more for overseers in accordance with Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 3:1ff.
