

JULY 2025 | ISSUE 32

Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.



a quarterly e-magazine designed to promote
growth in faith and service to God



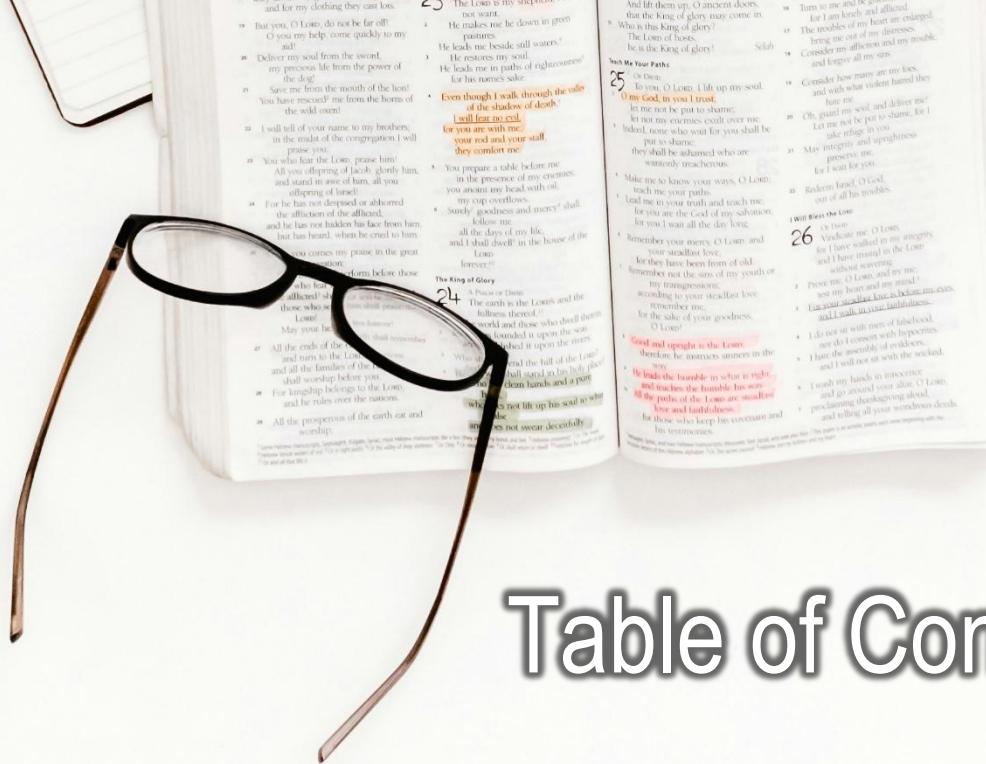


Table of Contents

5 | EXPOSITORY | **Shane Carrington** Hall of Faith: Samson

8 | CHURCH ARTICLE | **Mark Roberts** Seven Churches of Asia: The Church at Smyrna

11 | WORSHIP ARTICLE | **Sean Cavender** The Collection for the Saints

13 | APPLICATION ARTICLE | **Tim McPherson** Becoming Like Jesus: Purity

15 | EVANGELISM ARTICLE | **Don McClain** He Preached Jesus To Him

19 | BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE | **Bruce Reeves** What Is Behind Every Temptation?

From the Editor...

GROW magazine begins its 9th year with the July 2025 issue. While that is joyous, there is a measure of sadness – it has been two years since Sean Cavender passed away. I miss my friend and brother in Christ.

GROW magazine was Sean's idea. In an August 2016 chat, he mentioned a monthly e-mail publication he and another brother once worked on (Our Good Fight). It had fallen by the wayside, but he was interested in resurrecting it or something like it. He asked if I "had any interest in working together, in cooperation to do something worthwhile." My response was simple – "Sure, I like things that are worthwhile" ☺ Over the next several months we would discuss format, frequency, subscription, writers, etc..

We enjoyed bantering back and forth about what to call this forthcoming e-publication. "Cavender's Chronicles" was suggested but quickly struck down ☺ After a bit of brainstorming we settled on the acronym GROW, representing Godliness, Reverence, Obedience, and Worship. I developed the logo, initially with a compass, but soon it would be swapped out for a tree. Sean came up with the article sections (expository, church, worship, application, evangelism, and beyond the basics).



By early 2017, we could begin to envision what GROW magazine would look like. In May 2016, we had the topics and writers for our debut issue ready, and the website design began. Issue #1 of GROW was sent to 236 subscribers in July 2017.

Now, in July 2025, we have 390 subscribers. We haven't done any kind of advertising or promotion to gain subscribers. The plan was to allow GROW to grow organically. Thus, we are thankful for you, our subscribers, sharing content with others by email, on social media, by printing articles, or by word of mouth.

I am thankful to our writers. Both Sean and I brought men whom we knew to the writer pool. I am glad for those who knew Sean but not me who have continued to participate. And I appreciate the occasional new author who joins our ranks. May their work build us up as we seek to obey God and serve one another. This work continues in honour of my friend's vision to encourage God's people with a quarterly publication, penned by men who care about the truth of God's word and are focused on the edifying of God's people. May it to be God's glory.



Now, let's GROW together!

William Stewart
editor & designer

The Hall of Faith: Samson

SHANE CARRINGTON | SULPHUR SPRINGS, TEXAS

There are indelible characters with highly respected names in the Hall of Faith of Hebrews 11: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc.: what an incredible list of godly men of faith!

Others might not make the list if we were choosing them: Samson, for example, seems more an example of worldly-mindedness and carnality. For example:

- He demanded a wife from the Philistines (Judges 14:1-2). Israelites, of course, were not to marry foreigners (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). This was so serious that, in the days of Ezra, the people became aware that they had to put away the foreign wives they had married (Ezra 10:1-3), and they did exactly that (Ezra 10:19).
- When Samson's parents pushed back, he rebelled against their wise counsel (Judges 14:3), selfishly saying, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me." In this, he echoed the tragic theme of the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).
- Samson also solicited a prostitute. "Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her" (Judges 16:1).

His sins seem obvious to most, but some have tried to reframe Samson's choices in such a way as to declare most of his choices as righteous, not rebellious. Perhaps this effort is born from a viewpoint that a man listed in Hebrews 11 as an example of faith could not possibly have done the carnal acts that Samson did. However, there is another



possible explanation for Samson's appearance in Hebrews 11.

First of all, there is no justification for sin.

- Sin is a violation of God's holy law. "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4)
- God hates sin. "But of the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness'" (Hebrews 1:8-9a).
- By sinning we earn spiritual death. "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a).
- Eternal spiritual condemnation is our consequence for sinning. "...when the Lord Jesus will 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. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9).

- The only remedy for sin is Jesus. “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

Any attempts to soften the seriousness or repercussions of sin are ill-placed and unscriptural. Samson’s sins are unjustifiable; so are ours.

The reality is that the hall of faith in Hebrews 11 is a list of flawed, imperfect people who needed God’s patience, grace, and forgiveness. Consider a few from the list.

- Noah was saved by grace through faith (Hebrews 11:7), but later he committed the sin of drunkenness.
- Abraham was the friend of God who lived by faith (Hebrews 11:8-10), but he also lied on two different occasions about Sarah.
- Sarah and Abraham had Isaac by faith (Hebrews 11:11-12, 17-19), but earlier, they instituted a plan which produced Ishmael, trying to assist God by coming up with their own way for the lineage to continue.
- Moses led Israel by faith, but then sinned, and did not get to enter the promised land (Hebrews 11:23-29).
- Gideon backslid later in life (Hebrews 11:32).
- Barak showed cowardice (Hebrews 11:32).
- Jephthah made a rash vow (Hebrews 11:32).
- David sinned grievously in regard to Bathsheba and her husband in many ways that included adultery and murder (Hebrews 11:32).

Samson fits in Hebrews 11 because the passage lists people of faith who also had deep flaws and great spiritual needs. Unjust, unrepentant sinners need to forsake sin and come to God in order to receive forgiveness.

Thankfully, God provides a way of redemption for people who are willing!

One of the striking differences between God and Satan is that the devil only shows us what he wants us to know, while God gives us the full picture. Satan urges us to “enjoy the...pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25). God, on the other hand, removes the ellipsis, and reveals that these pleasures are “passing” (Hebrews 11:25). In this way, Satan tries to allure humanity with promises of carnal pleasures, selfish freedoms, and narcissistic exploits. By contrast, God tells us that sin has a pleasurable side, but that it brings eternal death in the ferocious wake of its temporary gratification (Romans 6:23).

In a similar fashion, when God depicts His faithful servants from ages past, He does not reveal them in the narrative of Scripture as flawless people who lacked weaknesses. God shows us that Abraham, Moses, Peter, and Samson, etc. were people who made mistakes, needed God’s forgiveness, and grew in faith. Men and women like us!

The hall of faith in Hebrews 11 is not a list of flawless paragons who made all the right decisions and lived without needing God’s help, including forgiveness. It is a description of decisions and lives of faith in people who learned how much they needed God’s grace, patience, and forgiveness. And when times were at their darkest — including those times when their own bad decisions dimmed the light — they came to realize just how much they needed God for forgiveness, strength, and renewed purpose in His service. This sounds a great deal like Samson between two pillars, having lost his dignity, purpose, and even his eyes.

The character of God shapes His people by His holiness. God expresses this throughout Leviticus as seen in the thematic statement of

Leviticus 10:44-45:

"For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. ... For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy."

God's holiness means His purity from sin and His consecration to higher purposes. In a sense it could be said that holiness is the central attribute of God, encompassing both His justice (see Leviticus 10:1-2) and His love (see Leviticus 19:18). God is separate from sin (holy), but He is also compassionate and merciful, desiring to provide humanity a way of sanctification (holiness). The Levitical system of the Old Testament provided a provisional way of declaring God's holiness to Israel, bringing them closer to Him through teachings, sacrifices, and spiritual growth. In time, God sent Jesus as the ultimate declaration of His holiness and the means of truly redeeming humanity. As Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6), "and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). Or, as the Hebrews writer expressed it,

"And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39-40).

They needed Jesus, and so do we. We are fortunate to live on this side of the cross, whereas they lived in a time anticipating the Davidic (Messianic) king and the redemption He offers.

Samson lived in a barbaric time. The book of Judges, from beginning to end, describes Israel in disarray. They had not followed God's instructions fully concerning removing the natives from the land of Canaan. As a result, they were afflicted with many sorrows. This brutal period in Israel describes the people without good and godly leadership (Judges 21:25). During their time, God sent deliverer after deliverer: judges who led the people in victory over oppression. However, the leaders were flawed. They struggled to live their faith. Samson was no different. Yet God used this man and his weaknesses to fulfill His purpose. As the pillars of the temple collapsed upon him, this broken man helped God's people win a great victory. What a blessing!

Seven Churches of Asia: The Church at Smyrna

MARK ROBERTS | IRVING, TEXAS

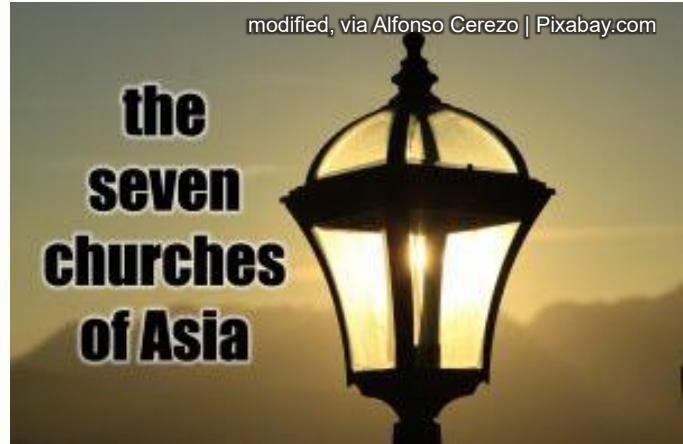
You've Got Mail: Smyrna A Persecuted Church (Revelation 2:8-11)

When Jesus evaluates a church, what kind of grade does He give? If your congregation received a divine inspection report, what evaluation would it receive? In Revelation 2, we find Jesus giving Smyrna an A+. In a world filled with trials, their unwavering commitment to Christ remains a powerful model for the Lord's people today. Let's open this divine correspondence and learn what made Smyrna so exceptional.

A Church Jesus Knows

At the time John wrote Revelation, Smyrna—modern-day Izmir in Turkey—was an important city with deep ties to Rome. In A.D. 23, it won a competition for the privilege of building a temple to Augustus and his mother. It was also one of four cities, alongside Ephesus, Sardis, and Pergamum, chosen to host the provincial assembly, a clear sign of its importance to Rome. Famed as well for its beauty (Strabo, writing around the time of Augustus and Tiberius, called Smyrna “the most beautiful city of all”), some claimed it even surpassed the great Roman cultural centers of Ephesus to the south and Pergamum to the north, each about 40 miles away. However, its devotion to Rome meant Smyrna was not an easy place to be a disciple of Jesus. (sources: ISBE, Lexham Bible Dictionary, New Bible Dictionary, Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary).

And Jesus knew that. Jesus begins His message with a solemn reassurance: “I know.” He sees. He understands. Then He identifies Himself as “the First and the Last, who died and came to life.” This introduction is rich with



meaning: It recalls Isaiah's descriptions of Jehovah (Isaiah 44:6; 48:12), affirming Christ's eternal nature and divine authority. It also reminds suffering saints that their Savior has triumphed over death—an especially powerful comfort for those facing affliction.

What Jesus Praises

Jesus tells the church in Smyrna, “*I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)*” (2:9).

What a paradox! The impoverishment of Smyrna's Christians probably resulted from refusing to worship Caesar. But spiritually, Jesus sees true wealth. Their treasure wasn't measured in denarii, but in devotion. These saints had stored up riches in heaven (Luke 6:20), and Jesus praises them for it.

This passage challenges our modern-day assumptions. Many assume that faithfulness should lead to material blessing. But Smyrna's poverty, far from indicating failure, was the very context in which their spiritual wealth shone most brightly. The Lord offers no promise of financial relief—only the recognition that they are already rich in what truly matters.

We would do well to reflect on this. In a society that idolizes prosperity, Smyrna forces us to ask how we gauge “success” in a local church. Buildings, budgets, and numbers can be suitable tools in kingdom work—but they’re not the measure of a church’s worth in the eyes of Christ. Faithfulness, endurance, and devotion are what He values.

What Jesus Warns

Though Smyrna receives no rebuke, the Lord does not shield them from the truth about their situation. Their suffering is not over. Jesus warns, *“The devil is about to throw some of you into prison... and you will have tribulation ten days”* (v. 10).

This is sobering. Jesus doesn’t promise to remove the trial. Instead, He tells them to be faithful through it. The reference to “ten days” likely signifies a limited, though intense, period of suffering. And while the details of that persecution aren’t spelled out, church history tells us that Smyrna became one of the bloodiest theaters of martyrdom. In 156 AD the famous church father Polycarp was burned at the stake. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* further records that Jews brought wood for his pyre even though it was a sabbath!

Jesus’ words—*“Do not fear what you are about to suffer”*—must have been deeply meaningful to these brethren. The call is not to escape, but to endure. Not to panic, but to persevere. *“Be faithful until death,”* He says, *“and I will give you the crown of life.”*

The crown He promises is not a temporary reward, but eternal life itself. This is the victor’s wreath that far outshines any Roman laurel. Smyrna’s future, though marked by suffering, would culminate in glory.

What Jesus Condemns

While Smyrna receives no rebuke directly, Jesus does condemn those attacking His church. *“I know... the slander of those who say*

that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”

Jesus clarifies that being ethnically Jewish does not make one part of God’s covenant people under the new covenant. True membership in God’s family now comes through faith in Christ, not race (Romans 2:28–29; Colossians 2:11–12).

What Jesus Promises

Smyrna had every reason to fear—but Jesus offers the greatest hope: *“The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death”* (v. 11).

The “second death” refers to eternal separation from God—the final judgment of the wicked (Revelation 20:14). Jesus doesn’t guarantee these Christians won’t die physically. Many did. But He promises that their spiritual life is secure. That’s the heart of the gospel: through Jesus, death doesn’t get the last word.

This promise reframes the question of suffering. The worst Rome could do was kill their bodies. But Jesus had already conquered the grave. And with that victory, He assures His people that they will overcome as well.

A Church Worth Emulating

What kind of church gets an A+ from Jesus? The church in Smyrna wasn’t wealthy, popular, or influential. But they were faithful. They loved the Lord more than their lives, and that made them rich in what mattered most.

Today, we may not face same intense persecution (yet!), but we still need the courage of Smyrna. We must resist the temptation to measure our success by worldly standards, especially as we evaluate the local church. We must live with the same eternal perspective, investing in the treasures that do not rust or fade. And we must prepare our hearts for whatever challenges may come, confident that the crown of life awaits those who remain faithful.

SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA: THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA | MARK ROBERTS

Mark Roberts has preached for the Westside church of Christ in Irving, Texas, for over 30 years. He is the author of Understanding Apocalyptic Literature, Romans for Everyone, and The Sermon on the Mount for Everyone, part of the Coffee and Bible series. Mark is known for clear, practical Bible teaching – best served with a fresh cup of coffee. You can reach him or explore his work at MarkRobertsBooks.com

Return to: [Front Cover](#) | [Table of Contents](#)

The Collection for the Saints

SEAN CAVENDER | IN MEMORIAM

– via Meditate On These Things | 2014.02 –

There have been varying opinions and teachings concerning the collection for the saints. Is it supposed to be a weekly collection? Do we offer a collection out of tradition or because it is a commanded aspect of our worship? Is the contribution merely something done out of convenience?

So much of the discussion pertaining to the collection is about how the finances are spent. We must continue to stand for the truth in that regard. Another aspect we must consider is why we have the collection.

The first question that we must answer, as approaching any Bible subject, is whether or not the collection is authorized. If it is authorized then it is pleasing to God. If it is not authorized then we should cease participating in the collection now. Convenience and tradition do not matter.

Is There Authority For The Collection?

Believe it or not, some well-intended people have made statements such as, “there is no authority for a weekly collection.” Such a statement should be alarming to us! When we admit there is no authority for a particular practice then we are admitting the sinfulness of that practice. There is no authority for using instrumental music, thus instrumental music is sinful. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire unto the Lord; it was fire that God did not prescribe nor authorize to be used. Their offering was sin and they were judged for their action. To make outlandish statements such as “there is no authority for a weekly collection” is to acknowledge we are participating in sin.

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Bible authority is established through direct statements, approved examples, and unavoidable conclusions. The apostle Paul said, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye,” (1 Corinthians 16:1). The word “order” means to arrange thoroughly, to charge, or appoint (NASB Dictionary). Swanson defines the word as “command, give detailed structure, tell what to do (Luke 8:55), arrange for, plan for a particular matter (Acts 10:13; Galatians 3:19)” (Dictionary of Biblical Languages). The Greek word for “order” is *diatasso* which is often translated “command.” Paul “ordered” the churches to have the collection for the saints. The

collection was supposed to be done by the instruction and command Paul was establishing in the passage.

Also, the example of the Macedonians show that the collection was not just given to the church at Corinth, but it was commanded in other churches (2 Corinthians 8:1; 1 Corinthians 16:1). Paul's command and the Macedonian's example show that the collection is authorized. Churches have biblical authority for the collection of the saints.

The Weekly Collection

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come," (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Some incorrectly assume that there had been no prior instruction or practice of collecting goods or money prior to Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 16. Clearly there was organization in the collecting of goods and money before (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-35; 6:1-4). The instruction of 1 Corinthians 16 was not a new practice that was foreign to the churches of Christ. It was an established practice and one without the intention of ending.

The collection was to be gathered upon the first day of the week and laid in store. Kittle defines the term "store" as putting in a place or a location (cf. Luke 11:33). When the collection was made it was intended to be put in a common treasury under the oversight of elders in the local church. A church treasury is authorized and it was meant to be accessible for the purpose of benevolence towards needy saints.

Concerning The Collection

The purpose for the collection was to be used to help the saints. It was thus called "the collection for the saints" (1 Corinthians 16:1). Churches

are authorized to help needy saints. Those that are not members of the Lord's church are not to be helped with the funds of the local church. Local churches were to organize this collection. Paul directed the church at Corinth and the churches of Galatia (1 Corinthians 16:1). The saints in Macedonia had also been given the instruction, too (2 Corinthians 8:1).

Paul specified the day upon which the collection was to take place. The church is only authorized to collect its funds on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). Organizing car washes, spaghetti suppers, or raffles are not permitted ways to raise funds for the church. The day of worship, the Lord's Day, is the day that the church meets and would lay by in store.

Every member of the Lord's church is to contribute as he prospers (1 Corinthians 16:2). While the church organizes a collection, the individual has the responsibility to give. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). No one can determine the amount an individual is supposed to give, nor may they give for any person. The church cannot force anyone to give cheerfully. The responsibility to give lies within each and every person and individual. Our giving is supposed to be in proportion to what we receive. We cannot give what we do not have. However, this is not to be an excuse to not give as we should. We should consider the Lord as number one in our life and that should be reflected in every sacrifice that we make, even in our financial commitments to the Lord.

Conclusion

Much discussion is warranted in a study of the collection. It is a matter of our worship unto God and an action of the Lord's church. We must strive to make certain that we are obeying the Lord. We must seek the truth in all things. When we seek the truth then we may be unified and we may be pleasing unto God.

Becoming Like Jesus: The Purity of Christ

TIM McPHERSON | MARION, INDIANA

Purity is a wonderful study. In a Canadian illustration that William Stewart is aware – I've witnessed the making of maple syrup, right from the sap of the maple trees, immediately to the giant vat with a wood burning fire lit underneath. That 100% sap is boiled down and without any additives, without any pollutants, the sap becomes 100% maple syrup. Sweet and tasty in its own pure way. That's pureness! There are no contaminants. Now you can put that on your pancakes! That's good.

CHRIST'S EXAMPLE:

1 John 3:3, And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, **just as He is pure**.

1 John 3:5, And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, **and in Him there is no sin**.

APPLICATION OF CHRIST TO OUR LIFE:

The pureness and spotlessness of our savior is without question in scripture. He was as a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:19). The word purity means cleanliness. **Thayer defines purity as:** 2a) pure from carnality, chaste, modest 2b) pure from every fault, immaculate 2c) clean. It is an adjective! It describes Christ and those who live Christlike. To live pure is to live as Christ lived. I'm not going to discuss the fact that Christians might stumble, or fall, or sin at times. We do, but such sin is never approved by God, and must be repented of, confessed, and Christ's blood cleanses us to **return to the way of Christlike purity**. Such failure is an exception to the rule, not the rule of life. As a rule of life, we practice purity. God has set forth purity as the way and method of life for a Christian. And we are to imitate the purity of Jesus and not excusing that



pure life because of failure at times. To excuse sin, because we sin, would be to impose an impure life, the very opposite of God's desire and will for Christians.

PURITY MAKES SENSE:

To become a Christian, I have been made clean. One of the grandest themes of the Bible is that a filthy sinner, a wretched man, a person guilty of vile sins and ungodliness can be made pure again. **1 Peter 1: 22** Since you have **purified your souls** in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently **with a pure heart**. **1 Corinthians 6:11** states, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." The plea is to live holy because we have been made holy and purified. A Christian is washed, justified, and sanctified. I've heard it said that a Christian is never pure. Who can believe it? Don't let anyone rob you of the peace of mind that comes from being cleansed and made pure through Christ. Yes, you have your sins "washed away" (Acts 22:16), to arise to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). That is the motivation to live righteous and holy, and that is the motivation to live righteous and holy, and that

is the motivation to continue with Christ until the end. We are made righteous and holy. **1 John 2:29** If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. Your argument is with God if you advocate a continual state of defilement. Don't let Satan deceive you into thinking a pure life is impossible to live or maintain. God would not be calling us to purity if we are unable to remain pure in our thoughts and actions (Philippians 4:8). The will of God will not take us where the grace of God cannot keep us. **1 Peter 1:15-16** "but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." Christ's holy life calls us to imitate holiness. **Titus 2:14** states: "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself **His** own special people, zealous for good works."

THE WILL OF GOD:

I love the following passage: **1 Thessalonians 4:3-4** "For this is the will of God, **your sanctification**: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in **sanctification** and honor..." Once again, commentators try to wrestle away the clear teaching of the Bible by stating that the will of God simply means God's part of sanctification, but the passage includes both God's part and man's part. Obviously, we are studying that God's part leads us to our part, God's holiness leads us to our holy way of life and living. Although the word purity is not used, a parallel word is, that being **sanctification**. It is the Greek word, *hagiasmos*, meaning sanctification, moral purity, sanctity. Strong's states: (*hagiasmos*) properly *purification*, that is, (the state) *purity*; concretely (by Hebraism) a *purifier*:—holiness, sanctification. Did you notice, "This is the will of God"? "Your holiness", your purity. The choice of Greek words used was specific by the apostolic writer, in contrast to the ungodly world and its view. The world does not make any demand

concerning holiness or purity. How different we are from the world.

Quoting from Robertson word picture commentary: "**Your sanctification (ho hagiasmos humōn)**. Found only in the Greek Bible and ecclesiastical writers from *hagiazō* and both to take the place of the old words *hagizo*, *hagismos* with their technical ideas of consecration to a god or goddess that did not include holiness in life. So, Paul makes a sharp and pointed stand here for the Christian idea of sanctification as being "the will of God" (apposition) and as further explained by the epexegetic infinitive that ye abstain from fornication (*apechesthai humas apo tēs porneias*). Pagan religion did not demand sexual purity of its devotees, the gods and goddesses being grossly immoral. Priestesses were in the temples for the service of the men who came."

Wonderfully worded, God's sanctification through Christ, being His will, includes His will for our sanctification as we live for that purity of life in Christ. So, in that one verse we see that God's sanctification through Christ's purity, that provides our salvation, then leads us to walk in that same holiness or purity.

MAKE APPLICATION

Purity in heart (Matthew 5:8) (2 Timothy 2:22) and mind (Titus 1:15) (2 Peter 3:1) and thoughts (Proverbs 15:26)

Purity in conduct (1 Peter 3:11) (1 Peter 1:15) (Ephesians 5:27)

Purity in words (Job 33:3) (Proverbs 15:26)

PRAISE BE TO GOD:

How wonderful it is to be God's people. What makes us special is our pure way of life. We are following our savior. I encourage you to embrace that life! The pure life of our savior.

1 John 2:6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

He Preached Jesus To Him

DON McCLAIN | BRYANT, ARKANSAS

The book of Acts is a narrative detailing the early church's growth and the spread of the Gospel after Jesus's ascension. Following the intense persecution that erupted in Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7), Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. One of these Christians was a man named Philip, (Acts 8:4,5). He was one of the seven men chosen to serve the church in Acts 6:5.

In Acts chapter 8 we read of Phillip going down to Samaria where he "preached Christ to them." Afterward, an angel of the Lord directed Philip to travel south on an unpopulated road that went to Gaza. It was here that he encountered the Ethiopian eunuch, a high-ranking official serving as treasurer for the Queen of Ethiopia. This man had been to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home to Ethiopia, a journey of over 1,000 miles, (Acts 8:27,28). When Phillip approached the chariot, he heard the eunuch reading from Isaiah's scroll, specifically Isaiah 53:7-8.

*"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth. In His
humiliation His justice was taken away,
and who will declare His generation? For
His life is taken from the earth."* (Acts
8:32,33).

Phillip asked him "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I unless someone guides me?" And he then asked Philip to come up and sit with him," (Acts 8:30,31). Puzzled, the eunuch asked Philip who the prophet was talking about, himself or someone else? ³⁵ "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture preached Jesus to



him." (Acts 8:35)

TO PREACH JESUS, OR NOT TO PREACH JESUS?

There have been, and continue to be, those who bemoan what they perceive to be a problem within the church. They have tried to convince us to abandon the practice of preaching about doctrinal issues, or the plan of salvation, and to move away from emphasizing the church. "We JUST need to preach Jesus!" they say.

K.C. Moser (1893-1976) wrote an article entitled "Preaching Jesus," which was published in the December 1, 1932, issue of the *Gospel Advocate*. He claimed that "Philip did not preach a system of religion, or conditions of salvation disconnected from the atonement. He proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God who bears the sins of the world." K. C. Moser argued that when Philip encountered the eunuch, he "preached not a plan, but a man." Moser's article drew an immediate rebuttal from R.L. Whiteside, a staff writer for the *Gospel Advocate* at the time. That same year The *Gospel Advocate* Company published Moser's first book, "The Way of Salvation," which incorporated material from his

earlier articles. C. Leonard Allen, an ACU supporter of Moser, summarized the intent of Moser's book as a correction of a "displacement of the cross and God's grace" in our preaching and our concepts.

K.C. Moser was (and through his writings, still is) the principal fountain of the "demote-the-plan-of-the-Man" contention of the 1960s and of the ever louder "emphasis on grace" advocacy since the early 1980s. This idea of "preaching the man, not the plan," has been slowly spreading throughout the brotherhood through the years.

In the article "It's Christmas Time Again," Reuel Lemmons opined, that we need to "get the emphasis back where it belongs—on Christ, rather than on the church. ...We need more Christ-ism and less church of Christ-ism." [IMAGE (Vol. 4, No. 12): Dec. 1988, pp. 4,9],

Denny Boultinghouse wrote "More elderships want the focus of their pulpit to be Jesus Christ. I am not hopeful for churches where the "issues" take precedence over Christ in the preaching." ["I Have Hope," – Image (Vol. 8, No. 1): Jan/Feb. 1992, p. 4.]

Certainly, every gospel preacher should be for preaching JESUS! We should all be unanimously opposed to preaching any condition of salvation that is disconnected from the person and sacrifice of Jesus! I am fully on board with the idea of EMPHASIZING the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, in our preaching, teaching, and writing. But how can one preach Jesus, and emphasize what Jesus has done for us, (grace), without also preaching Jesus as the One Who has all authority in heaven and earth? How can we fully preach Jesus without teaching all things He has commanded us? (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:36; Colossians 1:13-29).

TO PREACH JESUS, WE MUST PREACH WHO JESUS IS

Philip skillfully connects the dots between the prophetic text in Isaiah 53 and its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him," (Acts 8:35). For one to come to faith in Christ, one must accept the scriptural evidence affirming that Jesus is indeed the promised, prophesied Messiah, (Romans 10:17).

The Old Testament scripture will bring those who accept it to believe in Jesus as the Christ, (John 5:39-47; Galatians 3:19-25). The New Testament bears witness to Who Jesus is by informing us of His birth, life, and many deeds, (Matthew; Mark; Luke; and John).

"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:30-31)

We preach Jesus when we preach WHO the scriptures reveal He truly is, (Romans 10:13-17), and what He has done for us, (Ephesians 5:2). He is the Son of God, and the Son of Man. Jesus is God, (Deity), Who came in the flesh, (John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:6-11; etc.); Jesus was the suffering Servant, Who gave His life for all of mankind, that all who believe and follow Him will be saved, (Isaiah 53; John 3:16; Hebrews 5:8,9). Jesus, by His resurrection, is now Lord of lords and King of kings, (Acts 2:36; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 14:8-12; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 1:5; 17:14; 19:16). Jesus is our one and only Mediator, (1 Timothy 2:5), and our great High Priest, (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:11-21). And Jesus will judge all men, and He will judge us by His words, (John 12:48; 2 Corinthians 5:10. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

Am I “preaching Jesus” when I emphasize His sacrifice but belittle His authority and teaching?

TO PREACH JESUS INCLUDES BAPTISM

As Phillip preached Jesus, the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). There can be no doubt Philip’s message included baptism. We see the same scenario play out earlier in the chapter when Phillip “preached Christ” to the Samaritans, (Acts 8:5). Just as with the Samaritans, preaching Jesus produced faith and resulted in a believer being baptized “in the name of Jesus,” (Acts 8:12,13,16; cf. Acts 2:38; 10:47,48). The eunuch’s immediate request for baptism also suggests the importance of baptism, which corresponds with what Jesus said when He commissioned His disciples, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved,” (Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 28:19,20).

As Peter embarked on carrying out the great commission, he preached Jesus for the first time and instructed his audience ³⁶... God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. ... ³⁸ Then Peter said to them, “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:36-42).

Am I actually “preaching Jesus” if I tell people who Jesus is, but refuse to tell them what Jesus says for them to do? (Acts 2:40).

TO PREACH JESUS INCLUDES THE CHURCH AND HIS AUTHORITY

Admittedly, for me to sustain this point I must draw evidence from beyond the conversion of the eunuch, but we do not have to go too far. Let us once again go back to the previous

conversion account, where Phillip preached Christ to the Samaritans. It is only reasonable to conclude that preaching Jesus, (Acts 8:35), and preaching Christ (Acts 8:5), are synonymous concepts? When Phillip preached Christ to the Samaritans. It is only reasonable to conclude that preaching Jesus, (Acts 8:35), and preaching Christ, (Acts 8:5), are synonymous concepts? When Phillip preached Christ, we are told he preached “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:5,12). The kingdom of God and the church are synonymous entities in these last days, (Daniel 2:44; Matthew 16:18,19; Colossians 1:13; Romans 14:17).

Preaching about Jesus inherently involves discussing His blood and the church (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25). It’s impossible to separate Jesus from His body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18,24; 3:15). Acknowledging Jesus also means recognizing His authority as the Head of the church (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:36; 10:40-47; Ephesians 5:22-32).

CONCLUSION

Yes, let us preach Jesus! Yes, let us preach Christ, and Him crucified, (1 Corinthians 2:2). And yes, let us preach that Jesus is Lord of Lords and King of kings, (Acts 2:36; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 14:8-12; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 1:5; 17:14; 19:16).

We cannot separate the gracious provision of salvation in Jesus from His person, His authority, or His teaching. His teaching is found in the New Testament, which is the pattern He has provided to govern the organization, worship, and work of the local church, (2 Timothy 1:13; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 6:3). The teaching of Jesus emanates directly from His authority as the head of the church. How can we ignore His teaching, or the teaching of His apostles, without simultaneously dismissing both His authority and salvation, (grace)? (Luke 6:46; Hebrews 5:8,9)?

HE PREACHED JESUS TO HIM | DON McCLAIN

²⁸ Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.
— Colossians 1:28 (NKJV)

Return to: [Front Cover](#) | [Table of Contents](#)

What Is Behind Every Temptation?

BRUCE REEVES | CONWAY, ARKANSAS

When we face temptation, it often feels like a simple choice – a fleeting moment in which we are torn between what's right and what's appealing. But if we take a step back, there is more at stake than just the immediate decision or temptation itself. The truth is, behind every temptation lies a deeper spiritual battle, one that targets not only our actions but also our trust in God. The true challenge of temptation is not solely about willpower or self-control; it is fundamentally about our confidence in God's truth, power, and wisdom.

Many people may view temptation as merely a matter of self-discipline—a battle of self-control to avoid doing something we know is wrong. While self-control is essential and part of the fruit of the Spirit, the deeper issue at play is our trust in God. When we are tempted to sin, we are faced with a subtle question: *“Can I truly trust God in this situation?”* This was the question behind every temptation that Jesus faced, and it's the question behind the temptations we face today.

Jesus's Temptations and Ours

To better understand the nature of temptation, we can look at the temptation of Jesus. In the Gospels, the Lord is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He faces a series of temptations from Satan. This was not a random occurrence or a moment of misfortune for Christ—it was a divine appointment for holy purposes. Jesus was divinely led into this confrontation to demonstrate victory over temptation and to provide us with an example of how to resist the wicked one when we face similar struggles.

In Matthew 4:1, we read that Jesus was “led up of the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.” Luke



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and Mark provide additional insight into the nature of this temptation, with Luke noting that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit when He entered the wilderness (Luke 4:1), and Mark describes how the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness (Mark 1:12). This powerful language underscores the urgency and purpose behind this event. It wasn't simply a test of Jesus's character—it was a necessary challenge to confront and expose the enemy's tactics.

Through His temptations, Jesus not only showed us how to resist, but He also revealed the strategies Satan uses to entice us. Understanding these strategies is crucial in overcoming temptation. As General Douglas MacArthur said, “The greater the knowledge of the enemy, the greater the potential for victory.” Satan's methods are often subtle, but by studying Christ's responses, we can see the enemy's strategies. This knowledge will help us resist when we face our battles.

But the benefit of Jesus's temptations goes beyond revealing Satan's strategies. They also demonstrate His compassion as our High Priest. The Son of God faced temptation “in all points like as we are” yet He remained “without sin”

(Hebrews 4:15). Our Savior understands our struggles intimately, not as a distant observer, but as one who has walked through them Himself. When we face temptation, we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus understands exactly what we are going through (Hebrews 2:17-18).

Moreover, Christ's temptation shows us that Satan can be resisted. The New Testament writers would not appeal to Jesus's temptation as a model for overcoming our own if there was no real connection between His experience and ours. Jesus, in His humanity, faced the same kinds of temptations we do, yet He overcame them. His victory is the basis for our hope that we, too, can resist the devil's advances (1 Corinthians 10:13; James 4:7).

The Essence of Temptation

So, what was behind the temptation of Christ? In each instance, Satan was attacking His confidence in His Father. The first temptation came when Jesus was fasting in the wilderness. Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. On the surface, this may seem like a simple temptation to act out of self-interest, but it was much deeper than that enticement. Satan was subtly questioning whether Jesus could trust God to meet His needs. "If you are the Son of God," Satan taunted, "why don't you just provide for yourself?" The question was not simply about food—it was about trust. Would Jesus step outside of God's will to provide for His own needs, or would He trust God's provision? This is the very place where Adam and Eve and Israel had failed.

The Lord's response was direct: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). By quoting Scripture, Jesus affirmed that His confidence was in God's Word and His faithfulness. We too can overcome temptation to sin when we faithfully wield the sword of the

Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

The second temptation was even more subtle. Satan challenged Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, citing Scripture to encourage Him to test God's promises. It should be remembered that Jesus had just quoted from God's word, therefore, Satan attempts to turn his strength into weakness through pride.

Christ's temptation involved presuming on God—taking matters into one's own hands and forcing God to act on one's behalf. Jesus responded again with Scripture, saying, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matthew 4:7). This response reminds us that true faith isn't about manipulating or testing God; it's about trusting Him fully and not forcing His hand to act according to our will.

Finally, in the third temptation, Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship. The temptation was to bypass the suffering and sacrifice of the cross and achieve His mission by compromising His integrity. Satan's offer was a shortcut—one that promised the world without the pain of sacrifice. But Jesus saw through the lie. He rejected Satan's offer with a clear and emphatic command: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve" (Matthew 4:10). Jesus understood that His mission would not be fulfilled by compromising His loyalty to the Father.

The Stakes of Temptation

When we face temptation, three things are at stake: our future, the future of those we love, and our faith. First, temptation often feels like a small, isolated decision, but the choices we make today have ripple effects on our future. A single moment of weakness can trigger a chain of events that changes the course of our lives. Our decisions not only impact our path but also the lives of those around us—our families, friends, and communities. Parents understand this well,

often seeing how their children's choices in moments of temptation can affect their futures, even if their children don't realize it at the time.

Second, the future of our loved ones is also impacted by the choices we make in times of temptation. Our actions—especially those driven by selfishness, dishonesty, or rebellion—can have lasting consequences for the people we care about most. This reality is especially poignant for parents, who sometimes feel the weight of their own decisions on their children's lives.

Finally, and most importantly, our faith is at stake. Sin damages our relationship with God, erodes our confidence in His goodness, and weakens our trust in His promises. It is in moments of temptation that our confidence in God is most tested. This is why people often drift away from God—not because of intellectual arguments or philosophical doubts, but because they repeatedly violate their conscience and begin to lose faith in God's goodness and truth. Temptation is a battle for our trust in God, and every time we give in to sin, we are essentially saying, "I trust myself more than I trust God."

Learning to Trust in God's Will

In each of the temptations, Jesus was presented with a choice to trust God or to take matters into His own hands. In the first temptation, the question was: *Will God provide for me?* In the second: *Will God protect me?* And in the third: *Will God's will require sacrifice?* Jesus answered every question with a firm "yes" to God's will, even when it meant suffering or sacrifice.

In our own lives, we will face similar choices. Temptation often arises when we are vulnerable—whether we are tired, hungry, stressed, or facing some form of struggle. But Jesus shows us that the key to overcoming temptation is trusting in God's provision, protection, and purpose. He trusted in His Father's will, and that obedient trust made all the difference.

As we face our temptations, we need to remind ourselves that behind every temptation lies an attack on our trust in God. The enemy seeks to undermine our faith in God's goodness, provision, and wisdom. But just as Jesus overcame temptation by trusting His Father's will, we too can overcome it by trusting God in every circumstance.

Conclusion: Following Jesus' Example

The temptation of Jesus provides us with both a model and a source of strength. He faced the same temptations we do, yet He overcame them through complete trust in God. As we walk in His footsteps, we can find the strength to resist temptation and remain faithful to God's will. Peter wrote: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Every temptation is an opportunity to choose faith over fear, trust over doubt, and obedience over self-interest. By looking to Jesus, we can face life's challenges with confidence, knowing that God is faithful and will provide the strength we need to stand firm.

OCTOBER 2025 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Jeremy Diestelkamp will write our next article in the Hall of Faith series from Hebrews 11, focused on the faith of Jephthah.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Joshua Welch looks at the third in our series on the seven churches of Asia, the letter to the church at Pergamum.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

William Stewart looks at the audience of worship.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

Jeremy Woodman pens our next article on becoming like Jesus, focused on compassion.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Jesse Flowers focuses on the need for us to develop a mindset of evangelism throughout the day.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

William Stewart considers who the sons of God are (Genesis 6).



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