

In Genesis 1 the concept of a Creator God was introduced with all its implications concerning God's authority and sovereignty. First God had created the heavens and the earth. Then He reformed the earth into a habitable environment and created various life forms. Finally, man was introduced as a special creation, made in the image and likeness of God, and given dominion over every living creature. The "likeness" of God implies that man was created similar to God in such a way that he could relate to his Creator God. The "image" of God implies that man was placed in this earthly environment with the responsibility to represent his Creator God. God was the Owner of this creation; and man was a sort of steward, responsible to represent the Owner in creation.

In Genesis 2 man was placed in the Garden of Eden and given the specific job "to tend and to keep it." This clearly acknowledged God's authority over man and His right to tell man what to do. Furthermore, "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Gen 2:16-17). This command clearly delineated the will of God; it clearly stated the consequences of disobedience; and because it required obedience, it introduced the idea of choice. Would man do his own will, or would he choose to do God's will? Faith in God alone could preserve him in the pathway of obedience. In addition, the woman was provided by God as a helper for the man in this pathway. She would operate in a complementary, supportive role, being equal yet different from her mate. Marriage was introduced as the core unit of society.

In Genesis 3 Satan, the tempter, was allowed to test the man and the woman. Did they have the character to persist in obedience to the commandment of their God? Did they have faith in God Himself such that they would reject any suggestion that He might be wrong? They failed shamefully in this moral test, for the woman was deceived by Satan's subtle lies, and the man followed rebelliously in her pathway of disobedience. The Lord then appeared on the scene, and they faced the inescapable truth that they were to be held accountable for their disobedience. The consequences for their departure were pronounced first upon the serpent, and then upon the woman, and finally upon the man. Then they were driven from the garden to face the sorrowful consequences of their sin.

Moral responsibility is the obligation to choose what is right and to reject what is wrong. Consider the moral principles that were introduced in this account of Adam and Eve.

- Man was created by God as a moral being, *responsible to obey* his Creator. (Even before the fall, man had a will of his own which required submission. Our sinless Savior had a will which He submitted perfectly to that of His Father, Luke 22:42.)
- Man was given at least one initial commandment, *a standard for moral responsibility*, by which obedience could be evaluated. God has provided moral standards which we are responsible to obey, for which we will be held accountable. (The Ten Commandments could be taken as a summary statement of God's moral standards for mankind. Even when men do not have divine revelation, like the heathen peoples, each person's conscience provides a moral standard for which he held responsible, Romans 2:14-15.)
- Man was allowed *choice* to obey or not to obey. Without the opportunity to choose, moral responsibility would lack the element of responsibility. (Joshua challenged the idolatrous Israelites, saying, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD," Joshua 24:15).
- Man was warned of the *consequences* of disobedience because choices are always accompanied by consequences. Since man was created to live forever, the ultimate consequences of his choices are everlasting. (Paul summarized the principle, saying, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life," Galatians 6:7-8.)
- Man was allowed to be tempted because *testing* reveals our true moral character. Pain and suffering are all part of the moral testing of mankind. Man's *faith in God* is the means by which he could remain obedient to his Creator in the face of temptation. (John said it like this, "This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1 John 5:4-5.)
- Man was held *accountable* for his choices because under moral responsibility every man must give account of himself before God. There is a day of accountability. (Paul quoted from the Psalms, saying, "For it is written: 'As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." Romans 14:11-12).
- Man found himself participating in a great *moral struggle* involving forces and influences outside of himself and much greater than himself. There is a larger picture – man is not the center of the universe. Meanwhile, man participates in a great spiritual battle, and believers are provided with a spiritual armor for this warfare (Ephesians 6).

These principles of moral responsibility existed before man sinned. They were basic, underlying principles by which the moral character of man could be evaluated and rewarded. The moral principles do not offer salvation to man; rather, they condemn man because he has chosen to do his own will rather than the will of his Creator. God's offer of salvation is His response to man's failure under moral responsibility.

The Awesome Creator God:

Our great Creator God spoke through Moses, saying, “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?” (Deut 10:12-13). This is the awesome fear of the Lord. Though we are not placed under the Law in Christianity, God’s moral standards for us are certainly no less that they were for Israel.

- “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 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.*’ And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear” (1 Peter 1:13-17; quoting from Lev 11:44).
- “Come, you children, listen to me; *I will teach you the fear of the LORD.* Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth” (Psalm 34:11-16; quoted in 1 Peter 3:10-12).
- “Be clothed with humility, for ‘*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6; quoting from Prov 3:34).

The Scriptures command us to fear the Lord, but just what is “the fear of the Lord”? It is that reverential conviction that acknowledges the infinite power and authority of God, bowing before Him in recognition of His deity. “Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him” (Psalm 33:8).

- The fear of the Lord introduces men into the pathway of wisdom, as they seek to know God better and to understand His holiness. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov 9:10).
- The fear of the Lord has a moral element for it causes men to recoil from evil, hating it just like their God hates it. “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate” (Prov 8:13).
- The fear of the Lord causes His people to live their lives in a holy imitation of their God. “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:9).
- The fear of the Lord energizes men to live lives of sincerity and truth. “Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth” (Josh 24:14). “Thus you shall act in the fear of the LORD, faithfully and with a loyal heart” (2 Chron 19:9).
- The fear of the Lord leads us to treat our fellowmen with honor and justice. “You shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God” (Lev 25:17).
- The Lord promises blessing for those who fear Him. “The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil” (Prov 19:23).

Choices and Consequences:

Man was given the choice of whether he would obey God or not, and we can see that God is greatly glorified when men choose to obey Him, particularly in the face of temptation. The life of Christ Himself is the perfect example of how God is glorified by our obedience. We are called to follow His example.

Choices are always accompanied by consequences for God has provided a way that the moral choices of His creatures could be evaluated and rewarded. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal 6:7-8).

Motivation goes hand in hand with choice. But what would motivate a human being to make the right choice in the tests of life? Only faith in God would provide the motivation for right moral choices, so failure in moral responsibility is really failure in faith. “This is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith” (1 John 5:4). Furthermore, “The love of Christ compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14).

The Scriptures give us many principles concerning moral choice.

- *The consequences of moral choices are placed before men, for they must choose life or death, blessing or cursing.* “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that *I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deut 30:18).
- *Weigh your options on your moral scales, and then make the right choice.* This principal was demonstrated in the account of Elijah. When God was about to end the three-year draught in Israel, He sent Elijah to the people with this message. “*How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him*” (1 Kings 18:21). Then Elijah performed a notable miracle by praying for God to reveal Himself by fire from heaven. When the fire came down from heaven, it consumed the sacrifice, the altar and even the dust around the altar in an amazing display of the power of God. The people responded, “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!” There was a great victory for God that day, for the people chose to follow the great God of Israel.
- *The Lord Himself is placed before us, and we must choose whether we will serve Him, or not.* Near the end of his life, Joshua called the elders of Israel, along with the leaders, judges and officers. He rehearsed the history of Israel to them, starting with Abraham, and going clear through their triumphal invasion of the promised land. Then he exhorted them, “Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, *choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve*, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh 24:14-15).
- *The decision to continue faithfully in the pathway of obedience is a choice.* The catalog of faithful men in Hebrews 11 dwells upon the pilgrim character of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These men chose the follow the Lord as pilgrims and strangers because they had a vision of a far-off heavenly country. God Himself says, “Truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Heb 11:25-26).
- *In order to make the proper moral choices of life, we must view the momentary pleasures of sin in the light of the eternal promises of God.* “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin*, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Heb 11:24-26).

The book of Proverbs is full of practical advice for our everyday lives which demonstrate the consequences of our choices, as a moral principle under which we live:

- “As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death” (Prov 11:19). “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Prov 28:13).
- “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov 14:12). “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered” (Prov 28:26).
- “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18). “Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; though they join forces, none will go unpunished” (Prov 16:5).
- “Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away” (Prov 6:32-33).
- “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape” (Prov 19:5). “Getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death” (Prov 21:6).
- “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine” (Prov 23:29-30).
- “A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; for if you rescue him, you will have to do it again” (Prov 19:19). “Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Prov 29:20).
- “Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in deep darkness” (Prov 20:20).
- “He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Prov 29:1). “He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding” (Prov 15:32).
- “He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished” (Prov 17:5). “He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses” (Prov 28:27).

The Biblical account reveals that God purposefully tests the character of mankind. Furthermore, character is based upon faith in God, so temptation is actually a test of our faith.

Satan's purposes in assaulting us through temptation differ vastly from the purposes of God as He tests us in the circumstances of life.

- Satan tempts us through our lusts to try to make us sin.
 - "I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain" (1 Thess 3:5).
 - "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14).
 - "The devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested" (Rev 2:10).
 - "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt 6:13).
 - "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt 4:1).
- God tests us under moral responsibility to reveal whether we will remain true to Him or not. God's objective is exactly the opposite to that of Satan (James 1:12-15). Furthermore, even our failures can bring a blessing if they lead us to repentance.
 - "I know also, my God, that *You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness*" (1 Chron 29:17).
 - "Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for *God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin*'" (Exod 20:29).
 - "You shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, *to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not*" (Deut 8:2).
 - "What is man, that You should exalt him, that You should set Your heart on him, that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?" (Job 7:17).
 - "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer 17:10). "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties" (Psalm 139:23).

God has revealed His purposes as He tests His people in the furnace of affliction. God's testing is like a refiner's fire which not only tests the character of the metal, but also purifies it. The refiner continues to remove the impurities from the crucible until His own face is reflected from the mirror-like surface of the purified metal. The trials and temptations in our lives develop patience, perseverance, character and hope. "To you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil 1:29).

- *God has our good in mind in His tests.* "Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end" (Deut 8:16).
- *Testing produces patience.* "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting" (James 1:2-6).
- *Testing develops character.* "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5). "He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:9-10).
- *We are purified into something that is very precious to God Himself through testing.* "For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined" (Psalm 66:10). "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10). "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Behold, I will refine them and try them'" (Jeremiah 9:7).
- *We are drawn into a closer personal relationship with God through testing.* "I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people', and each one will say, 'The LORD is my God'" (Zech 13:9).

- *Overcoming in the tests of life brings glory to God and eternal blessing to man.* “Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.’ ... ‘By Myself I have sworn,’ says the LORD, ‘because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, blessing I will bless you... In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice’” (Genesis 22).
- *God promises to reward those who endure through temptation.* “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you, but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Peter 4:12-14).
- *The Lord provides joy, strength and victory to those who through faith endure in spite of every obstacle.* “Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls – Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills” (Hab 3:17-19).

Accountability:

Man will be held *accountable* for his choices because under moral responsibility every man must give account of himself before God. “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Unbelievers will be judged at a different time and in a different way from believers. Unbelievers will be judged according to their works at the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11-15). On the other hand, the lives of believers will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ – Faithfulness will be rewarded, but there will be no punishment.

- “We shall all stand before *the judgment seat of Christ*. For it is written: ‘As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:10-12). “They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Pet 4:5).
- “We make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before *the judgment seat of Christ*, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor 5:9-11).
- “Each one’s work will become clear; for *the Day* will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:13-15).

We are held accountable for the light that we have been given. “He that knows to do right, and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). In Romans 1-3 the condemnation of man is based completely on his having demonstrated some knowledge of God and of right and wrong. Furthermore, God has placed three great witnesses before mankind for which he is accountable.

- *Creation* (Rom 1:19-32): *Creation itself is God’s first great universal witness to mankind.* This is introduced in verses 1:19-20, and then the progress and the ultimate consequences of man’s rejection of this witness are discussed throughout the remainder of this portion in verses 1:21-32. The moral corruption of the world is the direct result of man’s rejection of responsibility toward his Creator God. This explains the development of heathenism; however, every culture is within one generation of being heathen if they step away from knowledge of God. Furthermore, the images and gods of heathenism have their counterparts in the most developed cultures on the face of the earth.
- *Conscience* (Rom 2:1-16): *Conscience is God’s second great universal witness to mankind.* This is introduced in verses 2:14-15 as an explanation of why the Gentiles are responsible before God, even though they do not know the Law. It is presented as a concluding thought at the end of a discussion of man’s moral responsibility before God, which includes several logical points:
 - The fact that we judge others establishes that we do have the knowledge of good and evil. This is universal in establishing our moral responsibility before God; that is, it does not require special revelation.
 - To judge others is to despise the mercy of God without which we would all perish; and furthermore the forbearance of God is shown purposely toward us so that we will repent of our sins.
 - God is twice presented as the righteous judge who renders to every man according to his deeds and who is no respecter of persons. He is the One who will judge the secrets of man by Jesus Christ
 - Those that have the knowledge of the Law will be judged according to the Law; but those that do not have the knowledge of the Law will be judged according to whatever knowledge that they do have, which is the knowledge of good and evil, manifested in their conscience.
- *Word of God* (Rom 2:17-3:20): *The Revelation of God through the written Word is the third great witness to man;* however, it is not universal for there are many who have never heard the Word. The Law is alluded to in verse 2:12; but it is addressed in detail, starting with verse 2:17. To have been given the Scriptures is the chief blessing of the Jews; however, possession of the revelation of God is not sufficient, for God expects obedience from the heart. The Law provides a divine standard of righteousness for man; but the revelation of God documents that man has totally failed in his responsibility to obey God. “By the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20).

The Big Picture:

Man found himself participating in a great *moral struggle* involving forces and influences outside of himself and much greater than himself. These spiritual, angelic forces are divided into two camps, the good angels under the authority of God and the fallen angels under the leadership of Satan. There is literally a spiritual war going on continually between these opposing forces.

Satan's spiritual, moral attack upon mankind began in the Garden of Eden where Satan deceived Eve with a blatant lie. Then through Eve's persuasive powers, Satan led Adam into a disobedient choice (Gen 3:1-15; 2 Tim 2:15). Thus death entered into the world through sin (Rom 5:12).

- Satan is like a vicious lion. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9).
- The Lord Jesus Himself called Satan a liar and a murderer. "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).
- Satan often presents himself deceptively as an angel of light. "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14). Satan is called, "the tempter" (Matt 4:3; 2 Thes 3:5).

Through Satan's influence upon the lusts of sinful men, the social system of this world has been utterly corrupted. "You He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Eph 2:1-3). "The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Satan is called the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and the god of this age (1 Cor 4:4).

- We need to be delivered from the snare of Satan. "God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim 2:25-26).
- We need to be delivered from darkness and the power of Satan. "I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18).

The Lord Jesus delivers us from the power of Satan by offering a solution to our sins. "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb 2:14-15).

- We overcome by faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5).
- Through God's grace we are able to resist the temptations of Satan. "He [God] gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:6-8; quoting from Prov 3:34).
- The armor of God is provided so that we can overcome in the spiritual battle. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.* For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places..." (Eph 6:10-18).

- “Having girded your waist with *truth*”: The “girding” of the truth of God is God’s way of preparing us for action. “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). The truth liberates us from bondage, for “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). It sets us apart to be used by God, for Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). “You have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1 Peter 1:22). If Satan clouds the truth, he reduces us to inactivity or worse. When the Galatians put themselves back under the law, they were in bondage; and Paul told them, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Gal 5:7).
- “Having put on the breastplate of *righteousness*”: Righteousness is the protection of our very vitality. When Satan tempts us into unholiness, he has slain our vital link of communion with God, for “The LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright” (Psalm 11:7). “The kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:7). “Awake to righteousness, and do not sin” (1 Cor 15:34). The protective character of practical righteousness before God is called, “the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” (2 Cor 6:7).
- “Having shod your feet with the preparation of *the gospel of peace*”: This speaks of vision, purpose and preparedness in our service for God for we are lights for Him in a dark world. Paul said, “Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim 4:5). “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:20). Peter said, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).
- “Above all, taking the shield of *faith*”: Faith is what we need “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” Faith is placed above every other piece of armor, for Satan’s fiery darts of doubt and temptation can only be quenched by faith in our wonderful God. “This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4). Satan’s attacks upon us are designed to undermine our faith, for if he can do that he can destroy us. Satan tempts us to sin for he knows that he can destroy our faith by causing us to give up a good conscience. Paul desired that Timothy would “wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck” (1 Tim 1:18-19).
- “Take the helmet of *salvation*”: We cannot even begin the battle without salvation; however, this seems to refer rather to the assurance of salvation, the confidence that comes from knowing that He will never give us up. We all fail, even after we are saved; but the assurance of salvation will aid us to always return in repentance to Him for restoration. Our confidence is in the finished work of Christ, a never to be repeated offering for our sins which is adequate to bring us spotless and perfect into His presence, in spite of our failures. “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:19, 22).
- “Take... the sword of the Spirit which is *the Word of God*”: This is the only offensive weapon in the armor of God. With this we move in to destroy the work of Satan. It is the sword of the Spirit, and only through the guidance of the Spirit of God can we use the Word of God effectively against the enemy. “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). One of the wonderful things about this sword is that it has two edges, one to strike at the enemy, but the other to cut back at ourselves, testing and purifying our own actions and motives. It also serves as a light for our pathway, for “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).
- “*Praying* always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”: Communication with the commanding officer is absolutely necessary for success in the battle.
 - Pray at all times: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18).
 - Never stop praying: “Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess 5:17-18).
 - Pray everywhere: “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim 2:8).
 - Pray in every circumstance: “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6).

I want to discuss our spiritual rebirth, that is, our New Life in Christ: The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” When Nicodemus was confused, the Lord Jesus told him, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:3-8). Spiritual rebirth is absolutely necessary in order to participate in the kingdom of God, “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor 15:50). The flesh is our sinful fleshly inheritance from Adam, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” When we are born again, we become *the children of God Himself*, receiving a new spiritual life, for “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Those who are “born again” are said to have *put away the old man and to have put on the new man*. Paul told the Corinthians, “Christ... died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). Practically, this means that we should cease from the sinful behaviors of our unsaved years. Paul told the Colossians, “You yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col 3:8-10).

The idea of “the old man” and “the new man” is illustrated graphically by baptism in Romans 6, going down into the waters of death and coming back up in new life. Baptism is a visible, public act which illustrates an invisible, spiritual reality. The spiritual reality of our spiritual standing before God is that when we were born again we terminated the old life of sin and took up a new spiritual life in Christ Jesus.

- **Allegiance:** As a public act in baptism, *we are declaring that we are now associated with Christ*, both in His death and in His resurrection life as our glorified Lord. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). Perhaps it could be compared to a soldier putting on his uniform.
- **Burial:** In the public act of baptism, *we are acting out an illustration of what our spiritual position is* before God; that is, we are showing how we ended *our old sinful standing* which separated us from God, and how we began our completely *new standing in Christ* based upon the cleansing of all sin (Rom 6:4).
- **Commitment:** As a public act we are *declaring our intention to live our lives in conformance* to the position that God has given us. We intend to lay aside the flesh with its enslavement to sin, and to live our lives in the purity of the Christ who died for us. “So we should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4b).

This is summarized in Galatians – “I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me” (Gal 2:20).

- “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” The old me has been crucified, and the new me lives through Christ who lives in me.
- “The life which I now live in the flesh.” As long as we continue to live in these human bodies, we find that we still have the flesh with its selfish lusts. Indeed, the believer has two opposing moral influences within him: The sinful flesh with its continual selfish demands for fulfillment, contrasted to the indwelling Holy Spirit who stands in opposition to the willfulness of the flesh. The apostle Paul told the Galatians, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Gal 5:16-17). We are given a thorough description of the works of the flesh, and of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:19-23). Then we are instructed, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). Inherent to this statement is the possibility that we might not “walk in the Spirit” even though we have been born again by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, this encapsulates the struggle of the believer as he attempts to live the sanctified life of faith before God.
- But how do I walk in the Spirit? Galatians 2:20 speaks of two great principles in the believer’s life:
 - *Faith* as a motivating force: “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5). Faith is characterized by assurance and conviction (Heb 11:1)
 - *Love* as a energizing force: “The love of Christ compels us” (2 Cor 5:14).

This leads to the subject of sanctification. God's purpose in our salvation is to have a special people, dedicated to holy living (Titus 2:11-14; This is one of the best summaries of what Christianity is all about):

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

14 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.

Sanctification:

Sanctification is being set apart to God. Our Savior has given Himself for us in order to "purify for Himself *His own special people, zealous for good works*" (Titus 2:14). This is positional sanctification, for every believer as been set apart for God.

There is also a practical side of sanctification in which God works in us through His Holy Spirit to conform us to the image of Christ Himself. This starts at the time of spiritual rebirth and continues the remainder of the believers life here on earth.

- "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, not in passion of lust" (1 Thess 4:3-5).
- "Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thess 5:22-24).

The whole idea of sanctification, of being set aside for God, suggests that God has granted the believer the privilege of offering himself as a living sacrifice. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable [intelligent JND] service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:1-2).

- This "living sacrifice" was to be "holy, acceptable to God," indicating the moral character of the living sacrifice. Paul told the Philippians, "According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Phil 1:20-21).
- The "living sacrifice" refers to the sacrificial way that we are to live out our lives – it is intelligent service, not done in ignorance but rather in obedience to God's revealed will in the Scriptures.

Paul continues his plea for intelligent service in our sacrificial living, saying, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2a). The fact that it is to be intelligent service points us the importance of avoiding the tainted thinking of the world, and of renewing the mind by focusing on the Lord and on the truth presented in His holy word. It is transformational and life-changing, providing a way that we can live our lives in godliness and holiness. It is accomplished as a discipline, spending time daily reading and meditating on the word of God. Dwell upon the Lord, making Him your focus, for "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). Christ Himself provides the motivation, for "The love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor 5:14).

- The mind of man is the battleground of the spiritual battle.
 - "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Eph 4:23). "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, *bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*" (2 Cor 10:3-5).

- “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.* For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 2:1-3). “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep” (Rom 13:11).
- “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things” (Phil 4:8).
- We are sustained by God’s grace through faith:
 - God’s grace is His provision for our weakness. “Beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; *but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Pet 3:17-18). “He said to me, *‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’* Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor 12:9).
 - We live by faith. “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). “*This is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.* Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5). “You may *wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience,* which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck” (1 Tim 1:18-19).
- Our two great resources are the Holy Spirit and the word of God:
 - We have been granted “sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience” (1 Peter 1:2). Indeed, the indwelling Holy Spirit is God’s provision for our weakness. “*Strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,* that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:16-17).
 - The Word of God is our resource for practical sanctification.
 - “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word*” (Eph 5:25-26).
 - “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable* for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).
 - “The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is *a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:12-13).
 - “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, *as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,* if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Peter 2:1-3). “I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and *the word of God abides in you,* and you have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:14). “*Be doers of the word, and not hearers only,* deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).
- Motivated by a future hope.
 - “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And *everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*” (1 John 3:2-3).
 - “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, *what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God,* because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. *Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless*” (2 Peter 3:11-14).
 - “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and *to wait for His Son from heaven,* whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thes 1:9-10).
 - “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, *looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:11-13).

- Walk worthy of the Lord. Run the race. Be strong in the Lord. “That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2b).
 - “That you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; *that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy” (Col 1:9-11).
 - “*Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ*, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27).
 - “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? *Run in such a way that you may obtain it*. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But *I discipline my body and bring it into subjection*, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:24-27).
 - “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and *let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus*, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls” (Heb 12:1-3).
 - “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Eph 6:10). “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy” (Col 1:11). “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).
 - “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Heb 12:12-15).
 - “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:10-12; quoted from Psalm 34:12-16).
 - “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).
- We are vessels, prepared for God. “O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isa 64:8). God is the Potter who works in our lives to sanctify us unto holy living so that we are useful for the Master.
 - “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, *he will be a vessel for honor*, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:19-22).
 - “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*, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thes 4:3-8).
 - “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Thess 5:22-24).

- “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor 6:18-20). “Because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Cor 7:2). “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb 13:4). “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the LORD” (Prov 18:22).
 - Consider this from the standpoint of creation. God said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” and then God gave man the sexual drive to energize him to accomplish that project. Sexual desire, sexual rolls, the sexual act, conception, pregnancy and birth are all part of the creation of God which He called, “Very good!” Because God said, “Be fruitful and multiply,” we know that it was the will of God for mankind to participate in sexual procreation within the moral restraints of one-man, one-women marriage. Because marriage is ordained by God, it is sacred; it is holy matrimony. The fact that the sexual act is forbidden outside of marriage shows that God wills for society to develop according to a God-given pattern with the family as the basic unit of society. An orderly family provides a means for God-given moral principles to be passed on from generation to generation. As man “fills the earth” in submission to God’s pattern, God is glorified.
 - The relationship of the husband and wife is used as an illustration of the relationship of Christ and the church (Eph 5:21-33). In order to be fulfill this picture, the wife must submit respectfully to her husband, and the husband must unselfishly love his wife. The greater responsibility rests upon the husband for he must love his wife with the same sort of sacrificial love that Christ has demonstrated toward the church. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” To God, this is an exceedingly important paradigm – He commands it to be so.
 - So, what is wrong with this picture? Is this what we see going on around us in society today? What has happened?
- Improper affections.
 - “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).
 - “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Tim 6:9-11).
 - “Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Tim 3:2-5).

The Heart is my inner man, what I really am by character, called “the hidden person of the heart” (1 Peter 3:4). The mind provides reasoning capability, giving a way for us to make sense both of the feelings and desires of our hearts, and also of what we perceive around us. The mind is the battlefield for the spiritual warfare. The eyes and the ears are the perceptive members of each man, sometimes called the eye-gate and the ear-gate.

- God’s request to us is, “My son, *give me your heart*, and let your eyes observe my ways” (Prov 23:26). And we are exhorted to “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart*, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov 3:5-6).
 - We should respond to God’s request, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart*; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer” (Prov 19:14). “*Create in me a clean heart, O God*, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).
- Since the fall, men have been tainted by sin, and particularly, our hearts are tainted by sin. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart” (Jer 17:9). The Lord Jesus explained, “*For from within, out of the heart of men*, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23).
 - What we do is a pretty good indication of what we are. “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). Even the born-again believer has to struggle with choice of whether to allow his life to be controlled by the sinful flesh, or by the Spirit of God (Gal 5:16-17).
- We are counseled, “*Keep your heart with all diligence*, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov 4:23). We are greatly influenced by the things which we see and hear. For that reason, we should be careful concerning the influences that we allow in our lives, what we look at and what we listen to. “For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov 23:7).
 - On the positive side we can feed ourselves by spending time in the Word of God. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to convict us of sin and to energize us to holy living. “The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is *a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Heb 4:12). David said, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!” (Psalm 119:11).
 - On the bad side, we can fill our mind with the filthy things of this world. Pornography is perhaps the most insidious influence for evil that has polluted the morals of this world, particularly for the past 100 years. Peter described certain sinful men as, “Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices” (2 Peter 2:14). Paul said, “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom 3:14).
 - Sexual immorality is forbidden by God because it falls short of His moral standards. It certainly produces disorder in the family structure. It a choice that always has sad, oftentimes terrible, consequences.
 - The book of Proverbs provides instruction to young men on how to escape the wiles of the seductress who tempts men into immorality (Prov 6:32-33; 7:10-27).
 - Paul also told the Thessalonians, “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*, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thes 4:3-8).
 - And Paul told the Corinthians, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor 6:18-20).

- Homosexuality and mistaken Sexual Identity are problems which we face in society today. It is morally unacceptable to God, and it is destructive to both the individual and to society as a whole.
 - Homosexuality was part of the moral decay of the human race as they turned from God. “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened... For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error” (Rom 1:21-28).
 - Homosexuality is listed with other moral sins which are abhorrent to God. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 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” (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Do not miss the fact that some of the believers in Corinth had been delivered from the homosexual lifestyle (vs. 11). This offers the strong hope that others who have been lured into this lifestyle can also be delivered from it through the mercy of God.
- What should we do when we find that we have fallen short of God’s glorious standards?
 - “God... now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).
 - “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 3:15).
 - “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).
 - “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
 - “If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Cor 11:31).