

Delighting in the Almighty

A Practical Guide to Primitive Godliness

Seminar Workbook: **Advanced**



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Surrender is such an ugly word. Throughout history it has been used to describe what happens to the bad guy, the loser. In the world's eyes, surrender is a bad ending.

But in the Christian life things are different. The "ugly" life of surrender is actually the truly beautiful life. Surrender is dying in the arms of Jesus. It is throwing ourselves with utter abandon into the arms of the One Who runs the Universe. The surrendered life is one of privilege, peace, pleasure, and promise.

When disciples were leaving Jesus left and right, and the Lord asked the twelve if they would also leave, Peter proclaimed, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (John 6:68). Solomon came to this same conclusion after much careful study. "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 1:2, NIV).

Peter and Solomon discovered what we sometimes fail to see: the life of whole-hearted consecration to Jesus is the only life worth living. It is a great privilege to get out of God's way and let Him be Almighty God in and through us.

The surrendered life is also one of great peace. As Andrew Murray puts it, "God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him." What a thought! When God gets all of us, He assumes responsibility for every aspect of our lives. When we own nothing, we can lose nothing. There is no more peaceful place than to be yoked closely to the Almighty God.

In the same way, true pleasure can only be found in God. David proclaims to God, "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalms 16:11).

God invented pleasure. He gave us all our senses. And He delights in our godly pleasure. But for every good thing of God, the devil has a counterfeit. Those counterfeit pleasures are created by taking the good things of God and condensing, refining, artificializing, and processing them to the point where they become intensely stimulating, but intrinsically unhealthy. This can be seen in many worldly inventions such as sugar, cheese, and movies. They are condensed, over-stimulating—and bad for us. Only God's way brings true pleasure. "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

The surrendered life is one of privilege, peace, and true pleasure. It is also a life of power. The power of God is supernaturally revealed in every soul that submits themselves wholly to the Almighty. God powerfully transforms our way of thinking so that we can give Him every choice, in every area of our lives, all the time--and do it joyfully. Jeremiah discovered this powerful delight and wrote, "Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16).

Key phrase: "...those who in everything make God first and last and best, are the happiest people in the world" (RH, August 19, 1884).

What Christ Said

By George MacDonald

I said, "Let me walk in the fields." He said, "No walk in the town." I said, "There are no flowers there." He said, "No flowers but a crown."

I said, "But the skies are black, There is nothing but noise and din"; And he wept as he sent me back; "There is more," he said, "there is sin."

I said, "But the air is thick, And the fogs are veiling the sun." He answered, "Yet souls are sick, And souls in the dark undone."

I said, "I shall miss the light, And friends will miss me, they say." He answered, "Choose tonight If I am to miss you, or they."

I pleaded for time to be given. He said, "Is it hard to decide? It will not seem hard in Heaven To have followed the steps of the guide."

I cast one look at the fields, Then set my face to the town; He said, "My child, do you yield? Will you leave the flowers for the crown?"

Then into his hand went mine; And into my heart came he; And I walk in a light divine, The path I had feared to see.

Surrender is an ugly word to some. It means defeat. It is what happens to the bad guy. But surrendering to Christ is throwing ourselves with utter abandon into the arms of the One Who loves us most. It is a privilege, the source of true peace, and the deepest pleasure.

Solomon's Research

"'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the Teacher. 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless'" (Ecclesiastes 1:2, NIV).

"I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:13-14).

God "...gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore" (1 Kings 4:29).

"Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you" (1 Kings 3:12).



Solomon's Research - continued

"I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly--my mind still guiding me with **wisdom**. I wanted to see what was **worthwhile** for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees...I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well--the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. **In all this my wisdom stayed with me...**I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure...Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was **meaningless**, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:3-11).

Nobody in this world has ever had more wisdom, wealth, power, or pleasure than Solomon. God gave Him everything, in order to prove that everything is not enough. It is all meaningless without God.

"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

"The day that you heard you did not need to die, you felt this was a great gospel. Now, in another day, you are hearing that you do not need to live. This is also a **great gospel**" (Watchman Nee).

"True happiness will be the result of every self-denial, every crucifixion of self" (4T p. 345).

"You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalms 16:11).

"There is no influence in our land more powerful to **poison the imagination**, to **destroy religious impressions**, and to blunt the relish for the tranquil pleasures and sober realities of life than theatrical amusements. The love for these scenes increases with every indulgence, as the desire for intoxicating drink strengthens with its use" (4T p. 652).

"Providence has been leading the people of God out from the extravagant habits of the world, away from the indulgence of appetite and passion, to take their stand upon the platform of self-denial, and temperance in all things. The people whom God is leading will be peculiar. They will not be like the world...With a lavish hand God has provided us with rich and varied bounties for our sustenance and enjoyment. But in order for us to enjoy the natural appetite, which will preserve health and prolong life, He restricts the appetite. He says, Beware! restrain, deny, unnatural appetite" (Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 160).

"...those who in everything make God first and last and best, are the happiest people in the world" (Review and Herald, August 19, 1884).

"Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it" (Psalms 37:4-5).

"I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart" (Psalms 40:8).

"I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love" (Psalms 119:47).

"Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16).

Interact

The Joy of Dying

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1. In two or three sentences, how would you rewrite the poem “What Christ Said” to apply to your personal resistance to one or more of God’s desires for you? (See Ponder section for poem).

2. In what ways is the surrendered life a life of privilege and peace?

3. In what ways is the surrendered life one of true pleasure?



4. In your own words, how does the devil make counterfeits for God’s true pleasures?

Note

Becoming surrendered to Christ can be a traumatic experience for many of us. It can be excruciatingly difficult to let go of all our choices, and let God be Master of our lives.

If becoming surrendered is difficult, maintaining that surrender is no less so. The narrow way that we walk with Christ, on the mountaintop of surrender, has precipitously steep sides. If we stumble and fall, we can quickly find ourselves sliding down into the miry valley of sin, unless we immediately plead with God to rescue us.



Four years after my whole-hearted consecration to Christ, I fell off that trail and slid almost all the way to the bottom. It happened because I began to envy those around me who, although professed Christians, were carelessly living a life of self-indulgence. For a month and a half I slid down that slippery slope until I finally realized that indulging my selfish choices was making me sick and unsatisfied spiritually, physically, and emotionally. I had lost the joy of heaven and substituted it for slavery to self.

King David experienced a similar fall. The one of whom God had proclaimed, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22) became an adulterer and a murderer—stealing both Uriah’s wife and his life.

David’s slide, like mine, did not happen all at once. It was the result of a gradual letting go of God. This is a common pitfall. Ellen White speaks of those who “grow weary of protracted effort, of daily death, of ceaseless turmoil. Indolence seems inviting, death to self repulsive; and they close their drowsy eyes and fall under the power of temptation instead of resisting it” (Acts of the Apostles p. 565).

How can you and I avoid such tragic drowsiness? How can we stay safely on the narrow way, and continue to walk joyfully with the One true source of peace and pleasure?

There are many practical weapons at our disposal to fight this insidious tendency to become alive again to self after having died to it. Some of them include:

1. Ask God relentlessly – Never let up in your pleading with God to help you stay dead
2. Be healthily paranoid of the world – The devil is out to get you. It’s okay to be paranoid of worldliness
3. Fight rationalization – It is easy and natural to try to find ways to make our will look like God’s will. Fight it.
4. Deny self – By God’s grace live a godly life of “active, zealous” self-denial for the glory of God and the good of others.
5. Practice Praise – Don’t let yourself ever forget how good you have it. For the wholly-surrendered Christian, the grass is greenest right where you are. Don’t forget that!

Staying Dead

Key phrase: “lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so **easily** entangles us” (Hebrews 12:1).

“To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:29).

“Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (Matthew 24:12-13).

“The reason that we have not more of the Spirit and power of God with us is that we feel **too well satisfied** with ourselves. There is a marked tendency among those who are converted to the truth, to make a certain measure of advancement, and then **settle down** into a state of stolidity, where no further progress is attained” (BEcho, May 15, 1892).

“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first” (2 Peter 2:20).

“...who for a time are successful in the struggle against their selfish desire for pleasure and ease. They are **sincere and earnest**, but grow weary of protracted effort, of daily death, of ceaseless turmoil. Indolence seems inviting, death to self repulsive; and they close their **drowsy eyes** and fall under the power of temptation instead of resisting it” (Acts of the Apostles p. 565).

“Do not let your heart envy sinners, But live in the fear of the LORD always” (Proverbs 23:17).

David’s downfall

“...I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22).

“When in **ease and self-security** he **let go** his hold upon God, David yielded to Satan and brought upon his soul the stain of guilt. . . Every effort that David made to conceal his guilt proved unavailing. He had betrayed himself into the power of Satan. . . There appeared but one way of escape, and in his desperation he was hurried on to add murder to adultery. . .” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 718).

The Christian life is like an airplane. It must keep going forward or it will fall out of the sky.

“Let none feel that their way needs no changing. Those who decide thus are not fitted to engage in the work of God, for they will not feel the necessity of pressing constantly toward a higher standard, making continual improvement. None can walk safely unless they are distrustful of self, and are **constantly** looking to the word of God, studying it with willing heart to see their own errors, and to learn the will of Christ, and praying that it may be done in and by and through them. They show that their confidence is not in themselves, but in Christ. They hold the truth as a sacred treasure, able to sanctify and refine, and they are constantly seeking to bring their words and ways into harmony with its principles. **They fear and tremble lest something savoring of self shall be idolized...** They are always seeking to subdue self, to put away everything that savors of it, and to supply the place with the meekness and lowliness of Christ...” (RH, April 12, 1892).



Five practical steps to keeping your surrender

#1 Plead relentlessly with God

#2 Seek healthy paranoia – Distrust the world’s values and ways.

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so **easily** entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

“Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

#3 Avoid rationalization

“The reason many in this age of the world make no greater advancement in the divine life is because they interpret the will of God to be just what they will to do. While following their own desires, they flatter themselves that they are conforming to God's will. These have no conflicts with self” (Acts of the Apostles p. 565).

Benjamin Franklin’s experience

“...in my first voyage from Boston, being becalmed off Block Island, our people set about catching cod, and hauled up a great many. Hitherto, I had stuck to my resolution of not eating animal food, and on this occasion I considered, with my master Tryon, the taking of every fish as a kind of unprovoked murder, since none of them had, or ever could do us, any injury that might justify the slaughter. All this seemed very reasonable. But I had formerly been a great lover of fish, and, when this came hot out of the frying-pan, it smelt admirably well. I balanced some time between principle and inclination, till I recollected that, when the fish were opened, I saw smaller fish taken out of their stomachs; then, thought I, ‘If you eat one another, I don’t see why we mayn’t eat you.’ So I dined upon cod very heartily, and continued to eat with other people, returning, only now and then, occasionally to a vegetable diet” (Benjamin Franklin).

“So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do” (Benjamin Franklin).

#4 Practice godly self-denial

“[God] would have them lay aside the heavy burdens of worldly care and perplexity, and take His yoke, **which is** self-denial and sacrifice for others” (3T 385).

#5 Practice praise

The grass is always greenest right where God has put you.

1. In what sense can time be against us as we seek to maintain our surrender to Christ?
2. What does it mean that the narrow way has precipitously steep (and slippery) sides?
3. How can it be a problem for a Christian to “envy sinners?” (Proverbs 23:17). How can praise help us avoid that pitfall?
4. How is the Christian life like an airplane?
5. What is does it mean to have a “healthy paranoia” of the world?

Note

What Happens to Self After Surrender?

Olympians train and strain for many years in the hopes that they will have a good day at the Olympics, and bring home a medal or two. Olympians regularly deny their appetites, their comforts, their ease and pleasures for years in the hopes of a few moments of glory. “They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Jesus calls you and me to a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice. (Matthew 16:24). Why does He do it? Because self does not die when we die to it.

When we are “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20) self does not die. Yes, self is removed from the throne of our lives, and, yes, it is imprisoned in the deepest dungeons of our being—but it is still there. It calls out to us to return to our self-ish choices. Self longs to be reinstated to the throne. And that is why self must be constantly denied.



The story of Peter helps us understand self-denial. The Greek word *aparneomai* occurs 11 times in the New Testament. Eight of those times refers to Peter denying Christ. The Bible records that Peter proclaimed of Jesus, “I do not know the man!” (Matthew 26:74).

Self-denial is the exact opposite of that Christ-denial. Self-denial relinquishes self in favor of Jesus, and proclaims of self, “I do not know the man!”

Enoch is a good example of this daily self-denial. We are told that he lived an “active, zealous life of self-denial” (Christ Triumphant, p. 48).

This godly self-denial is a healthy self-denial. It is Spirit-inspired and Spirit-enabled (Only God can do it, only I can let Him). Godly self-denial is not for God’s sake, it is for us. It is one of God’s most powerful tools to keep self off the throne in our lives. And healthy, godly self-denial seeks the glory of God and the good of others. Self-denial means setting aside my own bad choices so that I can choose God’s good choices. There is no downside there.

Fortunately for us, opportunities for healthy, godly self-denial abound. Any time we go against our natural inclination in favor of God’s way, we are denying self. Anyone, for example, who desires to eat as healthfully as they know how, may need to deny self at least three times a day.

But, by far, the best self-denial is the self-denial for the sake of others. “No individual who has before him so great an object as the salvation of souls will be at a loss to devise ways and means for denying self” (Counsels on Stewardship, p. 55).

“There has been so little self-denial, so little suffering for Christ's sake, that the cross is almost entirely forgotten. We must be partakers with Christ of His sufferings if we would sit down in triumph with Him on His throne. So long as we choose the easy path of self-indulgence and are frightened at self-denial, our faith will never become firm, and we cannot know the peace of Jesus nor the joy that comes through conscious victory” (5T p. 215).

Ponder

What Happens to Self After Surrender?

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Key phrase: True self denial is Spirit-inspired, Spirit-enabled, love motivated, and seeks the glory of God and the good of others.

“First Olympic Requirement: Self-Torture” article by Thomas Boswell, Washington Post, Jan. 24, 1980

“You can put up with everything if you know you're doing it for a purpose and for your country, but now it looks like I'll never be known as an Olympian” (Rita Crockett - U.S. women's volleyball).

“I've only given up seven years of my life and my whole future, If there are no Olympics, what have I done with my life?” (Flora Hyman - U.S. women's volleyball)

“The women volleyballers live a spartan, year-round existence at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs -- rising at 7 a.m., practicing from 8 until 12 and from 2 until 6, with lunch and sleep between. After dinner come hypnosis and ‘mind control’ sessions, motivational talks or strategy sessions. ‘You're so tired you can't wait to get to bed,’ said Rita Crockett.”

Training for eternity: “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).



“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

“Self-denial is essential to genuine religion. Those who have not learned to deny themselves are destitute of vital, practical godliness. We cannot expect anything else than that the claims of religion will come in contact with the natural affections and worldly interests” (Counsels on Health, p. 75).

Enoch, an example: “Enoch lived an active, zealous life of self-denial. He walked with God in a world so corrupt that the Lord afterward destroyed it by the Flood. And he walked with the ungodly as one among them, not as one of them, but as one whose purposes and works and hopes were based not only on time, but on eternity” (Christ Triumphant p.48).

The little transactions of life: “The sin which is indulged to the greatest extent, and which separates us from God and produces so many contagious spiritual disorders, is selfishness. There can be no returning to the Lord except by self denial. Right in the **common walks of life** is where self is to be denied and kept in subordination. Paul could say: ‘I die daily.’ It is the daily dying to self in the **little transactions** of life that makes us overcomers” (Counsels for the Church p.80).



Simon Stylites – a bad example of self-denial. Lived in the 5th century AD. Stayed on top of a pillar for 37 years. Such self-denial is selfish. God calls us to do something much more difficult: to live among men working for their good, without being tainted by the world.

Avoiding the pitfalls of self-denial

1. Recognize that self-denial is NOT for God. We are not trying to impress God or convince Him of anything.
2. True self-denial is Spirit-inspired, Spirit-enabled, and love-motivated.
3. True self-denial seeks the glory of God and the good of others.

Self-denial is easy in theory. How does it work in practical terms?

Christians living in the more affluent countries rarely need to deny self. We have all that we need, and most of what we want.

Self-denial is counter-intuitive, uncomfortable, hard, and unpleasant.

Self-denial is not natural: “The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don’t want, drink what you don’t like and do what you’d rather not” (Mark Twain).

Examples of self-denial in the “little” things:

Attending church board faithfully

Driving the speed limit

Exercising 5 times a week

Keeping juicy gossip to ourselves

Curbing our spending

Easy way to deny self, three times a day: “The true fasting which should be recommended to all, is abstinence from every stimulating kind of food, and the proper use of wholesome, simple food, which God has provided in abundance” (Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 188).



“Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Me’” (Romans 15:1-3).

Ultimate self-denial: “No individual who has before him so great an object as the salvation of souls will be at a loss to devise ways and means for denying self” (Counsels on Stewardship, p. 55).

Frightened of self-denial: “There has been so little self-denial, so little suffering for Christ's sake, that the cross is almost entirely forgotten. We must be partakers with Christ of His sufferings if we would sit down in triumph with Him on His throne. So long as we choose the easy path of self-indulgence and are **frightened** at self-denial, our faith will never become firm, and we cannot know the peace of Jesus nor the joy that comes through conscious victory” (Testimonies, volume 5, p. 215).

Self-denial is one of God’s greatest blessings. It is setting aside my own bad choices, so that I can choose God’s good choices. There is no downside.

Christ’s yoke: “He would have them lay aside the heavy burdens of worldly care and perplexity, and take His yoke, which is self-denial and sacrifice for others” (Testimonies, volume 3, p. 385).

Interact

What Happens to Self After Surrender?

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1. What do Christians and Olympians have in common that they require self-denial and self-sacrifice?
2. What happens to self when we surrender ourselves wholly to Christ?
3. In your own words, how can we avoid unhealthy self-denial?
4. Why does it make a difference, in terms of self-denial, if my ultimate goal is to be like Jesus rather than just to be saved?
5. List some new ways that you, personally, can deny self in the “little transactions” of your life?

Note

What Happens to Self After Surrender?

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How does a Christian sin?

How does a Christian sin? It is an interesting, and important question. If I have drowned in the will of the Almighty, and “have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;...” (Galatians 2:20) then what role does sin play in my life? Do I continue to sin? Or do I immediately stop sinning when Christ takes over my life? Or do I keep sinning—just less and less? How does a Christian sin?



To answer this question, it is helpful to answer another question first: “Does a Christian sin?” On the surface, this question may seem trivial. “Yes!” we reply, “Of course Christians sin.” And yet, as we allow God to get us radically out of His way, and He becomes all-powerful in our lives, do we continue to lose daily battles to the devil? If it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me, then does Christ sin in me? The question, “Does a Christian sin?,” seems simple, but it may not be as easy to answer as we, at first, believed.

As we look through scripture seeking to answer the question, “Does a Christian sin?” we find many passages that seem to say “Yes,” but we also find many passages of scripture that seem to say, “No, true Christians do not sin.” For example, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived writes, “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). That pretty much seems to clinch the matter until we read the apostle John who proclaims, “No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him” (1 John 3:6).

How can we understand these seemingly contradicting Bible verses? The key is to recognize that there are at least two types of sins. Yes, there is a sense in which we do continue to sin, even as wholly surrendered Christians. But there is also a sense in which we cease to sin when we commit our lives unreservedly to Christ.

The two major types of sin taught in scripture are unintentional sins and intentional sins. Unintentional sins are sins that we commit without choosing to. They consist of mistakes, shortcomings, and character flaws.

Intentional sins, on the other hands, are consciously chosen. They consist of bad choices that we make even though we know the choice is wrong. Sometimes these intentional sins are obvious, like the 10 commandments. But many times they are far more subtle, and we do not even give them much thought because many around us are committing them, and they seem so “little.”

There are five important things we should know about intentional sins. Firstly, intentional sins can arise from unintentional sins if we are not careful. Secondly, willful ignorance of God’s will does not protect us from intentional sin. Thirdly, Christ’s robe of righteousness does not cover intentional sin. Fourthly, there are no such things as “little” intentional sins. And lastly, God promises total victory over intentional sins in our lives, if we are fully committed to Him and His will.

How does a Christian sin?

Key phrase: “The commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit, and separates the soul from God” (GC p. 472).

“The nature and the importance of the law of God have been, to a great extent, lost sight of. A wrong conception of the character, the perpetuity, and the obligation of the divine law has led to errors in relation to conversion and sanctification, and has resulted in lowering the standard of piety in the church. **Here is to be found the secret of the lack of the Spirit and power of God in the revivals of our time**” (The Great Controversy, p. 465).

We do sin “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

“If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (Psalms 130:3).

We don't have to sin “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We don't sin “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the **slave of sin**” (John 8:34).

“our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would **no longer be slaves to sin**” (Romans 6:6).

“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has **ceased from sin**, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1-2).

We do sin “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:10).

We don't sin “Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil;...No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:7-9).

“No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him” (1 John 3:6).

Many Bible passages seem to indicate that even true Christians sin. Others seem to indicate that we do not. To solve this apparent contradiction we need merely to realize that there are at least two types of sin.

4 types of sin taught to ancient Israel (see diagram in *Note* section below)

Faithful-unintentional – Leviticus 4:27-28 (sacrifice: female goat)

Unfaithful-unintentional – Leviticus 5:15 (sacrifice: ram)

Unfaithful-intentional – Leviticus 6:2-6 (sacrifice: restitution & ram)

Intentional-defiant – Numbers 15:29-30 (sacrifice: none)

Unintentional sin

“All unrighteousness is sin...” (1 John 5:17).

“There is none righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10).

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

“We need to understand that imperfection of character is sin” (Christ Object Lessons, p. 330).

What we CAN and CANNOT control

“God has given us the power of choice; it is ours to exercise. We cannot change our hearts, we cannot control our thoughts, our impulses, our affections. We cannot make ourselves pure, fit for God's service. But we can choose to serve God, we can give Him our will; then He will work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus our whole nature will be brought under the control of Christ” (Ministry of Healing, p.176).

“There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty,...We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged “ (Steps to Christ, p. 64).

3 types of unintentional sin

1. Mistakes – We don't know they are wrong at first (eg. Saul persecuting Christians).
2. Shortcomings – Missing the mark (eg. Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength)
3. Character flaws – Character traits that we don't like, but cannot control directly (eg. Pride, fear, etc).

Intentional sin “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

“Anything which tends to abate our love for God, or to interfere with the service due him, becomes thereby an idol” (Signs of the Times, January 26, 1882).

Five things we should know about intentional sin

1. **Unintentional sins can become intentional** “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14-15).
2. **Willful ignorance of God's will is intentional sin** “Those who have an opportunity to hear the truth and yet take no pains to hear or understand it, thinking that if they do not hear they will not be accountable, will be judged guilty before God the same as if they had heard and rejected. There will be no excuse for those who choose to go in error when they might understand what is truth. In His sufferings and death Jesus has made atonement for all sins of ignorance, but there is no provision made for willful blindness” (Last Day Events, p. 218).
3. **Christ's Robe of Righteousness does not cover intentional sin** “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Hebrews 10:26).

“...while God can be just, and yet justify the sinner through the merits of Christ, no man can cover his soul with the garments of Christ's righteousness while practicing known sins, or neglecting known duties. God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul” (Selected Messages Vol. 1, p. 366).

4. **There is no such thing as a “little” intentional sin** “...lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us...” (Hebrews 12:1).

“Every act of life, however small, has its bearing for good or for evil...It is little things that test the character” (CC 52.4).

“The commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit, and separates the soul from God” (GC p. 472).

5. **God can give us consistent victory over intentional sins!** “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

“We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18).

“Feeling the terrible power of temptation, the drawing of desire that leads to indulgence, many a man cries in despair, ‘I cannot resist evil.’ Tell him that he can, that he must resist. He may have been overcome again and again, but it need not be always thus. He is weak in moral power, controlled by the habits of a life of sin. His promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand...The knowledge of his broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens his confidence in his own sincerity and causes him to feel that God cannot accept him or work with his efforts. But he need not despair. Those who put their trust in Christ are not to be enslaved by any hereditary or cultivated habit or tendency” (Councils on Health, p. 440).

“Do not think that God will work a miracle to save those weak souls who cherish evil, who practice sin; or that some supernatural element will be brought into their lives, lifting them out of self into a higher sphere, where it will be comparatively easy work, without any special effort, any special fighting, without any crucifixion of self; because all who dally on Satan's ground for this to be done will perish with the evildoers” (TM p. 453).

“Christ is our personal Saviour; and if we are his disciples, our wrong-doing will cease, unrighteousness will come to an end” (YI, December 8, 1898).

“To every one who surrenders fully to God is given the privilege of living without sin, in obedience to the law of heaven” (RH, September 27, 1906).

“When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes **His own fortress**, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is **impregnable to the assaults of Satan**. But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one” (DA p. 324).

Interact

How does a Christian sin?

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1. If a friend asked you how true Christians sin, how would you answer?
2. In what sense do Christians continue to sin even after conversion and surrender?
3. In what sense do Christians cease to sin when they commit themselves wholly to Christ?
4. Can you think of any unintentional sins in your life? If so, write down a couple.
5. Can you think of any intentional sins in your life? If so, write them down.

Note

How does a Christian sin?

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	Unintentional	Intentional	
Faithful	Passage: Leviticus 4 Sacrifice: female goat		Intentional-Defiant Passage: Num. 15 Sacrifice: None
Unfaithful	Passage: Leviticus 5 Sacrifice: ram	Passage: Leviticus 6 Sacrifice: restitution & ram	

How am I (really) doing spiritually?

One of the most important questions that you and I as Christians need to ask ourselves is, “How am I (really) doing spiritually?” Closely related to that questions is, “How can I know?” How can I know my true spiritual condition? How can we, as end-time Christians, see through the fog of Laodicean self-deception that envelops us?

Peter’s experience shows us that recognizing our spiritual condition is more than just an academic exercise. He truly believed himself to be fully committed to Christ, even to the point of death. And yet just a few hours after proclaiming his allegiance, Peter cursed and swore and denied that he even knew the Lord.

So how can we know? How can we answer the question, “How am I doing spiritually?” The answer is in the signs. Using my vacuum cleaner experience we recognize that the Christian life, like vacuum cleaners, have both false and true signs to their true condition. A vacuum cleaner may look like it works, and sound like it works, but it may all be an illusion. It is the same way in the Christian life.



Two of the false signposts of the narrow way are zeal and feelings. The apostle Paul’s experience demonstrates powerfully that godly zeal does not necessarily indicate true conversion. He persecuted and killed God’s people for God’s sake. What a tragic misunderstanding of his true spiritual condition.

And feelings are no better at indicating our spiritual condition. Ellen White warns us that many people, “...look for a special change to take place in their feelings. This they term conversion. Over this error thousands have stumbled to ruin, not understanding the expression, “Ye must be born again” (MYP p. 71).

Those are some of the false signs, but what about the true signposts on the narrow way? The most powerful of these is love for God and others. Ellen White writes that, “Many profess to be on the Lord's side, but they are not;...By what means shall we determine whose side we are on? Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Upon whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are on the Lord's side, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. We have no friendship with the world; we have consecrated all that we have and are to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His Spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things” (CC, p. 185).

Who has the heart? But our hearts are deceitful. How can we know if we love God with such godly love? The proof is in the outcomes of that love working in our lives. The apostle John writes that, “whoever **keeps His word**, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. **By this we know** that we are in Him” (1 John 2:5). In another place he proclaims, “**By this we know** that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:4).



The greatest proof that we are fully connected to Jesus is that we love and enjoy Him, and do His will through the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit.

How am I (really) doing spiritually?

Key phrase: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so **prove** to be My disciples” (John 15:8).

Peter’s experience –“Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away...Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You...Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. But **Peter followed him at a distance**” (Matthew 26:33-58).

“Peter had just declared that he knew not Jesus, but he now realized with bitter grief how well his Lord knew him, and how accurately He had read his heart, the **falseness** of which was **unknown even to himself**” (Desire of Ages, p. 713).

“MANY” will follow Christ...at a distance

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are **many** who enter through it” (Matthew 7:13).

“**Many** will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’” (Matthew 7:22).

“Strive to enter through the narrow door; for **many**, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24).

“It is a solemn statement that I make to the church, that **not one in twenty** whose names are registered upon the church books are prepared to close their earthly history, and would be as verily without God and without hope in the world as the common sinner” (Christian Service p.41).

How can we know if we follow Christ at a distance?

“...you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

“**Test** yourselves to see if you are in the faith; **examine** yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-unless indeed you **fail the test**?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Peter – Jesus probed Peter three times with “Peter, do you love me?”

“This heart-searching question was necessary in the case of Peter, and it is necessary in our case. The work of restoration can never be thorough unless the roots of evil are reached. Again and again the shoots have been clipped, while the root of bitterness has been left to spring up and defile many; but the very depth of the hidden evil must be reached...When, the third time, Christ said to Peter, “Lovest thou me?” the probe reached the soul center. Self-judged, Peter fell upon the Rock, saying, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (Conflict and Courage, p.322).

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way” (Psalms 139:23-24).

“Examine me, O LORD, and try me; Test my mind and my heart” (Psalms 26:2).

False signs: Zeal (Saul before he became Paul), Emotions/feelings

“professed to love Jesus, and who shed tears as they read the story of the cross,” and yet they “hated those who loved His appearing and shut them out of the churches” (EW p.260).

Some people "...look for a special change to take place in their feelings. This they term conversion. Over this error thousands have stumbled to ruin, not understanding the expression, 'Ye must be born again'" (Messages to Young People, p.71).

True sign

"Many profess to be on the Lord's side, but they are not;...By what means shall we determine whose side we are on? Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Upon whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are on the Lord's side, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. We have no friendship with the world; we have consecrated all that we have and are to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His Spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things" (CC 185) .

Deceitful heart

"The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

"Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the hearts" (Proverbs 21:2).

By this we know – seeing the signs

"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

"While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power" (Desire of Ages p. 173).

"No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him" (1 John 3:6).

"to know Jesus requires a change of heart. No unconverted person, in his natural state of depravity, loves Christ. A love of Jesus is the first result of conversion. The **proof of this love** is given: '**If ye love me, keep my commandments**'" (DG p. 240).

By this we know – love-inspired obedience

- "**By this we know** that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:4).
- "but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. **By this we know** that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5).
- "And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And **we know by this** that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24).
- "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. **We will know by this** that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him..." (1 John 3:18-19).
- "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so **prove** to be My disciples" (John 15:8).
- "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22).

"Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. **The works show whether the faith is genuine**" (Christ's Object Lessons p. 312).

"Hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments.' 1 John 2:3. **This is the genuine evidence of conversion.** Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 312).


"Obedience--the service and allegiance of love--is the **true sign** of discipleship." (Steps to Christ, p. 61)

"When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us" (DA p. 668).

Interact

How am I (really) doing spiritually?

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1. Why did Peter curse and swear that He did not know Jesus, just hours after proclaiming that he was willing to die for Jesus? What warning can we take from Peter's experience?
2. Why is Christ's reply to the question, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" (Luke 13:23-24) so terrifying?
3. What are some of the false signs of our Christian condition?

4. If a friend or family member asked you the question, "How can I know how I am truly doing spiritually?" What would you tell them?

Note

How am I (really) doing spiritually?

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What Happens When I Fail?



Human beings are, by nature, failures. That statement may not be politically correct or conform to the latest ideas of self-respect, but it is true nonetheless.

We all fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23). We have all gone astray and follow our own way (Isaiah 53:6). We are all “sold into bondage to sin.” (Romans 7:14) and by nature “hostile toward God” (Romans 8:7).

But a knowledge of that intrinsic bent toward failing need not discourage or depress us. In fact, it should give us great courage, because we realize that God knows about our failings—and loves us in spite of them.

Failing is a natural part of what it means to be a human being. And that is why it is so important that, in the Christian life, we understand the answer to the question, “What happens when I fail?” What happens to God and what happens to me?

There are three failure scenarios that encompass every kind of human failure: un-surrendered sin, surrendered-intentional sin, and surrendered-unintentional sin.

The un-surrendered person should not be surprised when they fail. Without Christ we can do nothing. Failure for such a person is inevitable.

To the surrendered Christian, however, intentional failure is abnormal. The surrendered Christian is God’s own fortress, and that fortress cannot fail unless it is sabotaged by us from the inside. That is something that should seriously concern us. And it must be remedied quickly or the outcome could be catastrophic.

Unintentional failure, on the other hand, is normal—even for the fully consecrated Christian. The sanctification process means that it will take God some time to overcome the mistakes, shortcomings, and character flaws in our lives.

Regardless of the failure scenario, however, God never stops loving us. Ever. And, in none of these scenarios do we stop deserving God’s goodness. None of us could ever deserve God’s blessings, no matter how good we are. And we do not have to. Deserving has never been part of the Christian life equation.

What happens when I fail? Nothing happens to God, except sorrow. God is not changed by our failures. His love and power and desire to bless us do not change, regardless of our faults, stubbornness, and failure.

But, what happens to me when I fail? That depends entirely on the failure scenario. If I fail intentionally, I suffer the temporal (physical, mental, emotional, psychological) effects of disobeying God, but, even worse, I am separated from the Almighty God, Whom I need desperately for love, life, peace and joy—not to mention eternal life.

What happens to me, then, when I fail unintentionally. I may (or may not) experience the temporal effects of that failure, but my walk with Jesus remains fully intact. I repent when I discover the unintentional sin. But I do not get discouraged. I recognize that God is making great strides in my life and will continue to do so, in spite of my failures.

What Happens When I Fail?

Key phrase: If we are surrendered to Him, God is pleased with us regardless of our many failings.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17, NIV).

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:21-23).

“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (Romans 7:14).

“For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all” (Romans 11:32).

“For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

Three failure scenarios

1. Un-surrendered – intentional or unintentional sin

We should not be surprised if we sin when we are un-surrendered. It is inevitable.

“**Submit** therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, **for apart from Me you can do nothing**” (John 15:5).



2. Surrendered – unintentional sin

This failure scenario is common, even among truly surrendered Christians. Our sinful natures are still fighting to assert themselves, and, at times, they succeed, against our will. This is an unintentional sin. We did not ask for it. We did not choose it. We hate it. But we cannot control it directly.



3. Surrendered – intentional sin



“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has **ceased from sin**” (1 Peter 4:1).

Such failure is tragic and unnecessary. “By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers” (SC, p. 48).

“When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes **His own fortress**, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is **impregnable** to the assaults of Satan. But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one” (Desire of Ages, p. 325).

Undeserved love

If we take 1 Corinthians 13 and replace the word “love” with the word “God”, we get: “[God] is patient, [God] is kind and is not jealous; [God] does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; [God] does not seek [His] own, is not provoked, [God] does not take into account a wrong suffered, [God] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [God] bears all things, [God] believes all things, [God] hopes all things, [God] endures all things. [God] never fails...” (1Corinthians 13:4-8, modified).

“We [must] begin at the real beginning, with love as the Divine energy. This primal love is Gift-love. In God there is no hunger that needs to be filled, only plenteousness that desires to give” (C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, London: HarperCollins, 1998, p. 121).

At first, the Prodigal Son felt he deserved his portion of his father’s wealth, and he deserved it right now. (Luke 15:12). After squandering his father’s money, he found himself feeding pigs and longing to eat their food. At this point the Prodigal Son felt he did not deserve to be called his father’s son. He would go back to dad and say, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men” (vss. 18-19).

What the Prodigal Son misunderstood was that he was not his father’s son because he deserved to be. When he returned home, his father ignored his speech and immediately reinstated him into his household, rejoicing that his son had returned (v. 24). Deserving had nothing to do with it.

What happens to God when I fail? Seven things that every Christian should know about God.

1. He **loves** me more than I can imagine (1 John 4:9, John 3:16, Isaiah 53).
2. His love and **patience** with me is supernatural (James 1:17, Hebrews 13:8, 2 Timothy 2:13, Hebrews 6:17-18).
3. God is **actively** using all His wisdom and power to bless me as much as He possibly can (Isaiah 30:18, Job 37:5, 2 Peter 3:9, Isaiah 59:1).
4. God **never** gets tired (Isaiah 40:28-29).
5. He **never** gets discouraged (Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:24).
6. God **does not** make mistakes—ever! (1 Samuel 15:29, Number 23:19).
7. He **will succeed** in blessing me...if I let Him (Romans 8:28).

The only thing that happens to God when I fail is that He becomes sad. He does not stop loving us or striving for us.

What happens to me when I fail?

“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first” (2 Peter 2:20).

“There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such I would say, Do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God” (Steps to Christ, p. 65).



“where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” (Romans 5:20). But, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2).

Reflect

What Happens When I Fail?

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1. Summarize the chapter in your own words.

2. What key concepts from the chapter do you want to apply to your life? How will you accomplish this?

Points to Ponder

3. Read through the Ponder section prayerfully. Pick one or two Bible verses or EGW statements to memorize, or review often. List the references here, and write the quotations on 3x5 cards.

1.

2.

Interact

What Happens When I Fail?

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1. Can you remember a time when you failed God dramatically? How did you feel? How should you have felt?

2. In your own words, what happens to God when you fail?



3. In your own words, what happens to you when you fail?

4. How can it be encouraging that human beings are failures by nature?

5. Why does the Christian life and our relationship with God have nothing to do with deserving?

Note

It is sometimes difficult to understand the role that obedience plays in our salvation. Many Bible passages teach clearly that we are saved by grace, through faith, and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). But many other Bible passages teach, just as clearly, that obedience plays an important role in our salvation. Jesus, for example, proclaimed that, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21).

How do we mesh these two, seemingly contradictory, groups of passages? It helps to understand the question that these Bible writers were addressing. Paul, for example, often fought the problem of legalism among the Jewish converts. This group of people grew up believing that they could deserve eternal life, if they tried hard enough.

James, on the other hand, fought against the opposite problem: lazy grace. His readers seemed to have the idea that they could do pretty much whatever they wanted, and still be saved. That is why his writings are often works focused.



We have these two insidious, devil-inspired pitfalls: legalism and lazy grace. The devil does not care into which we fall. By God's grace we must travel the narrow way between these perilous cliffs. How do we do this? By recognizing the true role that obedience plays in our salvation.

To do this, we must answer correctly two important questions. The first question is, "Is obedience required in order to earn, deserve, or merit salvation?" And the second question is, "Is obedience required in order to **receive** salvation?"

These two questions may seem closely related, but the difference is important. Both questions are clearly answered in scripture. The first question can be answered with a resounding, "No! Of course there is nothing that we can do to deserve salvation." And the second question can be answered with "Yes, obedience is required in order to receive salvation."

But in what sense is obedience required? What part does it play in the salvation process? The answer is that while obedience does not merit salvation in any way, it does keep us close to the Savior. In order to be saved, we must be in Jesus, abiding with Him in the center of the Father's will. Obedience is faith and love enhancing. Disobedience is faith and love inhibiting. If we wish to stay close to Jesus, we must walk the narrow way with Him. Only through whole-hearted obedience is this possible.

We are told that "To know God is...to be one with him in heart and mind, having an experimental knowledge of him, holding reverential communion with him as the Redeemer. Only through sincere obedience can this communion be obtained" (Review and Herald, June 30, 1910).

The purpose of obedience; the role that it plays in our salvation is simply this: to keep us close to our Savior.

Key phrase: Obedience is not how we earn our salvation. It is how we stay close to the Savior.

Are good works required for salvation?

Not by works

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the **gift** of God; **not as a result of works**, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

“nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and **not by the works** of the Law; since *by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified*” (Galatians 2:16).

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith **apart from works** of the Law” (Romans 3:28).

“But now **apart from the Law** the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; ...being justified as a **gift** by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:21-24).

By works

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the **good deeds to a resurrection of life**, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29).

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, **according to what he has done**, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

James

“...a man is **justified by works** and not by faith alone” (James 2:24).

Paul

“for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the **doers of the Law will be justified**” (Romans 2:13).

By works and not by works

Paul - “For we maintain that a man is **justified** by faith **apart from works** of the Law” (Romans 3:28).

Paul - “for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the **doers of the Law will be justified**” (Romans 2:13).

By works and not by works – James and Paul use the same example to prove seemingly opposite points

Paul (Romans 4:2-3):

“For if **Abraham was justified by works**, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “**ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”

James (James 2:21-23):

“Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works...and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “**AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”

Two important questions?



1. **Do I need works in order to EARN, deserve, or merit salvation?**

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith **apart from works** of the Law” (Romans 3:28).

2. **Do I need works in order to RECEIVE salvation?**

“for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the **doers of the Law** will be justified” (Romans 2:13).

Gasoline analogy - Just because gasoline does not help us navigate to our destination does not mean that we do not need it in order to get to our destination.

Obedying Jesus keeps us close to Jesus. Disobedience separates us from Him. We cannot be saved unless we stay close to the Savior.

"You are My friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14).

“Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

Do I need works in order to EARN salvation? **NO**

Do I need works in order to RECEIVE salvation? **YES**

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matthew 7:21).

Obedience is not something we do to ingratiate ourselves to God or make Him indebted to us. Obedience is God’s good way, and we go that way because we want to walk with Him. Salvation is a love relationship with Jesus that starts right now, and just happens to last for eternity.

“To know God is...to be one with him in heart and mind, having an experimental knowledge of him, holding reverential communion with him as the Redeemer. **Only through sincere obedience can this communion be obtained**” (Review and Herald, June 30, 1910).

“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have **made a separation** between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

Interact

Enjoying God Forever

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1. Why do many of Paul's writings downplay the role of works in salvation, but others like Jesus and James clearly highlight the importance of works in our salvation?

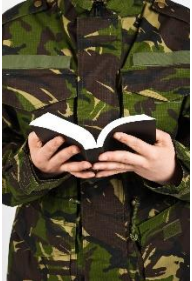
2. We are saved by grace, through faith. What role does works play in growing our faith? (James 2:21-22).

3. If your best friend asked you if obedience plays an important part in salvation, what would you tell them? Explain your answer. (Hint: Think about the Kingdom Banquet parable).



4. How does obedience enhance our relationship with Jesus? How does disobedience hurt that friendship?

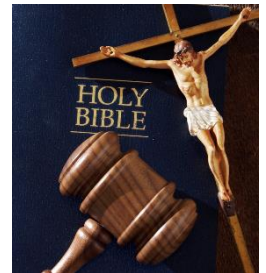
Note



Just before Jesus returns to take His people home, God will demonstrate to the universe His love and power and victory over sin. He will do this through a symbolic army of 144,000 who have “kept themselves pure” (Revelation 14:4) and who “follow the Lamb wherever he goes”. These end-time warriors have been “purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless” (vs. 5).

One defining quality of this special army is that every man, woman, and child in it has been sealed (Revelation 7:4). What is this seal? It is a “a **settling into the truth**, both intellectually and spiritually, so they **cannot be moved...**” (Manuscript Releases, vol. 1, page 249). In other words, it is irretrievable surrender. These righteous warriors have so thoroughly died to self, that Christ is living and working unreservedly in their lives (Galatians 2:20). These irretrievably surrendered Christians have made their final choice. They have chosen Jesus—irreversibly.

This sealing is necessary because the 144,000 will fight a fierce battle against sin and Satan. And they will do it without a mediator (The Great Controversy, p. 425). For the first time since the world was created, mankind will have no opportunity for forgiveness. At this time in earth’s history, any sin—every sin—will be an unpardonable sin. That is why the sealing is so important—without it we could not survive without a mediator. Our only hope is Christ living unhindered in us.



But what happened to Jesus? Why is there no longer a mediator in heaven during this period of time? The answer is that Jesus has finished cleansing the sanctuary. He has blotted out all our sins, thrown down the censer, and left the temple to begin His journey to earth (Early Writings, p. 279).

No wonder the sealing is so important. But how can we receive it? Malachi, chapter 3 tells us that God is going to send a special messenger to purify us and refine us so that we can be sealed. This messenger is the Holy Spirit in Latter Rain power. But “who can endure the day of His coming?” (Malachi 3:2). Only those who have prepared for it.

The Latter Rain cannot fall on just anyone. It takes a special work of careful, intentional preparation. Ellen White writes, “I saw that none could share the ‘refreshing’ unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action. We should, therefore, be drawing nearer and nearer to the Lord and be **earnestly seeking that preparation** necessary to enable us to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord” (Early Writings, p. 71).

My friends, the sanctuary in heaven will soon close its doors for the last time. We, as God’s people, must earnestly and intentionally prepare for that time. Irretrievable surrender does not happen overnight. If we are to be ready to receive the Latter Rain, be sealed, and fight as God’s last day warriors, we must begin now. We must allow God to consecrate us fully to Himself. Then we must walk faithfully in that whole-hearted consecration, and let nothing worldly distract or entangle us. God must be our all, in all, all the time. Only God can do it. Only I can let Him.

Key phrase: “The present is our time of proving. The experience necessary in order to gain the crown of life will bring us far greater crucifixion of self than we have hitherto thought possible” (Upward Look, p.134).

“Send into battle a thousand men from each of the tribes of Israel. So twelve thousand men armed for battle, a thousand from each tribe, were supplied from the clans of Israel” (Numbers 31:4-5).

“the officers who were over the units of the army--the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds--went to Moses and said to him, ‘Your servants have counted the soldiers under our command, and **not one is missing**’” (Numbers 31:48-49).

“These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves **pure**. They **follow the Lamb** wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are **blameless**” (Revelation 14:4-5, NIV).

“Upon the crystal sea before the throne...are gathered the company that have ‘gotten the **victory over the beast**, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name.’ With the Lamb upon Mount Zion, ‘having the harps of God,’ they stand, the hundred and forty and four thousand that were redeemed from among men” (Great Controversy, p. 648 – See also Revelation 15:2).

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel” (Revelation 7:4).

“Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God...Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward” (Evangelism p. 695).

“In the typical service, when the high priest entered the most holy place, all Israel were required to gather about the sanctuary and in the most solemn manner **humble their souls** before God, that they might receive the pardon of their sins and not be cut off from the congregation. **How much more essential in this antitypical Day of Atonement that we understand the work of our High Priest and know what duties are required of us**” (The Great Controversy, p. 430).

“The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the law, was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement...” (Councils to the Church, p. 348).

“...the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded. This necessitates an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement” (The Faith I Live By, p. 206).

“When Jesus leaves the sanctuary, then they who are holy and righteous, will be holy and righteous still; for all their sins will then be blotted out, and they will be sealed with the seal of the living God” (CET p. 105).

“And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.’ And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel” (Revelation 7:2-4).

What is the Seal of God? “it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they **cannot be moved...**” (Manuscript Releases, vol. 1, page 249).

“I saw angels hurrying to and fro in heaven. An angel with a writer's inkhorn by his side returned from the earth and reported to Jesus that his work was done, and the saints were numbered and **sealed**. Then I saw Jesus, who had been ministering before the ark containing the ten commandments, **throw down the censers**. He raised His hands, and with a loud voice said, “It is done.” And all the angelic host laid off their crowns as Jesus made the solemn declaration, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and **he that is righteous, let him be righteous still**: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Early Writings, p. 279).



“Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God **without a mediator**. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil” (The Great Controversy, p. 425).

“Behold, I [God] am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me...But **who can endure the day of His coming?** And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a **refiner's fire** and like **fullers' soap**. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and **He will purify the sons of Levi** and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness” (Malachi 3:1-3).

“I also saw that many do not realize what they must be in order to live in the sight of the Lord without a high priest in the sanctuary through the time of trouble. Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully. I saw that **many were neglecting the preparation so needful** and were looking to the time of “refreshing” and the “latter rain” to fit them to stand in the day of the Lord and to live in His sight. Oh, how many I saw in the time of trouble without a shelter! They had neglected the needful preparation; therefore they could not receive the refreshing that all must have to fit them to live in the sight of a holy God. Those who refuse to be hewed by the prophets and fail to purify their souls in obeying the whole truth, and who are willing to believe that their condition is far better than it really is, will come up to the time of the falling of the plagues, and then see that they needed to be hewed and squared for the building. But there will be no time then to do it and no Mediator to plead their cause before the Father. Before this time the awfully solemn declaration has gone forth, ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.’ I saw that **none could share the “refreshing” unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action**. We should, therefore, be drawing nearer and nearer to the Lord and be **earnestly seeking that preparation necessary** to enable us to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. Let all remember that God is holy and that none but holy beings can ever dwell in His presence” (Early Writings, p. 71).

“The present is our time of proving. The experience necessary in order to gain the crown of life will bring us **far greater crucifixion of self than we have hitherto thought possible**” (The Upward Look, p. 134) .

“While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a **special work of purification**, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth...When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for his appearing” (The Great Controversy, p.423).

Interact

Irretrievable Surrender

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1. How would you explain to a friend what Jesus is currently doing in the heavenly sanctuary and why it is taking Him so long to finish?
2. What is the difference between “covered” sins and “blotted out” sins? Why are some sins not yet blotted out?
3. What, in your own words, is the sealing?
4. How is it possible for the 144,000 to live sinless lives without a mediator during a time of intense persecution by the devil and his agents?
5. What is required in order to receive the Latter Rain?



Note

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