

Part 2

Foundations of Faith

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Salvation is not an end in itself; rather, salvation is the first step of an exciting, challenging journey. When we accept Christ's forgiveness and repent of our sin, we open the door to that relationship with God that He has created us for. Just because we've taken that first step, however, doesn't mean the rest of the journey will be easy. The Bible never promises an easy, happy life for those who follow God. It DOES promise that God will be with us along the way and that He will provide for every need:

Deuteronomy 31.8 – The LORD Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

2 Corinthians 9.8 – And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Philippians 4.19 – And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

2 Peter 1.3 – His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him...

There are certain principles, or foundational truths, that the Bible gives us to help us along in our walk. We won't be able to prevent storms that shake us, but by building a strong foundation for our faith with these basic truths, we WILL be able to make it through the storms and grow from those experiences. (See Luke 6.46-49, "The Wise and Foolish Builders") If we can understand and apply these principles, our journey with God will be off on a good start!

These truths are more than just theory: what we believe dramatically impacts how we live. When we believe lies, we live in defeat and wonder why our walk with God isn't working. In fact, most spiritual problems and many psychological problems in our life are the result of lies we believe. An incorrect view of God or belief about how He views us is detrimental to our faith and will negatively impact our walk with Him. In contrast, those with healthy spiritual and emotional lives are usually that way because they are living in the light of the truth given us in God's Word.

A New Creation

THE PROBLEMS: Living like you did before you had Christ; approaching situations with the same mindset and actions as you did before Christ; feeling spiritually "dead"; guilt and defeat in Christian life; feeling "dirty", guilty, unworthy, discouraged; believing that God is disappointed with us or that we're not good enough for Him.

THE TRUTH TO UNDERSTAND: When we are saved, we are a changed person! Our entire spiritual identity has been altered. When we don't understand this truth, we are likely to believe that God doesn't love us because we've messed up, or that our old spiritual status is true of us as soon as we sin. If we believe these lies, we end up living in the mindset and lifestyle we did before we were saved; if we see ourselves as sinner, we'll act like one. We need to resist lies about who we are by thanking God that we ARE a new creation! The truth about how Christ has changed our spiritual state gives us great worth and will lead to the life of freedom and joy that God intended for us to live.

2 Corinthians 5.17 says "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" This verse clearly states that we are no longer who we used to be:

¹ We were spiritually dead, enemies of God, and condemned to eternal death...but Christ has made us spiritually alive!

Ephesians 2.4-5 – But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

1 We were God's enemies...but now we are friends of God and are called His children.

1 John 3.1 – How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

John 15.13-15 – “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

1 We were intimidated by God and what He thought of us...but because of our new standing, we can approach Him with confidence because He has forgiven us completely.

Ephesians 3.12 – In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

1 God saw us as sinful...but because of Christ's work on the cross, it's as if when God looks at us, He sees His son Jesus.

Colossians 1.22 – But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation—
Ephesians 1.4 – For He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight...

We will still make mistakes, but if we are saved, God sees us as righteous.

Because we are a new creation in Christ, our life will change. Galatians 2.20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me...” This means that we have died to ourselves and our sinful nature and that, instead, Christ is living in us and directing our lives. Ephesians 4.22-24 says, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to *put off your old self*, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to *put on the new self*, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Freedom From Sin

THE PROBLEMS: Feeling that a specific sin has control of us...that we can't help doing it; feeling tremendous guilt from past or present sins; sinning willingly and without regret because “Hey, God will forgive me”; trying to get as close to sin as possible without “sinning”.

THE TRUTH TO UNDERSTAND: When we are saved, we are now free from the power of sin – we have died to sin and are alive in Christ. We need to understand this truth because there are some sins that we may feel have us trapped. Sometimes there are things we do that we know are wrong, but we don't feel like we can keep from doing them, and instead of us being able to say ‘no’ to sin, sin is in control. When this happens, we need to remember that we are free from sin and that Christ has already won the battle.

Paul discusses our freedom from sin over and over in his letters. Many of the people he wrote to interpreted the freedom we find in Christ as freedom to sin...Paul indicates that this is going back to the very thing Christ saved us from. Other people he wrote to simply didn't understand where that they and their response to sin changed upon salvation.

Romans 6.1-2 – What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Galatians 5.13 – You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature...

Romans 6.18 – You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Romans 8.2 – because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Because we are a new creation, the sin nature has been replaced with our new selves:

2 Corinthians 5.17 – Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Romans 8.9 – You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you...

Galatians 5.24 – Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Because of what Christ did for us, we no longer HAVE to sin or be controlled by sin. Our lives should reflect the fact that we are free from sin. This doesn't mean we won't sin anymore, because even though we are free, we still mess up. Freedom from sin DOES mean that our lives are no longer controlled by sin and that we are actively resisting sin and getting it out of our life. We will never be perfect; but, with God's help, we should be moving in that direction.

1 Corinthians 15.57 – But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no sin that is too big for God to handle!

Dealing with Temptation

Because we are free from sin, we don't have to give into temptation because God is always ready to help us not to sin:

1 Corinthians 10.13 – No temptation has faced you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

This verse shows that God can help us resist temptation. Here are some practical tips on dealing with temptation:

- 1 View every temptation as an opportunity to do good and to grow
- 1 Everyone is tempted. So don't feel guilty about being tempted – we will never be so spiritually mature that we will never be tempted. In fact, the closer you grow to God, the harder Satan will try to trip you up.
- 1 Don't put yourself in tempting situations. If you know you're more likely to be tempted if you do certain things (even if those things themselves are not sin), then don't do them!
- 1 Identify your "pattern of temptation" – When are you normally tempted? Where? With who? How do I feel when I'm normally tempted? Then take steps to avoid or be extra careful when in those circumstances.
- 1 Refocus your thoughts on something else – it's easier to ignore a temptation than to fight it.
- 1 Fill your mind with good things – choose not to think about evil things.
- 1 Share your struggle with others and ask for prayer and accountability.
- 1 Be armed for the attack – memorize some verses to help you face Satan's lies with God's truth.
- 1 Remember that we lack the ability to change ourselves and avoid sin – we have to rely on God's power! He wants to help you defeat sin, so ask Him for help.

God's Forgiveness

THE PROBLEMS: Thinking we've sinned too often or too "big" for God to forgive us; distance from God because of guilt, or that we feel He's disappointed with us; approach God with an "I'm scum" attitude, rather than with confidence; focusing too much on ourselves and whether or not God likes us at the moment.

THE TRUTH TO UNDERSTAND: Even though we are free from sin, we sometimes mess up. God is not surprised when we do this; He understands that we aren't perfect and doesn't expect us to be perfect. He has forgiven all our sin, and there is none too big for Him to forgive. When we don't understand and believe this truth, we begin to think that God won't forgive us if we keep messing up, or that He is frustrated with us, or that He will give up on us. If we believe God feels this way, we are believing lies. These thoughts will cause us to drift away from God because we let our guilt come between us and God – and this is exactly what Satan wants!

2 Corinthians 7.10 says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." This verse means that when we sin and feel bad, God wants us to repent and turn from that sin – this is the "godly sorrow that brings repentance". Satan wants sorrow, and the guilt that comes from it, to separate us from God – this is the "worldly sorrow that brings death". Whenever we begin to feel that God is upset with us and holds our sin against us, remember that you are no longer guilty before God!

Romans 8.1 – Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

When God forgives us, it's complete. He doesn't forgive some sins and not others, He doesn't partially forgive sins, and when He's forgiven our sins, they're gone!

Psalms 103.2-3 – Praise the LORD, O my soul...who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases...

Psalms 130.3-4 – If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness...

Remember that we are a new creation and God sees us as blameless before Him.

We cannot rely on our feelings when we feel guilty about our mistakes. We must remember the truth God has given us and accept His forgiveness and believe He has forgiven us, no matter what we do or how many times we do it. This truth has been compared to a parent teaching their child to walk. When the child takes a step and falls down, does the parent get upset, abandon the child, and give up on him? Of course not! In the same way, when we fall down, God is right there ready to help us back up and encouraging us to take another step. God wants to be with us every step of the way as we learn to walk in Him and He will finish what He started in us!

Philippians 1.6 – being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Confessing Sin

When we do mess up, we need to confess our sin to God – that just means that we repent (which means agreeing with God that what we did was wrong) and ask forgiveness. 1 John 1.9 says, "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." It is true that God has already forgiven us, but by confessing specific sins after we have received Christ, we restore the relationship that has been broken by our sin. Because we are already forgiven, we don't need to worry about "making up for it" when we sin...all God wants is the restored relationship. Our sin may still have earthly consequences -- a murderer still has to do time in prison, for instance -- but before God you have a clean slate!

God's Unconditional Love

THE PROBLEMS: Trying to "earn" God's love through our actions; thinking we're no longer saved because of what we've done; discouragement because we don't think God loves us.

THE TRUTH TO UNDERSTAND: It is easy to think that God loves us based on what we do. But when we believe this, we buy into the lie that we're not good enough or that what Jesus did for us on the cross wasn't good enough. God's unconditional love is a major theme in Christianity. It's what the salvation message is about: God loves us, His enemies, not because of anything we do, but because of His grace. If God so readily loves His enemies, how much more quickly will He love and forgive His own children!?!

He loved us before we turned to Him, and He will continue to love us as we walk with Him.

Romans 5.8 – But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It wasn't our own good actions that saved us, and likewise, our messing up doesn't "unsave" us. It was God's grace – His giving us what we don't deserve – that saved us.

Ephesians 2.8-9 – For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.

God's grace doesn't end at salvation, but covers us as we walk with Him. This grace is the reason that God so eagerly forgives us when we are His children.

Romans 5.1-2 – Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Ephesians 1.7 – In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Confidence in Your Salvation: Spiritual Fruit & the Holy Spirit

THE PROBLEMS: Fears and doubts that you aren't really saved; distance from God because you're unsure of where you stand before Him.

THE TRUTH TO UNDERSTAND: At some point in your Christian walk, you may begin to wonder if you are really saved. The truth in God's Word shows us we don't need to experience fear and doubt over your salvation. Romans 10.9 says, "If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." If these things are true of us, we do not need to wonder about how we stand before God.

In addition to this verse, the Bible gives us two main ways that we can be sure that we are saved: bearing "spiritual fruit" and seeing the Holy Spirit work in our life.

John 7.38-39 – "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Matthew 12.33 – "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit."

Spiritual Fruit

Our lifestyle reveals our spiritual condition. If we are bearing spiritual fruit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control" (Galatians 5.22-23); if God has made changes in our life and is continuing to work, we can be certain of our salvation. Spiritual fruit is a natural result of our spiritual condition. We don't have to try to bear fruit, because if we are close to God, He will be working in us and spiritual fruit will be evident in our lives. Another part of the evidence of salvation in our lives is our response to God's Word. Jesus says in John 15.14, "You are my friends if you do what I command." This means that if we are obeying God's Word and applying it to our life, we can be assured that God sees us as a friend.

Our good works do not bring about our salvation, but they are evidence of it. If we cannot see fruit in our life, it MAY be indicative of a lack of sincere faith. If you feel this might be the case, talk to a spiritual friend or leader. Sometimes we are tricked into thinking we don't have fruit so we'll doubt our faith, when in fact, there is fruit in our life. A mature Christian friend can help us see the fruit we feel might be missing. Or, if we really aren't exhibiting fruit, they can help direct us to do what needs to be done.

The Holy Spirit

We can also be certain of our salvation when the Holy Spirit is working in our life. For many people the Holy Spirit is an ambiguous aspect of God, but most simply put, the Holy Spirit is our guide and helper in life:

John 14.26- "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."
Examples of the Holy Spirit leading in people's lives: Luke 4.1, Acts 8.26-40, and many more!

Because Jesus is not here on earth, the Holy Spirit shows us what is right, convicts us when we have sinned, empowers us to do God's will, and much more. The Holy Spirit cannot work in someone who is spiritually dead, so if He is working in our life, we can know we have spiritual life!

Romans 8.14 - ...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
Romans 8.16 - The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.
1 John 3.24 - Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit He gave us.

The Bible also talks about how the Holy Spirit's presence in our life is a guarantee of the blessings God has for us in the future:

2 Corinthians 1.22 - [Jesus] set his seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.
2 Corinthians 5.5 - Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.
Ephesians 1.13 - And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of His glory.

The Holy Spirit's work doesn't always have to be dramatic; we don't have to be hearing God's audible voice, or having mystical experiences, or doing miracles in order to be experiencing the Holy Spirit in our life. When God shows us truths in His Word, when He helps us do what's right and resist doing what's wrong, when we have confidence in God's directing in our life, when we are changed by God, when we have peace in difficult situations...then we are experiencing the Holy Spirit! He does a wide range of work in our life and sometimes the most important things aren't the dramatic things, but the simple, everyday ones:

1 The Holy Spirit is our communication line – how God speaks to us and how we speak to God:

John 16.15 – “All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”

1 Corinthians 2.14 – The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Romans 8.27 – And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Ephesians 2.18 – For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

1 The Holy Spirit provides power, strength, joy, and peace:

Acts 1.8 – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 9.31 – Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Romans 15.13 – May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 3.16 – I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being.

1 The Holy Spirit directs us – for example, what to say when we are witnessing or praying:
Mark 13.11 – “Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 8.26 – In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

1 The Holy Spirit sanctifies us, or makes us holy:

Romans 15.16 – [God made me] to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

2 Thessalonians 2.13 – But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

“Living in the spirit” is not just for the super-spiritual. It is necessary for every believer to be experiencing the Holy Spirit in their life, not only because it validates their salvation, but also because it is how God intended the Christian life to be led. We are either living in the sin nature or living in the spirit, and as Christians, we want to be spending our time living in the spirit!

Romans 8.5 – Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Romans 8.9 – You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Galatians 5.17 – For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Sometimes we can get frustrated because we feel that we're not able to live the Christian life. We can feel like we are trying so hard and getting nowhere fast. This is when we need to recognize the role of the Holy Spirit in our life – He is the one that enables us to live as we should. If you feel frustrated like this, make sure you really want the Holy Spirit's leading in your life and that sin isn't keeping Him from being able to direct and empower you. Then ask God to bless you with His Holy Spirit and trust Him to do the rest!

Luke 11.13 – “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

Relating to God Personally

THE PROBLEMS: Going through the motions of Christianity; “dryness” or boredom in our Christian walk; giving up in our faith because “I don’t need God in order to be a good person”, or “I don’t like all the rules”; self-righteous attitude towards others.

THE TRUTH TO UNDERSTAND: God intended us to live out our faith with Him as our friend. Jesus died so that this relationship could take place, and it is the most significant truth we are to base our spiritual journey on.

People often mistakenly think that Christianity is about being good, or going to heaven, or having a happy life, but the real point of our faith is a relationship with God. Sometimes even those who have been in that relationship can get distracted by things like church, and Bible studies, and doing things for God that they forget to cultivate a relationship with their Creator!

God wants to be our friend. That’s an amazing truth, if you really think about it! He doesn’t just want to be our lord, our provider, our father...He also wants to be our friend. He wants us to enjoy Him as much as He enjoys us. John 13-15 talks about Jesus love for us:

John 14.18, 21 – “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

John 15.9 – “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”

John 15.12-16 – “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last...”

It can sometimes be difficult for people to understand what a relationship with God is like if they haven’t experienced it for themselves. Even though God isn’t a physical person we can see, our relationship with Him is much the same as a relationship with anyone else. We can enjoy His company, spend time with Him, trust Him, be honest and genuine with Him, talk about things we’re excited or frustrated about...just look at any of your good friendships with people and it can be an example of how to relate to God.

When we are in a close relationship with God, our faith will fall into place and make sense. It is the foundational principle to living the Christian life. So many times people worry about their walk – they worry about bearing fruit, or listening to the Holy Spirit, or making sure they know God’s will – that they ignore this relationship with God. Not that these things aren’t important, but many of them will be taken care of when your relationship with God is as it should be.