

Chapter 6

God Is On Your Side

Knowing that our sins set in motion God's laws, and therefore every sin brings negative consequences, can make us very anxious. The power and inevitability of the operation of God's laws revealed in the following scriptures can haunt us:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7).

For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you (Matthew 7:2).

What happens if I don't get it right? What happens if I fail to catch every sin and have it forgiven? We may feel alone and hopeless, and may be set into striving to make sure we don't miss anything. We may then become discouraged, despondent, even desperate when we fail to catch every sin.

If the spiritual universe was simply mechanical and automatic, we would indeed be in trouble. If at this moment we were to reap the just consequences of every sin we ever committed, we would be overwhelmed. The pain and bad fruit in our lives would be unbearable.

God Is Protecting Us

Fortunately for us, God actively intervenes in this process. For His children, God holds back most of the accumulated reaping that we would otherwise experience. He loves us and does not want us overwhelmed or destroyed.

We see this easily when we think of children. For example, when children are very small, we put them in a crib with side rails. We do this to protect them from falling out of bed and getting hurt. However, there

comes a time when we expect them to be able to sleep without falling out of bed.

We also provide "baby sitters" for our children when they are small. Otherwise, while we are gone they might hurt themselves, or perhaps burn the house down. We take care of them in this way because we know they are not yet ready to handle the responsibilities of looking after themselves. Eventually they will have matured enough to handle greater responsibilities, and we can then leave them alone and expect them to be responsible. In fact, they will eventually want to take care of themselves. Then we no longer should protect them to the same degree. They need to grow and practice exercising the new responsibilities while we are still available to coach them.

God protects us in a similar way. He only allows us to reap what will help us, what will motivate us to pursue our healing. He only allows us to experience what we are ready to handle, so that the experience will bring about good in our lives, rather than destruction.

The trials that you have had to bear are no more than people normally have. You can trust God not to let you be tried beyond your strength, and with any trial he will give you a way out of it and the strength to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13, The Jerusalem Bible, underlining is mine).

Raising My Son

My son John was always a happy-go-lucky boy. He always had a lot of friends, and was very generous. However, if he had a dollar in his pocket, he spent it. After all, he knew that his parents would meet all of his financial needs, so why not? We talked to him many times about saving some money, but it never happened. We were very concerned that he would grow up to be financially irresponsible.

In the summer between his sophomore and junior year of high school we got him a good paying job with a building contractor who was putting an addition onto our house. As a growing boy, when school started in the fall, none of his old clothes would fit anymore. In the past we had always bought all his clothes. Now that he had a well-paying job, he agreed that he would pay for his own new clothes that fall.

When fall came, he informed us that he needed some new clothes for school. We agreed, as his pants were three inches too short. However,

over the summer he had spent all of his money, much of it on his friends. We were then faced with either bailing him out of his dilemma, or making him live with the consequences of his behavior. Since our previous words had not taught him about saving for a rainy day, we realized that he needed to experience in his life the results of his choices. So we didn't pay for new clothes.

As we all know, peer pressure is a cruel master for teenagers. When John had to go to school in clothes that were too small, each day he died a thousand deaths. Later in the fall his wrestling coach gave him an old pair of tennis shoes that he had found abandoned in a locker. John was mortified by this. What finally bailed him out of his unpleasant consequence was Christmas and clothing gifts. John has now become a financially responsible adult.

Were we cruel when we allowed peer pressure to impact him? Were we being unloving by allowing him to suffer for his misbehavior? Not at all. It was difficult for us to watch him suffer. We loved him, but we knew there was a lesson that he needed to learn; and it could only be learned by experience. If he didn't change his attitude towards money he would possibly suffer all of his life from financial folly. As his parents, it was our responsibility to do what was necessary to help him to grow up to be mature and responsible.

We did not create the peer pressure that made him suffer, but we did withdraw our "protection" from it. We had within our power the ability to protect him from that embarrassment by buying him some new clothes for the start of school. However, it was evident that he had not yet learned to be responsible, and perhaps the only way he would become mature would be for us to withhold our "protection." It was in his best interest, even though he hated it, and he suffered. In a sense, we "used" the peer pressure, which is a cruel and merciless force, to help him to become mature and responsible.

When Christians encounter difficulties they often ask, "Why didn't God keep that from happening?" They wonder, if God is all powerful, why didn't He intervene?

Hopefully this example with my own son will help you understand how God works in our lives. He tries to gently tell us about something that we need to change. But if we don't, or can't, change our behavior, there are times that He has to allow us to suffer the consequences for what we do. Because He loves us, even though it hurts Him to watch us suffer, He is willing to endure this. He knows that we need our character

changed, and that experiencing pain in our lives is sometimes the only way that we will be motivated to seek change.

God Is Raising His Children

As parents, most of us do the best we can in raising our children, but we don't do it perfectly. However, God is the perfect parent.

For they (our earthly parents) indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:10).

God is your Father, and He is raising you like a good father raises a child. God speaks in relationship terms, because most of us have been raised in families, and many have been parents. Thus He is speaking about relationships, with which you can likely relate, because He wants you to understand experientially what your relationship with Him is like.

Those of us who are parents know how much we love our children. We also know that when they were little we were much wiser than they were, and hopefully we had their best interests at heart as we raised them. Sometimes they did not understand all the reasons why we were disciplining them as we were, and usually they were not happy with the discipline. In fact, the discipline had to be unpleasant or it would be ineffective.

We also realized that one-year-old children cannot perform as five-year-old children. Schools do not expect as much of first graders as they do of ninth graders. In the mean time, as they gradually grow, we need to do for them what they cannot do for themselves. However, it is up to us as parents to decide what they can or cannot do. Parents also need to challenge their children to help them to grow up into mature and responsible adults. If parents were to do everything for their children, they would grow up to be lazy, spoiled, self-centered, and immature. But if children are properly mentored, they grow up to be mature.

So it is with God. He is raising you for your good. He is wiser, and He has a special plan for your life. He knows what you need at any stage of your life. For example, all of you who have walked with the Lord for some time have discovered that you can't "get away with" as much as you could when you were first saved. The level of accountability for your sins has obviously increased.

Before you gave your life to Jesus, you were not God's child, and you were in rebellion against Him. At that time He let you go your own way, and you were not under His protection.¹

You were in the world and of the world, and Satan was the one who had authority over you. However, when you responded to God's invitation and made a choice to turn your life over to Jesus, you became God's child. At that moment reality changed for you.²

When you made that choice you gave Him permission to raise you as He saw best. At that time you probably didn't know the full impact of your decision. But from the moment you made Jesus your Lord, He had your permission to do whatever it took to direct you to maturity.

God Does Not Afflict You

It is important for you to know that God does not afflict you. Otherwise you might be angry at Him and judge Him, and that wouldn't be good for you. God allowing you to reap some of the just consequences of your own sin is very different than God afflicting you. In the example of raising my son, if I had been the one afflicting him, I would be the one taunting him and making fun of him. I would be pointing out to all of his friends his inadequate clothing and being sure to point out his immaturity and irresponsibility. That would be an awful thing to do! Can you imagine doing that to your own child?

God specifically tells us that He won't do this to us.

Happy the man who remains steadfast under trial, for having passed that test he will receive for his prize the gift of life promised to those who love God. No one under trial or temptation should say, "I am

¹ **Ephesians 2:11-13**, *Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.*

Also see Footnote #74 for more on this.

² **Romans 8:16**, *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*
1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*

Ephesians 1:13, *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,*

being tempted by God"; for God is untouched by evil, and does not himself tempt anyone. Temptation arises when a man is enticed and lured away by his own lust; then lust conceives, and gives birth to sin; and sin full-grown breeds death. Do not deceive yourselves, my friends. All good giving and every perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of the lights of heaven. With him there is no variation, no play of passing shadows. Of his set purpose, by declaring the truth, he gave us birth to be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (James 1:12-18, New English Bible).

The above scripture touches on God's purpose in allowing trials in our lives. He says, *he gave us birth to be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*. He also implies that this is a good thing: *All good giving and every perfect gift comes from above*. But what does this really mean?

What Is The Purpose Of Your Life?

Does your life have a purpose, or is it just a series of random events that will be over when you die? As a Christian, what does God expect of you? Does He have a plan for you? Have you ever asked yourself questions like:

- Why do bad things happen to "good" people?
- Why do I suffer?
- Why does life sometimes seem to not go my way?
- Why do my plans so often not work out?
- Will I go to hell because I sin?
- Am I pleasing God?
- Why am I not prospering?
- Why don't I feel satisfied and fulfilled?
- What is the purpose of my life?

Truly, life is frustrating and confusing when you don't know what God's plan is for you and what He wants from you.

Possible Purposes For Your Life

In reading the Bible it is possible to come up with quite a challenging list of things that Christians are supposed to do with their lives.

"The List"

We are to:

- love God.
- worship God.
- love others.
- preach the Gospel.
- bring others into the Kingdom.
- live a "good" life.
- be a good witness to the world.
- be changed into the image of God.
- resist evil.
- pray for one another.

This is an overwhelming list, and yet it isn't even exhaustive. It seems even more overwhelming when we have been striving to live up to any part of it. Most of us have tried very hard, and we have not been very successful. It may even seem impossible. The Apostle Paul experienced this same struggle.

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. . . O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:15, 24-25).

Paul understands our struggle, and here he is saying that Jesus can deliver us from this cycle of trying and failing, trying and failing again. But how can this happen?

Jesus Kept The Whole "List"

Jesus kept the whole "List." How did He manage to do this? He did it because it was His very nature, and therefore He did it effortlessly and perfectly. A fish swims and a bird flies. They don't have to think about it, they just do it. It is their nature. Jesus lived perfectly because he was without sin.

Then Jesus says that we are to do the same works as He did!

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (John 14:12).

How Can We Possibly Keep "The List?"

How can we possibly keep "The List" when we find it so difficult to keep one or two of the items? It sounds impossible. Jesus was able to keep "The List" because it was His nature. That is also the only way we can keep it. We need a new nature. In our "Honeycomb" we need to be changed into the image of Jesus. When we have been changed, we too can keep "The List." As we are in the process of being changed into His image, we will each incrementally gain His nature; and we will then behave as He does, step by step. As each segment of our "Honeycomb" (see Chapter 3, "Remove All The Bad Roots") is cleansed and inhabited by Jesus, the new "good root" (Jesus) will produce "good fruit." In that specific area of our lives, our character has been transformed.³

- **The primary thing that God wants is to change us into the image of Jesus. He doesn't want us to act like Jesus. He wants us to be like Jesus. When we "be" like Him, we will then "act" like Him.**
- **The good root (Jesus in us) will then produce good fruit.**

³ "The kind of character development which happens in the soul is His primary interest and purpose" (Sandford, Restoring the Christian Family, p.5).

Why Does God Want This For You?

We don't know all the reasons why God wants you changed into the image of Jesus, but He does reveal some of the reasons.

1. He loves you. As a result of this love, He gave His Son to make it possible for you to be set free from the just consequences of your sins. He hates sin, because it causes His children to suffer. He wants this cycle of sin and death to stop.⁴
2. You are here to be changed into the image of Jesus in order to be prepared to rule and reign with Him in eternity. You need to be like Him to be trustworthy so that you can carry out this assignment.⁵
3. He wants companions, beings that have freely chosen Him, despite the fact that in many ways it would have been easier not to choose Him.⁶

As you can see, God made provision for you not only to go to heaven and to live with Him for eternity, but He also made provision for you in this life.

Being “Saved” Has Two Meanings

1. The first meaning refers to the one time event that occurred when you made Him Lord of your life. At that moment you turned over to

⁴ **John 3:16**, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Romans 8:2, *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*

⁵ **Matthew 19:28**, *So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

See **Endnote #6-1** for more scriptures on God's ultimate plan for us.

⁶ **Romans 8:18**, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

2 Timothy 2:12, *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

Revelation 3:21, *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

Revelation 20:4, *And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and have not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*

Him the "title deed," the ownership rights, to your life. We call this event such things as: becoming a Christian, being born again, or "justification." This event happens at the point in time when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and receive Him into your life.⁷

From then on, you belong to God.⁸ You are a member of His family⁹, a child of His, and thus He has permission to do whatever He wants to in your life.

Because He loves you, whatever He does is always for your best interest.¹⁰ He knows how to take care of those who belong to Him.

2. The second meaning of being "saved" refers to the **ongoing process** that then takes place in which you are being changed into His image. We call this process "sanctification," or discipleship, or growing in Godliness, or being transformed into the image of Jesus. This is a lifetime process, and is sometimes called "Inner Healing," though this particular term does not appear in the Bible. Your sanctification is His major goal for you, and He spares no resources

Your sanctification is God's major goal for you, and He spares no resources to bring this about. Everything else in your life is secondary to this goal.

⁷ **Romans 10:9**, *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

⁸ **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**, . . . *and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price;*

1 Corinthians 7:22-23, *Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price:*

⁹ **Galatians 4:3-7**, *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

¹⁰ **Hebrews 12:5-12**, *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

to bring this about. Everything else in your life is secondary to this goal.¹¹ You may have some other goal in life, such as happiness, or abundance, or a life without difficulties. If you don't achieve these other goals, it can be frustrating and confusing. However, it is only confusing because you don't see God's priority in that moment, because you have your eyes on the wrong goal. You may also want to read about "justification" and "sanctification" in the Glossary.

Recognize that the "one-time" event does not change you into the image of Jesus (being sanctified). It only puts you into a legal position for God to take you on your journey of being sanctified.¹²

God Is Very Personal With You

The events that happen in your life as a Christian are not random, or impersonal consequences of your sin, nor are they pointless. They are God's personal, loving attention to your life.

Keep in mind that the Lord's paramount goal is to change you into the image of Jesus, and everything else is secondary. Just as good parents have to allow their children to suffer difficulties if they are to

¹¹ **Hebrews 12:10-11**, *For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

James 1:2-4, *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

See **Endnote #6-2** for more scriptures on God working in our hearts.

See **Endnote #6-3** for more scriptures on the process of being changed into the image of Jesus.

¹² **Philippians 3:12**, Paul, speaking of himself (a Christian) *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.* (Underlining is mine).

Philippians 2:12-13, Paul, speaking to people who clearly have already been saved (the one-time event, also called "justification"), says: *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure* (Underlining is mine)

It is important to note that the Greek tense of work out (present imperative) denotes a command to do something in the future which involves continuous or repeated action. In other words, it is a process that occurs over time.

"By sanctification is meant the continued transformation of moral and spiritual character so that the life of the believer actually comes to mirror the standing which he or she already has in God's sight. While justification is an instantaneous act giving the individual a righteous standing before God, sanctification is a process making the person holy or good (Elwell, p.875).

mature, so God allows the trials you go through in order to bring about the transformation you need.¹³ He knows each of us and carefully designs each of our training programs to fit us perfectly. He knows our level of maturity.¹⁴

This Sanctification Process Can Feel Grievous

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).

Unfortunately, this process of being changed into His image is very difficult. If everything in our life went smoothly, we would become spoiled, self-centered, and greedy. We can see this in children who are not properly disciplined by their parents. This tendency is also illustrated in the Old Testament and the history of the nation of Israel.

- When King David began to prosper and experience a life of ease, he sinned with Bathsheba.
- King Solomon had the throne handed to him, and he always experienced a life of ease and luxury. He sinned mightily. For example, he had 700 wives and 300 concubines, *and his wives turned*

¹³ If life is going well for us, and if we then think it is because we have no sin in us, we are deluded. *There is none righteous, not one* (Romans 3:10).

We all sin many times daily, and we have done so all of our lives; though we may be unaware of these areas of sin until the Lord shows them to us. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (1 John 1:8).

Consequently, if Satan had free access to all areas of sin in each of us, we would be destroyed by him immediately. After all, he hates us and would miss no opportunity to oppress one of God's children. As water entering a leak in a boat, Satan would enter into us through any crack available. Since our own "boat" leaks like a sieve (lots of sin), and since Satan doesn't overwhelm and sink us immediately, there must be something else keeping him out. God's boat doesn't leak, and we are in His boat.

Since this total destruction does not come upon us, there must be something restraining Satan. This restraint is God's protecting us in many ways, most of which we are not even aware. He knows how to protect His children. See also: Ps 23:1-6, 27:1-6, 91:1-16; Is 26:3-4, 41:10; Is 26:3-4, 41:10, 43:1-10; 2 Cor 1:10; 2 Tim 1:12; Heb 7:25; 1 Pet 4:19; Jude 24.

¹⁴ **Hebrews 4:14-16**, *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

away his heart (1 Kings 11:3). He also greatly oppressed the people (1 Kings 12:4).

- When God gave prosperity to the people of Israel, they strayed from God because they felt self-sufficient. They only came back to Him when threatened with destruction. This happened many times in their history. He warned them about this tendency in Deuteronomy 6:12: *then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.*¹⁵

The apostle Paul is also an example of God using Satan to bring about eventual blessing. Paul says of himself,

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness'. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast of my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Clearly, the Lord knew that Paul might become "exalted" (*huperairomai*, "to become haughty") because of the special things that he experienced; and it was clearly implied in this passage that it was within the Lord's power to remove the "thorn." But He didn't remove it, because it was in the best interest of both Paul and the cause of Christ for which Paul labored that the "thorn" remain.¹⁶

Therefore, each of us needs tests, trials, and discomfort to achieve God's goal for us, because these things motivate us. God undoubtedly wishes that He did not have to allow us to be afflicted and thus experience pain, but He knows He must if we are to be transformed. I

¹⁵ Also read Jeremiah Chapter 25, Ezekiel Chapter 14, and Deuteronomy Chapter 28 and Deuteronomy 6:10-12; 32:15 for more examples of Israel's waywardness.

¹⁶ Many times we do not see what God is doing in our life until after the fact. This has happened many times in my life. Often I was not very happy about what was going on in my life at the time; but afterward I was awed by what the Lord was able to do - usually in me. I have learned that when I encounter difficulties in my life, the correct question for me to ask is, "Lord, what are you wanting to do in me through this trial?"

Job is another person who suffered so that his character could be changed.
See **Endnote #6-4** for more details on Job's trials.

am also convinced that He uses the minimum amount of pain and challenge necessary to accomplish the change, but He does use every bit of pressure that is necessary to accomplish His purpose. He is more interested in our character than in our being free from pain.¹⁷

Again, keep in mind that as Christians we are in a special relationship with God. We are now His children and we have given Him ownership of our life¹⁸. There will be times when we, like Paul, would rather not be experiencing the pain; but God is more interested in our character than in our comfort. Those who are not members of God's family do not have the same level of protection from evil. Since God does not "own them," He therefore does not have the same freedom to operate in their lives.

What About The Devil?

God is sovereign, and He is greater than the Devil. God protects those who belong to Him. So as God's child, Satan does not have access to you unless God allows it. God sometimes even uses Satan to accomplish His purposes.¹⁹

There are Christians who believe it is their job to rebuke the Devil all the time. They see a demon behind every negative thing that happens to them, and they believe it is totally up to them to stand against the Devil (in the name of Jesus, of course). It is as though they are naked and alone; and if they don't protect themselves, nobody else will. This is based upon a misunderstanding of Scripture, and this tendency may be evidence of striving, performance and a need to control. Their view is totally different than the view I am presenting.

You do need to recognize that there is an enemy and many demons. Usually, however, where there are no roots of bitterness, demons have no access to you. For most people, their problems are not primarily demonic (see Chapter 16, "Deliverance and Inner Healing," for more details on this subject). When you gave your life to Jesus, you

¹⁷ **Hebrews 12:10-11**, *For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

¹⁸ **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**, . . . *and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

¹⁹ See **Footnote #74**. Also see **Endnote #6-5** regarding the lie of *dualism*, which gives a false picture of the battle between God and Satan.

became His property, and He became your protector.²⁰ When demons do have access, it is because God is allowing this in order to accomplish His purpose. There are, in fact, times when God's purpose is for you to practice using your authority to command demons. When Paul commanded the demon in Acts 16:16-18,²¹ he first walked by the situation for many days before he acted, so he obviously did not command demons every time he saw evil. Evidently, Paul only acted when God told him to.

Random Use Of Authority Can Be Dangerous!

If you use your authority to command a demon when that is not what God does want you to do at that moment, you may find yourself getting in the way of God's plan. Or worse yet, you may encounter a major demonic force, find yourself in trouble and learning a hard lesson. Even Jesus only followed His Father's orders (John 5:19, 5:30) In doing spiritual warfare, we need to be careful to make sure we are only doing what the Lord is telling us to do. For a greater understanding of this issue, read Needless Casualties of War by John Paul Jackson.

A Change Of Attitude Results From This New Awareness

Once you realize that God is active in all the troubles you face, your whole attitude will change. Instead of fighting against what He is doing, you will tend to ask, "OK, Lord, I don't like this at all. But what are You trying to change in me through this miserable experience?" This explains a scripture that many of us have hated:

²⁰ **2 Tim 1:12**, *For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*

See **Endnote #6-6** for more on God's protection.

²¹ **Acts 16:16-18, 23, 30**, *Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who bought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her," and he came out that very hour . . . And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely . . . And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4).

Now that you understand what God is doing in your life, this verse makes perfect sense! I used to have comfort, peace, and financial prosperity as my life's goals. At that time I thought that if I had enough faith, then my life should be smooth sailing. But it seemed to me that God would keep going by in a motorboat making waves on my placid lake.²² At that time I would get angry whenever my life didn't go well. I used to resist what was going on, thinking it shouldn't be happening. I would either be angry with God or I would wonder what I had done wrong that had caused the problem. This perspective had a tendency to put me in a performance mode by thinking that if I do right (by the power of my will, of course), things will go well in my life. If I don't do right, then things will not go well. That view is in error for a New Testament believer. This erroneous perspective eliminates God's active participation in my life. In truth, worrying and striving are not necessary. I just need to listen, trust, and obey.

²² **Romans 5:3-10**, *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

Note that here "saved" refers to the sanctification process, or transformation (in addition to our final salvation and to the consequences of the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:12).

Revelation 3:18-21, *"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."*

See Endnote #6-7 for more scriptures on how God pressures us in order to heal us.

Sin Has Consequences

Does the fact that God is committed to our sanctification mean it is alright to sin? After all, we may conclude, He will protect us from the consequences of our sin. But keep in mind that God is actively in charge of our process. If we begin to think we are so insulated from the consequences of our sin that we can sin and get away with it, God will know this and discipline us accordingly. God looks on the heart, and we can't fool Him. He is gracious to the repentant, but committed to our sanctification. If we are being casual about sin, we are not being like Jesus, and so He will go to work on correcting our misperception.

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (Romans 6:1-2).

Because God is actively in charge of our sanctification, reaping from our sin is not simply a mechanical consequence, and the consequences are not random. Sometimes He causes us to reap what we sow, because that is

The consequences God allows are not to punish us, but to lead us to healing (to being changed into the image of Jesus).

what we need to pay attention to at that moment. At other times He protects us from the consequences of a sin, because that is not what He is working on in our life at that time. The consequences are not to punish us, but to lead us to healing (to being changed into the image of Jesus).

If We Resist

It is true that if we drag our feet or rebel against the lesson He is giving us, it will be harder for us. Then we will have to endure more suffering. Since He is determined to heal us, He will persist in bringing trials until we do respond. On the other hand, if we listen and obey, then the trial can end, because it has accomplished its purpose. This is one very important reason why we must understand the purpose of our trials, so that we will not fight against what God is doing, or attempt to evade his discipline.

We can do it the easy way, or the hard way.

Saul discovered this on the road to Damascus. He had been persecuting the early church and was obviously ignoring any messages from God. God had to roll out the "big guns" to get his attention. Jesus appeared in a bright light, and Saul fell to the ground.

God is actively in charge of our lives, and the consequences we experience from our sins are not random. They are to motivate us so as to lead us to healing

And Saul said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting. It is dangerous and it turns out badly for you to keep kicking against the goad - that is, to offer vain and perilous resistance" (Acts 9:5, Amplified Bible).

In that moment, God got Saul's attention. Saul was terrified! *Trembling and astonished he asked, Lord, what do You desire me to do?* (Acts 9:6, Amplified Bible). Saul believed, and then he obeyed what Jesus told him to do.

There can, of course, also be natural consequences to things that we do in ignorance, or willfully, or because of weakness. Examples of natural consequences would be destruction to our health through smoking or overeating, or physical injury from risky behavior. If we suffer such consequences, it may not have anything to do with God's plan for us, or His training. These consequences may simply be the natural consequences of physical laws. Even in these areas, however, God will do everything He can to warn us about the problem, and He will find a way to use these experiences as part of our process of being transformed.

God only expects us to deal with the areas of sin that He knows we are ready to work on. In other words, He has a plan for our lives, He has our lives under His control, and He only lets us pay the consequences for those sins that He wants us to deal with right now. That is part of the mystery. He has a unique and a dynamic plan for each of us, and it is ever changing as we grow. That is why a formula doesn't work.

The Christian Walk Is Not A Set Of Rules - We Have A Living God

It is important to guard against trying to reduce God to a formula, using the Bible as a rulebook. Putting Him in a box this way often happens so subtly that we are not even aware of it. For instance, when I am faced with a problem in my life, I go to the Bible to find an answer. This is good. But this quest for His guidance can go astray.

The following is a real story. A Christian woman was married to a non-Christian. Of course, she badly wanted her husband to receive Jesus. She read Acts 16:31, spoken to the Philippian jailer through the Apostle Paul: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."* She assumed this is a "rule," a general principle and a universal truth that then applies to everybody who will believe it. So she meditated on this verse and tried her best to believe that it was true for her husband. She prayed this every day, over and over. However, her husband remained unsaved, year after year.

What went wrong? Wasn't she praying hard enough? Didn't God inspire Paul to speak those words? Didn't she believe God's Word? Was the Devil in the way? The flaw in her understanding was that this verse was a word of truth from the Lord spoken about a particular "household" at a specific point in time. God, in His foreknowledge, knew that this statement to the Philippian jailer would come to pass. But nowhere does the Bible imply that this word is universally true for all people, in all generations.

Years ago, I made this same type of mistake. At that time my insurance business was struggling. I had been taught that God wants us to have plenty, as stated in 3 John 1:2: *Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.* I mistakenly understood that if I would believe this verse to apply to me, I would prosper. So I tried to believe this and prayed over and over that this was true for me. However, instead of improving, my business

problems persisted. In fact, strange things happened to thwart my business plans. It became obvious to me that it was God who was causing my business to struggle. I was mystified, and I was angry with God because He wasn't answering my prayer as I had assumed He promised.

What went wrong? Didn't God inspire John to write those words? Yes, He did; but they were not necessarily directed at me at that moment in my life. As a matter of fact, I have since discovered that God was redirecting my life. He wanted me out of the insurance business and into counseling. Had I made lots of money, it might have been very difficult for me to give that up for a less lucrative calling. I now thank Him for doing it His way.

I was taking the Bible as a legalistic rulebook, and that particular scripture as a formula. When I did this, I was mistakenly seeing God's Word as an object, not as an expression of a living, present God.²³ By reducing God to a set of rules, I was subtly denying His active, living presence in my daily life.

Our living God will give us the guidance we need, when we need it. But we need to be seeking His guidance and to be listening for His directions, because He speaks in many diverse ways. Sometimes He will even direct our lives when we are not open to His leading.²⁴ His direction will always be specific to us for that time in our life, will promote what is good for us, and will always be in line with His character.

Who Is In Control?

There can be another hidden implication in this mistake in the misguided use of Scripture. I may think that if I can understand how God's system works, I can use the system to get what I want. I then think that all I have to do is to find a scripture that says what I want it to say, believe it, and I will have it. One reason I may fall for this trap is because this puts me back in control.²⁵ I want to be in control of my own life, because at some level I don't trust God to take care of me.

²³ Rudolf Bultmann refers to this tendency to turn God's word into a rule-book as to "objectivize God and His actions." (Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p.83).

²⁴ As with Paul on the road to Damascus, sometimes God will get our attention even when we are not seeking and listening. We can do it the easy way, or the hard way.

²⁵ In Martin Luther's day, the Roman Catholic Church was stuck in legalism and works.
See **Endnote #6-8** to understand how Martin Luther was freed from this bondage.

However, despite my need to control, God is not my errand boy. He is actually the One who is actively in control of my life, and that is a very good thing!

Profoundly Different, But True!

The view I am presenting may be profoundly different than what you have believed. As a new Christian, I was greatly interested in what my new life was all about, and I wondered what I was supposed to be doing. I wanted so much to obey God.

Unfortunately, I heard preaching that confused me. From one teacher I would be told that our main duty was to preach the Gospel. I tried that, but failed miserably. Another

God loved me too much to let me succeed in my delusion that I can do it myself.

teacher emphasized loving God. I tried that, but knew I was doing that inadequately. At one time or another, I tried to do most of the things on "The List."²⁶ I wanted so much to please God, but kept falling short.

However, as time went by and I began to see what God really wanted from me, I experienced great relief. God knew I couldn't do those things in my own strength. He knew that the only way I could obey Him was for Him to change me into the image of Jesus. I then realized how confused I had previously been.

If you have tried to obey Him and failed, this new understanding will bring great relief and will be life-giving to you. As you begin to read the New Testament through the eyes of this new perspective, God's plan for you will make sense, and you will be able to see that His plan for you is possible to fulfill! In fact, you might be a bit surprised at how prominently the Bible presents this glorious provision He has made for your transformation.

Most of this book will be devoted to showing you how you can become like Jesus; and revealing the amazing, miraculous provisions God has established through Jesus, so that this transformation can happen in you.

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See **Endnote #6-9** for more details on teachings that may be confusing to us.

The purpose of this book is to show you how to cooperate with God's plan for you, which is to change you into the image of Jesus.

Why It Is So Important To Know About God's Plan For Your Life

The reason that I have just devoted an entire chapter to the issue of God's plan for His children is because it is so highly important.

His plan for you is the very foundation for your Christian life here on earth, and everything I have written in this book depends upon this understanding. You can either resist what He is doing, or cooperate.

Key Points:

- For many, the awareness that God is in charge of every aspect of their life will require a huge shift in perspective as to how they view themselves and their life as a Christian. Unfortunately, at a very deep but subtle level, we tend to perceive God as being in the same mold as our parents. If they were neglectful, we have trouble knowing deep inside that He is proactive in our lives. If parents were angry, we have trouble knowing that He is gentle and loving. **See Page 66** for more on "How We See God."
- This walk is not just for a sick few, but rather it is the normal life for every Christian.
- The goal of Inner Healing is not simply to remove your pain, but it has the larger goal of changing you into the image of Jesus. Pain is simply a motivator.
- Inner Healing is a new way of life, living in a new way every day for the rest of your life. You cannot go back to your old way of living or you will again be stuck.
- Inner Healing is the very core of God's plan for your life. Life will only go well if you are pursuing His plan for you.

Inner Healing is the very core of God's plan for your life.

Summary

By the operation of God's laws, when we sin we set in motion negative consequences which will bring destruction in our lives. However, God loves His children and is on our side. He has the power to protect us from these

consequences, and He does so. However, there are times when God steps aside and allows us to suffer these just consequences of our sin.

When He does allow us to suffer, it is always for our good. Though the suffering is painful for the moment, He allows it because He has a good plan for us. God wants to change us into the image of Jesus (to remove the bad roots in our "Honeycomb"). He knows that repenting and forgiving are often difficult for us, and sometimes we need suffering and pain to motivate us to surrender to His process.

God is personally committed to this process in each of His children. He tailor makes the plan for each individual, and He personally oversees it as it proceeds. Our sanctification is not a mechanical or random process, so we can rest in the sure knowledge that our loving Father is in charge.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:31-35, 37).

We can rest in the sure knowledge that our loving Father is in charge of our life.

It is a hostile world, but not a hostile God. God is on your side!