



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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What is the gospel of Jesus Christ? Part 3

MAN THE SINNER

I just paid a parking ticket the other day. It was easy. I read the charge against me, flipped the ticket over, checked the box that said “I plead guilty to the charge,” filled out a check for \$35 to the Los Angeles Traffic Citation Department, sealed the envelope, and dropped it in the mail.

I’m a convicted criminal.

For some reason, though, even though I checked the “guilty” box, I don’t feel terribly guilty. I’m not going to lose any sleep over my walk on the wrong side of the law.

I don’t feel the need to ask anyone’s forgiveness, and now that I think about it, I’m even a little bitter that the ticket was \$10 more than the previous one I got.

Why don’t I feel bad about breaking the law? I suppose it’s because, when you get right down to it, breaking a parking regulation just doesn’t strike me as being all that important—or all that heinous. Yes, I’ll be sure to drop an extra nickel in the meter next time, but my conscience isn’t exactly torn up over the whole thing.

One thing I’ve noticed over the years is that most people tend to think of sin, especially their own, as not much more than a parking infraction. “Yes of course,” we think, “technically sin is a violation of the law handed down by God on high, and all that, but surely He must know there are bigger criminals out there than me. Besides, nobody was hurt, and I’m willing to pay the fine. And come on—there’s no need for a whole lot of soul-searching over something like this. Is there?”

Well, I guess not, at least not if you think of sin in that cold way. But according to the Bible, sin is a lot more than just the violation of some impersonal, arbitrary, heavenly traffic regulation. It’s the breaking of a relationship, and even more, it is a rejection of God Himself—a repudiation of God’s rule, God’s care, God’s authority, and God’s right to command those to whom he gave life. In short, it is the rebellion of the creature against his Creator.

What Went Wrong

When God created human beings, His intention was that they would live under His righteous rule in perfect joy, worshipping Him, obeying Him, and thereby living in unbroken fellowship with Him. As we saw in the last lesson, He created man and woman in His own image, meaning that they were to be like Him, to be in relationship with Him, and to declare His glory to the world. Further, God had a job for humans to do. They were to be His vice-regents, ruling His world under Him. **“Be fruitful and multiply,”** God told them, **“and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth”** ([Genesis 1:28 \(NASB\)](#)).

Man and woman’s rule over creation was not ultimate, however. Their authority was not their own; it was given to them by God. So even as Adam and Eve exercised dominion over the world, they were to remember that they were subject to God and under His rule. He had created them, and therefore He had the right to command them.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God planted in the center of the garden, was a stark reminder of that fact ([Genesis 3:17](#)).

[Genesis 3:17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷ **“Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.”**

When Adam and Eve looked at that tree and saw its fruit, they would remember that their authority was limited, that they were creatures, and that they were dependent on God for their very lives. They were only the stewards. He was the King.

When Adam and Eve bit into the fruit, therefore, they weren’t just violating some arbitrary command, **“Don’t eat the fruit.”** They were doing something much sadder and much more serious. They were rejecting God’s authority over them and declaring their independence from Him.

Adam and Eve wanted to be, as the Serpent promised them, **“like God,”** so both of them seized on what they thought was an opportunity to shed the vice-regency and take the crown itself. In all the universe, there was only one thing God had not placed under Adam’s feet—God himself. Yet Adam decided this arrangement was not good enough for

him, and so he rebelled.

The worst of it, though, is that by disobeying God’s command, Adam and Eve made a conscious decision to reject Him as their King. They knew what the consequences would be if they disobeyed him. God had told them in no uncertain terms that if they ate the fruit, they would **“surely die,”** which meant above all that they would be cast away from His presence and become His enemies, rather than His friends and joyful subjects ([Genesis 2:17](#)).

[Genesis 2:17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷ **“But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”**

But they didn’t care. Adam and Eve traded their favor with God for the pursuit of their own pleasure and their own glory.

The Bible calls this disobedience of God’s commands—whether in word, thought, or deed—**“sin.”** Literally, the word means **“missing the mark,”** but the biblical meaning of sin is much deeper. It’s not as if Adam and Eve were trying very hard to keep God’s command and just missed the bull’s-eye by a few degrees. No, the fact is that they were shooting in the opposite direction! They had goals and desires that were categorically opposed to what God desired for them, and so they sinned. They deliberately violated God’s command, broke their relationship with Him, and rejected Him as their rightful Lord.

The consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin were disastrous for them, their descendants, and the rest of creation. They themselves were cast out of the idyllic garden of Eden. No longer would the earth willingly and joyfully present its fruits and treasures to them. They would have to work, hard and painfully, to get them. Even worse, God executed the promised sentence of death upon them. They didn’t physically die right away, of course. Their bodies continued to live, lungs breathing, hearts beating, limbs moving.

But their spiritual life, the one that matters most, ended immediately. Their fellowship with God was broken, and thus their hearts shriveled, their minds filled up with selfish thoughts, their eyes darkened to the beauty of God, and their souls became sere and arid, utterly void of that spiritual life that God gave them in the beginning, when everything was good.

Not Just Them, but Us

The Bible tells us that it is not just Adam and Eve

who are guilty of sin. We all are. Paul says in [Romans 3:23 NASB](#), “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” And just a few paragraphs earlier he says, “**None is righteous, no, not one**” ([Romans 3:10 \(NASB\)](#)).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is full of stumbling stones, and this is one of the largest. To human hearts that stubbornly think of themselves as basically good and self-sufficient, this idea that human beings are fundamentally sinful and rebellious is not merely scandalous. It is revolting.

That’s why it is so absolutely crucial that we understand both the nature and the depth of our sin. If we approach the gospel thinking that sin is something else or something less than what it really is, we will badly misunderstand the good news of Jesus Christ. Let me give you a few examples of how Christians often misunderstand sin.

CONFUSING SIN WITH SIN’S EFFECTS

It’s become fashionable lately to present the gospel by saying that Jesus came to save humanity from an innate sense of guilt or meaninglessness or purposelessness or emptiness. Now of course those things really are problems, and many people feel them deeply. But the Bible teaches that humanity’s fundamental problem—the thing from which we need to be saved—is not meaninglessness or disintegration in our lives, or even a debilitating sense of guilt. Those are merely symptoms of a deeper and much more profound problem: our sin. What we must understand is that the predicament we’re in is a predicament of our own making. **We** have disobeyed God’s word. **We** have ignored His commands. **We** have sinned against Him.

To talk about salvation being from meaninglessness or purposelessness without tracing those things down to their root in sin may make the medicine go down easier, but it is the wrong medicine. It allows a person to continue thinking of himself as a victim and never really deal with the fact that he himself is the criminal, unrighteous and deserving of judgment.

REDUCING SIN TO BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

Relationship is an important category in the Bible. Human beings were *made* to live in fellowship with God. What we must remember, however, is that it was a specific *kind* of relationship in which

they were to live—not the relationship between two equals, where law, judgment, and punishment are out of view, but the relationship between a King and His subjects.

Many Christians talk about sin as if it were merely a relational tiff between God and man, and what is needed is for us simply to apologize and accept God’s forgiveness. That image of sin as a lovers’ quarrel, though, distorts the relationship in which we stand to God. It communicates that there is no broken law, no violated justice, no righteous wrath, no holy judgment—and therefore, ultimately, no need for a substitute to bear that judgment, either.

The Bible’s teaching is that sin is indeed a breaking of relationship with God, but that broken relationship consists in a rejection of His kingly majesty. It’s not *just* adultery (though it is that); it is also rebellion. Not *just* betrayal, but also treason. If we reduce sin to a mere breaking of relationship, rather than understanding it as the traitorous rebellion of a beloved subject against his good and righteous King, we will never understand why the death of God’s Son was required to address it.

CONFUSING SIN WITH NEGATIVE THINKING

Another misunderstanding of sin is to say that it’s just a matter of negative thinking. We saw that in some of the quotes in the introduction to this book. Get rid of your old wineskins! Think bigger! God wants to show you His incredible favor, if you’ll just get rid of all those negative mind-sets that hold you back!

Now that’s a compelling message to self-reliant people who want to believe they can take care of their sin all by themselves. That’s probably why men who proclaim that message have managed to build some of the largest churches in the world. The formula is pretty easy, really. Just tell people that their sin is no deeper than negative thinking and that it’s holding them back from health, wealth, and happiness. Then tell them that if they’ll just think more positively about themselves (with God’s help, of course), they’ll be rid of their sin and get rich, to boot. Bingo! Instant megachurch!

Sometimes the promised goal is money, sometimes health, sometimes something else entirely. But however you spin it, to say that Jesus Christ died to save us from negative thoughts about ourselves is reprehensibly unbiblical. In fact, the Bible teaches that a big part of our problem is that we think too *highly* of ourselves, not too lowly. Stop and think about it for a moment. How did the Serpent tempt Adam and Eve? He told them they were thinking too negatively about themselves. He told

them they needed to think more positively, to extend their grasp, to reach toward their full potential, to be like God! In a word, he told them to think bigger.

Now how'd that work out for them?

CONFUSING SIN WITH SINS

There is a huge difference between understanding yourself to be guilty of sins, and knowing yourself to be guilty of *sin*. Most people have no problem at all admitting that they've committed sins (plural), at least so long as they can think about those sins as isolated little mistakes in an otherwise pretty good life—a parking ticket here or there on an otherwise clean record.

Sins don't shock us much. We know they are there, we see them in ourselves and others every day, and we've gotten pretty used to them. What is shocking to us is when God shows us the *sin* that runs to the very depths of our hearts, the deep-running deposits of filth and corruption that we never knew existed in us and that we ourselves could never expunge. That's how the Bible talks about the depth and darkness of our sin—it is *in* us and *of* us, not just *on* us.

On the second floor of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, there is what is said to be the largest flawless quartz sphere in the entire world. The sphere is a little bigger than a basketball, and there is not a single visible scratch, pockmark, or discoloration on the entire thing. It is perfect. People often think human nature is like that quartz sphere. Yes, every now and then we may smear it up with dirt and mud, but underneath the grime it remains as pristine as ever, and all we really need to do is wipe it clean in order to restore its brilliance.

The Bible's picture of human nature, though, is not so pretty. According to Scripture, the sphere of human nature is not pristine at all, and the mud is not just smeared on the outside. On the contrary, we are shot through with sin. The cracks, mud, filth, and corruption go all the way to the center. We are, as Paul said, **“Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest”** ([Ephesians 2:3 \(NASB\)](#)).

We are included in Adam's guilt and corruption ([Romans 5](#)). Jesus taught this, too: **“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slan-**

ders” ([Matthew 15:19 \(NASB\)](#)). The sinful words you speak and sinful actions you do are not just isolated incidents. They rise out of the evil of your own heart.

Every part of our human existence is corrupted by sin and under its power. Our understanding, our personality, our feelings and emotions, and even our will are all enslaved to sin. So Paul says in [Romans 8:7](#), **“Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.”** What a shocking and frightening statement! So thorough is sin's rule over us—our minds, understanding, and will—that we see God's glory and goodness, and we *inevitably* turn away from it in disgust.

It's not enough to say that Jesus came to save us from sins, if what we mean by that is that He came to save us from our isolated mistakes. It's only when we realize that our very nature is sinful—that we are indeed **“dead in our trespasses and sins,”** and **“even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”** as Paul says ([Ephesians 2:1, 5 \(NASB\)](#))—that we see just how good the news is that there is a way to be saved.

God's Active Judgment against Sin

One of the most frightening statements in all the Bible is in [Romans 3:19](#). It comes at the end of Paul's indictment of all humanity—first the Gentile, then the Jew—as being under sin and utterly unrighteous before God. Here's what Paul says, as the grand conclusion of the matter: **“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God”** ([NASB](#)).

Can you even begin to imagine what that will mean? To stand before God and to have no explanation, no plea, no excuse, no case? And what does it mean to be **“held accountable to God”**? The Bible is very clear, as we saw in the last lesson, that God is righteous and holy, and therefore He will not excuse sin. But what will it mean for God to deal with sin, to judge it and punish it?

[Romans 6:23 NASB](#) says, **“The wages of sin is death.”** In other words, the payment we earn for our sins is to die. That's not just physical death, either. It is spiritual death, a forceful separating of our sinful, wretched selves from the presence of the righteous and holy God. The prophet Isaiah describes it like this:
[Isaiah 59:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² **“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.”**

Sometimes people talk about this as if it is just the passive, quiet absence of God. But it's more than that. It is God's active judgment against sin, and the Bible says it will be terrifying. Look at how the book of Revelation describes what the end will be like on the day of God's right and good judgment.

The seven angels will **“pour out on the earth ... the wrath of God,”** and **“all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him”** ([Revelation 16:1](#); [Revelation 1:7](#)).

[Revelation 16:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ **“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”**

[Revelation 1:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ **“BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”**

They will call out to the mountains and the rocks, **“Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”** ([Revelation 6:16–17 \(NASB\)](#)). They will see Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and they will cower, for **“...He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty”** ([Revelation 19:15 \(NASB\)](#)).

The Bible teaches that the final destiny for unrepentant, unbelieving sinners is a place of eternal, conscious torment called **“hell.”** Revelation describes it as a **“lake of fire and brimstone,”** and Jesus says it is a place of **“unquenchable fire,”** ([Revelation 20:10](#); [Mark 9:43](#)).

[Revelation 20:10 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁰ **“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”**

[Mark 9:43 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴³ **“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell,**

into the unquenchable fire.”

Given how the Bible talks about hell and warns us against it, I do not understand the impulse some Christians seem to have to explain it in a way that makes it sound more tolerable. When Revelation speaks of Jesus treading the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty, when Jesus himself warns of the **“unquenchable fire ... where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched”** ([Mark 9:43, 48](#)), my incredulous question is, *Why* would any Christian have an interest in making that sound *less* horrific? *Why on earth* would we comfort sinners with the thought that maybe hell will not be so bad after all?

We Didn't Just Make This Up

The images the Bible uses to talk about God's judgment against sin are truly horrifying. It's really no wonder the world reads the Bible's descriptions of hell and calls Christians **“sick”** for believing them.

But that misses the point. It's not as if we just make these ideas up ourselves. We Christians don't read, believe, and talk about hell because we somehow enjoy the thought of it. God forbid. No, we talk about hell because, finally, we believe the Bible. We believe it when it says that hell is real, and we believe it with tears when it says that people we love are in danger of spending eternity there.

This is the Bible's sobering verdict on us. There is not one of us righteous, not even one. And because of that, one day every mouth will be silenced, every wagging tongue stopped, and the whole world will be held accountable to God.

But ...

Continued in next edition...

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

*The New Testament is in the Old concealed; the
Old Testament is in the New revealed.*
—Augustine

The Bible says that all Scripture is inspired and profitable ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)).

[2 Timothy 3:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”

Faith believes it to be true. Faith in the inspiration of Scripture affirms the Bible’s authority, infallibility, sufficiency, and effectiveness. If experience concludes it to be without purpose, irrelevant, outdated, or in some other way without profit, experience is wrong. Faith ought to stop us short every time we are tempted to skip through or over any portion of God’s holy Word just because we are not immediately blessed.

Before giving up on the passage, we should ask ourselves this question: Why, of all the possible things that God could have said, did He say this? By faith, we know why He said it—“**that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work**” ([2 Timothy 3:17](#)). It remains for us to learn, understand, and apply what He said. The Scripture is the means by which God reveals, not conceals, truth.

Yet even here we must be realistic. To assume that we will understand everything in Scripture with equal ease is to reduce the Bible to a document that is less than ordinary and to set ourselves up for more frustration when we do not immediately get the point. The statement of the Westminster divines is a good and comforting reminder:

“All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.” ([Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.7](#))



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Hebrews 12 – Overview Part 6

Hebrews 12:12-17

This study will look at two specific areas. The first is what it means to “**fall short of the grace of God**”, and the second deals with a “**root of bitterness**”. This is the only place in Scripture that this particular phrase to “**fall short of the grace of God**” is actually used. The only other place that is similar is found in [Galatians 5:4](#) which says,

Gal 5:4 **You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.***

In this particular verse it is speaking specifically about someone who was trying to be justified by their good works, or what the author calls “**by law**”. It would be similar to the person who thinks that they can be saved and justified by God because they attend a church or because they have been baptized. Those may be good and appropriate things to do, but they certainly have nothing to do with what is called “saving faith”.

The first thing that the author states is in [Hebrews 12:15](#) and begins with the words “**looking carefully**”. The Greek word for “**looking carefully**” is “*episkopeo*” and is in the plural which means that the author is speaking to a larger number of people than just an individual.

The prefix “*epi*” intensifies the actual meaning of the verb “*skopeo*” which means to regard, to give attention to something, to look at something, or to contemplate. It carries the idea of examining something thoroughly so that the individual can know the actual state of affairs. We might say “to really look into something” or “to really examine it”. The word speaks of doing something very earnestly, very carefully. Every year I have someone come and carefully examine my home for termites. I want to know that the house is protected from any termite infestation, so I have them examine it thoroughly and carefully. The only other place that this word is used in the New Testament is in [1 Peter 5:2](#) where it is speaking about the responsibility of those who shepherd the flock and is translated as “**servicing as overseers**”.

So, the issue that the author is addressing in this verse is that of personal carelessness. The more careless a believer is in their personal walk, the less of God’s grace will be appropriated to them. This verse is speaking of an active disregard for God’s grace. This is not someone simply not knowing about the work of God’s grace, but rather of their knowing and then casually disregarding what God wants to accomplish in their life. A believer can do one of two things regarding the grace of God. They can forfeit God’s grace through personal neglect, or they can receive God’s grace through faith and steadfast adherence to His Word. [Colossians 1:23](#) and [Hebrews 3:14](#) state,

Col 1:23 **if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.**

Heb 3:14 **For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,**

This is not salvation by works, but personal spiritual growth through being grounded and steadfast in the things of God.

There are always areas of any believer’s life that they need to give attention to, and the reason is simple. If they do not pay attention to certain areas of their life, what will happen is that they will “**fall short of the grace of God**”. The word for “**fall short**” means to come too late or to be left out. It carries the idea of failing in something, or coming

short, of missing, and of not reaching what was needed to be reached. It would be like someone not having enough money at the end of the month to pay for their bills. They have fallen short in being able to meet their obligations. This entire letter has been absorbed with very serious and earnest warnings for Christians. There just seems to be so many Christians who simply come short of God’s grace in their lives. They never seem to be possessed by it. The genuine fruit of God’s Spirit is hopelessly and consistently missing. There seems to be no real hunger or thirst for the Word of God and conversely for applying it in their lives. It simply is not there. So, this is one of the much milder verses that serves as both a warning and as an encouragement.

Now, it is critical to appreciate that the primary thrust of this passage is to Christians. The author is specifically addressing people who are saved. Many commentaries indicate that the author is addressing two groups of people – those who are close to salvation and those who have been saved. However, beginning in v12 the author provides three specific imperative verbs and encouragements to help every believer renew and increase their personal spiritual vitality. He encourages them with three specific imperative commands to “**strengthen**”, to “**make straight paths**”, and to “**pursue peace**”. So, v15 is simply a “continuation” of his encouragement to his specific audience - which is Christians. The author is **NOT** providing an encouragement to lost people, but a very provocative warning to believers. The idea is that if the believer does not look carefully at their life and where they really are spiritually, then they will “**fall short of the grace of God**” for their lives. It is not that the believer will lose their salvation, but as has been stated all along, they will lose something. They will lose opportunities, spiritual rewards, and God’s blessings. They may lose their families, their jobs, their hope, and certainly their spiritual bearings. One of the worst things that can happen to a believer is for them to think that they do not need God’s grace in their life and that they can just figure life out on their own and make it without God’s grace. That really is a place of great spiritual pride and arrogance – for a believer to think that they know more than God does and that they are capable of solving everything on their own. So much that is negative can easily happen when a believer fails to avail themselves of God’s grace for their lives. [James 4:6](#) makes this perfectly clear when it says,

Jas 4:6 **But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."**

From a practical perspective, the grace of God can be defined as God providing the believer two strategic attributes for their life – the **desire** to do His will and the **power** to do His will. God is the One who gives the desire to do what is right and He is the One who gives the power to do what is right. For instance, [Ephesians 2:8](#) says,

Eph 2:8 **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,**

God gives every believer the desire to be saved, and then He gives them the power to be saved. On their own, the lost person has neither. [James 4:5](#) has a very interesting phrase. It says,

Jas 4:5 **Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?**

Does someone think that God is just mumbling, just muttering, and just kind of babbling? Hopefully not! If a person will simply listen to Scripture instead of ignoring it or just letting it speak “**in vain**”, then they will begin to experience the grace of God working in their life. God’s desire is to give His grace – that desire and power to do His will. However, that is not going to happen until a believer is willing to submit their lives to Him. When a believer submits their life to God’s Word, He will give them more grace, more of His divine power for their life, and more of His spiritual resources for their life.

Now, what is important to clearly see is that one of the many results of failing to avail oneself of God’s grace is having a “**root of bitterness**” spring up in their life and cause trouble and defile others. Many speak of this bitter root as a certain segment that existed in the church fellowship that the writer was addressing, and the encouragement was to the other members to not allow their influence to trouble and defile those members who were faithful and were persevering through the difficult trials they were facing. That may very well have been true under the circumstances the author was addressing. Obviously, believers have a corporate responsibility to care for one another and to guard against allowing bitterness or a spirit of rebellion and defiance to God’s Word to have a troubling and defiling effect on the rest of the body. However, from a practical perspective it is easy for people to become bitter when offended and that is a key issue – how a believer avoids bitterness in their life.

Bitterness is actually a form of hatred towards another person. When a believer becomes bitter in their spirit, it is like poison in their body and literally damages their immune system. It will infect their thoughts, their emotions, their decisions, and ultimately will cause very serious health issues. When Jesus said in [Matthew 18:22](#) to forgive someone seventy times seven, He fully understood the mental, emotional, and physical consequences of being resentful and bitter towards people. Physically bitterness can cause ulcers, goiters, and high blood pressure just to mention a few of the physical disorders that it creates. What it does is call forth certain hormones from the pituitary, adrenal, thyroid, and other glands. Any excess of these hormones can create disease in any part of the resentful person’s body. When a person is bitter, it creates a high level of physical fatigue and a loss of sleep and rest in their life. One of the most prevalent consequences occurs at the emotional level as depression. It requires an incredible amount of emotional energy to carry and maintain bitterness. In the same way that a person becomes weary when their physical energy is exerted, they become depressed when their emotional energy is exhausted. The moment that a person hates someone, they become that person’s emotional slave. Resentment simply creates too many stress hormones in the body and the individual becomes physically weary after just a short period of work.

The worst result, however, is the spiritual result of being deceived. It is quite common for someone who is bitter to think that they actually love God. However, [1 John 4:20](#) says something quite different,

1Jn 4:20 **If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?**

In order to properly deal with bitterness, a Christian has to also deal with forgiveness. Forgiveness occurs when the person who has been offended (1) “clears the record” of the person who has offended and hurt them and (2) they transfer any responsibility for punishment to God. [Romans 12:19-21](#) clarifies that believers do not have the right to avenge themselves of those who offend them when it says,

Ro 12:19 **Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

In essence, what God wants the believer to do is to use their hurts to express God's love. What normally happens when someone is offended is that their primary focus is on the individual who offended them. However, from God's perspective His concern is not so much on what happened to the believer, but on how they responded to what happened to them. God desires that they look not at the offender, but at the actual offense that has been committed against them. God wants the believer to see the offense as a spiritual **tool** that God will use to develop the character of Christ in their life. That is why Christ could ask the Father to forgive those who were actually crucifying Him.

Once someone allows bitterness to become a part of their life, they develop an emotional focus on the one who offended them and very negative attributes begin to develop in their life. They develop an attitude of "contempt" in their life. They have been offended and they feel contempt towards the individual who hurt them. They find themselves continually concentrating on how offensive someone was towards them, and the result is that they begin to develop the same basic attitudes as the one they have come to resent. However, if the believer will forgive and clear the offender's record, then they can concentrate on what God desires for their life and how He wants to use the hurts that have been created in their life to develop the character of Christ in them. If the believer is not careful, they will become exactly like the one they despise or resent. The goal is to become like the One that the believer truly loves – which is Christ. That is always the goal. When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, he could have become extremely bitter, but he did not. In [Genesis 50:20](#) he spoke these words to them after Jacob had died. He said, "**You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.**" If a believer remains bitter towards someone else, then they simply cannot become more like Christ. Bitterness and conformity to Christ cannot exist side by side at the same time. It is a spiritual impossibility. What is the problem? It is falling short of the grace of God, and the result is that many will become defiled by the person's bitterness. In [Ephesians 4:30-32](#), Paul provides God's solution to bitterness.

^{Eph 4:30} **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.** ³¹**Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.** ³²**And be kind to one an-**

other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

God simply says to "**put away**" bitterness and the accompanying "**anger**" and "**evil speaking**" that naturally follow it. Just put it away. The verb "**put away**" is in the imperative mood which makes it a command. God says to replace bitterness with kindness, with being tender, and with being forgiving. That is God's solution – and it works! If, however, someone decides to ignore what God's Word clearly states, then they will "**fall short of the grace of God**" and eventually reap what they have sown.

ENDNOTES

¹ Zodhiates, 634.

² Lane, 452.

³ MacArthur, 406.

⁴ Zodhiates, 1431.

⁵ Ger, 209.

⁶ McMillen, 69-72.

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